



LITERATURE.

IN PRAISE OF THE GOOD OLD PLOUGH.

BY HENRY MOON.

Let them sing who may of the battle fray,
And the deeds that have long since past;
Let them chant in praise of the far whose days
Are spent on the ocean vast;
I would render to these all the worship you please,
I would honour them even now;
But I'd give far more from my heart's full store
To the cause of the Good Old Plough.

Let them laud the notes that in music float
Through their bright and their glittering halls,
While the amorous twirl of the hair's bright curl
Round the shoulder of beauty falls;
But dearer to me is the song from the tree,
And the rich and the blossoming bough;
Oh, these are the sweets which the rustic greets,
As he follows the Good Old Plough.

Then how jocund the song as it comes along
From the ploughman's lusty throat!
Did the hunter's shout ever yet give out
To the brown woods a merrier note?
Though he follows no hound, yet his day is crowned
With a triumph as good, I trow,
As though antlered head at his feet lay dead,
Instead of the Good Old Plough.

Full many there be that we daily see
With a selfish and hollow pride,
Who the ploughman's lot in his humble cot
With a scornful look deride;
Yet I'd rather take, aye, a hearty shake
From his hand, than to wealth I'd bow;
For the honest grasp of that hand's rude clasp
Hath stood by the Good Old Plough.

All honour be then to these gay old men,
When at last they are bowed with toil;
Their warfare then o'er, why they battle no more,
For they've conquered the stubborn soil;
And the chaplet each wears are his silver hairs;
And ne'er shall the victor's brow
With a laureled crown to the grave go down,
Like these sons of the Good Old Plough.

THE HAG OF THE BOG.

A TALE OF THE WILDS OF CONNAUGHT.

BY W. D. WADE.

What means that piercing shriek borne on the still evening air across the bog? The sound seems to paralyze the weary traveller, the solitary pedestrian, who is wending his way over the dreary waste, and he pauses, listening apparently for a repetition of the sound. Fearful tales crowd rapidly to his brain, and he falters in his purpose to proceed. The daylight is barely sufficient now to render the precarious path perceptible—and to retrace the long miles to the town from whence he came, would be a perilous if not an utterly impracticable undertaking. Come what will of it, on he must go. A deep sigh relieved his heart of the momentary, almost unaccountable, but painful oppression that had nearly caused its vibrations to cease, and firmly gripping his stout stick, the traveller slowly advanced.

It was from the direction of a lone hovel, the only one on the moor, that the sound which met his ear had seemed to come, and then for the first time had occurred the vague, but terrible surmises (as the character of its inmates) which he had heard some time previous, when he had had occasion to call there. He was then one of a numerous body, and they found the people, who kept a little shabben or whiskey inn, very civil, and paid no heed to the dark hints of persons who had been known to leave the town at one extremity of the vast moor, and had never reached the village beyond it for which they were bound, or ever been seen again.

These stories suddenly obtruded themselves on his recollection, and gained credence as quickly as the fearful array flashed before him; and though he was a man of tried bravery, he foresaw that he might not only need courage, but the greatest coolness, prudence, and self-possession, if any foundation really existed for his suspicions. He nerved himself accordingly for unknown peril, and was thankful for the warning voice, which, but for the providential circumstance of the wind being in the right quarter to bear the charming sound to his ears, he would have been devoid of suspicion, and utterly unprepared to encounter or resist danger.

On reaching the hovel all was still. The wayfarer took care so to approach, that the wolf-dog (which he had once so much admired and which he suspected they might still have) should not readily scent him. The ground was soft and his footsteps were unheard—he advanced softly and listened.

Voices within told that the family had not retired to rest, and he plainly distinguished these words. "Quick, mother, let us lay him under the bed for the present—the dog is getting uneasy—some one else is coming over the bog."

Hastily retreating to a short distance, the stranger then again came forward, loudly whistling, as if in happy un-

consciousness of danger. Well was it for him that he took this precaution, for presently the door was opened, and a man peered cautiously into the gloom. A cheerful voice accosted him with the usual greeting, and in a reply to a request for a night's lodging inquired:

"Are you alone?"

"Yes, and too tired to go any further," was the prompt answer.

"It is lucky for you that you found your way so far; however, you are welcome, so come in. The fire is not yet covered up, we will throw on some more peat, and get you a rasher and eggs, and some as good whiskey as never paid duty."

The speaker was a good looking young man, with an easy, careless sort of manner, that tended much to reassure the doubts of the hardy intruder. Surely this man could not be a deliberate assassin, a cut-throat—he does not look like one that would be guilty of violence to an offending stranger like me, thought the self-invited guest.

Few of the unlettered dwellers amongst the bogs and mountains of that wild district, when their passions are roused and their blood up, would think it a sin or a shame to finish a tithe proctor, a gauger, or such like; if unfortunately, he chanced in their way conveniently—or even to kill a few boys in a faction-fight—but to murder a confiding, unprovoked guest was a rare crime.

As the fire burnt up lightly, our traveller, whom we shall for the present call Delany (he having determined in his own mind that it would be prudent to assume a fictitious name and character), surveyed with reconnoitering glances the other inmates of the rude dwelling. Crouched in the chimney corner, with his head resting on his knees, and his face shrouded by his hands, sat a young man.

An old woman who was also seated on the hearth-stone at the opposite side, apparently knitting very industriously, turning to the guest, said:

"Thomas has the tooth-ache, sir; excuse his want of manners in sitting that way. Will your honor take a drop of the cratur to keep out the cold before I get ye a bite of supper to eat?"

This offer was cordially accepted, for the gentleman felt it would be advisable in any case thus to recruit his strength. Whilst eating a hastily prepared meal, he saw the man by the fire turn slowly and stealthily round and earnestly regard him. He shuddered involuntarily, but quickly recovering himself, he remarked that the night was very chilly.

Thomas looked haggard, care-worn, pale and uneasy, just like a man fresh from the commission of such an act as the object of this furtive regard from the few words he had heard, fancied had lately taken place. An angry look from the coarse, active, muscular old hag of the bog was quickly thrown upon him, and the young man at once relapsed into his former position.

Invigorated by the hearty meal, and his spirits revived by the moderate portion of whiskey he had imbibed, even the forbidding aspect of the old woman and her son in the chimney-nook, failed to arouse serious apprehension for himself—though assuredly the confirmation it lent to his unfavorable opinions of their characters determined him on unceasing vigilance. To render his caution availing, it was needful that it should be imperceptible; the stranger therefore entered into conversation with Dennis, the oldest son, who readily took part in it, and seemed as well disposed as his guest to prolong the sitting.

As it was not easy to tell from the dress and appearance of the traveller his business, or the probability of his having much money about him, it was no wonder that they should encourage him to talk, and drink, to enable them to determine how best to proceed with their designs.

In obedience to a sign from the mother, by raising her hand to her mouth, Dennis acting on the hint, re-produced the whiskey jug, and filling a cup, handed it to his guest saying: "after you is manners. Let us drink to our better acquaintance sir,—it seems as if I had seen your face before, though really I dis-remember your name."

Seeing the purport of the remark, and willing to gratify the curiosity of the speaker as the safest course to pursue, our friend whilst still holding the cup, replied; "yes, that is true enough, of course you saw me when I was here before, but as that was about two years ago, no wonder you forget my name. I only am surprised that you remember myself at all."

A look of surprise which passed between the brothers at this unlooked-for announcement, did not escape the notice of the watchful and wary traveller, and Dennis instantly called out to his mother. "I say, mother, the gentleman has been here before."

In a twinkling, as the young man's eye was directed to the inner room where the woman had gone to prepare a bed for the stranger (as she said,) the greater part of the whiskey in the cup was dexterously spilled on the clay floor (literally on the ground), and as Dennis turned round, the stranger replaced the empty vessel on the table as though he had faithfully drunk it out.

"Sure and meself is sorry ye did not tell us at worst who you were, and may be its a better supper I would have got you," said the hag, coming forward and severely scrutinizing his features; "how could I ever forget your handsome face? Who are ye any way, and where are ye going now?"

Had the person thus addressed had no surmises of the fearful motives that might prompt these queries, he would doubtless have been surprised and offended at the curiosity thus shown,—but too well he guessed the purport of them, and it suited him to reply as follows without any apparent embarrassment.

"O, you need not be distressed at your want of memory for I am but a stranger in these parts, and I was never here but once, and I would desire no better entertainment than I got on that occasion—or a better supper than I have just had. I was one of several, and we all sat up drinking till day-light, for you had not beds for so many, and we all continued our journey very early. My name you very probably heard and will remember, on hearing it again. I have just finished my studies for a doctor, and am on my way to Dublin to get a diploma, but some day Mr. Delaney may be riding in his coach instead of tramp-

ing over the bogs all alone this way on shank's mare."

This was said so naturally that it carried conviction to the suspicious hearers.

"You need not fill the cup again for me, Dennis," said the so styled doctor, for I have hardly silver enough to pay my expenses to —, where my old aunt lives, from whom I must coax away a little of the money she is so fond of hoarding up."

"Never mind that," said the old hag with a laugh, which (though doubtless meant to be very pleasant) grated harshly on his ear.

"Ye are welcome to a drop of comfort—ye will sleep the better for the morning's walk before ye. I will make it hot and strong for ye meself, for I know that the quality likes it best so."

He assented, but kept a keen lookout; and observing that she did not take the whiskey from the jug on the table, but from a black bottle which she produced from out of a chest, he shrewdly conjectured that it was drugged, but whether to produce death or only prolonged sleep he of course could not determine. When the suspicious draught was presented to him, he put it to his lips and just tasted it, but spit out the little drop he had taken into his mouth, saying it was so hot that it burned him, but that he would like to take it as soon as he got into bed, that it would throw him into a perspiration and refresh him.

"Will ye bring it in just now?" said he, seeing the ominous gloom that darkened the brow of both Dennis and this mother, as he ejected the suspected liquid from his mouth.

"Certainly, that's what I will," said the hag quickly, with her ghastly good-humored smile, if such it might be called.

"Well, then, good night to you all, and don't forget to call me at daylight, if you please, Dennis, for I am anxious to be stirring very early."

In a few minutes the repulsive chamber maid brought him the drink which might indeed be the drink of death—the critical time had come—but he was not without an expedient—taking the fatal cup and raising it to his lips, he suddenly paused to request the old woman to take up his wet and muddy clothes which were laying on the floor and see if she could dry and cleanse them a little for him. As she stooped down to gather them up, he managed to stuff his pocket handkerchief into the cup and completely absorb the liquor, and unperceived he hid it under the bed clothes; and when the beldame raised her head, he appeared to be in the act of finishing his draught; and as he returned the empty cup to the eager hand that sought it, he continued: "There are only a few ten penny pieces in my pockets, you may keep them for your trouble, and some day I may better repay your services."

With a kindly 'good night,' he was left to his repose. All was still for a time in the outer room, but for reasons which will suggest themselves to the imagination of the readers who have pursued the foregoing, sleep or repose was far from him.

The solemn silence that ensued, far from dispelling doubt or lulling into forgetfulness, only led to the belief that his hours were numbered; and as the family had not retired to rest, the untroubling thought haunted the stranger's mind, that with murderous intent they only awaited the effects of the poison, ere they took further steps respecting him. He knew that the only other sleeping apartments were in the loft above, which must be reached by mounting a ladder, and his vigilant ear could not fail to have detected every movement on their part, for which he had anxiously listened in vain.

After having tossed and turned restlessly for some time, it occurred to him that if this were the case, he had better simulate that sleep which was denied him; but as his only chance for safety sedulously to keep his whole faculties intensely on the alert. He therefore gradually composed himself and breathed louder and louder, as though being overcome by slumber. So well did he counterfeit the reality, that it was not long ere the old woman opened the door, and coming softly up to the bed and bending over him listened intently, then softly raising the clothes she pressed her hand over his heart—and went away apparently satisfied with the result of her investigation.

"What shall we do with him, boys?" she said, on returning to the fireside. "The poppy-drops which I put in his hot-stuff will keep him safe and sound till morning, when he may go his way for all I care. He has nothing worth while."

"I don't know that," replied Dennis. "He must have more than those few ten-penny pieces in his pocket."

"If I thought so," rejoined the hag, "I'd soon make sale work of it now whilst he is sound asleep."

"Not so, mother," said Thomas, eagerly, yet in a subdued tone, for though believing him to have drank a powerful soporific, they all spoke low, still it was loud enough to reach his sharpened hearing. "Do not for a trifling chance of a little more money commit another murder to-night. I cannot and will not stand by and see it. The screams of yon poor wretch when the dog held him fast and Dennis drove the knife in his side, are wringing in my ears yet. Then to see him clasp his hands and beg for mercy when you came up not to help him, but cut his throat—O, mother, it makes me sick to think of it. There shall be no more murder here this blessed night, I tell ye."

"Hush ye, O madown, and hold your foolish tongue. Haven't we got a hape of money by the job? See the bright golden guineas here in this grand purse."

The clink of the dangerous metal was then plainly heard by the attentive and horrified listener. O my God, thought he, if I had not left my pistols in the carriage, I should at least have some chance for my life, and could at any rate sell it dearly, but now I am totally unarmed and powerless.

"By the powers," resumed Dennis, "but he was like to be too many for us, only for the dog there I would not say but he might have got off—and then the country would have been too hot to hold us."

"It's that for me, already," said Thomas. "I can't stand this cruel life no longer. It's true for me, and well