Since Nellie Went Away.

The homestead ain't ez bright an' cheerful es
it used to be,
The leaves ain't growin' half so green upon the
maple tree;
The brook don't seem ter ripple like it used
ter, down the hill—
The bobolinks appear ter lev a some'at sad-
der trill;
The wavin' corn hez lost its gold, the sunshine
ain't so bright,
The day is growin' shorter jest ter make a
longer night;
There is sometidin' gnawin' at my heart I
guess hez come ter stay;
The world ain't been the same to me since
Nellie went away.

The old piano over there I gave her when a
bride—
It ain't been played upon but once since she
took sick an' died;
An' then a neighbor's girl came in an' struck
up "Old Black Joe"
An' "When the Swallows Homeward Fly," an'
somehow, don't you know,
It almos' made me crazy wild with anguish an'
dispair—
I saw her sittin' at the keys, but knew she
wasn't there.
An' that is why I never want ter hear the old
thing play—
The music don't sound natural since Nellie
went away.

The parson tells me every man hez got ter hev
his woe—
His argument is good, perhaps, for he had
orter know—
But then it's hard for every one ter allers see
the right
In turnin' pleasure into pain an' sunshine into
night;
I guess it's all included in the Maker's hidden
plan—
It takes a heap o' grief an' woe ter temper up
a man.
I sympathize with any fellow when I hear him
say
The world don't seem the same ter him since
some one went away.

The Scripture says that in his own sweet way,
if we but wait,
The Lord'll take our burdens an' set crooked
matters straight;
An' there's a hope that all the grief an aching
heart can hold
Will be offset by happiness a hundred million
fold
When we hev reached the end o' life's event-
ful voy'ge at last,
An' all our pain an' misery is buried in the
past,
An' so I'm lookin' for'ard to the dawnin' of a
day
When mebbe it won't seem so long since
Nellie went away.

Harry S. Chester.

HER LAST ROMANCE.

"You are too romantic."

Mrs. Merriweather turned her face upon her.

"What did you say, Amina?"

"I said you were too romantic," repeated Amina, with sullen deliberation.

Amina was the daughter of a defunct Italian fiddler—a wild-eyed, erratic dreamer, who had drifted to these shores and for a few years kept the red-eyed hunger-wolf from the door by playing in the orchestra of the opera. There was nothing Amina did not owe to Mrs. Merriweather. It was the rich widow who had gathered her in and given her a home.

Mrs. Merriweather stood before her and in the abrupt arresting of her movements all the tinkling bangles on her wrists gave tongue. Mrs. Merriweather was very fond of bangles and pendants and tinkling cymbals. She looked very stately in her dignified pose, and scarcely more than thirty-five.

"It seems to me," she enunciated, with disarming gentleness, "that I hardly merit abuse at your hands, Amina."

Amina saw through her protectress as though she had been glass. But what had that to do with it? She felt convicted of ingratitude.

She suddenly flung herself out of her chair and down on the floor at Mrs. Merriweather's knee.

"Oh, don't mind what I say! I'm a wretch! You've been a angel to me and I'm unworthy as any viper!"

Mrs. Merriweather smiled benignly. Such scenes were not new. Upon the whole, it was not unpleasant to have this half-indignant, half-protected austerity close to one. It made one feel young—almost girlish! And the alternations of passionate, adoring fealty were pleasant also. They gave color to daily life.

Mrs. Merriweather's smile curved into a youthful archness.

"You love me so much and yet you don't seem to think that others could love me!"

Amina was on her feet again, serious and almost sullen as before.

"Mr. Pallatine is young. I don't think he is more than thirty," she said.

This indeed, was venturing much!

Mrs. Merriweather drew herself up again, and this time there was no doubt about the steely point in her eyes.

"Mr. Pallantine is poor and a gentleman. That means that he has tastes which he cannot satisfy. To go about giving readings—gifted and fastidious as he is—cannot be wholly agreeable."

"I should think it might be more agreeable than being patronized by fine ladies," supplemented Amina.

"Decidedly," said Mrs. Merriweather, sweeping from the room, "you forget yourself to-day."

Amina sat down by the window with her hands in her lap. A wretch? Of course she was a wretch! Why had she not been left to starve by the body of her dead father in that bare room long ago?

That evening Egbert Pallatine, reading "Ulf in Ireland" Mrs. at Van Hooker's reception, was conscious of Mrs. Merriweather's fascinated eyes hanging on his face.

One hour later, when the recitations were over and some music to which people had listened with a patient resignation had been performed, he found himself in the midst of the push for the supper-room close to the widow's perfumed pink brocade and elaborate blonde head and opulent white shoulders and throat rising generously like a full-blown hot-house flower out of her low corsage and plentifully bedewed with diamonds.

He offered his arm, and Mrs. Merriweather rustled along beside him, showing all her wholesome white teeth and chattering graciously.

"I am desperately hungry," she declared, "and when you have attended to me in that way you will have to attend to me in another way also. The affair to-night has given me an idea."

Pallatine wheeled rather wearily. When he had returned with some salad and fricasseed oysters and croquettes and sandwiches on a plate and stood before the widow holding her champagne glass, she proceeded:

"I shall have some tableaux at my house. And they shall be described, as it were, by recitations. You will do the recitations and you will give me the benefit of your ideas as to how such things as you think could be littingly illustrated by tableaux vivants. There! Will not that be a new idea? I want something that has not been done before. We must begin preparations at once."

When they got back to the drawing-rooms a move was being made by the younger people to break into dancing. Pallatine, having in some way become free again, made his way to where Amina sat alone against the wall.

"Aren't you going to dance?" he said, looking at her as he dropped into a seat beside her. She wore a gown of dark red crepe, almost high in the neck, and her small olive-tinted head, with a knot of waving black hair, looked like cameo. Mrs. Merriweather, who had regained her good-humor long before the evening, had urged Amina to wear something a little more youthful.

"You look so prim," had said the widow, gazing, not without complacency, at the Venetian vision of robust charms thrown back by the mirror, as her maid gave a deft touch here and there to the bodice of the pink brocade.

"I don't care about dancing," was Amina's reply to Pallatine's remark. "I don't care for this sort of thing, anyway. Only Mrs. Merriweather is good enough to bring me. She is always good. If I were better myself, I suppose I should enjoy it more."

"Why don't you enjoy it?" Pallatine's eyes had grown as serious as her own. He had abruptly awakened to the fact of how profoundly bored he had been all the evening. He had not before felt so rested and comfortable as sitting by the side of this solemn little girl who took so determinedly the air of a dependent.

"Because I was not made for it, I suppose."

"Well," Pallatine's voice sank unconsciously, "perhaps I was not, either."

"But your family used to be very gay and rich and fashionable, used it not? That makes a difference. You would naturally feel willing to give it all up now. It's only fair to take that into account."

Pallatine brought his fine eyes around upon her. What an extraordinary little girl! What could she mean?

* * * * *

Mr. Pallatine was coming into the house constantly now to direct the arrangements for Mrs. Merriweather's great entertainment—for as Mrs. Merriweather said what was there with his astonishing artistic taste that he could not do?—and Mrs. Merriweather had never been more gorgeous at all seasons in her dress, had never had her complexion put on more delicately, more carefully and more with the illusion of nature. Next to her Amina crawled about the rooms and halls like a little brown mouse.

"I don't see why you can't at least be Elaine to my Guinevere," Mrs. Merriweather said complainingly to the girl. "Then if we could only have had Mr. Pallatine for Launcelot it would have been perfect! He would make such a handsome Launcelot! He is so dark and knightly-looking!" Mrs. Merriweather's blue eyes were soft. She gave a little sigh. "But, of course, as he is to read that portion of the poem when the curtain rises to show a tableau of the barge and the courtiers of Arthur assembled, he can't be Launcelot too. But I repeat that you might be Elaine, Amina."

"Do I look like the Lily Maid of Ascolat?" cried Amina, flashing suddenly her berry-brown face with a bitter gleam in the eyes on her protectress.

"A wig and *blanc de theatre* would make you do," said Mrs. Merriweather.

But after all Amina held good and another Elaine was chosen. Mrs. Merriweather would have liked well enough to be the Lily Maid herself. But she could not be that and the beautiful, guilty Queen too. And Guinevere, of the two roles, was the stronger attraction.

When the great night came Mrs. Merriweather's magnificent drawing-room was crowded to suffocation.

"Absurd to wear a decent gown in such a crowd as this!" buzzed one lady to another.

"But then, my dear, this is an especial occasion! A sort of public proclamation of coming events—eh?"

The first lady tittered behind her fan.

"Actually it would seem so! You notice that the young man has a very prominent place in the entire affair! Good Heavens! how old do you think Mrs. Merriweather really is?"

"To be charitable—forty-five."

"Oh, my dear! Say forty-eight! Well, he is a handsome fellow. And romance was always her weakness."

On the improvised platform, meanwhile behind the lowered curtain, a wild scene was enacting. A rumble of crazy conversation arose from the ladies' dressing-room, like the tumult of the sea when all its waves murmur together.

"How resolutely you have kept out of this whole thing," said Egbert Pallatine abruptly to Amina. He found himself, for the moment, standing alone with her—both of them isolated in the vortex of the confusion.

"No. But I could do more by helping than by being in the tableaux myself," she said, coldly, and hastened away with her hands full of pins and draperies. A moment later she returned to find the young man standing motionless in the same place.

"Mrs. Merriweather is dressed for the first tableau and wishes you to see whether there are any suggestions to make."

She spoke without looking at him, and the next instant she was bending to adjust a fold in the widow's costume.

The latter stood before the young man and challenged him to admiration with every inch of her resplendent presence. She was a gleam of jewels and priceless stuffs and red lips. She was undeniably handsome. She looked fifteen years younger than her age, and the artist in Pallatine did homage to the consummate cleverness of the whole production.

"Perfect," he said, bowing low. The "Elaine" tableau came first. This was really a regal Guinevere. A flutter rose in Mrs. Merriweather's throat. The excitement half carried her a little out of herself.

"Had you been Launcelot," she murmured, with softened eyes, "it might have been perfect, indeed!"

And she held out her hand toward him.

The curtain went up in a moment and Pallatine began his reading in a whirl. He scarcely heard his own words. When the curtain had gone down again amid a burst of applause, hiding the reader and the illustrative tableau alike from view, he withdrew into a corner and tried, with all the renewed confusion around him, to collect his thoughts.

Great heaven! He did not wish to be a coxcomb, but what was this? Could it be—! Was this where he had been drifting, with his frequent visits to this house, his tolerance of the great lady's patronage? It seemed impossible, and yet— Merciful powers! He remembered Mrs. Merriweathrr's look, her extended hand and a chill ran down his spine.

Had the little Italian girl seen them? She had moved away as soon as he approached Mrs. Merriweather. And yet, how could he tell? His cheek tingled. If she had surmised anything of this sort it would account for the coldness, the contempt almost, with which she had seemed to treat him in these weeks he had been coming here. A poverty-stricken reader ingratiating himself into the favors of an elderly widow of wealth and social standing with visions of a matrimonial denouement—that was how he must have appeared to her. Faugh! The thought sickened him.

He went through the rest of the programme automatically. He was seized with a wild desire to get away. And yet his eye watched for Amina constantly. Just before the last tableau he caught sight of her standing on a chair and nailing up some bit of drapery for the scenery.

He found himself the next instant beside her and looking up, with a sort of desperation, into her pale face. Her lips were tightly set. Some hidden emotion seemed to communicate itself from him to her, from her to him. He longed to explain to her—

His voice came thickly, and all he found to say was: "I'm afraid the chair is not steady. You will fall."

"Oh, no," she said in turn. But was it his close presence that made her fingers less sure? One end of the heavy drapery slipped from her grasp and, as she made a movement to recover it, the chair tipped and her light weight slid downward into his arms.

It was a tremendous revelation to both of them. Their faces were white and their eyes glowed.

"Let me go," whispered Amina, fighting for her self-control.

"I love you," Egbert kept repeating, "I love you very much, Amina. You must believe me. That is why I have been coming here—though I did not know it myself."

It had been the affair of a moment. A high cardboard wing had screened them from view. But in the interstice of it Mrs. Merriweather had suddenly appeared. The three stood looking at each other; then a youth, wild with haste and excitement under his paint and wig, rushed frantically toward them and, dragging the fallen drapery out of sight, told them the curtain was about to rise.

* * * * *

Mrs. Merriweather's boudoir was darkened and an odor of cologne and *vinaigre de toilette* pervaded it. She herself lay on the lounge in a *deshabille* of the highest art design and with one hand, sparkling with rings, veiling her eyes.

A light tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Amina. She had, at length, been sent for and she appeared, like a culprit, with downcast eyes.

It was a dramatic moment, and Mrs. Merriweather would not have been Mrs. Merriweather had she not felt the thrill of the occasion.

"So," she began, "you have deceived me—both of you——"

But at this Amina unexpectedly rallied.

"Deceived you—no! I know now that Mr. Pallatine loves me and that I have loved him all along! But there was no deception. I owe you everything, and if you say that I must give him up I shall do so at once and forever. That I can do. But I cannot make him unlove me or love you instead if he has not done so already."

Mrs. Merriweather said not a word; and suddenly Amina threw herself down before the lounge and kissed the high art *deshabille* passionately.

"You are the kindest-hearted creature in all the world," she cried, "and when you are anything else you do yourself injustice! I know you will let us be happy still! Think of what you have! You can even pick up such waifs as I am and give them the greatest joy in life. But by ourselves we two have nothing—nothing but each other. Oh, be generous to us! You could not help being generous if you tried!"

* * * * *

It must be that Amina was right. For, after all, she and Egbert Pallatine were married not long after. The bride's trousseau was as complete as though she had been an heiress of untold means.

Mrs. Merriweather wears black a great deal now and a pensive smile. Both become her, and it is impossible that she is conscious of the fact. In any case she does not appear deeply unhappy.

Wind Flowers.

A flower has been discovered in South America which is only visible when the wind blows. The shrub belongs to the cactus family and is about three feet high. The stem is covered with dead, watery-looking lumps in calm weather; these lumps, however need but a light breeze to make them unfold large flowers of a creamy white, which close and appear dead when the wind subsides.

The "Old Witch House," in Salem, Mass., is still standing, just as in the days of Hawthorne, and by a sort of grim wooing of circumstance, almost opposite it there is, on a door, a sign which reads like this: "Clairvoyant

"THE DUCHESS."

CHAPTER VI.—CONTINUED.

"I wish you could cure yourself."

"I assure you I can't even laugh comfortably," goes on the squire, with a sigh; "and that's a great loss to me. 'Tis a thing I'm not accustomed to. I don't indeed; and if they do give I shan't be able to hold up my head again."

"I'll get a good strong bit of housewife's thread and sew the seams on the inside wherever they look strained, and then you can laugh," said his daughter, giving him an encouraging pat on his broad back.

"If you do, I'm thinking you'll sew the suit," says he, still melancholy. "There isn't a seam in it that you couldn't burst with a decent sigh."

He looks at her as if defying her to deny this, and then, all suddenly, without so much as a second's warning, he bursts out into an irresistible peal of laughter. His laugh and Norah's are just the same—musical, hearty, compelling. To hear them is to join in them, nolens volens. Long and loud he laughed, Norah keeping him company, without exactly knowing why; but youth, especially Irish youth, is prone to laughter, and is always thankful for a chance of giving way to it.

"Speak! Speak!" cries she at last. "I can't laugh forever without a reason for it. It's an unsatisfactory kind of mirth."

"I was thinking," says he, still choking, "that if I did burst those clothes what a row there would be. Such an explosion! Just think of his face and yours! and your poor old dad at the head of the table—ha! ha! ha! with vacancies in his raiment and —. Oh, my! oh, my!"

The tears of mirth are running down his cheeks as he pictures to himself the scene that a moment before had reduced him to despair. Norah, too, is laughing with all her heart, when Denis, opening the door, thrusts in his head.

"It does one good to hear you," he said, "May I know what it is all about?"

"No; it isn't good enough," says the Duchess hastily. "It is too ancient; a perfectly threadbare joke."

"Good for you, Duchess!" cries the squire, beginning to explode again. "Faith, the subject of it is threadbare enough in all conscience and ancient to a fault."

"Never mind, dad. You have come to tell us something," says Norah, addressing her cousin pointedly, as if to turn his attention from the squire, who is in quite a dangerous mood, "That letter in your hand—"

"Is from my mother, asking me when I intend returning."

"My dear boy! Why, you have only just come!" exclaims the squire, forgetful now of the joke, the fragility of the evening clothes, everything.

"Nevertheless she says she can't do without me. The house is full of people, and it appears the task of keeping them in a good temper is beyond her. Norah, she also wants to know if you are coming back with me."

"Back with you? To the castle? Oh, no! Certainly not!" says the Duchess in a tone of horror. All the laughter is gone now, giving place to nervous astonishment. Involuntarily she steps backwards until she reaches the wall behind her, as if desirous of getting as far from the castle in question as possible. No words could be as eloquent as this movement.

"But why?" asks the young man reproachfully. "My mother is so anxious to make your acquaintance that she will take your refusal hardly. As you know, she cannot well come to you at present, but if you will go to her—"

"I haven't thought of it. I didn't know she wished—"

"I told your father. You didn't tell her?" looking at the squire, who is now the picture of guilt.

"I recollect something about it. I believe you did say that madam would like to see her," says he, temporizing disgracefully, the fact being that he had remembered, but had decided from the first that Norah could never get on without him or he without Norah.

"More than that, I gave you my mother's invitation. I hope, Norah," regarding her earnestly, "that you will accept it. You will like my mother, I know, and as there are so many people staying there at present you won't feel dull."

"Oh! That's just it," miserably.

"What?"

"All those people!" growing quite pale.

"Nonsense!" laughing. "Not one of them will eat you, and some may amuse you. I am quite sure you will enjoy it."

"I shouldn't, indeed. Dad," indignantly, "why don't you speak? Why don't you say I should be wretched away from you?"

"She would. She would indeed, I assure you," said the squire, waking to an enthusiastic defense of the position because of that indignant glance. "I assure you, my dear Denis, she would be the most melancholy creature alive if deprived of my society even for a day!"

He says it in such perfect good faith and with such an open desire to help her in her extremity that he is irresistible. Even Norah gives way to laughter.

"It is true, though," she says to Denis, a little defiantly.

"We have never been separated, never. Even for the three years I was at school in France he came over and lived there with me."

"Then I wish you would change your mind and come to Ventry, too," says Denis.

"I wish I could," says the squire, who indeed would have desired nothing better; "but I'm tied by the heels just now. You know what a worry the tenants are?"

He refrains from mention of the evening suit and the utter inability to order a new one.

"Norah," says her cousin, suddenly, "come out and let us talk it over."

CHAPTER VII.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!"

Outside, the world is so fair, so fresh, so joyous, that it is scarcely to be wondered at if Denis trusted it to help him with his pleading. Who could prove unkind with such a sun gilding such fleecy clouds; who be obdurate with all nature's richest treasures spread on every side of one with such a lavish hand?

It rather upsets his theory, however, when on glancing downward at his cousin he finds her as hard-hearted as ever.

"Well," she says with a very vexed laugh, catching his expression, "what did you expect? I have come out here with you as you seemed to imagine great things would come of such a move; but I warn you it will not do a bit of good."

"I wonder why you have so determinedly set your face against coming to us," says he, a little offended.

"It isn't that," hastily. "Don't you think it for a moment. If it were only you and your mother; but—the fact is," speaking reluctantly and coloring warmly, "I—I'm afraid!"

"Afraid of what?" incredulously.

"Of all those strangers. When I think of being alone there—amongst so many people unknown to me without dad—I fee' —oh" laying her hand upon her bosom—"dreadful!"

"But you wouldn't be alone. I shall be there!" says Delaney, the very slightest suspicion of a grievance in his tone.

"Why, so you would," says she, slowly, as if suddenly awakening to a hitherto forgotten fact. "I never thought of that; but still you are not dad, you know."

This is indisputable. Beyond all doubt she has taken an unassailable position. Acknowledging this fact, Delaney gives up argument.

"I won't listen to another objection," cries he, gayly. "Not one. I insist on carrying you off bodily and introducing you to the lot of them, whether you will or not. I have set my heart on the doing of this, and I know you will not have the heart to thwart me. What! Do you think I would readily relinquish the triumph of showing you off to them—of exhibiting my captive? My very own discovery too!"

He is thinking of the sensation her beauty will create even among the throng of pretty women with whom his mother ever delights to surround herself. What one of that gay crowd could dare to compare with her? Already, in his fond fancy, he can see her dancing through the grand old halls of Ventry, or walking sedately through its gardens, the sweetest flower among all those myriad blossoms.

The charm of this vision, however, it being a mere mental vagary, being naturally withheld from the Duchess, it so happens that his words fall with a meaning little intended upon her ears. Far from seeing anything complimentary in them, she sees something fatally the reverse. Could so lovely a thing as her face be ever guilty of showing wrath undiguised, now is the time.

"Show me off!" she repeats, in a voice that positively electrifies the ill-fated Denis. "Exhibit me! Am I then a South Sea Islander? Am I to understand that I really differ so entirely from the rest of your acquaintances?"

"As light from darkness," replies he, with promptitude, though considerably puzzled by her tone and expression.

"Oh!" says the Duchess.

Great meaning may be thrown into this apparently harmless monosyllable. Miss Delaney makes it so eloquent that her cousin turns sharply to look at her. What can be the matter with her? For an instant their eyes meet; time long enough to let him see that tears are standing thickly in hers.

"Norah! what is it?" he exclaims, stopping short. "Does this visit to my mother make you really so unhappy? If I thought so—"

"It has nothing to do with it, and you know it!" returns she, respectfully. This time the tears are very plain to him, as she lifts two indignant eyes to his. Large and brilliant they hang upon her lashes, trembling to their fall. "But to be told that one is 'different!' Of course," with a baleful glance at him, "I know I am not as those others—those fashionable friends of yours, who have been everywhere and seen everything, and heard all there is to hear—and I dare say"—with tearful contempt—"a good deal more! I know I am not like them, and"—passionately—"I don't want to be, either. But one may be different from people without liking to hear it said. One may be absurd and old-fashioned without wanting to hear it put into words!"

This terrible speech is poured forth with a startling fluency that reduces Denis to a state bordering on coma. Recovering himself by an effort, "Norah! is it possible you could so misjudge me!" he says, flushing hotly. "My dar—er—h'm—" seeking wildly for a compromise—"my dearest girl! can it be that you don't see what I really meant, where the true difference lies? That you are the light—the rest of them darkness. Oh! Norah, look at me! Say you believe me!"

"I won't! I don't!" keeping her gaze studiously averted; and now the two large tears detach themselves at last from the lashes and roll slowly, pitifully down her cheeks. "I'm sure you are saying all that just to please and comfort me." A little sob breaks from her.

It is by a mighty effort alone that Delaney controls the eager longing that now almost overpowers him to catch her in his arms and press that sad, angry little face against his own. Was ever thing created fairer than this child? Oh that he were free to woo—perchance to win her? Oh that he had never seen her!—and yet—not that! He could not wish that. With what a strange suddenness she had fallen into his life (and alas! how much too late), killing for him the serenity in which he had believed he should live and die, not knowing then the greatest good of all—nor having tasted of love's draught—that bitter sweet! Now, all that is over; serenity is dead, and peace has flown; and here a galling chain binds him secure, and there stands love, uncrowned, waiting, it might have been, for him. A love so sweet, an eager, gracious thing; careless as yet, with songs on her lips and laughter in her eyes, and no knowledge (as it seems to him) of the cruel fret and fever of the pain that men call passion.

All this, or a vague sense of it, runs through him as he stands there looking on her tears, but when he speaks his voice, though low, is calm.

"Not I," he says. "I'll swear it to you if you will, though my word is as good as my bond. Why, you silly baby, do you think if I did entertain such a heresy that I should have had the pluck to say it?"

This appears to be an excellent bit of reasoning and very convincing. The Duchess smiles, and earth grows bright again.

"REALLY, DO YOU THINK ME PRETTY?"

She even draws a little nearer to him, as if about to speak, and then, as if overcome by a little access of shyness, stops short, and taking hold of one of the buttons of his coat between a slender finger and thumb twists it round and round again without any apparent reason.

"Well?" questioned Denis, stifling a sigh. "It is very hard for any one, unless an anchorite, to have the chosen of his heart so very close to him and feel that he mustn't encourage her to come closer still. Well?"

"Denis, tell me this," with the sweetest blush imaginable. "Really, now mind—honestly, do you think me pretty?"

"It is too poor a word!" says the miserable Denis, so far forgetting the stern role allotted to him as to take the little thin fingers from the long-suffering button and press them to his lips. "If you will say 'lovely' I can answer you."

"Oh, now!" with a little pleased laugh, "that is going too far. They tell me my mother was beautiful, but that I do not resemble her much; that I'm like dad's people. Like," thoughtfully, "your people. You, perhaps? How strange that would be! Am I like you?"

"I dare say I have frequently flattered myself," says Denis, laughing. "We all do it; but I think I can honestly say never to that extent."

"Well," persists the Duchess, positively, "now that it has occurred to me, I am sure I reminded myself of somebody this morning when I was doing my hair before the glass. It must have been you. Come over here," slipping her hand into his and drawing him to where a deep pool lies drowsily in the the sunshine, encompassed by ferns and mosses.

Over this she bends, scrutinizing the faint, imperfect reflection of her charms it throws up to her. Delicate, vague, unsatisfactory it is, yet sweet withal. Denis, standing behind her and gazing over her shoulder, can see the quivering image that so maligns her pure and perfect beauty, and turns with impatience to the living original beside him. She is still absorbed in tracing a likeness that does not exist, and a sudden desire to play upon her an old schoolboy trick, and so disturb her thoughts, takes possession of him.

Passing his hands round her waist from the back he pushes her well over the brink of the pool, holding her thus for an instant, and then drawing her back to terra firma.

"There! only for me you would have been in," he says vainglorously.

"Oh, Denis!" cries she, genuinely startled. Then she laughs, and with his arms still encircling her she looks back at him over her shoulder with parted lips and brightened eyes. Her attitude brings her head almost to his shoulder. She was never yet so near to his heart. Was she ever yet so lovely? His pulses are beginning to beat madly, his eyes grow warm. The laugh is still fresh upon her lips.

My love whose lips are softer far,
Than drowsy poppy petals are,
And sweeter than the violet.

But the smile has died from his. There is a quick, irrepressible movement. He bends over her—nearer—nearer still; and then he loosens his hold of her and stands back, a frown upon his brow, his face a little pale.

"Are you frightened?" asks she lightly. "Did you think I was really going to fall in? Ha! Did punishment then overtake you? But you should know that I am sure-footed as a goat; that I seldom catch myself tripping."

She is evidently puzzled a good deal by the change in his manner, which has gone from "grave to gay, from lively to severe," without a second's warning, and would perhaps have subjected him to a rather embarrassing cross-examination, but that at this moment the appearance of a woman at the lower end of the path attracts both their attention.

CHAPTER VIII.

To mortal men great loads allotted be,
But of all packs no pack like poverty."

She is a woman, withered, and slightly bent, and wretchedly dressed, as are all poor Irish peasants. Her petticoat, made of a thick blue flannel, is short, and patched liberally here and there. No stockings cover her legs, no boots her feet, which though wonderfully small are hard as the path itself and roughened by work and exposure. An old jacket, worn at the elbows and very much the worse for wear, covers her body, and over her shoulders a dingy little red and black shawl is thrown.

Clothing enough certainly for a hot day in July, but, alas! terribly insufficient for the frosts and snows of winter; and when they come there will be nothing extra to cover that poor, frail body. Poverty has no diversity of costumes wherewith to meet the exigencies of each coming season.

Seeing Norah the woman quickened her footsteps, already marvelously agile for a woman past fifty.

"An! Biddy, is that you?" says Norah, asking the superfluous but kindly question with a smile.

"Good morning, your honor, my lady," returns the woman, this being a very usual greeting in the south of Ireland to those known to be of "dacent blood." There is no such ardent admirer of aristocracy as the Irish peasant. "Are ye in a hurry, Miss? Might I have a word wid ye, Miss Norah?"

"What is it now, Biddy?" asks the Duchess, anxiously. "Nothing wrong with little Larry?"

"No, Miss, glory be to God, he's betther an' betther every day. But tell me, alanna, 'tis the masther I want to see. Is he up above?" meaning Ballyhinch, not heaven.

"I left him there about half an hour ago." It is impossible for Denis, who is standing by, not to become conscious that she has found time in his society to run wonderfully swift. "What do you want from him now, Biddy?"

"Faix, miss, a bit of a sthick, no more. I thought as how he'd give me wan out of the wood beyant to keep up the house. The rafthers is givin' way like, but if I could get somethin' to prop 'em up wid they'd hould together if only for a year itself. One o' thim young threes, miss, out of the plantation would do. The masther, God bless him! is good to all, an' if ye think, miss, he'd give it—"

"I know he will. Hurry up, Biddy, because he may be going out. By the by," detaining her, "how's Dan? when did you hear from him?"

"Sure that was partly what was bringin' me up to the house. But," shyly, "when I saw ye wid the gintleman," with a shy glance at Denis. "Anyhow, Miss, 'twas this mornin' a letter came. I've got it here wid me," pulling it out of her bosom. "Maybe ye'd like to read it?"

"Of course I should," said the Duchess, heartily. "Dear me, what a good boy he always was!"

"Thrue for ye, miss," intensely gratified. "God bless ye! Ye have the good word always for rich an' poor. D'ye see, alanna," pointing to the letter with ungovernable pride, "'tis all the way from Chayny it has come. Glory to the Blessed Mother! but isn't it a sight of the world he is seein', an' him the biggest blackguard whin he was at home! Isn't it wonderful, Miss Nora, now? A spalpeen that I was forever leatherin', he was such a divil all out, wid his pranks and tricks, savin' your presence, miss. Even Father Jerry himself wasn't safe from him; an' there he is now as grand as the best of 'em, servin' aboard a man-o'-war."

"Well, why shouldn't he?" says Norah. "Where's the sailor that's better than an Irish sailor!"

"Fegs, and that's thrue, too," acknowledges the gratified mother. "He sint me a three pound note, miss, along with the letther. There's for ye now? Faix, yes! He'd never forget his old mammy, he says. D'ye know, Miss Norah, I'm dead sorry now as ever I cate that boy!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]