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Volumes—Volume I, by Frank Frankfort Moore**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A GRAY EYE OR SO. IN THREE VOLUMES—VOLUME I

A GRAY EYE OR SO

By Frank Frankfort Moore

**Author of "I Forbid The Banns," "Dalreen," "Sojourners Together,"
"Highways And High Seas," Etc.**

In Three Volumes—Volume I

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BY

FRANK FRANKFORT MOORE

AUTHOR OF

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A GRAY EYE OR SO

CHAPTER I.—ON CERTAIN ABSTRACTIONS.

I WAS talking about woman in the abstract," said Harold.

The other, whose name was Edmund—his worst enemies had never abbreviated it—smiled, lifted his eyes unto the hills as if in search of something, frowned as if he failed to find it, smiled a cat's-paw of a smile—a momentary crinkle in the region of the eyes—twice his lips parted as if he were about to speak; then he gave a laugh—the laugh of a man who finds that for which he has been searching.

"Woman in the abstract?" said he. "Woman in the abstract? My dear Harold, there is no such thing as woman in the abstract. When you talk about Woman enthusiastically, you are talking about the woman you love; when you talk about Woman cynically, you are talking about the woman who won't love you."

"Maybe your honours never heard tell of Larry O'Leary?" said the Third—for there was a Third, and his name was Brian; his duty was to row the boat, and this duty he interpreted by making now and again an elaborate pretence of rowing, which deceived no one.

"That sounds well," said Harold; "but do you want it to be applied? Do you want a test case of the operation of your epigram—if it is an epigram?"

"A test case?"

"Yes; I have heard you talk cynically about woman upon occasions. Does that mean that you have been unloved by many?"

Again the man called Edmund looked inquiringly up the purple slope of the hill.

"You're a wonderful clever gentleman," said Brian, as if communing with himself, "a wonderful gentleman entirely! Isn't he after casting his eyes at the very spot where old Larry kept his still?"

"No," said Edmund; "I have never spoken cynically of women. To do so would be to speak against my convictions. I have great hope of Woman."

"Yes; our mothers and sisters are women," said Harold. "That makes us hopeful of women. Now we are back in the wholesome regions of the abstract once more, so that we have talked in a circle and are precisely where we started, only that I have heard for the first time that you are hopeful of Woman."

"That's enough for one day," said Edmund.

"Quite," said Harold.

"You must know that in the old days the Excise police looked after the potheen—the Royal Irish does it now," said the Third. "Well, as I say, in the old days there was a reward of five pounds given by the Excisemen for the discovery of a private still. Now Larry had been a regular hero at transforming the innocent smiling pratie into the drink that's the curse of the country, God bless it! But he was too wary a lad for the police, and he rolled keg after keg down the side of Slieve Gorm. At last the worm of his still got worn out—they do wear out after a dozen years or so of stiff work—and people noticed that Larry was wearing out too, just through thinking of where he'd get the three pound ten to buy the new machinery. They tried to cheer him up, and the decent boys was so anxious to give him heart that there wasn't such a thing as a sober man to be found in all the country side. But though the brave fellows did what they could for him, it was no use. He never got within three pound five of the three pound ten that he needed. But just as things was at their worst, they mended. Larry was his old self again, and the word went round that the boys might get sober by degrees.

"Now what did our friend Larry do, if you please, but take his old worn-out still and hide it among the heather of the hill fornenst us—Slieve Glas is its name—and then he goes the same night to the Excise officer, in the queer secret way.

"I'm in a bad way for money, or it's not me that would be after turning informer,' says he, when he had told the officer that he knew where the still was concealed.

"That's the worst of you all,' says the officer. 'You'll not inform on principle, but only because you're in need of money.'

"More's the pity, sir,' says Larry.

"Where's the still?' says the officer.

"If I bring you to it,' says Larry, 'it must be kept a dead secret, for the owner is the best friend I have in the world.'

"You're a nice chap to inform on your best friend,' says the officer.

"I'll never be able to look at him straight in the face after, and that's the truth,' says Larry.

"Well, your honours, didn't Larry lead the officer and a couple of the Excisemen up the hill in the dark of the early morning, and sure enough they came upon the old still, hid among the heather. It was captured, and Larry got the five pound reward, and was able to buy a brand-new still with the money, besides having thirty shillings to the good in his pocket. After that, was it any wonder that he became one of the greatest informers in the country? By the Powers, he made a neat thing out of the business of leading the officers to his own stills and pocketing the reward. He was thirty shillings to the good every time. Ah, Larry was a boy!"

"So I judge," said the man called Edmund, with an unaffected laugh—he had studied the art of being unaffected. "But you see, it was not of the Man but of the Woman we were talking."

"That's why I thought that the change would be good for your honours," remarked Brian. "When gentlemen that I've out in this boat with me, begin to talk together in a way that has got no sense in it at all, I know that they're talking about a woman, and I tell them the story of Larry O'Leary."

Neither the man called Edmund, nor the man called Harold, talked any more that day upon Woman as a topic.

CHAPTER II.—ON A GREAT HOPE.

I THINK you remarked that you had great hope of Woman," said Harold, the next day. The boat had drifted once again into the centre of the same scene, and there seemed to be a likelihood of at least two of the boat's company drifting back to the topic of the previous afternoon.

"Yes, you certainly admitted that you had great hope of Woman."

"And so I have. Woman felt, long ago; she is beginning to feel again."

"You don't think that feeling is being educated out of her? I certainly have occasional suspicions that this process is going on. Why, just think of the Stafford girl. She can tell you at a moment's notice the exact difference between an atheist, an infidel, an agnostic, a freethinker, and the Honest Doubter."

"She has been reading modern fiction—that's all. No, I don't think that what is called education makes much difference to a woman. After all, what does this thing called education mean? It simply means that a girl can read all the objectionable passages of the ancient poets without the need of a translation. I have hope of Woman because she is frequently so intensely feminine."

"Maybe you never heard tell of how the Widdy MacDermott's cabin came to be a ruin," said the Third.

"Feeling and femininity will, shall I say, transform woman into our ideal?" said Harold.

"Transform is too strong a word," said Edmund. "And as for our ideal, well, every woman is the ideal of some man for a time."

"And that truth shows not only how lowly is the ideal of some men, but also how unwise it is to attempt to speak of woman in the abstract. I begin to think that what you said yesterday had a grain of truth in it, though it was an epigram."

"The Widdy MacDermott—oh, the Widdy Mac-Dermott," said the Third, as though repeating the burden of a ballad. "They made a pome about her in Irish, that was near as full of nonsense as if it had been in the English. You see when Tim, her husband, went to glory he left the cow behind him, taking thought for the need of his widdy, though she hadn't been a widdy when he was acquainted with her. Well, your honours, the byre was a trifle too near the edge of the bog hole, so that when one end fell out, there wasn't much of the mud walls that stood. Then one blessed morning the childer came running into the cabin to tell their mother that the cow was sitting among the ruins of its home."

"A Marius of the farmyard," remarked Edmund.

"Likely enough, sir. Anyhow, there she sat as melancholy as if she was a Christian. Of course, as the winter was well for'ard it wouldn't do to risk her life by leaving her to wander about the bogs, so they drove her into the cabin—it was a tight fit for her, passing through the door—she could just get in and nothing to spare; but when she was inside it was warm and comfortable that the same cow made the cabin, and the childer were wondering at the end of a month how they could have been such fools as to shiver through the winter while the cow was outside.

"In another month some fine spring days came, and the cabin was a bit close and stuffy with the cow inside, and the widdy herself turned the animal's head to the door and went to drive her out for exercise and ventilation. But the way the beast had been fed and petted told upon her, and by the Powers, if she didn't stick fast in the doorway.

"They leathered her in the cabin and they coaxed her from outside, but it was all of no use. The craythur stood jammed in the door, while the childer crawled in and out of the cabin among her hind legs—the fore legs was half a cow's length outside. That was the situation in the middle of the day, and all the neighbours was standing round giving advice, and calling in to the widdy herself—who, of course, was a prisoner in the cabin—not to lose heart.

"It's not heart I'm afeard of losing—it's the cow,' says she.

"Well, your honours, the evening was coming on, but no change in the situation of affairs took place, and the people of the country-side was getting used to the appearance of the half cow projecting beyond the door of the cabin, and to think that maybe, after all, it was nothing outside the ordinary course of events, when Barney M'Bratney, who does the carpentering at the Castle, came up the road.

"He took in the situation with the glance of the professional man, and says he, 'By the Powers, its a case of the cow or the cabin. Which would ye rather be after losing, Widdy?'

"The cabin by all means,' says she.

"You're right, my good woman,' says he. 'Come outside with you.'

"Well, your honours, the kindly neighbours hauled the widdy outside over the back of the cow, and then with a crowbar Barney attacked the walls on both sides of the door. In ten minutes the cow was free, but the cabin was a wreck.

"Of course his lardship built it up again stronger than it ever was, but as he wouldn't make the door wide enough to accommodate the cow—he offered to build a byre for her, but that wasn't the same—he has never been so respected as he was before in the neighbourhood of Ballyboreen."

"That's all very well as a story," said Edmund; "but you see we were talking on the subject of the advantages of the higher education of woman."

"True for you, sir," said Brian. "And if the Widdy MacDermott had been born with eddication would she have let her childer to sleep with the cow?"

"Harold," said Edmund, "there are many side lights upon the general question of the advantages of culture in women."

"And the story of the Widdy MacDermott is one of them?" said Harold.

"When I notice that gentlemen that come out in the boat with me begin to talk on contentious topics, I tell them the story of how the Widdy MacDermott's cabin was wrecked," said Brian.

CHAPTER III.—ON HONESTY AND THE WORKING MAN.

DON'T you think," remarked Edmund, the next day, as the boat drifted under the great cliffs, and Brian was discharging with great ability his normal duty of resting on his oars. "Don't you think that you should come to business without further delay?"

"Come to business?" said Harold.

"Yes. Two days ago you lured me out in this coracle to make a communication to me that I judged would have some bearing upon your future course of life. You began talking of Woman with a touch of fervour in your voice. You assured me that you were referring only to woman in the abstract, and when I convinced you—I trust I convinced you—that woman in the abstract has no existence, you got frightened—as frightened as a child would be, if the thing that it has always regarded as a doll were to wink suddenly, suggesting that it had an individuality, if not a distinction of its own—that it should no longer be included among the vague generalities of rags and bran. Yesterday you began rather more boldly. The effects of education upon the development of woman, the probability that feeling would survive an intimate acquaintance with Plato in the original. Why not take another onward step today? In short, who is she?"

Harold laughed—perhaps uneasily.

"I'm not without ambition," said he.

"I know that. What form does your ambition take? A colonial judgeship, after ten years of idleness at the bar? A success in literature that shall compensate you for the favourable criticisms of double that period? The ownership of the Derby winner? An American heiress, moving in the best society in Monte Carlo? A correspondency in brackets with a Countess? All these are the legitimate aspirations of the modern man."

"Co-respondency as a career has, no doubt, much to recommend it to some tastes," said Harold. "It appears to me, however, that it would be easy for an indiscreet advocate to over-estimate its practical value."

"You haven't been thinking about it?"

"You see, I haven't yet met the countess."

"What, then, in heaven's name do you hope for?"

"Well, I would say Parliament, if I could be sure that that came within the rather narrow restrictions which you assigned to my reply. You said 'in heaven's name.'"

"Parliament! Parliament! Great Powers! is it so bad as that with you?"

"I don't say that it is. I may be able to get over this ambition as I've got over others—the stroke oar in the Eight, for instance, the soul of Sarasate, the heart of Miss Polly Floss of the Music Halls. Up to the present, however, I have shown no sign of parting with the surviving ambition of many ambitions."

"I don't say that you're a fool," said the man called Edmund. He did not speak until the long pause, filled up by the great moan of the Atlantic in the distance and the hollow fitful plunge of the waters upon the rocks of the Irish shore, had become awkwardly long. "I can't say that you're a fool."

"That's very good of you, old chap."

"No; I can't conscientiously say that you're a fool."

"Again? This is becoming cloying. If I don't mistake, you yourself do a little in the line I suggest."

"What would be wisdom—comparative wisdom—on my part, might be idiotcy—"

"Comparative idiotcy?"

"Sheer idiotcy, on yours. I have several thousands a year, and I can almost—not quite—but I affirm, almost, afford to talk honestly to the Working man. No candidate for Parliament can quite afford to be honest to the Working man."

"And the Working man returns the compliment, only he works it off on the general public," said Harold.

The other man smiled pityingly upon him—the smile of the professor of anatomy upon the student who identifies a thigh bone—the smile which the *savant* allows himself when brought in contact with a discerner of the obvious.

"No woman is quite frank in her prayers—no politician is quite honest with the Working man."

"Well. I am prepared to be not quite honest with him too."

"You may believe yourself equal even to that; but it's not so easy as it sounds. There is an art in not being quite honest. However, that's a detail."

"I humbly venture so to judge it."

"The main thing is to get returned."

"The main thing is, as you say, to get the money."

"The money?"

"Perhaps I should have said the woman."

"The woman? the money? Ah, that brings us round again in the same circle that we traversed yesterday, and the day before. I begin to perceive."

"I had hope that you would—in time."

"I shouldn't wonder if we heard the Banshee after dark," said the Third.

"You are facing things boldly, my dear Harold," said Edmund.

"What's the use of doing anything else?" inquired Harold. "You know how I am situated."

"I know your father."

"That is enough. He writes to me that he finds it impossible to continue my allowance on its present scale. His expenses are daily increasing, he says. I believe him."

"Too many people believe in him," said Edmund. "I have never been among them."

"But you can easily believe that his expenses are daily increasing."

"Oh, yes, I am easily credulous on that point. Does he go the length of assigning any reason for the increase?"

"It's perfectly preposterous—he has no notion of the responsibilities of fatherhood—of the propriety of its limitations so far as an exchange of confidences is concerned. Why, if it were the other way—if I were to write to tell him that I was in love, I would feel a trifle awkward—I would think it almost indecent to quote poetry—Swinburne—something about crimson mouths."

"I dare say; but your father—"

"He writes to tell me that he is in love."

"In love?"

"Yes, with some—well, some woman."

"Some woman? I wonder if I know her husband." There was a considerable pause.

Brian pointed a ridiculous, hooked forefinger toward a hollow that from beneath resembled a cave, half-way up the precipitous wall of cliffs.

"That's where she comes on certain nights of the year. She stands at the entrance to that cave, and cries for her lover as she cried that night when she came only to find his dead body," said Brian, neutralizing the suggested tragedy in his narrative by keeping exhibited that comical crook in his index finger. "Ay, your honours, it's a quare story of pity." Both his auditors looked first at his face, then at the crook in his finger, and laughed. They declined to believe in the pity of it.

"It is preposterous," said Harold. "He writes to me that he never quite knew before what it was to love. He knows it now, he says, and as it's more expensive than he ever imagined it could be, he's reluctantly compelled to cut down my allowance. Then it is that he begins to talk of the crimson mouth—I fancy it's followed by something about the passion of the fervid South—so like my father, but like no other man in the world. He adds that perhaps one day I may also know 'what'tis to love.'"

"At present, however, he insists on your looking at that form of happiness through another man's eyes? Your father loves, and you are to learn—approximately—what it costs, and pay the expenses."

"That's the situation of the present hour. What am I to do?"

"Marry Helen Craven."

"That's brutally frank, at any rate."

"You see, you're not a working man with a vote. I can afford to be frank with you. Of course, that question which you have asked me is the one that was on your mind two days ago, when you began to talk about what you called 'woman in the abstract.'"

"I dare say it was. We have had two stories from Brian in the meantime."

"My dear Harold, your case is far from being unique. Some of its elements may present new features, but, taken as a whole, it is commonplace. You have ambition, but you have also a father."

"So far I am in line with the commonplace."

"You cannot hope to realize your aims without money, and the only way by which a man can acquire a large

amount of money suddenly, is by a deal on the Stock Exchange or at Monte Carlo, or by matrimony. The last is the safest."

"There's no doubt about that. But—"

"Yes, I know what's in your mind. I've read the scene between Captain Absolute and his father in 'The Rivals'—I read countless fictions up to the point where the writers artlessly introduce the same scene, then I throw away the books. With the examples we have all had of the success of the *mariage de convenance* and of the failure of the *mariage d'amour* it is absurd to find fault with the Johnsonian dictum about marriages made by the Lord Chancellor."

"I suppose not," said Harold. "Only I don't quite see why, if Dr. Johnson didn't believe that marriages were made in heaven, there was any necessity for him to run off to the other extreme."

"He merely said, I fancy, that a marriage arranged by the Lord Chancellor was as likely to turn out happily as one that was—well, made in heaven, if you insist on the phrase. Heaven, as a match-maker, has much to learn."

"Then it's settled," said Harold, with an affectation of cynicism that amused his friend and puzzled Brian, who had ears. "I'll have to sacrifice one ambition in order to secure the other."

"I think that you're right," said Edmund. "You're not in love just now—so much is certain."

"Nothing could be more certain," acquiesced Harold, with a laugh. "And now I suppose it is equally certain that I never shall be."

"Nothing of the sort. That cynicism which delights to suggest that marriage is fatal to love, is as false as it is pointless. Let any man keep his eyes open and he will see that marriage is the surest guarantee that exists of the permanence of love."

"Just as an I O U is a guarantee—it's a legal form. The money can be legally demanded."

"You are a trifle obscure in your parallel," remarked Edmund.

"I merely suggested that the marriage ceremony is an I O U for the debt which is love. Oh, this sort of beating about a question and making it the subject of phrases can lead nowhere. Never mind. I believe that, on the whole, the grain of advice which I have acquired out of your bushel of talk, is good, and is destined to bear good fruit. I'll have my career in the world, that my father may learn 'what'tis to love.' My mind is made up. Come, Brian, to the shore!"

"Not till I tell your honour the story of the lovely young Princess Fither," said the boatman, assuming a sentimental expression that was extremely comical.

"Brian, Prince of Storytellers, let it be brief," said Edmund.

"It's to his honour I'm telling this story, not to your honour, Mr. Airey," said Brian. "You've a way of wrinkling up your eyes, I notice, when you speak that word 'love,' and if you don't put your tongue in your cheek when anyone else comes across that word accidental-like, you put your tongue in your cheek when you're alone, and when you think over what has been said."

"Why, you're a student of men as well as an observer of nature, O Prince," laughed Edmund.

"No, I've only eyes and ears," said Brian, in a deprecating tone.

"And a certain skill in narrative," said Harold. "What about the beauteous Princess Fither? What dynasty did she belong to?"

"She belonged to Cashelderg," replied Brian. "A few stones of the ruin may still be seen, if you've any imagination, on the brink of the cliff that's called Carrigorm—you can just perceive its shape above the cove where his lordship's boathouse is built."

"Yes; I see the cliff—just where a castle might at one time have been built. And that's the dynasty that she belonged to?" said Harold.

"The same, sir. And on our side you may still see—always supposing that you have the imagination—"

"Of course, nothing imaginary can be seen without the aid of the imagination."

"You may see the ruins of what might have been Cashel-na-Mara, where the Macnamara held his court—Mac na Mara means Son of the Waves, you must know."

"It's a matter of notoriety," said Edmund.

"The Macnamaras and the Casheldergs were the deadliest of enemies, and hardly a day passed for years—maybe centuries—without some one of the clan getting the better of the other. Maybe that was how the surplus population was kept down in these parts. Anyhow there was no talk, so far as I've heard, of congested districts in them days. Well, sir, it so happened that the Prince of the Macnamaras was a fine, handsome, and brave young fellow, and the Princess Fither of Cashelderg was the most beautiful of Irish women, and that's saying a good deal. As luck would have it, the young people came together. Her boat was lost in a fog one night and drifting upon the sharp rocks beyond the headland. The cries of the poor girl were heard on both sides of the Lough—the blessed Lough where we're now floating—but no one was brave enough to put out to the rescue of the Princess—no one, did I say? Who is it that makes a quick leap off the cliffs into the rolling waters beneath? He fights his way, strong swimmer that he is! through the surge, and, unseen by any eye by reason of the fog, he reaches the Princess's boat. Her cries cease. And a keen arises along the cliffs of Carrigorm, for her friends think that she has been swallowed up in the cruel waves. The keen goes on, but it's sudden changed into a shout of joy; for a noble young figure appears as if by magic on the cliff head, and places the precious burden of her lovely daughter in the arms of her weeping mother, and then vanishes."

"And so the feud was healed, and if they didn't live happy, we may," said Edmund.

"That's all you know about the spirit of an ancient Irish family quarrel," said Brian pityingly. "No, sir. The brave deed of the young Prince only made the quarrel the bitterer. But the young people had fallen in love with each other, and they met in secret in that cave that you see there just above us—the Banshee's Cave, it's called to this day. The lovely Princess put off in her boat night after night, and climbed the cliff face—there was no path in them days—to where her lover was waiting for her in the cave. But at last some wretch

unworthy of the name of a man got to learn the secret and told it to the Princess's father. With half-a-dozen of the clan he lay in wait for the young Prince in the cave, and they stabbed him in twelve places with their daggers. And even while they were doing the murder, the song of the Princess was heard, telling her lover that she was coming. She climbed the face of the cliff and with a laugh ran into the trysting-place. She stumbled over the body of her lover. Her father stole out of the darkness of the cave and grasped her by the wrist. Then there rang out over the waters the cry, which still sounds on some nights from a cave—the cry of the girl when she learned the truth—the cry of the girl as, with a superhuman effort, she released herself from her father's iron grasp, and sprang from the head of the cliff you see there above, into the depths of the waters where we're now floating."

There was a pause before Edmund remarked, "Your story of the Montague-Macnamaras and the Capulet-Casheldergs is a sad one, Brian. And you have heard the cry of the young Princess with your own ears, I dare say?"

"That I have, your honour. And it's the story of the young Princess Fither and her lover that I tell to gentlemen that put their tongues in their cheeks when they're alone, and thinking of the way the less knowing ones talk of love and the heart of a woman."

Both Edmund and Harold began to think that perhaps the Irish boatman was a shrewder and a more careful listener than they had given him.

CHAPTER IV.—ON FABLES.

VERY amusing indeed was Edmund's parody of the boatman's wildly-romantic story. The travesty was composed for the benefit of Miss Craven, and the time of its communication was between the courses of the very excellent dinner which Lord Innisfail had provided for his numerous guests at his picturesque Castle overlooking Lough Suangorm—that magnificent fjord on the West Coast of Ireland. Lord Innisfail was a true Irishman. When he was away from Ireland he was ever longing to be back in it, and when he was in Ireland he was ever trying to get away from it. The result of his patriotism was a residence of a month in Connaught in the autumn, and the rest of the year in Connaught Square or Monte Carlo. He was accustomed to declare—in England—that Ireland and the Irish were magnificent. If this was his conviction, his self-abnegation, displayed by carefully avoiding both, except during a month every year, was all the greater.

And yet no one ever gave him credit for possessing the virtue of self-abnegation.

He declared—in England—that the Irish race was the finest on the face of the earth, and he invariably filled his Castle with Englishmen.

He was idolized by his Irish tenantry, and they occasionally left a few birds for his guests to shoot on his moors during the latter days of August.

Lord Innisfail was a man of about fifty years of age. His wife was forty and looked twenty-five: their daughter was eighteen and looked twenty-four.

Edmund Airey, who was trying to amuse Miss Craven by burlesquing the romance of the Princess Fither, was the representative in Parliament of an English constituency. His father had been in business—some people said on the Stock Exchange, which would be just the opposite. He had, however, died leaving his son a considerable fortune extremely well invested—a fact which tended strongly against the Stock Exchange theory. His son showed no desire to go on the turf or to live within reach to the European gaming-table. If there was any truth in the Stock Exchange theory, this fact tended to weaken the doctrine of heredity.

He had never blustered on the subject of his independence of thought or action. He had attached himself unobtrusively to the Government party on entering Parliament, and he had never occasioned the Whips a moment's anxiety during the three years that had elapsed since the date of his return. He was always found in the Government Lobby in a division, and he was thus regarded by the Ministers as an extremely conscientious man. This is only another way of saying that he was regarded by the Opposition as an extremely unscrupulous man.

His speeches were brief, but each of them contained a phrase which told against the Opposition. He was wise enough to refrain from introducing into any speech so doubtful an auxiliary as argument, in his attempts to convince the Opposition that they were in the wrong. He had the good sense to perceive early in his career that argument goes for nothing in the House of Commons, but that trusted Governments have been turned out of office by a phrase. This power of perception induced him to cultivate the art of phrase-making. His dexterity in this direction had now and again made the Opposition feel uncomfortable; and as making the Opposition feel uncomfortable embodies the whole science of successful party-government in England, it was generally assumed that, if the Opposition could only be kept out of power after the General Election, Edmund Airey would be rewarded by an Under-Secretaryship.

He was a year or two under forty, tall, slender, and so distinguished-looking that some people—they were not his friends—were accustomed to say that it was impossible that he could ever attain to political distinction.

He assured Miss Craven that, sitting in the stern sheets of the boat, idly rocking on the smooth swell that rolled through the Lough from the Atlantic, was by far the most profitable way of spending two hours of the afternoon. Miss Craven doubted if this was a fact. "Where did the profit come in except to the boatman?" she inquired.

Mr. Airey, who knew that Miss Craven was anxious to know if Harold had been of the profitable boating-party, had no idea of allowing his powers of travesty to be concealed by the account, for which the young woman was longing, of Harold and the topics upon which he had conversed. He assured her that it was eminently profitable for anyone interested in comparative mythology, to be made acquainted with the Irish equivalent to the Mantuan fable.

"Fable!" almost shrieked Miss Craven. "Mantuan fable! Do you mean to suggest that there never was a Romeo and Juliet?"

"On the contrary, I mean to say that there have been several," said Mr. Airey. "They exist in all languages. I have come unexpectedly upon them in India, then in Japan, afterwards they turned up, with some delicate Maori variations, in New Zealand when I was there. I might have been prepared for them at such a place as this. You know how the modern melodramas are made, Miss Craven?"

"I have read somewhere, but I forget. And you sat alone in the boat smoking, while the boatman droned out his stories?" remarked the young woman, refusing a cold *entrée*.

"I will tell you how the melodramas are made," said Mr. Airey, refusing to be led up to Harold as a topic. "The artist paints several effective pictures of scenery and then one of the collaborators—the man who can't write, for want of the grammar, but who knows how far to go with the public—invents the situation to work in with the scenery. Last of all, the man who has grammar—some grammar—fills in the details of the story."

"Really! How interesting! And that's how Shakespeare wrote 'Romeo and Juliet'? What a fund of knowledge you have, Mr. Airey!"

Mr. Airey, by the method of his disclaimer, laid claim to a much larger fund than any that Miss Craven had attributed to him.

"I only meant to suggest that traditional romance is evolved on the same lines," said he, when his deprecatory head-shakes had ceased. "Given the scenic effects of 'Romeo and Juliet,' the romance on the lines of 'Romeo and Juliet' will be forthcoming, if you only wait long enough. When you pay a visit to any romantic glen with a torrent—an amateurish copy of an unknown Salvator Rosa—ask for the 'Lover's Leap' and it will be shown to you."

"I'll try to remember."

"Given, as scenic details, the ruin of a Castle on one side of the Lough, the ruin of a Castle on the other, and the names of the hereditary enemies, the story comes naturally—quite as naturally—not to say overmuch about it—as the story of the melodrama follows the sketch of the scenic effects in the theatre. The transition from Montague to Macnamara—from Capulet to Cashelderg is easy, and there you are."

"And here we are," laughed Miss Craven. "How delightful it is to be able to work out a legend in that way, is it not, Mr. Durdan?" and she turned to a man sitting at her left.

"It's quite delightful, I'm sure," said Mr. Durdan. "But Airey is only adapting the creed of his party to matters of everyday life. What people say about his party is that they make a phrase first and then look out for a policy to hang upon it. Government by phrase is what the country is compelled to submit to."

Mr. Durdan was a prominent member of the Opposition.

CHAPTER V.—ON A PERILOUS CAUSEWAY.

MISS CRAVEN laughed and watched Mr. Airey searching for a reply beneath the frill of a Neapolitan ice. She did not mean that he should find one. Her aim was that he should talk about Harold Wynne. The dinner had reached its pianissimo passages, so to speak. It was dwindling away into the *marrons glacés* and *fondants* stage, so she had not much time left to her to find out if it was indeed with his friend Edmund Airey that Harold had disappeared every afternoon.

Edmund Airey knew what her aim was. He was a clever man, and he endeavoured to frustrate it. Ten minutes afterwards he was amazed to find that he had told her all that she wanted to know, and something over, for he had told her that Harold was at present greatly interested in the question of the advisability of a man's entering public life by the perilous causeway—the phrase was Edmund Airey's—of matrimony.

As he chose a cigar for himself—for there was a choice even among Lord Innisfail's cigars—he was actually amazed to find that the girl's purpose had been too strong for his resolution. He actually felt as if he had betrayed his friend to the enemy—he actually put the matter in this way in his moment of self-reproach.

Before his cigar was well alight, however, he had become more reasonable in his censorship of his own weakness. An enemy? Why, the young woman was the best friend that Harold Wynne could possibly have. She was young—that is, young enough—she was clever—had she not got the better of Edmund Airey?—and, best of all, she was an heiress.

"The perilous causeway of matrimony"—that was the phrase which had come suddenly into his mind, and, in order to introduce it, he had sent the girl away feeling that she was cleverer than he was.

"The perilous causeway of matrimony," he repeated. "With a handrail of ten thousand a year—there is safety in that."

He looked down the long dining-hall, glistening with silver, to where Harold stood facing the great window, the square of which framed a dim picture of a mountain slope, purple with heather, that had snared the last light of the sunken sun. The sea horizon cut upon the slope not far from its summit, and in that infinity of Western distance there was a dash of drifting crimson.

Harold Wynne stood watching that picture of the mountain with the Atlantic beyond, and Edmund watched him.

There was a good deal of conversation flying about the room. The smokers of cigarettes talked on a topic which they would probably have called Art. The smokers of pipes explained in a circumstantial way, that carried suspicion with it to the ears of all listeners, their splendid failures to secure certain big fish during the day. The smokers of cigars talked of the Horse and the House—mostly of the Horse. There was a rather florid judge present—he had talked himself crimson to the appreciative woman who had sat beside him at dinner, on the subject of the previous racing-season, and now he was talking himself purple on the subject of the future season. He had been at Castle Innisfail for three days, and he had steadily refused to entertain the idea of talking on any other subject than the Horse from the standpoint of a possible backer.

This was the judge, who, during the hearing of a celebrated case a few months before—a case that had involved a reference to an event known as the City and Suburban, inquired if that was the name of a Railway Company. Hearing that it was a race, he asked if it was a horse race or a dog race.

Harold remained on his feet in front of the window, and Edmund remained watching him until the streak of crimson had dwindled to a flaming Rahab thread. The servants entered the room with coffee, and brought out many subtle gleams from the old oak by lighting the candles in the silver sconces.

Every time that the door was opened, the sound of a human voice (female) trying, but with indifferent success, to scale the heights of a song that had been saleable by reason of its suggestions of passion—drawing-room passion—saleable passion—fought its way through the tobacco smoke of the dining-hall. Hearing it fitfully, such men as might have felt inclined to leave half-smoked cigars for the sake of the purer atmosphere of the drawingroom, became resigned to their immediate surroundings.

A whisper had gone round the table while dinner was in progress, that Miss Stafford had promised—some people said threatened—to recite something in the course of the evening. Miss Stafford was a highly-educated young woman. She spoke French, German, Italian and Spanish. This is only another way of saying that she could be uninteresting in four languages. In addition to the ordinary disqualifications of such young women, she recited a little—mostly poems about early childhood, involving a lisp and a pinafore. She wished to do duty as an object lesson of the possibility of combining with an exhaustive knowledge of mathematical formulæ, the strongest instincts of femininity. Mathematics and motherhood were not necessarily opposed to one another, her teachers had assured the world, through the medium of magazine articles. Formulæ and femininity went hand in hand, they endeavoured to prove, through the medium of Miss Stafford's recitations; so she acquired the imaginary lisp of early childhood, and tore a pinafore to shreds in the course of fifteen stanzas.

It was generally understood among men that one of these recitations amply repaid a listener for a careful avoidance of the apartment where it took place.

The threat that had been whispered round the dinner-table formed an excuse for long tarrying in front of the coffee cups and Bénédictine.

"Boys," at length said Lord Innisfail, endeavouring to put on an effective Irish brogue—he thought it was only due to Ireland to put on a month's brogue. "Boys, we'll face it like men. Shall it be said in the days to come that we ran away from a lisp and a pinafore?" Then suddenly remembering that Miss Stafford was his guest, he became grave. "Her father was my friend," he said. "He rode straight. What's the matter with the girl? If she does know all about the binomial-theorem and German philosophy, has she not some redeeming qualities? You needn't tell me that there's not some good in a young woman who commits to memory such stuff as that—that what's its name—the little boy that's run over by a 'bus or something or other and that lisps in consequence about his pap-pa. No, you needn't argue with me. It's extremely kind of her to offer to recite, and I will stand up for her, confound her! And if anyone wants to come round with the Judge and me to the stables while she's reciting, now's the time. Will you take another glass of claret, Wynne?"

"No, thank you," said Harold. "I'm off to the drawing-room."

He followed the men who were straggling into the great square hall where a billiard table occupied an insignificant space. The skeleton of an ancient Irish elk formed a rather more conspicuous object in the hall, and was occasionally found handy for the disposal of hats, rugs, and overcoats.

"She is greatly interested in the Romeo and Juliet story," remarked Edmund, strolling up to him.

"She—who?" asked Harold.

"The girl—the necessary girl. The—let us say, alternative. The—the handrail."

"The handrail?"

"Yes. Oh, I forgot: you were not within hearing. There was something said about the perilous causeway of matrimony."

"And that suggested the handrail idea to you? No better idea ever occurred even to you, O man of many ideas, and of still more numerous phrases."

"She is responsive—she is also clever—she is uncommonly clever—she got the better of me."

"Say no more about her cleverness."

"I will say no more about it. A man cannot go a better way about checking an incipient passion for a young woman than by insisting on her cleverness. We do not take to the clever ones. Our ideal does not include a power of repartee."

"Incipient passion!"

There was a suspicion of bitterness in Harold's voice, as he repeated the words of his friend.

"Incipient passion! I think we had better go into the drawing-room."

They went into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VI.—ON THE INFLUENCE OF AN OCEAN.

MISS CRAVEN was sitting on a distant sofa listening, or pretending to listen, which is precisely the same thing, with great earnestness to the discourse of Mr. Durdan, who, besides being an active politician, had a theory upon the question of what Ibsen meant by his "Master Builder."

Harold said a few words to Miss Innisfail, who was trying to damp her mother's hope of getting up a dance in the hall, but Lady Innisfail declined to be suppressed even by her daughter, and had received promises of support for her enterprise in influential quarters. Finding that her mother was likely to succeed, the girl hastened away to entreat one of her friends to play a "piece" on the pianoforte.

She knew that she might safely depend upon the person to whom she applied for this favour, to put a stop to her mother's negotiations. The lady performed in the old style. Under her hands the one instrument discharged the office of several. The volume of sound suggested that produced by the steam orchestra of a switchback railway.

Harold glanced across the room and perceived that, while the performer was tearing notes by the handful and flinging them about the place—up in the air, against the walls—while her hands were worrying the bass notes one moment like rival terrier puppies over a bone, and at other times tickling the treble rather too roughly to be good fun—Miss Craven's companion had not abandoned the hope of making himself audible if not intelligible. He had clearly accepted the challenge thrown down by the performer.

Harold perceived that a man behind him had furtively unlatched one of the windows leading to the terrace, and was escaping by that means, and not alone. From outside came the hearty laughter of the judge telling an open-air story to his host. People looked anxiously toward the window. Harold shook his head as though suggesting that that sort of interruption must be put a stop to at once, and that he was the man to do it.

He went resolutely out through the window.

"Which was immediately suppressed by the officers of the court," said Edmund, in the ear of Lady Innisfail.

He spoke too soon. The judge's laugh rolled along like the breaking of a tidal wave. It was plain that Harold had not gone to remonstrate with the judge.

He had not. He had merely strolled round the terrace to the entrance hall. Here he picked up one of the many caps which were hanging there, and putting it on his head, walked idly away from the castle, hearing only the floating eulogy uttered by the judge of a certain well-known jockey who was, he said, the kindest and most honourable soul that had ever pulled the favourite.

A longing had come to him to hurry as far as he could from the Castle and its company—they were hateful to him just at that instant. The shocking performance of the woman at the pianoforte, the chatter of his fellow-guests, the delicate way in which his friend Edmund Airey made the most indelicate allusions, the *nisi prius* jocularities of the judge—he turned away from all with a feeling of repulsion.

And yet Lord Innisfail's cook was beyond reproach as an artist.

Harold Wynne had accepted the invitation of Lady Innisfail in cold blood. She had asked him to go to Castle Innisfail for a few weeks in August, adding, "Helen Craven has promised to be among our party. You like her, don't you?"

"Immensely," he had replied.

"I knew it," she had cried, with an enthusiasm that would have shocked her daughter. "I don't want a discordant note at our gathering. If you look coldly on Helen Craven I shall wish that I hadn't asked you; but if you look on her in—well, in the other way, we shall all be happy."

He knew exactly what Lady Innisfail meant to convey. It had been hinted to him before that, as he was presumably desirous of marrying a girl with a considerable amount of money, he could not do better than ask Miss Craven to be his wife. He had then laughed and assured Lady Innisfail that if their happiness depended upon the way he looked upon Miss Craven, it would be his aim to look upon her in any way that Lady Innisfail might suggest.

Well, he had come to Castle Innisfail, and for a week he had given himself up to the vastness of the Western Cliffs—of the Atlantic waves—of the billowy mountains—of the mysterious sunsets. It was impossible to escape from the overwhelming influence of the Atlantic in the region of Castle Innisfail. Its sound seemed to go out to all the ends of the earth. At the Castle there was no speech or language where its voice was not heard. It was a sort of background of sound that had to be arranged for by anyone desirous of expressing any thought or emotion in that region. Even the judge had to take it into consideration upon occasions. He never took into consideration anything less important than an ocean.

For a week the influence of the Atlantic had overwhelmed Harold. He had given himself up to it. He had looked at Miss Craven neither coldly nor in the other way—whatever it was—to which Lady Innisfail had referred as desirable to be adopted by him. Miss Craven had simply not been in his thoughts. Face to face with the Infinite one hesitates to give up one's attention to a question of an income that may be indicated by five figures only.

But at the end of a week, he received a letter from his father, who was Lord Fotheringay, and this letter rang many changes upon the five-figure-income question. The question was more than all the Infinities to Lord Fotheringay, and he suggested as much in writing to his son.

"Miss Craven is all that is desirable," the letter had said. "Of course she is not an American; but one cannot

expect everything in this imperfect world. Her money is, I understand, well invested—not in land, thank heaven! She is, in fact, a CERTAINTY, and certainties are becoming rarer every day.”

Here the letter went on to refer to some abstract questions of the opera in Italy—it was to the opera in Italy that Lord Fotheringay was, for the time being, attached. The progress made by one of its ornaments—gifted with a singularly flexible soprano—interested him greatly, and Harold had invariably found that in proportion to the interest taken by his father in the exponents of certain arts—singing, dancing, and the drama—his own allowance was reduced. He knew that his father was not a rich man, for a peer. His income was only a trifle over twelve thousand a year; but he also knew that only for his father’s weaknesses, this sum should be sufficient for him to live on with some degree of comfort. The weaknesses, however, were there, and they had to be calculated on. Harold calculated on them; and after doing the sum in simple subtraction with the sound of the infinite ocean around him, he had asked his friend Edmund Airey to pass a few hours in the boat with him. Edmund had complied for three consecutive afternoons, with the result that, with three ridiculous stories from the Irish boatman, Harold had acquired a certain amount of sound advice from the friend who was in his confidence.

He had made up his mind that, if Miss Craven would marry him, he would endeavour to make her the wife of a distinguished man.

That included everything, did it not?

He felt that he might realize the brilliant future predicted for him by his friends when he was the leader of the party of the hour at Oxford. The theory of the party was—like everything that comes from Oxford—eminently practical. The Regeneration of Humanity by means of Natural Scenery was its foundation. Its advocates proved to their own satisfaction that, in every question of morality and the still more important question of artistic feeling, heredity was not the dominant influence, but natural scenery.

By the party Harold was regarded as the long-looked-for Man—what the world wanted was a Man, they declared, and he was destined to be the Man.

He had travelled a good deal on leaving the University, and in a year he had forgotten that he had ever pretended that he held any theory. A theory he had come to believe to be the paper fortress of the Immature. But the Man—that was a different thing. He hoped that he might yet prove himself to be a man, so that, after all, his friends—they had also ceased to theorize—might not have predicted in vain.

Like many young men without experience, he believed that Parliament was a great power. If anyone had told him that the art of gerrymandering is greater than the art of governing, he would not have known what his informant meant.

His aspirations took the direction of a seat in the House of Commons. In spite of the fact of his being the son of Lord Fotheringay, he believed that he might make his mark in that Assembly. The well-known love of the Voter for social purity—not necessarily in Beer—and his intolerance of idleness—excepting, of course, when it is paid for by an employer—had, he knew, to be counted on. Lord Fotheringay was not, he felt, the ideal of the Working man, but he hoped he might be able to convince the Working man—the Voter—that Lord Fotheringay’s most noted characteristics had not descended to his son.

From his concern on this point it will be readily understood how striking a figure was the Voter, in his estimation.

It is not so easy to understand how, with that ideal Voter—that stern unbending moralist—before his eyes, he should feel that there was a great need for him to be possessed of money before offering himself to any constituency. The fact remained, however, that everyone to whom he had confided his Parliamentary aspirations, had assured him at the outset that money had to be secured before a constituency could be reckoned on. His friend Edmund Airey had still further impressed upon him this fact; and now he had made up his mind that his aspirations should not be discouraged through the lack of money.

He would ask Helen Craven that very night if she would have the goodness to marry him.

CHAPTER VII.—ON THE ADVANTAGES OF A FULL MOON.

WHY the fact of his having made up his mind to ask Miss Craven who, without being an American, still possessed many qualities which are generally accepted as tending to married happiness, should cause him to feel a great longing to leave Castle Innisfail, its occupants, and its occupations behind him for evermore, it is difficult to explain on any rational grounds. That feeling was, however, upon him, and he strode away across the billowy moorland in the direction of the cliffs of the fjord known as Lough Suangorm.

The moon was at its full. It had arisen some little way up the sky and was showering its red gold down the slopes of the two cone-shaped mountains that guard the pass of Lamdhu; the deep glen was flooded with moonlight—Harold could perceive in its hollows such objects as were scarcely visible on the ordinary gray days of the West of Ireland. Then he walked until he was on the brink of the great cliffs overhanging the lough. From the high point on which he stood he could follow all the curves of the lough out to the headlands at its entrance seven miles away. Beyond those headlands the great expanse of sea was glittering splendidly in the moonlight, though the moon had not risen high enough to touch the restless waters at the base of the cliffs on which he stood. The waters were black as they struggled within their narrow limits and were

strangled in the channel. Only a white thread of surf marked the breaking place of the waves upon the cliffs.

He went down the little track, made among the rocks of the steep slope, until he reached the natural cavern that bore the name of the Banshee's Cave.

It was scarcely half-way up the face of the cliff. From that hollow in the rocks the descent to the waters of the lough was sheer; but the cave was easily accessible by a zig-zag path leading up from a small ledge of rocks which, being protected by a reef that started up abruptly half a dozen yards out in the narrow channel, served as a landing place for the fishing boats, of which there were several owned in the tiny village of Carrigorm.

He stood at the entrance to the cavern, thinking, not upon the scene which, according to the boatman's story, had been enacted at the place several hundreds—perhaps thousands (the chronology of Irish legends is vague)—of years before, but upon his own prospects.

"It is done," he said, looking the opposite cliffs straight in the face, as though they were Voters—(candidates usually look at the Voters straight in the face the first time they address them). "It is done; I cast it to the winds—to the seas, that are as indifferent to man's affairs as the winds. I must be content to live without it. The career—that is enough!"

What it was that he meant to cast to the indifference of the seas and the winds was nothing more than a sentiment—a vague feeling that he could not previously get rid of—a feeling that man's life without woman's love was something incomplete and unsatisfactory.

He had had his theory on this subject as well as on others long ago—he had gone the length of embodying it in sonnets.

Was it now to go the way of the other impracticable theories?

He had cherished it for long. If it had not been dear to him he would not have subjected himself to the restriction of the sonnet in writing about it. He would have adopted the commonplace and facile stanza. But a sonnet is a shrine.

He had felt that whatever might happen to him, however disappointed he might become with the world and the things of the world, that great and splendid love was before him, and he felt that to realize it would be to forget all disappointments—to forget all the pangs which the heart of man knows when its hour of disillusion comes.

Love was the reward of the struggle—the deep, sweet draught that refreshes the heart of the toiler, he felt. In whatever direction illusion may lie, love was not in that direction.

That had been his firm belief all his life, and now he was standing at the entrance to the cavern—the cavern that was associated with a story of love stronger than death—and he had just assured himself that he had flung to the seas and the winds all his hopes of that love which had been in his dreams.

"It is gone—it is gone!" he cried, looking down at that narrow part of the lough where the boat had been tumbling during the afternoon.

What had that adviser of his said? He remembered something of his words—something about marriage being a guarantee of love.

Harold laughed grimly as he recalled the words. He knew better. The love that he had looked for was not such as was referred to by his friend Mr. Airey. It was—

But what on earth was the good of trying to recall what it was? The diamonds that Queen Guinevere flung into the river, made just the same splash as common stones would have done under the same circumstances: and the love which he had cherished was, when cast to the winds, no more worthy of being thought precious than the many other ideas which he had happily rid himself of in the course of his walk through the world.

This was how he repressed the thought of his conversation with his friend; and after a while the recollections that he wished to suppress yielded to his methods.

Once more the influences of the place—the spectacle of the infinite mountains, the voice of the infinite sea—asserted themselves as they had done during the first week of his arrival at the Castle. The story of the legendary Prince and Princess came back to him as though it were the embodiment of the influences of the region of romance in the midst of which he was standing.

What had Brian the boatman said? The beautiful girl had crossed the narrow channel of the lough night after night and had climbed the face of the cliffs to her lover at their dizzy trysting-place—the place where he was now standing.

Even while he thought upon the details, as carefully narrated by the boatman, the moon rose high enough to send her rays sweeping over the full length of the lough. For a quarter of an hour a single thin crag of the Slieve Gorm mountains had stood between the moon and the narrowing of the lough. The orb rose over the last thin peak of the crag. The lough through all its sinuous length flashed beneath his eyes like a Malayan crease, and in the waters just below the cliffs which a moment before had been black, he saw a small boat being rowed by a white figure.

"That is the lovely Princess of the story," said he. "She is in white—of course they are all in white, these princesses. It's marvellous what a glint of moonlight can do. It throws a glamour over the essentially commonplace, the same way that—well, that that fancy known as love does upon occasions, otherwise the plain features of a woman would perish from the earth and not be perpetuated. The lumpy daughter of the village who exists simply to show what an artist was Jean François Millet, appears down there to float through the moonlight like the restless spirit of a princess. Is she coming to meet the spirit of her lover at their old trysting-place? Ah, no, she is probably about to convey a pannikin of worms for bait to one of the fishing boats."

CHAPTER VIII.—ON THE ZIG-ZAG TRACK.

HAROLD WYNNE was in one of those moods which struggle for expression through the medium of bitter phrases. He felt that he did well to be cynical. Had he not outlived his belief in love as a necessity of life?

He watched with some degree of interest the progress of the tiny boat rowed by the white figure. He had tried to bring himself to believe that the figure was that of a rough fisher-girl—the fisher-girls are not rough, however, on that part of the coast, and he knew it, only his mood tended to roughness. He tried to make himself believe that a coarse jest shrieked through the moonlight to reach the ears of an appreciatively coarse fisherman, would not be inconsistent with the appearance of that white figure. He felt quite equal to the act of looking beneath the glory and the glamour of the moonlight and of seeing there only the commonplace. He was, he believed, in a mood to revel in the disillusion of a man.

And yet he watched the progress of the boat through the glittering waters, without removing his eyes from it.

The white figure in the boat was so white as to seem the centre of the light that flashed along the ripples and silvered the faces of the cliffs—so much was apparent to him in spite of his mood. As the boat approached the landing-place at the ledge of rock a hundred feet below him, he also perceived that the rower handled her oars in a scientific way unknown to the fisher-girls; and the next thing that he noticed was that she wore a straw hat and a blouse of a pattern that the fisher-girls were powerless to imitate, though the skill was easily available to the Mary Anns and the Matilda Janes who steer (indifferently) perambulators through the London parks. He was so interested in what he saw, that he had not sufficient presence of mind to resume his cynical mutterings, or to inquire if it was possible that the fashion of the year as regards sailor hats and blouses, was a repetition of that of the period of the Princess Fither.

He was more than interested—he was puzzled—as the boat was skilfully run alongside the narrow landing ledge at the foot of the cliffs, and when the girl—the figure was clearly that of a girl—landed—she wore yachting shoes—carrying with her the boat's painter, which she made fast in a business-like way to one of the iron rings that had been sunk in the face of the cliff for the mooring of the fishing boats, he was more puzzled still. In another moment the girl was toiling up the little zig-zag track that led to the summit of the cliffs.

The track passed within a yard or two of the entrance to the cavern. He thought it advisable to step hack out of the moonlight, so that the girl should not see him. She was doubtless, he thought, on her way to the summit of the cliffs, and she would probably be startled if he were to appear suddenly before her eyes. He took a step or two back into the friendly shadow of the cavern, and waited to hear her footsteps on the track above him.

He waited in vain. She did not take that zigzag track that led to the cliffs above the cave. He heard her jump—it was almost a feat—from the track by which she had ascended, on to a flat rock not a yard from the entrance to the cavern. He shrunk still further back into the darkness, and then there came before the entrance the most entrancing figure of a girl that he had ever seen.

She stood there delightfully out of breath, with the moonlight bringing out every gracious curve in her shape. So he had seen the limelight reveal the graces of a breathless *danseuse*, when taking her "call."

"My dear Prince," said the girl, with many a gasp. "You have treated me very badly. It's a pull—undeniably a pull—up those rocks, and for the third time I have kept my tryst with you, only to be disappointed."

She laughed, and putting a shapely foot—she was by no means careful to conceal her stocking above the ankle—upon a stone, she quietly and in a matter-of-fact way, tied the lace of her yachting shoe.

The stooping was not good for her—he felt that, together with a few other matters incidental to her situation. He waited for the long breath he knew she would draw on straightening herself.

It came. He hoped that her other shoe needed tying; but it did not.

He watched her as she stood there with her back to him. She was sending her eyes out to the Western headlands.

"No, my Prince; on the whole I'm not disappointed," she said. "That picture repays me for my toil by sea and land. What a picture! But what would it be to be here with—with—love!"

That was all she said.

He thought it was quite enough.

She stood there like a statue of white marble set among the black rocks. She was absolutely motionless for some minutes; and then the sigh that fluttered from her lips was, he knew, a different expression altogether from that which had come from her when she had straightened herself on fastening her shoe.

His father was a connoisseur in sighs; Harold did not profess to have the same amount of knowledge on the subject, but still he knew something. He could distinguish roughly on some points incidental to the sigh as a medium of expression.

After that little gasp which was not quite a gasp, she was again silent; then she whispered, but by no means gently, the one word "Idiot!" and in another second she had sent her voice into the still night in a wild musical cry—such a cry as anyone gifted with that imaginative power which Brian had declared to be so necessary for archæological research, might attribute to the Banshee—the White Lady of Irish legends.

She repeated the cry an octave higher and then she executed what is technically known as a "scale" but ended with that same weird cry of the Banshee.

Once again she was breathless. Her blouse was turbulent just below her throat.

"If Brian does not cross himself until he feels more fatigue than he would after a pretence at rowing, I'll never play Banshee again," said the girl. "*Ta, ta, mon Prince; a rivederci.*"

He watched her poise herself for the leap from the rock where she was standing, to the track—her grace was exquisite—it suggested that of the lithe antelope. The leap took her beyond his sight, and he did not venture immediately to a point whence he could regain possession of her with his eyes. But when he heard the sound of her voice singing a snatch of song—it was actually "*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*"—the Habanera from "*Carmen*"—he judged that she had reached the second angle of the zig-zag downward, and he took a step into the moonlight.

There she went, lilting the song and keeping time with her feet, until she reached the ledge where the boat was moored. She unfastened the painter, hauled the boat close, and he heard the sound of the plunge of the bows as she jumped on one of the beams, the force of her jump sending the boat far from shore.

She sat for some minutes on the beam amidship, listlessly allowing the boat to drift away from the rocks, then she put out her hands for the oars. Her right hand grasped one, but there was none for the left to grasp. Harold perceived that one of the oars had disappeared.

There was the boat twenty yards from the rock drifting away beyond the control of the girl.

CHAPTER IX.—ON THE HELPLESSNESS OF WOMAN.

THE girl had shown so much adroitness in the management of the little craft previously, he felt—with deep regret—that she would be quite equal to her present emergency. He was mistaken. She had reached the end of her resources in navigation when she had run the boat alongside the landing place. He saw—with great satisfaction—that with only one oar she was helpless.

What should he do?

That was what he asked himself when he saw her dip her remaining oar into the water and paddle a few strokes, making the boat describe an awkward circle and bringing it perilously close to a jagged point of the reef that did duty as a natural breakwater for the mooring place of the boats. He came to the conclusion that if he allowed her to continue that sort of paddling, she would run the boat on the reef, and he would be morally responsible for the disaster and its consequences, whatever they might be. He had never felt more conscientious than at that moment.

He ran down the track to the landing ledge, but before he had reached the latter, the girl had ceased her efforts and was staring at him, her hands still resting on the oar.

He had an uneasy feeling that he was scarcely so picturesquely breathless as she had been, and this consciousness did not tend to make him fluent as he stood upon the rocky shelf not a foot above the ridges of the silver ripples.

He found himself staring at her, just as she was staring at him.

Quite a minute had passed before he found words to ask her if he could be of any help to her.

"I don't know," she replied, in a tone very different from that in which she had spoken at the entrance to the cavern. "I don't really know. One of the oars must have gone overboard while the boat was moored. I scarcely know what I am to do."

"I'm afraid you're in a bad way!" said he, shaking his head. The change in the girl's tone was very amusing to him. She had become quite demure; but previously, demureness had been in the background. "Yes, I'm afraid your case is a very bad one."

"So bad as that?" she asked.

"Well, perhaps not quite, but still bad enough," said he. "What do you want to do?"

"To get home as soon as possible," she replied, without the pause of a second.

Her tone was expressive. It conveyed to him the notion that she had just asked if he thought that she was an idiot. What could she want to do if not to go home?

"In that case," said he, "I should advise you to take the oar to the sculling place in the centre of the stern. The boat is a stout one and will scull well."

"But I don't know how to scull," said she, in a tone of real distress; "and I don't think I can begin to learn just now."

"There's something in that," said he. "If I were only aboard I could teach you in a short time."

"But—"

She had begun her reply without the delay of a second, but she did not get beyond the one word. He felt that she did not need to do so: it was a sentence by itself.

"Yes," said he, "as you say, I'm not aboard. Shall I get aboard?"

"How could you?" she inquired, brightening up.

"I can swim," he replied.

She laughed.

"The situation is not so desperate as that," she cried.

He also laughed.

They both laughed together.

She stopped suddenly and looked up the cliffs to the Banshee's Cave.

Was she wondering if he had been within hearing when she had been—and not in silence—at the entrance to the cave?

He felt that he had never seen so beautiful a girl. Even making a liberal allowance for that glamour of the moonlight, which he had tried to assure himself was as deceptive as the glamour of love, she was, he felt, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

He crushed down every suggestion that came to him as to the best way of helping her out of her difficulty. It was his opportunity.

Then she turned her eyes from the cliff and looked at him again.

There was something imploring in her look.

"Keep up your heart," said he. "Whose boat is that, may I ask?"

"It belongs to a man named Brian—Brian something or other—perhaps O'Donal."

"In that case I think it almost certain that you will find a fishing line in the locker astern—a fishing line and a tin bailer—the line will help you out of the difficulty."

Before he had quite done speaking she was in the stern sheets, groping with one hand in the little locker.

She brought out, first, a small jar of whiskey, secondly, a small pannikin that served a man's purpose when he wished to drink the whiskey in unusually small quantities, and was also handy in bailing out the boat, and, thirdly, a fishing line-wound about a square frame.

She held up the last-named so that Harold might see it.

"I thought it would be there," said he. "Now if you can only cast one end of that line ashore, I will catch it and the boat will be alongside the landing-place in a few minutes. Can you throw?"

She was silent. She examined the hooks on the whale-bone cross-cast.

He laughed again, for he perceived that she was reluctant to boast of the possession of a skill which was denied to all womankind.

"I'll explain to you what you must do," he said. "Cut away the cast of hooks."

"But I have no knife."

"Then I'll throw mine into the bottom of your boat. Look out."

Being a man, he was able to make the knife alight within reasonable distance of the spot at which he aimed. He saw her face brighten as she picked up the implement and, opening it, quickly cut away the cast of hooks.

"Now make fast the leaden sinker to the end of the fishing line, unwind it all from the frame, and then whirl the weight round and sling it ashore—anywhere ashore."

She followed his instructions implicitly, and the leaden weight fled through the air, with the sound of a shell from a mortar.

"Well thrown!" he cried, as it soared above his head; and it was well thrown—so well that it carried overboard every inch of the line and the frame to which it was attached.

"How stupid of me!" she said.

"Of me, you mean," said he. "I should have told you to make it fast. However, no harm is done. I'll recover the weight and send it back to you."

He had no trouble in effecting his purpose. He threw the weight as gently as possible into the bow of the boat, she picked it up, and the line was in her hands as he took in the slack and hauled the boat alongside the shelf of rock.

It cannot have escaped notice that the system of hauling which he adopted had the result of bringing their hands together. They scarcely touched, however.

"Thank you," said she, with profound coldness, when the boat was alongside.

"Your case was not so desperate, after all," he remarked, with just a trifle less frigidity in his tone, though he now knew that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. He had talked of the glamour of moonlight. How could he have been so ridiculous?

"No, my case was not so very desperate," she said. "Thank you so much."

Did she mean to suggest that he should now walk away?

"I can't go, you know, until I am satisfied that your *contretemps* is at an end," said he. "My name is Wynne—Harold Wynne. I am a guest of Lord Innisfail's. I dare say you know him."

"No," she replied. "I know nobody."

"Nobody?"

"Nobody here. Of course I daily hear something about Lord Innisfail and his guests."

"You know Brian—he is somebody—the historian of the region. Did you ever hear the story of the Banshee?"

She looked at him, but he flattered himself that his face told her nothing of what she seemed anxious to know.

"Yes," she said, after a pause. "I do believe that I heard the story of the Banshee—a princess, was she not—a sort of princess—an Irish princess?"

"Strictly Irish. It is said that the cry of the White Lady is sometimes heard even on these nights among the cliffs down which the Princess flung herself."

"Really?" said she, turning her eyes to the sea. "How strange!"

"Strange? well—perhaps. But Brian declares that he has heard the cry with his own ears. I have a friend who says, very coarsely, that if lies were landed property Brian would be the largest holder of real estate in the world."

"Your friend does not understand Brian." There was more than a trace of indignation in her voice. "Brian

has imagination—so have all the people about here. I must get home as soon as possible. I thank you very much for your trouble. Goodnight.”

“I have had no trouble. Good-night.”

He took off his cap, and moved away—to the extent of a single step. She was still standing in the boat.

“By the way,” he said, as if the thought had just occurred to him; “do you intend going overland?”

The glamour of the moonlight failed to conceal the troubled look that came to her eyes. He regained the step that he had taken away from her, and remarked, “If you will be good enough to allow me, I will scull you with the one oar to any part of the coast that you may wish to reach. It would be a pleasure to me. I have nothing whatever to do. As a matter of fact, I don’t see that you have any choice in the matter.”

“I have not,” she said gravely. “I was a fool—such a fool! But—the story of the Princess—”

“Pray don’t make any confession to me,” said he. “If I had not heard the story of the Princess, should I be here either?”

“My name,” said she, “is Beatrice Avon. My father’s name you may have heard—most people have heard his name, though I’m afraid that not so many have read his books.”

“But I have met your father,” said he. “If he is Julius Anthony Avon, I met him some years ago. He breakfasted with my tutor at Oxford. I have read all his books.”

“Oh, come into the boat,” she cried with a laugh. “I feel that we have been introduced.”

“And so we have,” said he, stepping upon the gunwale so as to push off the boat. “Now, where is your best landing place?”

She pointed out to him a white cottage at the entrance to a glen on the opposite coast of the lough, just below the ruins—they could be seen by the imaginative eye—of the Castle of Carrigorm. The cottage was glistening in the moonlight.

“That is where we have been living—my father and I—for the past month,” said she. “He is engaged on a new work—a History of Irish Patriotism, and he has begun by compiling a biographical dictionary of Irish Informers. He is making capital progress with it. He has already got to the end of the seventh volume and he has very nearly reached the letter C—oh, yes, he is making rapid progress.”

“But why is he at this place? Is he working up the Irish legends as well?”

“It seems that the French landed here some time or other, and that was the beginning of a new era of rebellions. My father is dealing with the period, and means to have his topography strictly accurate.”

“Yes,” said Harold, “if he carefully avoids everything that he is told in Ireland his book may tend to accuracy.”

CHAPTER X.—ON SCIENCE AND ART.

A BOAT being urged onwards—not very rapidly—by a single oar resting in a hollow in the centre of the stern, and worked from side to side by a man in evening dress, is not a sight of daily occurrence. This may have suggested itself to the girl who was seated on the midship beam; but if she was inclined to laugh, she succeeded in controlling her impulses.

He found that he was more adroit at the science of marine propulsion than he had fancied he was. The boat was making quite too rapid progress for his desires, across the lough.

He asked the girl if she did not think it well that she should become acquainted with at least the scientific principle which formed the basis of the marine propeller. It was extremely unlikely that such an emergency as that which had lately arisen should ever again make a demand upon her resources, but if such were ever to present itself, it might be well for her to be armed to overcome it.

Yes, she said, it was extremely unlikely that she should ever again be so foolish, and she hoped that her father would not be uneasy at her failure to return at the hour at which she had told him to expect her.

He stopped rocking the oar from side to side in order to assure her that she could not possibly be delayed more than a quarter of an hour through the loss of the oar.

She said that she was very glad, and that she really thought that the boat was making more rapid progress with his one oar than it had done in the opposite direction with her two oars.

He began to perceive that his opportunities of making her acquainted with the science of the screw propeller were dwindling. He faced the oar boldly, however, and he felt that he had at least succeeded in showing her how effective was the application of a scientific law to the achievement of his end—assuming that that end was the driving of the boat through the waters.

He was not a fool. He knew very well that there is nothing which so appeals to the interest of a woman as seeing a man do something that she cannot do.

When, after five minutes’ work, he turned his head to steer the boat, he found that she was watching him.

She had previously been watching the white glistening cottage, with the light in one window only.

The result of his observation was extremely satisfactory to him. He resumed his toil without a word.

And this was how it happened that the boat made so excellent a passage across the lough.

It was not until the keel grated upon the sand that the girl spoke. She made a splendid leap from the bows, and, turning, asked him if he would care to pay a visit to her father.

He replied that he feared that he might jeopardize the biography of some interesting informer whose name might occur at the close of the letter B. He hoped that he would be allowed to borrow the boat for his return to the cliffs, and to row it back the next day to where it was at the moment he was speaking.

His earnest sculling of the boat had not made all thought for the morrow impracticable. He had been reflecting through the silence, how he might make the chance of meeting once more this girl whose face he had seen for the first time half an hour before.

She had already given him an absurd amount of trouble, she said. The boat was one that she had borrowed from Brian, and Brian could easily row it across next morning.

But he happened to know that Brian was to be in attendance on Mr. Durdan all the next day. Mr. Durdan had come to the West solely for the purpose of studying the Irish question on the spot. He had, consequently, spent all his time, deep-sea fishing.

"So you perceive that there's nothing for it but for me to bring back the boat, Miss Avon," said he.

"You do it so well," she said, with a tone of enthusiasm in her voice. "I never admired anything so much—your sculling, I mean. And perhaps I may learn something about—was it the scientific principle that you were kind enough to offer to teach me?"

"The scientific principle," said he, with an uneasy feeling that the girl had seen through his artifice to prolong the crossing of the lough. "Yes, you certainly should know all about the scientific principle."

"I feel so, indeed. Good-night."

"Good-night," said he, preparing to push the boat off the sand where it had grounded. "Goodnight. By the way, it was only when we were out with Brian in the afternoon that he told us the story of the Princess and her lover. He added that the cry of the White Lady would probably be heard when night came."

"Perhaps you may hear it yet," said she. "Goodnight."

She had run up the sandy beach, before he had pushed off the boat, and she never looked round.

He stood with one foot on the gunwale of the boat in act to push into deep water, thinking that perhaps she might at the last moment look round.

She did not.

He caught another glimpse of her beyond the furze that crowned a ridge of rocks. But she had her face steadfastly set toward the white cottage.

He threw all his weight upon the oar which he was using as a pole, and out the boat shot into the deep water.

"Great heavens!" said Edmund Airey. "Where have you been for the past couple of hours?"

"Where?" repeated Miss Craven in a tone of voice that should only be assumed when the eyes, of the speaker are sparkling. But Miss Craven's eyes were not sparkling. Their strong point was not in that direction. "I'm afraid you must give an account of yourself, Mr. Wynne," she continued. She was standing by the side of Edmund Airey, within the embrace of the mighty antlers of the ancient elk in the hall. The sound of dance music was in the air, and Miss Craven's face was flushed.

"To give an account of myself would be to place myself on a level of dulness with the autobiographers whose reminiscences we yawn over."

"Then give us a chance of yawning," cried Miss Craven.

"You do not need one," said he. "Have you not been for some time by the side of a Member of Parliament?"

"He has been over the cliffs," suggested the Member of Parliament. He was looking at Harold's shoes, which bore tokens of having been ill-treated beyond the usual ill-treatment of shoes with bows of ribbon above the toes.

"Yes," said Harold. "Over the cliffs."

"At the Banshee's Cave, I'm certain," said Miss Craven.

"Yes, at the Banshee's Cave."

"How lovely! And you saw the White Lady?" she continued.

"Yes, I saw the White Lady."

"And you heard her cry at the entrance to the cave?"

"Yes, I heard her cry at the entrance to the cave."

"Nonsense!" said she.

"Utter nonsense!" said he. "I must ask Lady Innisfail to dance."

He crossed the hall to where Lady Innisfail was seated. She was fanning herself and making sparkling replies to the inanities of Mr. Durdan, who stood beside her. She had been engaged in every dance, Harold knew, from the extra gravity of her daughter.

"What does he mean?" Miss Craven asked of Edmund Airey in a low—almost an anxious, tone.

"Mean? Why, to dance with Lady Innisfail. He is a man of determination."

"What does he mean by that nonsense about the Banshee's Cave?"

"Is it nonsense?"

"Of course it is. Does anyone suppose that the legend of the White Lady is anything but nonsense? Didn't you ridicule it at dinner?"

"At dinner; oh, yes: but then you must remember that no one is altogether discreet at dinner. That cold *entrée*—the Russian salad—"

"A good many people are discreet neither at dinner nor after it."

"Our friend Harold, for instance? Oh, I have every confidence in him. I know his mood. I have experienced it myself. I, too, have stood in a sculpturesque attitude and attire, on a rock overhanging a deep sea, and I have been at the point of dressing again without taking the plunge that I meant to take."

"You mean that he—that he—oh, I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that if he had been so fortunate as to come upon you suddenly at the Banshee's Cave or wherever he was to-night, he would have—well, he would have taken the plunge."

He saw the girl's face become slightly roseate in spite of the fact of her being the most self-controlled person whom he had ever met. He perceived that she appreciated his meaning to a shade.

He liked that. A man who is gifted with the power of expressing his ideas in various shades, likes to feel that his power is appreciated. He knew that there are some people who fancy that every question is susceptible of being answered by yea or nay. He hated such people.

"The plunge?" said Miss Craven, with an ingenuousness that confirmed his high estimate of her powers of appreciation. "The plunge? But the Banshee's Cave is a hundred feet above the water."

"But men have taken headers—"

"They have," said she, "and therefore we should finish our waltz."

They did finish their waltz.

CHAPTER XI.—ON HEAVEN AND THE LORD CHANCELLOR.

MR. DURDAN was explaining something—he usually was explaining something. When he had been a member of the late Government his process of explaining something was generally regarded as a fine effort at mystification. In private his explanations were sometimes intelligible. As Harold entered the room where a stragglng breakfast was proceeding—everything except dinner had a tendency to be stragglng at Castle Innisfail—Mr. Dur dan was explaining how Brian had been bewildered.

It was a profitable theme, especially for a man who fondly believed that he had the power of reproducing what he imagined to be the Irish brogue of the boatman.

Harold gathered that Mr. Durdan had already had a couple of hours of deep-sea fishing in the boat with Brian—the servants were all the morning carrying into the dining-room plates of fish of his catching (audibly sneered at by the fly-fishers, who considered their supreme failures superior to the hugest successes of the deep-sea fishers).

But the fishing was not to the point. What Mr. Durdan believed to be very much to the point were the "begorras," the "acushlas," the "arrahs" which he tried to make his auditors believe the boatman had uttered in telling him how he had been awakened early in the night by hearing the cry of the Banshee.

Every phrase supposed to have been employed by the boatman was reproduced by the narrator; and his auditors glanced meaningly at one another. It would have required a great deal of convincing to make them fancy for a moment that the language of Brian consisted of an imaginary Irish exclamation preceding a purely Cockney—occasionally Yorkshire—idiom. But the narrator continued his story, and seemed convinced that his voice was an exact reproduction of Brian's brogue.

Harold thought that he would try a little of something that was not fish—he scarcely minded what he had, provided it was not fish, he told the servant. And as there was apparently some little-difficulty in procuring such a comestible, Harold drank some coffee and listened to Mr. Durdan's story—he recommenced it for everyone who entered the breakfast-room.

Yes, Brian had distinctly heard the cry of the Banshee, he said; but a greater marvel had happened, for he found one of his boats that had been made fast on the opposite shore of the lough in the early part of the night, moored at the landing-ledge at the base of the cliffs beneath the Banshee's Cave. By the aid of many a gratuitous "begorra," Mr. Durdan indicated the condition of perplexity in which the boatman had been all the time he was baiting the lines. He explained that the man had attributed to "herself"—meaning, of course, the White Lady—the removal of the boat from the one side of the lough to the other. It was plain that the ghost of the Princess was a good oarswoman, too, for a single paddle only was found in the boat. It was so like a ghost, he had confided to Mr. Durdan, to make a cruise in a way that was contrary—the accent on the second syllable—to nature.

"He has put another oar aboard and is now rowing the boat back to its original quarters," said Mr. Durdan, in conclusion. "But he declares that, be the Powers!"—here the narrator assumed once more the hybrid brogue—"if the boat was meddled with by 'herself' again he would call the priest to bless the craft, and where would 'herself' be then?"

"Where indeed?" said Lord Innisfail.

Harold said nothing. He was aware that Edmund was looking at him intently. Did he suspect anything, Harold wondered.

He gave no indication of being more interested in the story than anyone present, and no one present seemed struck with it—no one, except perhaps, Miss Craven, who had entered the room late, and was thus fortunate enough to obtain the general drift of what Mr. Durdan was talking about, without having her attention diverted by his loving repetition of the phrases of local colour.

Miss Craven heard the story, laughed, glanced at her plate, and remarked with some slyness that Mr. Durdan was clearly making strides in his acquaintance with the Irish question. She then glanced—confidentially—at Edmund Airey, and finally—rather less confidentially—at Harold.

He was eating of that which was not fish, and giving a good deal of attention to it.

Miss Craven thought he was giving quite too much attention to it. She suspected that he knew more about the boat incident than he cared to express, or why should he be giving so much attention to his plate?

As for Harold himself, he was feeling that it would be something of a gratification to him if a fatal accident were to happen to Brian.

He inwardly called him a meddling fool. Why should he take it upon him to row the boat across the lough, when he, Harold, had been looking forward during the sleepless hours of the night, to that exercise? When he had awakened from an early morning slumber, it was with the joyous feeling that nothing could deprive him of that row across the lough.

And yet he had been deprived of it, therefore he felt some regret that, the morning being a calm one, Brian's chances of disaster when crossing the lough were insignificant.

All the time that the judge was explaining in that lucid style which was the envy of his brethren on the Bench, how impossible it would be for the Son of Porcupine to purge himself of the contempt which was heaped upon him owing to his unseemly behaviour at a recent race meeting—the case of the son of so excellent a father as Porcupine turning out badly was jeopardizing the future of Evolution as a doctrine—Harold was trying to devise some plan that should make him independent of the interference of the boatman. He did not insist on the plan being legitimate or even reasonable; all that he felt was that he must cross the lough.

He thought of the girl whom he had seen in that atmosphere of moonlight; and somehow he came to think of her as responsible for her exquisite surroundings. There was nothing commonplace about her—that was what he felt most strongly as he noticed the excellent appetites of the young women around him. Even Miss Stafford, who hoped to be accepted as an Intellect embodied in a mere film of flesh—she went to the extreme length of cultivating a Brow—tickled her trout with the point of her fork much less tenderly than the fisherman who told her the story—with an impromptu bravura passage or two—of its capture, had done.

But the girl whom he had seen in the moonlight—whom he was yearning to see in the sunlight—was as refined as a star. "As refined as a star," he actually murmured, when he found himself with an unlighted cigar between his fingers on that part of the terrace which afforded a fine view of the lough—the narrow part as well—his eyes were directed to the narrow part. "As refined as a star—a—"

He turned himself round with a jerk. "A star?"

His father's letter was still in his pocket. It contained in the course of its operative clauses some references to a Star—a Star, who, alas! was not refined—who, on the contrary, was expensive.

He struck a match very viciously and lit his cigar.

Miss Craven had just appeared on the terrace.

He dropped his still flaming match on the hard gravel walk and put his foot upon it.

"A star!"

He was very vicious.

"She is not a particularly good talker, but she is a most fascinating listener," said Edmund Airey, who strolled up.

"I have noticed so much—when you have been the talker," said Harold. "It is only to the brilliant talker that the fascinating listener appeals. By the way, how does 'fascinated listener' sound as a phrase? Haven't I read somewhere that the speeches of an eminent politician were modelled on the principle of catching birds by night? You flash a lamp upon them and they may be captured by the score. The speeches were compared to the lantern and the public to the birds."

"Gulls," said Edmund. "My dear Harold, I did not come out here to exchange opinions with you on the vexed question of vote-catching or gulls—it will be time enough to do so when you have found a constituency."

"Quite. And meantime I am to think of Miss Craven as a fascinating listener? That's what you have come to impress upon me."

"I mean that you should give yourself a fair chance of becoming acquainted with her powers as a listener—I mean that you should talk to her on an interesting topic."

"Would to heaven that I had your capacity of being interesting on all topics."

"The dullest man on earth when talking to a woman on love as a topic, is infinitely more interesting to her than the most brilliant man when talking to her on any other topic."

"You suggest a perilous way to the dull man of becoming momentarily interesting."

"Of course I know the phrase which, in spite of being the composition of a French philosopher, is not altogether devoid of truth—yes, '*Qui parle d'amour fait l'amour*'."

"Only that love is born, not made."

"Great heavens! have you learned that—that, with your father's letter next your heart?"

Harold laughed.

"Do you fancy that I have forgotten your conversation in the boat yesterday?" said he. "Heaven on one side and the Lord Chancellor on the other."

"And you have come to the conclusion that you are on the side of heaven? You are in a perilous way."

"Your logic is a trifle shaky, friend. Besides, you have no right to assume that I am on the side of heaven."

"There is a suggestion of indignation in your voice that gives me hope that you are not in so evil a case as I may have suspected. Do you think that another afternoon in the boat—"

"Would make me on the side of the Lord Chancellor? I doubt it. But that is not equivalent to saying that I doubt the excellence of your advice."

"Yesterday afternoon I flattered myself that I had given you such advice as commended itself to you, and

yet now you tell me that love is born, not made. The man who believes that is past being advised. It is, I say, the end of wisdom. What has happened since yesterday afternoon?"

"Nothing has happened to shake my confidence in the soundness of your advice," said Harold, but not until a pause had occurred—a pause of sufficient duration to tell his observant friend that something had happened.

"If nothing has happened—Miss Craven is going to sketch the Round Tower at noon," said Edmund—the Round Tower was some distance through the romantic Pass of Lamdhu.

"The Round Tower will not suffer; Miss Craven is not one of the landscape libellers," remarked Harold.

Just then Miss Innisfail hurried up with a face lined with anxiety.

Miss Innisfail was the sort of girl who always, says, "It is I."

"Oh, Mr. Airey," she cried, "I have come to entreat of you to do your best to dissuade mamma from her wild notion—the wildest she has ever had. You may have some restraining influence upon her. She is trying to get up an Irish jig in the hall after dinner—she has set her heart on it."

"I can promise you that if Lady Innisfail asks me to be one of the performers I shall decline," said Edmund.

"Oh, she has set her heart on bringing native dancers for the purpose," cried the girl.

"That sounds serious," said Edmund. "Native dances are usually very terrible visitations. I saw one at Samoa."

"I knew it—yes, I suspected as much," murmured the girl, shaking her head. "Oh, we must put a stop to it. You will help me, Mr. Airey?"

"I am always on the side of law and order," said Mr. Airey. "A mother is a great responsibility, Miss Innisfail."

Miss Innisfail smiled sadly, shook her head again, and fled to find another supporter against the latest frivolity of her mother.

When Edmund turned about from watching her, he saw that his friend Harold Wynne had gone off with some of the yachtsmen—for every day a yachting party as well as deep-sea-fishing, and salmon-fishing parties—shooting parties and even archæological parties were in the habit of setting-out from Castle Innisfail.

Was it possible that Harold intended spending the day aboard the cutter, Edmund asked himself.

Harold's mood of the previous evening had been quite intelligible to him—he had confessed to Miss Craven that he understood and even sympathized with him. He was the man who was putting off the plunge as long as possible, he felt.

But he knew that that attitude, if prolonged, not only becomes ridiculous, but positively verges on the indecent. It is one thing to pause for a minute on the brink of the deep water, and quite another to remain shivering on the rock for half a day.

Harold Wynne wanted money in order to realize a legitimate ambition. But it so happened that he could not obtain that money unless by marrying Miss Craven—that was the situation of the moment. But instead of asking Miss Craven if she would have the goodness to marry him, he was wandering about the coast in an aimless way.

Lady Innisfail was the most finished artist in matchmaking that Edmund had ever met. So finished an artist was she that no one had ever ventured to suggest that she was a match-maker. As a matter of fact, her reputation lay in just the opposite direction. She was generally looked upon as a marrer of matches. This was how she had achieved some of her most brilliant successes. She was herself so fascinating that she attracted the nicest men to her side; but, somehow, instead of making love to her as they meant to do, they found themselves making love to the nice girls with whom she surrounded herself. When running upon the love-making track with her, she switched them on, so to speak, to the nice eligible girls, and they became engaged before they quite knew what had happened.

This was her art, Edmund knew, and he appreciated it as it deserved.

She appreciated him as he deserved, he also acknowledged; for she had never tried to switch him on to any of her girls. By never making love to her he had proved himself to be no fit subject for the exercise of her art.

If a man truly loves a woman he will marry anyone whom she asks him to marry.

This, he knew, was the precept that Lady Innisfail inculcated upon the young men—they were mostly very young men—who assured her that they adored her. It rarely failed to bring them to their senses, she had admitted to Edmund in the course of a confidential lapse.

By bringing them to their senses she meant inducing them to ask the right girls to marry them.

Edmund felt that it was rather a pity that his friend Harold had never adored Lady Innisfail. Harold had always liked her too well to make love to her. This was rather a pity, Edmund felt. It practically disarmed Lady Innisfail, otherwise she would have taken care that he made straightforward love to Miss Craven.

As for Harold, he strolled off with the yachtsmen, giving them to understand that he intended sailing with them. The cutter was at her moorings in the lough about a mile from the Castle, and there was a narrow natural dock between the cliffs into which the dingey ran to carry the party out to the yacht.

It was at this point that Harold separated himself from the yachtsmen—not without some mutterings on their part and the delivery of a few reproaches with a fresh maritime flavour about them.

"What was he up to at all?" they asked of one another.

He could scarcely have told these earnest inquirers what he was up to. But his mood would have been quite intelligible to them had they known that he had, within the past half hour made up his mind to let nothing interfere with his asking Helen Craven if she would be good enough to marry him.

CHAPTER XII.—ON THE MYSTERY OF MAN.

HE meant to ask her at night. He had felt convinced, on returning after his adventure in his dinner dress, that nothing could induce him to think of Miss Craven as a possible wife. While sitting at breakfast, he had felt even more confident on this point; and yet now his mind was made up to ask her to marry him.

It must be admitted that his mood was a singular one, especially as, with his mind full of his resolution to ask Miss Craven to marry him, he was wandering around the rugged coastway, wondering by what means he could bring himself by the side of the girl with whom he had crossed the lough on the previous night.

His mood will be intelligible to such persons as have had friends who occasionally have found it necessary to their well-being to become teetotallers. It is well known that the fascination of the prospect of teetotalism is so great for such persons that the very thought of it compels them to rush off in the opposite direction. They indulge in an outburst of imbibing that makes even their best friends stand aghast, and then they 'take the pledge' with the cheerfulness of a child.

Harold Wynne felt inclined to allow his feelings an outburst, previous to entering upon a condition in which he meant his feelings to be kept in subjection.

To engage himself to marry Miss Craven was, he believed, equivalent to taking the pledge of the teetotaller so far as his feelings were concerned.

Meantime, however, he remained unpledged and with an unbounded sense of freedom.

And this was why he laughed loud and long when he saw in the course of his stroll around the cliffs, a small oar jammed in a crevice of the rocks a hundred feet below where he was walking.

He laughed again when he had gone—not so cautiously as he might have done—down to the crevice and released the oar.

It was, he knew, the one that had gone adrift from the boat the previous night.

He climbed the cliff to the Banshee's Cave and deposited the piece of timber in the recesses of that place. Then he lay down on the coarse herbage at the summit of the cliff until it was time to drift to the Castle for lunch. Life at the Castle involved a good deal of drifting. The guests drifted out in many directions after breakfast and occasionally drifted back to lunch, after which they drifted about until the dinner hour.

While taking lunch he was in such good spirits as made Lady Innisfail almost hopeless of him.

Edmund Airey had told her the previous night that Harold intended asking Miss Craven to marry him. Now, however, perceiving how excellent were his spirits, she looked reproachfully across the table at Edmund.

She was mutely asking him—and he knew it—how it was possible to reconcile Harold's good spirits with his resolution to ask Helen Craven to marry him? She knew—and so did Edmund—that high spirits and the Resolution are rarely found in association.

An hour after lunch the girl with the Brow entreated Harold's critical opinion on the subject of a gesture in the delivery of a certain poem, and the discussion of the whole question occupied another hour. The afternoon was thus pretty far advanced before he found himself seated alone in the boat which had been at the disposal of himself and Edmund during the two previous afternoons. The oar that he had picked up was lying at his feet along the timbers of the boat.

The sun was within an hour of setting when Brian appeared at the Castle bearing a letter for Lady Innisfail. It had been entrusted to him for delivery to her ladyship by Mr. Wynne, he said. Where was Mr. Wynne? That Brian would not take upon him to say; only he was at the opposite side of the lough. Maybe he was with Father Conn, who was the best of good company, or it wasn't a bit unlikely that it was the District Inspector of the Constabulary he was with. Anyhow it was sure that the gentleman had took a great fancy to the queer places along the coast, for hadn't he been to the thrubble to give a look in at the Banshee's Cave, the previous night, just because he was sthrucc with admiration of the story of the Princess that he, Brian, had told him and Mr. Airey in the boat?

The letter that Lady Innisfail received and glanced at while drinking tea on one of the garden seats outside the Castle, begged her ladyship to pardon the writer's not appearing at dinner that night, the fact being that he had unexpectedly found an old friend who had taken possession of him.

"It was very nice of him to write, wasn't it, my dear?" Lady Innisfail remarked to her friend Miss Craven, who was filtering a novel by a popular French author for the benefit of Lady Innisfail. "It was very nice of him to write. Of course that about the friend is rubbish. The charm of this neighbourhood is that no old friend ever turns up."

"You don't think that—that—perhaps—" suggested Miss Craven with the infinite delicacy of one who has been employed in the filtration of Paul Bourget.

"Not at all—not at all," said Lady Innisfail, shaking her head. "If it was his father it would be quite another matter."

"Oh!"

"Lord Fotheringay is too great a responsibility even for me, and I don't as a rule shirk such things," said Lady Innisfail. "But Harold is—well, I'll let you into a secret, though it is against myself: he has never made love even to me."

"That is inexcusable," remarked Miss Craven, with a little movement of the eyebrows. She did not altogether appreciate Lady Innisfail's systems. She had not a sufficient knowledge of dynamics and the transference of energy to be able to understand the beauty of the "switch" principle. "But if he is not with a friend—or—or—the other—"

"The enemy—our enemy?"

"Where can he be—where can he have been?"

"Heaven knows! There are some things that are too wonderful for me. I fancied long ago that I knew Man. My dear Helen, I was a fool. Man is a mystery. What could that boy mean by going to the Banshee's Cave last night, when he might have been dancing with me—or you?"

"Romance?"

"Romance and rubbish mean the same thing to such men as Harold Wynne, Helen—you should know so much," said Lady Innisfail. "That is, of course, romance in the abstract. The flutter of a human white frock would produce more impression on a man than a whole army of Banshees."

"And yet the boatman said that Mr. Wynne had spent some time last night at the Cave," said Miss Craven. "Was there a white dress in the question, do you fancy?"

Lady Innisfail turned her large and luminous eyes upon her companion. So she was accustomed to turn those orbs upon such young men as declared that they adored her. The movement was supposed to be indicative of infinite surprise, with abundant sympathy, and a trace of pity.

Helen Craven met the luminous gaze with a smile, that broadened as she murmured, "Dearest Lilian, we are quite alone. It is extremely unlikely that your expression can be noticed by any of the men. It is practically wasted."

"It is the natural and reasonable expression of the surprise I feel at the wisdom of the—the—"

"Serpent?"

"Not quite. Let us say, the young matron, lurking beneath the harmlessness of the—the—let us say the *ingenue*. A white dress! Pray go on with '*Un Cour de Femme*'."

Miss Craven picked up the novel which had been on the ground, flattened out in a position of oriental prostration and humility before the wisdom of the women.

CHAPTER XIII.—ON THE ART OF COLOURING.

THE people of the village of Ballycruiskeen showed themselves quite ready to enter into the plans of their pastor in the profitable enterprise of making entertainment for Lady Innisfail and her guests. The good pastor had both enterprise and imagination. Lady Innisfail had told him confidentially that day that she wished to impress her English visitors with the local colour of the region round about. Local colour was a phrase that she was as fond of as if she had been an art critic; but it so happened that the pastor had never heard the phrase before; he promptly assured her, however, that he sympathized most heartily with her ladyship's aspirations in this direction. Yes, it was absolutely necessary that they should be impressed with the local colour, and if, with this impression, there came an appreciation of the requirements of the chapel in the way of a new roof, it would please him greatly.

The roof would certainly be put on before the winter, even if the work had to be carried out at the expense of his Lordship, Lady Innisfail said with enthusiasm; and if Father Constantine could only get up a wake or a dance or some other festivity for the visitors, just to show them how picturesque and sincere were the Irish race in the West, she would take care that the work on the roof was begun without delay.

Father Constantine—he hardly knew himself by that name, having invariably been called Father Conn by his flock—began to have a comprehensive knowledge of what was meant by the phrase "local colour." Did her ladyship insist on a wake, he inquired.

Her ladyship said she had no foolish prejudices in the matter. She was quite willing to leave the whole question of the entertainment in the hands of his reverence. He knew the people best and he would be able to say in what direction their abilities could be exhibited to the greatest advantage. She had always had an idea, she confessed, that it was at a wake they shone; but, of course, if Father Constantine thought differently she would make no objection, but she would dearly like a wake.

The priest did not even smile for more than a minute; but he could not keep that twinkle out of his eyes even if the chapel walls in addition to the roof depended on his self-control.

He assured her ladyship that she was perfectly right in her ideas. He agreed with her that the wake was the one festivity that was calculated to bring into prominence the varied talents of his flock. But the unfortunate thing about it was its variableness. A wake was something that could not be arranged for beforehand—at least not without involving a certain liability to criminal prosecution. The elements of a wake were simple enough, to be sure, but simple and all as they were, they were not always forthcoming.

Lady Innisfail thought this very provoking. Of course, expense was no consideration—she hoped that the pastor understood so much. She hoped he understood that if he could arrange for a wake that night she would bear the expense.

The priest shook his head.

Well, then, if a wake was absolutely out of the question—she didn't see why it should be, but, of course, he knew best—why should he not get up an eviction? She thought that on the whole the guests had latterly heard more about Irish evictions than Irish wakes. There was plenty of local colour in an eviction, and so far as she could gather from the pictures she had seen in the illustrated papers, it was extremely picturesque—

yes, when the girls were barefooted, and when there was active resistance. Hadn't she heard something about boiling water?

The twinkle had left the priest's eyes as she prattled away. He had an impulse to tell her that it was the class to which her ladyship belonged and not that to which he belonged, who had most practice in that form of entertainment known as the eviction. But thinking of the chapel roof, he restrained himself. After all, Lord Innisfail had never evicted a family on his Irish estate. He had evicted several families on his English property, however; but no one ever makes a fuss about English evictions. If people fail to pay their rent in England they know that they must go. They have not the imagination of the Irish.

"I'll tell your ladyship what it is," said Father Conn, before she had quite come to the end of her prattle: "if the ladies and gentlemen who have the honour to be your ladyship's guests will take the trouble to walk or drive round the coast to the Curragh of Lamdhu after supper—I mean dinner—to-night, I'll get up a celebration of the Cruiskeen for you all."

"How delightful!" exclaimed her ladyship. "And what might a celebration of the Cruiskeen be?"

It was at this point that the imagination of the good father came to his assistance. He explained, with a volubility that comes to the Celt only when he is romancing, that the celebration of the Cruiskeen was a prehistoric rite associated with the village of Ballycruiskeen. Cruiskeen was, as perhaps her ladyship had heard, the Irish for a vessel known to common people as a jug—it was, he explained, a useful vessel for drinking out of—when it held a sufficient quantity.

Of course Lady Innisfail had heard of a jug—she had even heard of a song called "The Cruiskeen Lawn"—did that mean some sort of jug?

It meant the little full jug, his reverence assured her. Anyhow, the celebration of the Cruiskeen of Ballycruiskeen had taken place for hundreds—most likely thousands—of years at the Curragh of Lamdhu—Lamdhu meaning the Black Hand—and it was perhaps the most interesting of Irish customs. Was it more interesting than a wake? Why, a wake couldn't hold a candle to a Cruiskeen, and the display of candles was, as probably her ladyship knew, a distinctive feature of a wake.

Father Conn, finding how much imaginary archæology Lady Innisfail would stand without a protest, then allowed his imagination to revel in the details of harpers—who were much more genteel than fiddlers, he thought, though his flock preferred the fiddle—of native dances and of the recitals of genuine Irish poems—probably prehistoric. All these were associated with a Cruiskeen, he declared, and a Cruiskeen her ladyship and her ladyship's guests should have that night, if there was any public spirit left in Ballycruiskeen, and he rather thought that there was a good deal still left, thank God!

Lady Innisfail was delighted. Local colour! Why, this entertainment was a regular Winsor and Newton Cabinet.

It included everything that people in England were accustomed to associate with the Irish, and this was just what the guests would relish. It was infinitely more promising than the simple national dance for which she had been trying to arrange.

She shook Father Conn heartily by the hand, but stared at him when he made some remark about the chapel roof—she had already forgotten all about the roof.

The priest had not.

"God forgive me for my romancing!" he murmured, when her ladyship had departed and he stood wiping his forehead. "God forgive me! If it wasn't for the sake of the slate or two, the ne'er a word but the blessed truth would have been forced from me. A Cruiskeen! How was it that the notion seized me at all?"

He hurried off to an ingenious friend and confidential adviser of his, whose name was O'Flaherty, and who did a little in the horse-dealing line—a profession that tends to develop the ingenuity of those associated with it either as buyers or sellers—and Mr. O'Flaherty, after hearing Father Conn's story, sat down on the side of one of the ditches, which are such a distinctive feature of Ballycruiskeen and the neighbourhood, and roared with laughter.

"Ye've done it this time, and no mistake, Father Conn," he cried, when he had partially recovered from his hilarity. "I always said you'd do it some day, and ye've done it now. A Cruiskeen! Mother of Moses! A Cruiskeen! Oh, but it's yourself has the quare head, Father Conn!"

"Give over your fun, and tell us what's to be done—that's what you're to do if there's any good in you at all," said the priest.

"Oh, by my soul, ye'll have to carry out the enterprise in your own way, my brave Father Conn," said Mr. O'Flaherty. "A Cruiskeen! A——"

"Phinny O'Flaherty," said the priest solemnly, "if ye don't want to have the curse of the Holy Church flung at that red head of yours, ye'll rise and put me on the way of getting up at least a jig or two on the Curragh this night."

After due consideration Mr. O'Flaherty came to the conclusion that it would be unwise on his part to put in motion the terrible machinery of the Papal Interdict—if the forces of the Vatican were to be concentrated upon him he might never again be able to dispose of a "roarer" as merely a "whistler" to someone whose suspicions were susceptible of being lulled by a brogue. Mr. Phineas O'Flaherty consequently assured Father Conn that he would help his reverence, even if the act should jeopardize his prospects of future happiness in another world.

CHAPTER XIV.—ON AN IRISH DANCE.

LADY INNISFAIL'S guests—especially those who had been wandering over the mountains with guns all day—found her rather too indefatigable in her search for new methods of entertaining them. The notion of an after-dinner stroll of a few miles to the village of Ballycruiskeen for the sake of witnessing an entertainment, the details of which Lady Innisfail was unable to do more than suggest, and the attractions of which were rather more than doubtful, was not largely relished at the Castle.

Lord Innisfail announced his intention of remaining where he had dined; but he was one of the few men who could afford to brave Lady Innisfail's disdain and to decline to be chilled by her cold glances. The other men who did not want to be entertained on the principles formulated by Lady Innisfail, meanly kept out of her way after dinner. They hoped that they might have a chance of declaring solemnly afterwards, that they had been anxious to go, but had waited in vain for information as to the hour of departure, the costume to be worn, and the password—if a password were needed—to admit them to the historic rites of the Cruiskeen.

One of the women declined to go, on the ground that, so far as she could gather, the rite was not evangelical. Her views were evangelical.

One of the men—he was an Orangeman from Ulster—boldly refused to attend what was so plainly a device planned by the Jesuits for the capture of the souls—he assumed that they had souls—of the Innisfail family and their guests.

Miss Craven professed so ardently to be looking forward to the entertainment, that Mr. Airey, with his accustomed observance of the distribution of high lights in demeanour as well as in conversation, felt certain that she meant to stay at the Castle.

His accuracy of observation was proved when the party were ready to set out for Ballycruiskeen. MISS Craven's maid earned that lady's affectionate regards to her hostess; she had been foolish enough to sit in the sun during the afternoon with that fascinating novel, and as she feared it would, her indiscretion had given her a headache accompanied by dizziness. She would thus be unable to go with the general party to the village, but if she possibly could, she would follow them in an hour—perhaps less.

Edmund Airey smiled the smile of the prophet who lives to see his prediction realized—most of the prophets died violent deaths before they could have that gratification.

"Yes, it was undoubtedly an indiscretion," he murmured.

"Sitting in the sun?" said Lady Innisfail.

"Reading Paul Bourget," said he.

"Of course," said Lady Innisfail. "Talking of indiscretions, has anyone seen—ah, never mind."

"It is quite possible that the old friend whom you say he wrote about, may be a person of primitive habits—he may be inclined to retire early," said Mr. Airey.

Lady Innisfail gave a little puzzled glance at him—the puzzled expression vanished in a moment, however, before the ingenuousness of his smile.

"What a fool I am becoming!" she whispered. "I really never thought of that."

"That was because you never turned your attention properly to the mystery of the headache," said he.

Then they set off in the early moonlight for their walk along the cliff path that, in the course of a mile or so, trended downward and through the Pass of Lamdhu, with its dark pines growing half-way up the slope on one side. The lower branches of the trees stretched fantastic arms over the heads of the party walking on the road through the Pass. In the moonlight these fantastic arms seemed draped. The trees seemed attitudinizing to one another in a strange pantomime of their own.

The village of Ballycruiskeen lay just beyond the romantic defile, so that occasionally the inhabitants failed to hear the sound of the Atlantic hoarsely roaring as it was being strangled in the narrow part of the lough. They were therefore sometimes merry with a merriment impossible to dwellers nearer the coast.

It did not appear to their visitors that this was one of their merry nights. The natives were commanded by their good priest to be merry for "the quality," under penalties with which they were well acquainted. But merriment under a penalty is no more successful than the smile which is manufactured in a photographer's studio.

Father Conn made the mistake of insisting on all the members of his flock washing their faces. They had washed all the picturesqueness out of them, Mr. Airey suggested.

The Curragh of Ballycruiskeen was a somewhat wild moorland that became demoralized into a bog at one extremity. There was, however, a sufficiently settled portion to form a dancing green, and at one side of this patch the shocking incongruity of chairs—of a certain sort—and even a sofa—it was somewhat less certain—met the eyes of the visitors.

"Mind this, ye divils," the priest was saying in an affectionate way to the members of his flock, as the party from the Castle approached. "Mind this, it's dancing a new roof on the chapel that ye are. Every step ye take means a slate, so it does."

This was clearly the peroration of the pastor's speech.

The speech of Mr. Phineas O'Flaherty, who was a sort of unceremonious master of the ceremonies, had been previously delivered, fortunately when the guests were out of hearing.

At first the entertainment seemed to be a very mournful one. It was too like examination day at a village school to convey an idea of spontaneous mirth. The "quality" sat severely on the incongruous chairs—no one was brave enough to try the sofa—and some of the "quality" used double eye-glasses with handles, for the better inspection of the performers. This was chilling to the performers.

In spite of the efforts of Father Conn and his stage manager, Mr. O'Flaherty, the members of the cast for the entertainment assumed a huddled appearance that did themselves great injustice. They declined to group themselves effectively, but suggested to Mr. Durdan—who was not silent on the subject—one of the

illustrations to Foxe's Book of Martyrs—a scene in which about a score of persons about to be martyred are shown to be awaiting, with an aspect of cheerful resignation that deceived no one, their “turn” at the hands of the executioner.

The merry Irish jig had a depressing effect at first. The priest was well-meaning, but he had not the soul of an artist. When a man has devoted all his spare moments for several years to the repression of unseemly mirth, he is unwise to undertake, at a moment's notice, the duties of stimulating such mirth. Under the priest's eye the jig was robbed of its jiguity, so to speak. It was the jig of the dancing class.

Mr. O'Flaherty threatened to scandalize Father Conn by a few exclamations about the display of fetlocks—the priest had so little experience of the “quality” that he fancied a suggestion of slang would be offensive to their ears. He did not know that the hero of the “quality” in England is the costermonger, and that a few years ago the hero was the cowboy. But Edmund Airey, perceiving with his accustomed shrewdness, how matters stood, managed to draw the priest away from the halfhearted exponents of the dance, and so questioned him on the statistics of the parish—for Father Conn was as hospitable with his statistics as he was with his whiskey punch upon occasions—that half an hour had passed before they returned together to the scene of the dance, the priest with a five-pound note of Mr. Airey's pressed against his heart.

“Murder alive! what's this at all at all?” cried Father Conn, becoming aware of the utterance of whoop after whoop by the dancers.

“It's the jig they're dancin' at last, an' more power to thim!” cried Phineas O'Flaherty, clapping his hands and giving an encouraging whoop or two.

He was right. The half dozen couples artistically dishevelled, and rapidly losing the baleful recollections of having been recently tidied up to meet the “quality”—rapidly losing every recollection of the critical gaze of the “quality”—of the power of speech possessed by the priest—of everything, clerical and lay, except the strains of the fiddle which occupied an intermediate position between things lay and clerical, being wholly demoniac—these half dozen couples were dancing the jig with a breadth and feeling that suggested the youth of the world and the reign of Bacchus.

Black hair flowing in heavy flakes over shoulders unevenly bare—shapely arms flung over heads in an attitude of supreme self-abandonment—a passionate advance, a fervent retreat, then an exchange of musical cries like wild gasps for breath, and ever, ever, ever the demoniac music of the fiddle, and ever, ever, ever the flashing and flying from the ground like the feet of the winged Hermes—flashing and flashing with the moonlight over all, and the fantastic arms of the hill-side pines stretched out like the fringed arms of a grotesque Pierrot—this was the scene to which the priest returned with Edmund Airey.

He threw up his hands and was about to rush upon the half-frenzied dancers, when Edmund grasped him by the arm, and pointed mutely to the attitude of the “quality.”

Lady Innisfail and her friends were no longer sitting frigidly on their chairs—the double eye-glasses were dropped, and those who had held them were actually joining in the whoops of the dancers. Her ladyship was actually clapping her hands in the style of encouragement adopted by Mr. O'Flaherty.

The priest stood in the attitude in which he had been arrested by the artful Edmund Airey. His eyes and his mouth were open, and his right hand was pressed against the five-pound note that he had just received. There was a good deal of slate-purchasing potentialities in a five-pound note. If her ladyship and her guests were shocked—as the priest, never having heard of the skirt dance and its popularity in the drawing-room—believed they should be, they were not displaying their indignation in a usual way. They were almost as excited as the performers.

Father Conn seated himself without a word of protest, in one of the chairs vacated by the Castle party. He felt that if her ladyship liked that form of entertainment, the chapel roof was safe. The amount of injury that would be done to the Foul Fiend by the complete re-roofing of the chapel should certainly be sufficient to counteract whatever sin might be involved in the wild orgy that was being carried on beneath the light of the moon. This was the consolation that the priest had as he heard whoop after whoop coming from the dancers.

Six couples remained on the green dancing-space. The fiddler was a wizened, deformed man with small gleaming eyes. He stood on a stool and kept time with one foot. He increased the time of the dance so gradually as to lead the dancers imperceptibly on until, without being aware of it, they had reached a frenzied pitch that could not be maintained for many minutes. But still the six couples continued wildly dancing, the moonlight striking them aslant and sending six black quivering shadows far over the ground. Suddenly a man dropped out of the line and lay gasping on the grass. Then a girl flung herself with a cry into the arms of a woman who was standing among the onlookers. Faster still and faster went the grotesquely long arms of the dwarf fiddler—his shadow cast by the moonlight was full of horrible suggestions—and every now and again a falsetto whoop came from him, his teeth suddenly gleaming as his lips parted in uttering the cry.

The two couples, who now remained facing one another, changing feet with a rapidity that caused them to appear constantly off the ground, were encouraged by the shouts and applause of their friends. The air was full of cries, in which the spectators from the Castle joined. Faster still the demoniac music went, every strident note being clearly heard above the shouts. But when one of the two couples staggered wildly and fell with outstretched arms upon the grass, the shriek of the fiddle sounded but faintly above the cries.

The priest could restrain himself no longer. He sprang to his feet and kicked the stool from under the fiddler, sending the misshapen man sprawling in one direction and his instrument with an unearthly shriek in another.

Silence followed that shriek. It lasted but a few seconds, however. The figure of a man—a stranger—appeared running across the open space between the village and the Curragh, where the dance was being held.

He held up his right hand in so significant a way, that the priest's foot was arrested in the act of implanting another kick upon the stool, and the fiddler sat up on the ground and forgot to look for his instrument through surprise at the apparition.

"It's dancin' at the brink of the grave, ye are," gasped the man, as he approached the group that had become suddenly congested in anticipation of the priest's wrath.

"Why, it's only Brian the boatman, after all," said Lady Innisfail. "Great heavens! I had such a curious thought as he appeared. Oh, that dancing! He did not seem to be a man."

"This is no doubt part of the prehistoric rite," said Mr. Airey.

"How simply lovely!" cried Miss Stafford.

"In God's name, man, tell us what you mean," said the priest.

"It's herself," gasped Brian. "It's the one that's nameless. Her wail is heard over all the lough—I heard it with my ears and hurried here for your reverence. Don't we know that she never cries except for a death?"

"He means the Banshee," said Lady Innisfail.

"The people, I've heard, think it unlucky to utter her name."

"So lovely! Just like savages!" said Miss Stafford.

"I dare say the whole thing is only part of the ceremony of the Cruiskeen," said Mr. Durdan.

"Brian O'Donal," said the priest; "have you come here to try and terrify the country side with your romancin'?"

"By the sacred Powers, your reverence, I heard the cry of her myself, as I came by the bend of the lough. If it's not the truth that I'm after speaking, may I be the one that she's come for."

"Doesn't he play the part splendidly?" said Lady Innisfail. "I'd almost think that he was in earnest. Look how the people are crossing themselves."

Miss Stafford looked at them through her double eye-glasses with the long handle.

"How lovely!" she murmured. "The Cruiskeen is the Oberammergau of Connaught."

Edmund Airey laughed.

"God forgive us all for this night!" said the priest. "Sure, didn't I think that the good that would come of getting on the chapel roof would cover the shame of this night! Go to your cabins, my children. You were not to blame. It was me and me only. My Lady"—he turned to the Innisfail party—"this entertainment is over. God knows I meant it for the best."

"But we haven't yet heard the harper," cried Lady Innisfail.

"And the native bards," said Miss Stafford. "I should so much like to hear a bard. I might even recite a native poem under his tuition."

Miss Stafford saw a great future for native Irish poetry in English drawing-rooms. It might be the success of a season.

"The entertainment's over," said the priest.

"It's that romancer Brian, that's done it all," cried Phineas O'Flaherty.

"Mr. O'Flaherty, if it's not the truth may I—oh, didn't I hear her voice, like the wail of a girl in distress?" cried Brian.

"Like what?" said Mr. Airey.

"Oh, you don't believe anything—we all know that, sir," said Brian.

"A girl in distress—I believe in that, at any rate," said Edmund.

"Now!" said Miss Stafford, "don't you think that I might recite something to these poor people?" She turned to Lady Innisfail. "Poor people! They may never have heard a real recitation—"The Dove Cote,' 'Peter's Blue Bell'—something simple."

There was a movement among her group.

"The sooner we get back to the Castle the better it will be for all of us," said Lady Innisfail. "Yes, Father Constantine, we distinctly looked for a native bard, and we are greatly disappointed. Who ever heard of a genuine Cruiskeen without a native bard? Why, the thing's absurd!"

"A Connaught Oberammergau without a native bard! *Oh, Padre mio—Padre mio!*" said Miss Stafford, daintily shaking her double eye-glasses at the priest.

"My lady," said he, "you heard what the man said. How would it be possible for us to continue this scene while that warning voice is in the air?"

"If you give us a chance of hearing the warning voice, we'll forgive you everything, and say that the Cruiskeen is a great success," cried Lady Innisfail.

"If your ladyship takes the short way to the bend of the lough you may still hear her," said Brian.

"God forbid," said the priest.

"Take us there, and if we hear her, I'll give you half a sovereign," cried her ladyship, enthusiastically.

"If harm comes of it don't blame me," said Brian. "Step out this way, my lady."

"We may still be repaid for our trouble in coming so far," said one of the party. "If we do actually hear the Banshee, I, for one, will feel more than satisfied."

Miss Stafford, as she hurried away with the party led by Brian, wondered if it might not be possible to find a market for a Banshee's cry in a London drawing-room. A new emotion was, she understood, eagerly awaited. The serpentine dance and the costermonger's lyre had waned. It was extremely unlikely that they should survive another season. If she were to be first in the field with the Banshee's cry, introduced with a few dainty steps of the jig incidental to a poem with a refrain of "Asthore" or "Mavourneen," she might yet make a name for herself.

CHAPTER XV.—ON THE SHRIEK.

IN a space of time that was very brief, owing to the resolution with which Lady Innisfail declined to accept the suggestion of short cuts by Brian, the whole party found themselves standing breathless at the beginning of the line of cliffs. A mist saturated with moonlight had drifted into the lough from the Atlantic. It billowed below their eyes along the surface of the water, and crawled along the seared faces of the cliffs, but no cold fingers of the many-fingered mist clasped the higher ridges. The sound of the crashing of the unseen waves about the bases of the cliffs filled the air, but there was no other sound.

"Impostor!" said Edmund Airey, turning upon Brian. "You heard no White Lady to-night. You have jeopardized our physical and your spiritual health by your falsehood."

"You shall get no half sovereign from me," said Lady Innisfail.

"Is it me that's accountable for her coming and going?" cried Brian, with as much indignation as he could afford. Even an Irishman cannot afford the luxury of being indignant with people who are in the habit of paying him well, and an Irishman is ready to sacrifice much to sentiment. "It's glad we should all be this night not to hear the voice of herself."

Lady Innisfail looked at him. She could afford to be indignant, and she meant to express her indignation; but when it came to the point she found that it was too profound to be susceptible of expression.

"Oh, come away," she said, after looking severely at Brian for nearly a minute.

"Dear Lady Innisfail," said Mr. Durdan, "I know that you feel indignant, fancying that we have been disappointed. Pray do not let such an idea have weight with you for a moment."

"Oh, no, no," said Miss Stafford, who liked speaking in public quite as well as Mr. Durdan. "Oh, no, no; you have done your best, dear Lady Innisfail. The dance was lovely; and though, of course, we should have liked to hear a native bard or two, as well as the Banshee—"

"Yet bards and Banshees we know to be beyond human control," said Mr. Airey.

"We know that if it rested with you, we should hear the Banshee every night," said Mr. Durdan.

"Yes, we all know your kindness of heart, dear Lady Innisfail," resumed Miss Stafford.

"Indeed you should hear it, and the bard as well," cried Lady Innisfail. "But as Mr. Airey says—and he knows all about bard and Banshees and such like things Great heaven! We are not disappointed after all, thank heaven!"

Lady Innisfail's exclamation was uttered after there floated to the cliffs where she and her friends were standing, from the rolling white mist that lay below, the sound of a long wail. It was repeated, only fainter, when she had uttered her thanksgiving, and it was followed by a more robust shout.

"Isn't it lovely?" whispered Lady Innisfail.

"I don't like it," said Miss Stafford, with a shudder. "Let us go away—oh, let us go away at once."

Miss Stafford liked simulated horrors only. The uncanny in verse was dear to her; but when, for the first time, she was brought face to face with what would have formed the subject of a thrilling romance with a suggestion of the supernatural, she shuddered.

"Hush," said Lady Innisfail; "if we remain quiet we may hear it again."

"I don't want to hear it again," cried Miss Stafford. "Look at the man. He knows all about it. He is one of the natives."

She pointed to Brian, who was on his knees on the rock muttering petitions for the protection of all the party.

He knew, however, that his half sovereign was safe, whatever might happen. Miss Stafford's remark was reasonable. Brian should know all about the Banshee and its potentialities of mischief.

"Get up, you fool!" said Edmund Airey, catching the native by the shoulder. "Don't you know as well as I do that a boat with someone aboard is adrift in the mist?"

"Oh, I know that you don't believe in anything," said Brian.

"I believe in your unlimited laziness and superstition," said Edmund. "I'm very sorry, my dear Lady Innisfail, to interfere with your entertainment, but it's perfectly clear to me that someone is in distress at the foot of the cliffs."

"How can you be so horrid—so commonplace?" said Lady Innisfail.

"He is one of the modern iconoclasts," said another of the group. "He would fling down our most cherished beliefs. He told me that he considered Madame Blavatsky a swindler."

"Dear Mr. Airey," said Miss Stafford, who was becoming less timid as the wail from the sea had not been repeated. "Dear Mr. Airey, let us entreat of you to leave us our Banshee whatever you may take from us."

"There are some things in heaven and earth that refuse to be governed by a phrase," sneered Mr. Durdan.

"Mules and the members of the Opposition are among them," said Edmund, preparing to descend the cliffs by the zig-zag track.

He had scarcely disappeared in the mist when there was a shriek from Miss Stafford, and pointing down the track with a gesture, which for expressiveness, she had never surpassed in the most powerful of her recitations, she flung herself into Lady Innisfail's arms.

"Great heavens!" cried Lady Innisfail. "It is the White Lady herself!"

"We're all lost, and the half sovereign's nothing here or there," said Brian, in a tone of complete resignation.

Out of the mist there seemed to float a white figure of a girl. She stood for some moments with the faint mist around her, and while the group on the cliff watched her—some of them found it necessary to cling together—another white figure floated through the mist to the side of the first, and then came another figure—that of a man—only he did not float.

“I wish you would not cling quite so close to me, my dear; I can’t see anything of what’s going on,” said Lady Innisfail to Miss Stafford, whose head was certainly an inconvenience to Lady Innisfail.

With a sudden, determined movement she shifted the head from her bosom to her shoulder, and the instant that this feat was accomplished she cried out, “Helen Craven!”

“Helen Craven?” said Miss Stafford, recovering the use of her head in a moment.

“Yes, it’s Helen Craven or her ghost that’s standing there,” said Lady Innisfail.

“And Harold Wynne is with her. Are you there, Wynne?” sang out Mr. Durdan.

“Hallo?” came the voice of Harold from below. “Who is there?”

“Why, we’re all here,” cried Edmund, emerging from the mist at his side. “How on earth did you get here?—and Miss Craven—and—he looked at the third figure—he had never seen the third figure before.

“Oh, it’s a long story,” laughed Harold. “Will you give a hand to Miss Craven?”

Mr. Airey said it would please him greatly to do so, and by his kindly aid Miss Craven was, in the course of a few minutes, placed by the side of Lady Innisfail.

She took the place just vacated by Miss Stafford on Lady Innisfail’s bosom, and was even more embarrassing to Lady Innisfail than the other had been. Helen Craven was heavier, to start with.

But it was rather by reason of her earnest desire to see the strange face, that Lady Innisfail found Helen’s head greatly in her way.

“Lady Innisfail, when Miss Craven is quite finished with you, I shall present to you Miss Avon,” said Harold.

“I should be delighted,” said Lady Innisfail. “Dearest Helen, can you not spare me for a moment?”

Helen raised her head.

It was then that everyone perceived how great was the devastation done by the mist to the graceful little curled fringes of her forehead. Her hair was lank, showing that she had as massive a brow as Miss Stafford’s, if she wished to display it.

“It is a great pleasure to me to meet you, Miss Avon; I’m sure that I have often heard of you from Mr. Wynne and—oh, yes, many other people,” said Lady Innisfail. “But just now—well, you can understand that we are all bewildered.”

“Yes, we are all bewildered,” said Miss Avon. “You see, we heard the cry of the White Lady—”

“Of course,” said Harold; “we heard it too. The White Lady was Miss Craven. She was in one of the boats, and the mist coming on so suddenly, she could not find her way back to the landing place. Luckily we were able to take her boat in tow before it got knocked to pieces. I hope Miss Craven did not over-exert herself.”

“I hope not,” said Lady Innisfail. “What on earth induced you to go out in a boat alone, Helen—and suffering from so severe a headache into the bargain?”

“I felt confident that the cool air would do me good,” said Miss Craven, somewhat dolefully.

Lady Innisfail looked at her in silence for some moments, then she laughed.

No one else seemed to perceive any reason for laughter.

Lady Innisfail then turned her eyes upon Miss Avon. The result of her observation was precisely the same as the result of Harold’s first sight of that face had been. Lady Innisfail felt that she had never seen so beautiful a girl.

Then Lady Innisfail laughed again.

Finally she looked at Harold and laughed for the third time. The space of a minute nearly was occupied by her observations and her laughter.

“I think that on the whole we should hasten on to the Castle,” said she at length. “Miss Craven is pretty certain to be fatigued—we are, at any rate. Of course you will come with us, Miss Avon.”

The group on the cliff ceased to be a group when she had spoken; but Miss Avon did not move with the others. Harold also remained by her side.

“I don’t know what I should do,” said Miss Avon. “The boat is at the foot of the cliff.”

“It would be impossible for you to find your course so long as the mist continues,” said Harold. “Miss Avon and her father—he is an old friend of mine—we breakfasted together at my college—are living in the White House—you may have heard its name—on the opposite shore—only a mile by sea, but six by land,” he added, turning to Lady Innisfail.

“Returning to-night is out of the question,” said Lady Innisfail. “You must come with us to the Castle for to-night. I shall explain all to your father to-morrow, if any explanation is needed.” Miss Avon shook her head, and murmured a recognition of Lady Innisfail’s kindness.

“There is Brian,” said Harold. “He will confront your father in the morning with the whole story.”

“Yes, with the whole story,” said Lady Innisfail, with an amusing emphasis on the words. “I already owe Brian half a sovereign.”

“Oh, Brian will carry the message all for love,” cried the girl.

Lady Innisfail did her best to imitate the captivating freshness of the girl’s words.

“All for love—all for love!” she cried.

Harold smiled. He remembered having had brought under his notice a toy nightingale that imitated the song of the nightingale so closely that the Jew dealer, who wanted to sell the thing, declared that no one on earth could tell the difference between the two.

The volubility of Brian in declaring that he would do anything out of love for Miss Avon was amazing. He

went down the cliff face to bring the boats round to the regular moorings, promising to be at the Castle in half an hour to receive Miss Avon's letter to be put into her father's hand at his hour of rising.

By the time Miss Avon and Harold had walked to the Castle with Lady Innisfail, they had acquainted her with a few of the incidents of the evening—how they also had been caught by the mist while in their boat, and had with considerable trouble succeeded in reaching the craft in which Miss Craven was helplessly drifting. They had heard Miss Craven's cry for help, they said, and Harold had replied to it. But still they had some trouble picking up her boat.

Lady Innisfail heard all the story, and ventured to assert that all was well that ended well.

"And this is the end," she cried, as she pointed to the shining hall seen through the open doors.

"Yes, this is the end of all—a pleasant end to the story," said the girl.

Harold followed them as they entered.

He wondered if this was the end of the story, or only the beginning.

CHAPTER XVI.—ON THE VALUE OF A BAD CHARACTER.

IT was said by some people that the judge, during his vacation, had solved the problem set by the philosopher to his horse. He had learned to live on a straw a day, only there was something perpetually at the end of his straw—something with a preposterous American name in a tumbler to match.

He had the tumbler and the straw on a small table by his side while he watched, with great unsteadiness, the strokes of the billiard players.

From an hour after dinner he was in a condition of perpetual dozing. This was his condition also from an hour after the opening of a case in court, which required the closest attention to enable even the most delicately appreciative mind to grasp even its simplest elements.

He had, he said, been the most widely awake of counsel for thirty years, so that he rather thought he was entitled to a few years dozing as a judge.

Other people—they were his admirers—said that his dozing represented an alertness far beyond that of the most conscientiously wakeful and watchful of the judicial establishment in England.

It is easy to resemble Homer—in nodding—and in this special Homeric quality the judge excelled; but it was generally understood that it would not be wise to count upon his nodding himself into a condition of unobservance. He had already delivered judgment on the character of the fine cannons of one of the players in the hall, and upon the hazards of the other. He had declined to mark the game, however, and he had thereby shown his knowledge of human nature. There had already been four disputes as to the accuracy of the marking. (It was being done by a younger man).

"How can a man expect to make his favourite break after some hours on a diabolical Irish jaunting car?" one of the players was asking, as he bent over the table.

The words were uttered at the moment of Harold's entrance, close behind Lady Innisfail and Miss Avon.

Hearing the words he stood motionless before he had taken half-a-dozen steps into the hall.

Lady Innisfail also stopped at the same instant, and looked over her shoulder at Harold.

Through the silence there came the little click of the billiard balls.

The speaker gave the instinctive twist of the practised billiard player toward the pocket that he wished the ball to approach. Then he took a breath and straightened himself in a way that would have made any close observer aware of the fact that he was no longer a young man.

There was, however, more than a suggestion of juvenility in his manner of greeting Lady Innisfail. He was as effusive as is consistent with the modern spirit of indifference to the claims of hostesses and all other persons.

He was not so effusive when he turned to Harold; but that was only to be expected, because Harold was his son.

"No, my boy," said Lord Fotheringay, "I didn't fancy that you would expect to see me here to-night—I feel surprised to find myself here. It seems like a dream to me—a charming dream-vista with Lady Innisfail at the end of the vista. Innisfail always ruins his chances of winning a game by attempting a screw back into the pocket. He leaves everything on. You'll see what my game is now."

He chalked his cue and bent over the table once more.

Harold watched him make the stroke. "You'll see what my game is," said Lord Fotheringay, as he settled himself down to a long break.

Harold questioned it greatly. His father's games were rarely transparent.

"What on earth can have brought him?—oh, he takes one's breath away," whispered Lady Innisfail to Harold, with a pretty fair imitation of a smile lingering about some parts of her face.

Harold shook his head. There was not even the imitation of a smile about his face.

Lady Innisfail gave a laugh, and turned quickly to Miss Avon.

"My husband will be delighted to meet you, my dear," said she. "He is certain to know your father."

Harold watched Lord Innisfail shaking hands with Miss Avon at the side of the billiard table, while his father bent down to make another stroke. When the stroke was played he saw his father straighten himself and look toward Miss Avon.

The look was a long one and an interested one. Then the girl disappeared with Lady Innisfail, and the look that Lord Fotheringay cast at his son was a short one, but it was quite as intelligible to that soft as the long look at Miss Avon had been to him.

Harold went slowly and in a singularly contemplative mood to his bedroom, whence he emerged in a space, wearing a smoking-jacket and carrying a pipe and tobacco pouch.

The smoking-jackets that glowed through the hall towards the last hour of the day at Castle Innisfail were a dream of beauty.

Lady Innisfail had given orders to have a variety of sandwiches and other delicacies brought to the hall for those of her guests who had attended the festivities at Ballycruiskeen; and when Harold found his way downstairs, he perceived in a moment that only a few of the feeble ones of the house-party—the fishermen who had touches of rheumatism and the young women who cherished their complexions—were absent from the hall.

He also noticed that his father was seated by the side of Beatrice Avon and that he was succeeding in making himself interesting to her.

He knew that his father generally succeeded in making himself interesting to women.

In another part of the hall Lady Innisfail was succeeding in making herself interesting to some of the men. She also was accustomed to meet with success in this direction. She was describing to such as had contrived to escape the walk to Ballycruiskeen, the inexhaustibly romantic charm of the scene on the Curragh while the natives were dancing, and the descriptions certainly were not deficient in colour.

The men listened to her with such an aspect of being enthralled, she felt certain that they were full of regret that they had failed to witness the dance. It so happened, however, that the result of her account of the scene was to lead those of her audience who had remained at the Castle, to congratulate themselves upon a lucky escape.

And all this time, Harold noticed that his father was making himself interesting to Beatrice Avon.

The best way for any man to make himself interesting to a woman is to show himself interested in her. He knew that his father was well aware of this fact, and that he was getting Beatrice Avon to tell him all about herself.

But when Lady Innisfail reached the final situation in her dramatic account of the dance, and hurried her listeners to the brink of the cliff—when she reproduced in a soprano that was still vibratory, the cry that had sounded through the mist—when she pointed to Miss Avon in telling of the white figure that had emerged from the mist—(Lady Innisfail did not think it necessary to allude to Helen Craven, who had gone to bed)—the auditors' interest was real and not simulated. They looked at the white figure as Lady Innisfail pointed to her, and their interest was genuine.

They could at least appreciate this element of the evening's entertainment, and as they glanced at Harold, who was eating a number of sandwiches in a self-satisfied way, they thought that they might safely assume that he was the luckiest of the *dramatis personae* of the comedy—or was it a tragedy?—described by Lady Innisfail.

And all this time Harold was noticing that his father, by increasing his interest in Beatrice, was making himself additionally interesting to her.

But the judge had also—at the intervals between his Homeric nods—been noticing the living things around him. He put aside his glass and its straw—he had been toying with it all the evening, though the liquid that mounted by capillary attraction up the tube was something noisome, without a trace of alcohol—and seated himself on the other side of the girl.

He assured her that he had known her father. Lord Fotheringay did not believe him; but this was not to the point, and he knew it. What was to the point was the fact that the judge understood the elements of the art of interesting a girl almost as fully as Lord Fotheringay did, without having quite made it the serious business of his life. The result was that Miss Avon was soon telling the judge all about herself—this was what the judge professed to be the most anxious to hear—and Lord Fotheringay lit a cigar.

He felt somewhat bitterly on the subject of the judge's intrusion. But the feeling did not last for long. He reflected upon the circumstance that Miss Avon could never have heard that he himself was a very wicked man.

He knew that the interest that attaches to a man with a reputation for being very wicked is such as need fear no rival. He felt that should his power to interest a young woman ever be jeopardized, he could still fall back upon his bad character and be certain to attract her.

CHAPTER XVII.—ON PROVIDENCE AS A MATCH-MAKER.

Of course," said Lady Innisfail to Edmund Airey the next day. "Of course, if Harold alone had rescued Helen from her danger last night, all would have been well. You know as well as I do that when a man rescues a young woman from a position of great danger, he can scarcely do less than ask her to marry him."

"Of course," replied Edmund. "I really can't see how, if he has any dramatic appreciation whatever, he could avoid asking her to marry him."

"It is beyond a question," said Lady Innisfail. "So that if Harold had been alone in the boat all would have been well. The fact of Miss Avon's being also in the boat must, however, be faced. It complicates matters exceedingly."

Edmund shook his head gravely.

"I knew that you would see the force of it," resumed Lady Innisfail. "And then there is his father—his father must be taken into account."

"It might be as well, though I know that Lord Fotheringay's views are the same as yours."

"I am sure that they are; but why, then, does he come here to sit by the side of the other girl and interest her as he did last evening?"

"Lord Fotheringay can never be otherwise than interesting, even to people who do not know how entirely devoid of scruple he is."

"Of course I know all that; but why should he come here and sit beside so very pretty a girl as this Miss Avon?"

"There is no accounting for tastes, Lady Innisfail.

"You are very stupid, Mr. Airey. What I mean is, why should Lord Fotheringay behave in such a way as must force his son's attention to be turned in a direction that—that—in short, it should not be turned in? Heaven knows that I want to do the best for Harold—I like him so well that I could almost wish him to remain unmarried. But you know as well as I do, that it is absolutely necessary for him to marry a girl with a considerable amount of money."

"That is as certain as anything can be. I gave him the best advice in my power on this subject, and he announced his intention of asking Miss Craven to marry him."

"But instead of asking her he strolled round the coast to that wretched cave, and there met, by accident, the other girl—oh, these other girls are always appearing on the scene at the wrong moment."

"The world would go on beautifully if it were not for the Other Girl," said Edmund. "If you think of it, there is not an event in history that has not turned upon the opportune or inopportune appearance of the Other Girl. Nothing worth speaking of has taken place, unless by the agency of the Other Girl."

"And yet Lord Fotheringay comes here and sits by the side of this charming girl, and his son watches him making himself interesting to her as, alas! he can do but too easily. Mr. Airey, I should not be surprised if Harold were to ask Miss Avon to-day to marry him—I should not, indeed."

"Oh, I think you take too pessimistic a view of the matter altogether, Lady Innisfail. Anyhow, I don't see that we can do more than we have already done. I think I should feel greatly inclined to let Providence and Lord Fotheringay fight out the matter between them."

"Like the archangel and the Other over the body of Moses?"

"Well, something like that."

"No, Mr. Airey; I don't believe in Providence as a match-maker."

Mr. Airey gave a laugh. He wondered if it was possible that Harold had mentioned to her that he, Edmund, had expressed the belief that Providence as a match-maker had much to learn.

"I don't see how we can interfere," said he. "I like Harold Wynne greatly. He means to do something in the world, and I believe he will do it. He affords a convincing example of the collapse of heredity as a principle. I like him if only for that."

Lady Innisfail looked at him in silence for a few moments.

"Yes," she said, slowly. "Harold does seem to differ greatly from his father. I wonder if it is the decree of Providence that has kept him without money."

"Do you suggest that the absence of money—?"

"No, no; I suggest nothing. If a man must be wicked he'll be wicked without money almost as readily as with it. Only I wonder, if Harold had come in for the title and the property—such as it was—at the same age as his father was when he inherited all, would he be so ready as you say he is to do useful work on the side of the government of his country?"

"That is a question for the philosophers," said Edmund.

In this unsatisfactory way the conversation between Lady Innisfail and Mr. Airey on the morning after Lord Fotheringay's arrival at the Castle, came to an end. No conversation that ends in referring the question under consideration to the philosophers, can by any possibility be thought satisfactory. But the conversation could not well be continued when Miss Craven, by the side of Miss Avon, was seen to be approaching.

Edmund Airey turned his eyes upon the two girls, then they rested upon the face of Beatrice.

As she came closer his glance rested upon the eyes of Beatrice. The result of his observation was to convince him that he had never before seen such beautiful eyes.

They were certainly gray; and they were as full of expression as gray eyes can be. They were large, and to look into them seemed like looking into the transparent depths of an unfathomed sea—into the transparent heights of an inexhaustible heaven.

A glimpse of heaven suggests the bliss of the beatified. A glimpse of the ocean suggests shipwreck.

He knew this perfectly well as he looked at her eyes; but only for an instant did it occur to him that they

conveyed some message to him.

Before he had time to think whether the message promised the bliss of the dwellers in the highest heaven, or the disaster of those who go down into the depths of the deepest sea, he was inquiring from Helen Craven if the chill of which she had complained on the previous night, had developed into a cold.

Miss Craven assured him that, so far from experiencing any ill effects from her adventure, she had never felt better in all her life.

"But had it not been for Miss Avon's hearing my cries of despair, goodness knows where I should have been in another ten minutes," she added, putting her arm round Miss Avon's waist, and looking, as Edmund had done, into the mysterious depths of Miss Avon's gray eyes.

"Nonsense!" said Miss Avon. "To tell you the plain truth, I did not hear your cries. It was Mr. Wynne who said he heard the White Lady wailing for her lover."

"How could he translate the cry so accurately?" said Edmund. "Do you suppose that he had heard the Banshee's cry at the same place?"

He kept his eyes upon Miss Avon's face, and he saw in a moment that she was wondering how much he knew of the movements of Harold Wynne during the previous two nights.

Helen Craven looked at him also pretty narrowly. She was wondering if he had told anyone that he had suggested to her the possibility of Harold's being in the neighbourhood of the Banshee's Cave during the previous evening.

Both girls laughed in another moment, and then Edmund Airey laughed also—in a sort of way. Lady Innisfail was the last to join in the laugh. But what she laughed at was the way in which Edmund had laughed.

And while this group of four were upon the northern terrace, Harold was seated the side of his father on one of the chairs that faced the south. Lord Fotheringay was partial to a southern aspect. His life might be said to be a life of southern aspects. He meant that it should never be out of the sun, not because some of the incidents that seemed to him to make life worth preserving were such as could best stand the searching light of the sun, but simply because his was the nature of the butterfly. He was a butterfly of fifty-seven—a butterfly that found it necessary to touch up with artificial powders the ravages of years upon the delicate, downy bloom of youth—a butterfly whose wings had now and again been singed by contact with a harmful flame—whose still shapely body was now and again bent with rheumatism. Surely the rheumatic butterfly is the most wretched of insects!

He had fluttered away from a fresh singeing, he was assuring his son. Yes, he had scarcely strength left in his wings to carry him out of the sphere of influence of the flame. He had, he said in a mournful tone, been very badly treated. She had treated him very badly. The Italian nature was essentially false—he might have known it—and when an Italian nature is developed with a high soprano, very shrill in its upper register, the result was—well, the result was that the flame had singed the wings of the elderly insect who was Harold's father.

"Talk of money!" he cried, with so sudden an expression of emotion that a few caked scraps of sickly, roseate powder fluttered from the crinkled lines of his forehead—Talk of money! It was not a matter of hundreds—he was quite prepared for that—but when the bill ran up to thousands—thousands—thousands—oh, the whole affair was sickening. (Harold cordially agreed with him, though he did not express himself to this effect). Was it not enough to shake one's confidence in woman—in human nature—in human art (operatic)—in the world?

Yes, it was the Husband.

The Husband, Lord Fotheringay was disposed to regard in pretty much the same light as Mr. Airey regarded the Other Girl. The Husband was not exactly the obstacle, but the inconvenience. He had a habit of turning up, and it appeared that in the latest of Lord Fotheringay's experiences his turning up had been more than usually inopportune.

"That is why I followed so close upon the heels of my letter to you," said the father. "The crash came in a moment—it was literally a crash too, now that I think upon it, for that hot-blooded ruffian, her husband, caught one corner of the table cloth—we were at supper—and swept everything that was on the table into a corner of the room. Yes, the bill is in my portmanteau. And she took his part. Heavens above! She actually took his part. I was the scoundrel—*briccone!*—the coarse Italian is still ringing in my ears. It was anything but a charming duetto. He sang a basso—her upper register was terribly shrill—I had never heard it more so. Artistically the scene was a failure; but I had to run for all that. Humiliating, is it not, to be overcome by something that would, if subjected to the recognized canons of criticism, be pronounced a failure? And he swore that he would follow me and have my life. Enough. You got my letter. Fortune is on your side, my boy. You saved her life last night."

"Whose life did I save?" asked the son. "Whose life? Heavens above! Have you been saving more than one life?"

"Not more than one—a good deal less than one. Don't let us get into a sentimental strain, pater. You are the chartered—ah, the chartered sentimentalist of the family. Don't try and drag me into your strain. I'm not old enough. A man cannot pose as a sentimentalist nowadays until he is approaching sixty."

"Really? Then I shall have to pause for a year or two still. Let us put that question aside for a moment. Should I be exceeding my privileges if I were to tell you that I am ruined?—Financially ruined, I mean, of course; thank heaven, I am physically as strong as I was—ah, three years ago."

"You said something about my allowance, I think."

"If I did not I failed in my duty as a father, and I don't often do that, my boy—thank God, I don't often do that."

"No," said Harold. "If the whole duty of a father is comprised in acquainting his son with the various reductions that he says he finds it necessary to make in his allowance, you are the most exemplary of fathers, pater."

"There is a suspicion of sarcasm—or what is worse, epigram in that phrase," said the father. "Never mind, you cannot epigram away the stern fact that I have now barely a sufficient income to keep body and soul together. I wish you could."

"So do I," said Harold. "But yours is a *ménage à trois*. It is not merely body and soul with your but body, soul, and sentiment—it is the third element that is the expensive one."

"I dare say you are right. Anyhow, I grieve for your position, my boy. If it had pleased Heaven to make me a rich man, I would see that your allowance was a handsome one."

"But since it has pleased the other Power to make you a poor one—"

"You must marry Miss Craven—that's the end of the whole matter, and an end that most people would be disposed to regard as a very happy one, too. She is a virtuous young woman, and what is better, she dresses extremely well. What is best of all, she has several thousands a year."

There was a suggestion of the eighteenth century phraseology in Lord Fotheringay's speech, that made him seem at least a hundred years old. Surely people did not turn up their eyes and talk of virtue since the eighteenth century, Harold thought. The word had gone out. There was no more need for it. The quality is taken for granted in the nineteenth century.

"You are a trifle over-vehement," said he.

"Have I ever refused to ask Miss Craven to marry me?"

"Have you ever asked her—that's the matter before us?"

"Never. But what does that mean? Why, simply that I have before me instead of behind me a most interesting quarter of an hour—I suppose a penniless man can ask a wealthy woman inside a quarter of an hour, to marry him. The proposition doesn't take longer in such a case than an honourable one would."

"You are speaking in a way that is not becoming in a son addressing his father," said Lord Fotheringay. "You almost make me ashamed of you."

"You have had no reason to be ashamed of me yet," said Harold. "So long as I refrain from doing what you command me to do, I give you no cause to be ashamed of me."

"That is a pretty thing for a son to say," cried the father, indignantly.

"For heaven's sake don't let us begin a family broil under the windows of a house where we are guests," said the son, rising quickly from the chair. "We are on the border of a genuine family bickering. For God's sake let us stop in time."

"I did not come here to bicker," said the father. "Heavens above! Am I not entitled to some show of gratitude at least for having come more than a thousand miles—a hundred of them in an Irish train and ten of them on an Irish jolting car—simply to see that you are comfortably settled for life?"

"Yes," said the son, "I suppose I should feel grateful to you for coming so far to tell me that you are ruined and that I am a partner in your ruin." He had not seated himself, and now he turned his back upon his father and walked round to the west side of the Castle where some of the girls were strolling. They were waiting to see how the day would develop—if they should put on oilskins and sou'westers or gauzes and gossamer—the weather on the confines of the ocean knows only the extremes of winter or summer.

The furthest of the watchers were, he perceived, Edmund Airey and Miss Avon. He walked toward them, and pronounced in a somewhat irresponsible way an opinion upon the weather.

Before the topic had been adequately discussed, Mr. Durdan and another man came up to remind Mr. Airey that he had given them his word to be of their party in the fishing boat, where they were accustomed to study the Irish question for some hours daily.

Mr. Airey protested that his promise had been wholly a conditional one. It had not been made on the assumption that the lough should be moaning like a Wagnerian trombone, and it could not be denied that such notes were being produced by the great rollers beneath the influence of a westerly wind.

Harold gave a little shrug to suggest to Beatrice that the matter was not one that concerned her or himself in the least, and that it might be as well if Mr. Airey and his friends were left to discuss it by themselves.

The shrug scarcely suggested all that he meant it to suggest, but in the course of a minute he was by the side of the girl a dozen yards away from the three men.

"I wonder if you chanced to tell Mr. Airey of the queer way you and I met," she said in a moment.

"How could I have told any human being of that incident?" he cried. "Why do you ask me such a question?"

"He knows all about it—so much is certain," said she. "Oh, yes, he gave me to understand so much—not with brutal directness, of course."

"No, I should say not—brutal directness is not in his line," said Harold.

"But the result is just the same as if he had been as direct as—a girl."

"As a girl?"

"Yes. He said something about Miss Craven's voice having suggested something supernatural to Brian, and then he asked me all at once if there had been any mist on the previous evening when I had rowed across the lough. Now I should like to know how he guessed that I had crossed the lough on the previous night."

"He is clever—diabolically clever," said Harold after a pause. "He was with Miss Craven in the hall—they had been dancing—when I returned—I noticed the way he looked at me. Was there anything in my face to tell him that—that I had met you?"

She looked at his face and laughed.

"Your face," she said. "Your face—what could there have been apparent on your face for Mr. Airey to read?"

"What—what?" his voice was low. He was now looking into her gray eyes. "What was there upon my face? I cannot tell. Was it a sense of doom? God knows. Now that I look upon your face—even now I cannot tell whether I feel the peace of God which passes understanding, or the doom of those who go down to the sea and are lost."

"I do not like to hear you speak in that way," said she. "It would be better for me to die than to mean anything except what is peaceful and comforting to all of God's creatures."

"It would be better for you to die," said he. He took his eyes away from hers. They stood side by side in silence for some moments, before he turned suddenly to her and said in quite a different strain. "I shall row you across the lough when you are ready. Will you go after lunch?"

"I don't think that I shall be going quite so soon," said she. "The fact is that Lady Innisfail was good enough to send Brian with another letter to my father—a letter from herself, asking my father to come to the Castle for a day or two, but, whether he comes or not, to allow me to remain for some days."

Again some moments passed before Harold spoke.

"I want you to promise to let me know where you go when you leave Ireland," said he. "I don't want to lose sight of you. The world is large. I wandered about in it for nearly thirty years before meeting you."

She was silent. It seemed as if she was considering whether or not his last sentence should be regarded as a positive proof of the magnitude of the world.

She appeared to come to the conclusion that it would be unwise to discuss the question—after all, it was only a question of statistics.

"If you wish it," said she, "I shall let you know our next halting-place. I fancy that my poor father is less enthusiastic than he was some years ago on the subject of Irish patriotism. At any rate, I think that he has worked out all the battles fought in this region."

"Only let me know where you go," said he. "I do not want to lose sight of you. What did you say just now—peace and comfort to God's creatures? No, I do not want to lose sight of you."

CHAPTER XVIII.—ON THE PROFESSIONAL MORALIST.

THE people—Edmund Airey was one of them—who were accustomed to point to Harold Wynne as an example of the insecurity of formulating any definite theory of heredity, had no chance of being made aware of the nature of the conversations in which he had taken part, or they might not have been quite so ready to question the truth of that theory.

His father had made it plain to him, both by letter and word of mouth, that the proper course for him to pursue was one that involved asking Helen Craven to marry him—the adoption of any other course, even a prosaic one, would practically mean ruin to him; and yet he had gone straight from the side of his father, not to the side of Miss Craven, but to the side of Miss Avon. And not only had he done this, but he had looked into the gray eyes of Beatrice when he should have been gazing with ardour—or simulated ardour—into the rather lustreless orbs of Helen.

To do precisely the thing which he ought not to have done was certainly a trait which he had inherited from his father.

But he had not merely looked into the eyes of the one girl when he should have been looking into those of the other girl, he had spoken into her ears such words as would, if spoken into the ears of the other girl, have made her happy. The chances were that the words which he had spoken would lead to unhappiness. To speak such words had been his father's weakness all his life, so that it seemed that Harold had inherited this weakness also.

Perhaps for a moment or two, after Edmund Airey had sauntered up, having got the better of the argument with Mr. Durdan—he flattered himself that he had invariably got the better of him in the House of Commons—Harold felt that he was as rebellious against the excellent counsels of his father as his father had ever been against the excellent precepts which society has laid down for its own protection. He knew that the circumstance of his father's having never accepted the good advice which had been offered to him as freely as advice, good and bad, is usually offered to people who are almost certain not to follow it, did not diminish from the wisdom of the course which his father had urged upon him to pursue. He had acknowledged to Edmund Airey some days before, that the substance of the advice was good, and had expressed his intention of following it—nay, he felt even when he had walked straight from his father's side to indulge in that earnest look into the eyes of Beatrice, that it was almost inevitable that he should take the advice of his father; for however distasteful it may be, the advice of a father is sometimes acted on by a son. But still the act of rebellion had been pleasant to him—as pleasant to him as his father's acts of the same character had been to his father.

And all this time Helen Craven was making her usual elaborate preparations for finishing her sketch of some local scene, and everyone knew that she could not seek that scene unless accompanied by someone to carry her umbrella and stool.

Lord Fotheringay perceived this in a moment from his seat facing the south. He saw that Providence was on the side of art, so to speak—assuming that a water-colour sketch of a natural landscape by an amateur is art, and assuming that Providence meant simply an opportunity for his son to ask Miss Craven to marry him.

Lord Fotheringay saw how Miss Craven lingered with her colour-box in one hand and her stool in the other. What was she waiting for? He did not venture to think that she was waiting for Harold to saunter up and take possession of her apparatus, but he felt certain that if Harold were to saunter up, Miss Craven's eyes would brighten—so far as such eyes as hers could brighten. His teeth met with a snap that threatened the gold

springs when he saw some other man stroll up and express the hope that Miss Craven would permit him to carry her stool and umbrella, for her sketching umbrella was brought from the hall by a servant.

Lord Fotheringay's indignation against his son was great afterwards. He made an excellent attempt to express to Edmund Airey what he felt on the subject of Harold's conduct, and Edmund shook his head most sympathetically.

What was to be done, Lord Fotheringay inquired. What was to be done in order to make Harold act in accordance with the dictates not merely of prudence but of necessity as well?

Mr. Airey could not see that any positive action could be taken in order to compel Harold to adopt the course which every sensible person would admit was the right course—in fact the only course open to him under the circumstances. He added that only two days ago Harold had admitted that he meant to ask Miss Craven to marry him.

"Heavens above!" cried Lord Fotheringay. "He never admitted so much to me. Then what has occurred to change him within a few days?"

"In such a case as this it is as well not to ask *what* but *who*," remarked Edmund.

Lord Fotheringay looked at him eagerly. "Who—who—you don't mean another girl?"

"Why should I not mean another girl?" said Edmund. "You may have some elementary acquaintance with woman, Lord Fotheringay."

"I have—yes, elementary," admitted Lord Fotheringay.

"Then surely you must have perceived that a man's attention is turned away from one woman only by the appearance of another woman," said Edmund.

"You mean that—by heavens, that notion occurred to me the moment that I saw her. She is a lovely creature, Airey."

"A gray eye or so!" said Airey.

"A gray eye or so!" cried Lord Fotheringay, who had not given sufficient attention to the works of Shakespeare to recognize a quotation. "A gray—Oh, you were always a cold-blooded fellow. Such eyes, Airey, are so uncommon as—ah, the eyes are not to the point. They only lend colour to your belief that she is the other girl. Yes, that notion occurred to me the moment she entered the hall."

"I believe that but for her inopportune appearance Harold would now be engaged to Miss Craven," said Edmund.

"There's not the shadow of a doubt about the matter," cried Lord Fotheringay—both men seemed to regard Miss Craven's acquiescence in the scheme which they had in their minds, as outside the discussion altogether. "Now what on earth did Lady Innisfail mean by asking a girl with such eyes to stay here? A girl with such eyes has no business appearing among people like us who have to settle our mundane affairs to the best advantage. Those eyes are a disturbing influence, Airey. They should never be seen while matters are in an unsettled condition. And Lady Innisfail professes to be Harold's friend."

"And so she is," said Edmund. "But the delight that Lady Innisfail finds in capturing a strange face—especially when that face is beautiful—overcomes all other considerations with her. That is why, although anxious—she was anxious yesterday, though that is not saying she is anxious today—to hear of Harold's proposing to Miss Craven, yet she is much more anxious to see the effect produced by the appearance of Miss Avon among her guests."

"And this is a Christian country!" said Lord Fotheringay solemnly, after a pause of considerable duration.

"Nominally," said Mr. Airey,

"What is society coming to, Airey, when a woman occupying the position of Lady Innisfail, does not hesitate to throw all considerations of friendship to the winds solely for the sake of a momentary sensation?"

Lord Fotheringay was now so solemn that his words and his method of delivering them suggested the earnestness of an evangelist—zeal is always expected from an evangelist, though unbecoming in an ordained clergyman. He held one finger out and raised it and lowered it with the inflections of his voice with the skill of a professional moralist.

He had scarcely spoken before Miss Avon, by the side of the judge and Miss Innisfail, appeared on the terrace.

The judge—he said he had known her father—was beaming on her. Professing to know her father he probably considered sufficient justification for beaming on her.

Lord Fotheringay and his companion watched the girl in silence until she and her companions had descended to the path leading to the cliffs.

"Airey," said Lord Fotheringay at length. "Airey, that boy of mine must be prevented from making a fool of himself—he must be prevented from making a fool of that girl. I would not like to see such a girl as that—I think you said you noticed her eyes—made a fool of."

"It would be very sad," said Edmund. "But what means do you propose to adopt to prevent the increase by two of the many fools already in the world?"

"I mean to marry the girl myself," cried Lord Fotheringay, rising to his feet—not without some little difficulty, for rheumatism had for years been his greatest enemy.

CHAPTER XIX.—ON MODERN SOCIETY.

EDMUND AIREY had the most perfect command of his features under all circumstances. While the members of the Front Opposition Benches were endeavouring to sneer him into their lobby, upon the occasion of a division on some question on which it was rumoured he differed from the Government, he never moved a muscle. The flaunts and gibes may have stung him, but he had never yet given an indication of feeling the sting; so that if Lord Fotheringay looked for any of those twitches about the corners of Mr. Airey's mouth, which the sudden announcement of his determination would possibly have brought around the mouth of an ordinary man, he must have had little experience of his companion's powers.

But that Lord Fotheringay felt on the whole greatly flattered by the impassiveness of Edmund Airey's face after his announcement, Edmund Airey did not for a moment doubt. When a man of fifty-seven gravely announces his intention to another man of marrying a girl of, perhaps, twenty, and with eyes of remarkable lustre, and when the man takes such an announcement as the merest matter of course, the man who makes it has some reason for feeling flattered.

The chances are, however, that he succeeds in proving to his own satisfaction that he has no reason for feeling flattered; for the man of fifty-seven who is fool enough to entertain the notion of marrying a girl of twenty with lustrous eyes, is certainly fool enough to believe that the announcement of his intention in this respect is in no way out of the common.

Thus, when, after a glance concentrated upon the corners of Edmund Airey's mouth, Lord Fotheringay resumed his seat and began to give serious reasons for taking the step that he had declared himself ready to take—reasons beyond the mere natural desire to prevent Miss Avon from being made a fool of—he gave no indication of feeling in the least flattered by the impassiveness of the face of his companion.

Yes, he explained to Mr. Airey, he had been so badly treated by the world that he had almost made up his mind to retire from the world—the exact words in which he expressed that resolution were “to let the world go to the devil in its own way.”

Now, as the belief was general that Lord Fotheringay's presence in the world had materially accelerated its speed in the direction which he had indicated, the announcement of his intention to allow it to proceed without his assistance was not absurd.

Yes, he had been badly treated by the world, he said. The world was very wicked. He felt sad when he thought of the vast amount of wickedness there was in the world, and the small amount of it that he had already enjoyed. To be sure, it could not be said that he had quite lived the life of the ideal anchorite: he admitted—and smacked his lips as he did so—that he had now and again had a good time (Mr. Airey did not assume that the word “good” was to be accepted in its Sunday-school sense) but on the whole the result was disappointing.

“As saith the Preacher,” remarked Mr. Airey, when Lord Fotheringay paused and shook his head so that another little scrap of caked powder escaped from the depths of one of the wrinkles of his forehead.

“The Preacher—what Preacher?” he asked.

“The Preacher who cried *Vanitas Vanitatum*,” said Edmund.

“He had gone on a tour with an Italian opera company,” said Lord Fotheringay, “and he had fallen foul of the basso. Airey, my boy, whatever you do, steer clear of a prima donna with a high soprano. It means thousands—thousands, and a precipitate flight at the last. You needn't try a gift of paste—the finest productions of the Ormuz Gem Company—‘a Tiara for Thirty Shillings’—you know their advertisement—no, I've tried that. It was no use. The real thing she would have—Heavens above! Two thousand pounds for a trinket, and nothing to show for it, but a smashing of supper plates and a hurried flight. Ah, Airey, is it any wonder that I should make up my mind to live a quiet life with—I quite forget who was in my mind when I commenced this interesting conversation?”

“It makes no difference,” said Mr. Airey. “The principle is precisely the same. There is Miss Innisfail looking for someone, I must go to her.”

“A desperately proper girl,” said Lord Fotheringay. “As desperately proper as if she had once been desperately naughty. These proper girls know a vast deal. She scarcely speaks to me. Yes, she must know a lot.”

His remarks were lost upon Mr. Airey, for he had politely hurried to Miss Innisfail and was asking her if he could be of any assistance to her. But when Miss Innisfail replied that she was merely waiting for Brian, the boatman, who should have returned long ago from the other side of the lough, Mr. Airey did not return to Lord Fotheringay.

He had had enough of Lord Fotheringay for one afternoon, and he hoped that Lord Fotheringay would understand so much. He had long ago ceased to be amusing. As an addition to the house-party at the Castle he was unprofitable. He knew that Lady Innisfail was of this opinion, and he was well aware also that Lady Innisfail had not given him more than a general and very vague invitation to the Castle. He had simply come to the Castle in order to avoid the possibly disagreeable consequences of buying some thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds—perhaps it would be more correct to say, diamonds costing some thousands of pounds, leaving worth out of the question—for a woman with a husband.

Airey knew that the philosophy of Lord Fotheringay was the philosophy of the maker of omelettes. No one has yet solved the problem of how to make omelettes without breaking eggs. Lord Fotheringay had broken a good many eggs in his day, and occasionally the result was that his share of the transaction was not the omelette but the broken shells. Occasionally, too, Edmund Airey was well aware, Lord Fotheringay had suffered more inconvenience than was involved in the mere fact of his being deprived of the comestible. His latest adventure. Airey thought, might be included among such experiences. He had fled to the brink of the ocean in order to avoid the vengeance of the Husband. “Here the pursuer can pursue no more,” was the line that was in Edmund Airey's mind as he listened to the fragmentary account of the latest *contretemps* of the rheumatic butterfly.

Yes, he had had quite enough of Lord Fotheringay's company. The announcement of his intention to marry Miss Avon had not made him more interesting in the eyes of Edmund Airey, though it might have done so in other people's eyes—for a man who makes himself supremely ridiculous makes himself supremely interesting as well, in certain circles.

The announcement made by Lord Fotheringay had caused him to seem ridiculous, though of course Edmund had made no sign to this effect: had he made any sign he would not have heard the particulars of Lord Fotheringay's latest fiasco, and he was desirous of learning those particulars. Having become acquainted with them, however, he found that he had had quite enough of his company.

But in the course of the afternoon Mr. Airey perceived that, though in his eyes there was something ridiculous in the notion of Lord Fotheringay's expression of a determination to marry Beatrice Avon, the idea might not seem quite so ridiculous to other people—Miss Avon's father, for instance.

In another moment he had come to the conclusion that the idea might not seem altogether absurd to Miss Avon herself.

Young women of twenty—even when they have been endowed by heaven with lustrous eyes (assuming that the lustre of a young woman's eyes is a gift from heaven, and not acquired to work the purposes of a very different power)—have been known to entertain without repugnance the idea of marrying impecunious peers of fifty-seven; and upon this circumstance Edmund pondered.

Standing on the brink of a cliff at the base of which the great rollers were crouching like huge white-maned lions, Mr. Airey reflected as he had never previously done, upon the debased condition of modern society, in which such incidents are of constant occurrence. But, however deplorable such incidents are, he knew perfectly well that there never had existed a society in the world where they had not been quite as frequent as they are in modern society in England.

Yes, it was quite as likely as not that Lord Fotheringay would be able to carry out the intention which he had announced to his confidant of the moment.

But when Mr. Airey thought of the lustrous eyes of Beatrice Avon, recalling the next moment the rheumatic movements of Lord Fotheringay and the falling of the scrap of caked powder from his forehead, he felt quixotic enough to be equal to the attempt to prevent the realization of Lord Fotheringay's intention.

It was then that the thought occurred to him—Why should not Harold, who was clearly ready to fall in love with the liquid eyes of Beatrice Avon, ask her to marry him instead of his father?

The result of his consideration of this question was to convince him that such an occurrence as it suggested should be averted at all hazards.

Only the worst enemy that Harold Wynne could have—the worst enemy that the girl could have—would like to see them married.

It would be different if the hot-blooded Italian husband were to pursue the enemy of his household to the brink of the Atlantic cliffs and then push him over the cliffs into the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. But the hot-blooded Italian was not yet in sight, and Edmund knew very well that so long as Lord Fotheringay lived, Harold was dependent on him for his daily bread.

If Harold were to marry Miss Avon, it would lie in his father's power to make him a pauper, or, worse, the professional director with the honorary prefix of "Honourable" to his name, dear to the company promoter.

On the death of Lord Fotheringay Harold would inherit whatever property still remained out of the hands of the mortgagees; but Edmund was well aware of the longevity of that species of butterfly which is susceptible of rheumatic attacks; so that for, perhaps, fifteen years Harold might remain dependent upon the good-will of his father for his daily bread.

It thus appeared to Mr. Airey that the problem of how to frustrate the intentions of Lord Fotheringay, was not an easy one to solve.

He knew the world too well to entertain for a moment the possibility of defeating Lord Fotheringay's avowed purpose by informing either the girl or her father of the evil reputation of Lord Fotheringay. The evil deeds of a duke have occasionally permitted his wife to obtain a divorce; but they have never prevented him from obtaining another wife.

All this Mr. Edmund Airey knew, having lived in the world and observed the ways of its inhabitants for several years.

END OF VOLUME I.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A GRAY EYE OR SO. IN THREE VOLUMES—VOLUME I ***

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