

Lanty Riordan's Red Light.

By R. MANIFOLD CRAIG.

Poor Lanty Riordan!

At the mere mention of the name everyone connected with the Grand Southern Railway smiled. That is to say every one living within twenty miles of Hancastle.

To be sure, the smiles usually ended with sighs and shakes of the head; and one after another of those who had hazarded all they could conscientiously risk in his interest, frowned as they said: "It is hopeless, poor fellow! We can do no more for him."

It had often been said that Lanty was nobody's enemy but his own; and there were narratives of his having risked his life in Burmah, not only for comrades in imminent danger from the Dacoits, but for a poor shikari, over whose prostrate body he had shot the fierce tigress which was slowly crunching the thin black limbs inch by inch. It used to be believed that during this adventure—of which the hero could never be induced to speak—Gunner Riordan had never let his coarse Trichinopoly cheeroo go out, although he had walked so closely up to the wounded tigress that her fulvous coat was singed by the powder from the shot when she fell over.

It was further asserted that a formal charge of "making away with Government property, in that he did (date, place, etc.) expend, that is to say, fire off without proper authority, one round of breech loading carbine ammunition, the property," etc., was sent in against him by the Divisional Sergeant on the occasion. He was admonished in the Battery Orderly Room; but privately shaken hands with by the Brigadier General Commanding, and secretly presented with \$25, a sum which was collected in ten minutes in the artillery mess.

The expenditure of this sum naturally got Gunner Riordan and five beloved friends into the guard room, with long spells of confinement to barracks to follow. Poor Lanty could not bear so much fame, accompanied by so much wealth.

Now Hancastle, at the period of this true history—the locality where Lanty Riordan was so well, although not favorably known—was the point at which coal trucks were shunted, under somewhat incomplete arrangements, into the depot yard, then under construction. Here they stood, on from five to nine lines of rails, alongside nearly a quarter of a mile of the permanent way. The switch used when the cars were thus to be shunted was at the foot of a semaphore, which was under the control of the signalman in the box half a mile further away. Trains coming up to Washington passed first the signal box, then the semaphore, and lastly a dismounted old railroad car at the depot which had been Lanty's dwelling during the past three years.

It was impossible not to like Lanty. So fish, wilful, slovenly, sulky, often absent from duty, lazy disrespectful and ungrateful at times—he periodically turned over new leaves, attended to his religious and other duties, was sorry for his faults, overflowing with a gratitude which was as genuine as his wickedness, helpful, gentle, thoughtful, the cheer and life of all who knew him. His good-looking head was an intelligent one; his heart was warm and kind; but within five minutes of entering had company his good impulses and his pledges were forgotten in a very chaos of extravagance and dissipation.

In settling down at Hancastle Lanty fell across his evil genius in the person of a man named Potter. Shortly after Lanty's arrival it had been conveyed to him that it rested with him to say whether or not the person, and one hundred dollars in ready money, the property of a public school nurse in the neighborhood, should be attached to him matrimonially. In the *spere injuria forme* which his love of liberty caused, the addresses of a less desired but persistent suitor, Potter to wit, were hastily accepted; and much of the former liking for Lanty on the new Mrs. Potter's part turned into angry dislike, with out the addition of a grain of happiness or good-will to the sentiments of the bridegroom regarding Riordan.

To add to his troubles, Lanty at about this time was discharged from the service of the Grand Southern Railway. It was a line upon which vast changes of way and plant had been taking place, and from which, chiefly owing to the patience and co-patriotic kindness of Mr. Roche, the local superintendent of works, Lanty had had almost regular employment as a navvy on the new coal depot works, at fog signaling, at keeping up fires beside the hydrants in hard frosts, and so on.

But now all this was over. He had been a "blessed good fellow" while he had money. But when that had gone too low to stand another round of drinks, he had been sneered at as a poor beggar of a Paddy; had felled "sponging Sassenachs" as he called them, right and left; and had stalked out of the saloon, over their bodies, drunkenly singing that—

"The best of all ways
To lengthen our days
Is to steal a few hours from the night,
My dear!"

Whither should poor Lanty's staggering footsteps lead him except toward the half made coal depot near which was the dis-

mounted old railroad car which he had been allowed to occupy during the past three years.

Of course he ought to have recollected that he had been firmly evicted that morning. He had also been informed that he must expect to find his late residence appropriated to stores thence-forward, and provided with a powerful bolt secured by a padlock of which he had not the key. But his faculties were not very clear; and he also had a vague despairing feeling that he should have neither food nor shelter tomorrow: that he would probably have to go to jail; for assault; and that the rushing monsters which he loved made so—God rest their souls!—for those whose remains, on two occasions, he had coolly and most decorously dealt with, when others had shrunk and turned pale, and hurried away from the ghastly sights.

Lanty, in India, had shown great gifts as an extra hospital orderly during cholera epidemics; as also when a party had suffered severe losses by falling into an ambush in Loonungoung, Burmah. He had for a time been a medical officer's latman in Ireland; and had evinced such intelligent interest when detailed to help at autopsies in the mortuary in Burmah, that the surgeons had taught him a good deal about the human bones and the general lie of blood-vessels and organs of the body.

There was, indeed, scarcely a sense in which Lanty Riordan could be said to fear death. Even drunkenness only gave unctious to his homilies upon the wisdom of preparation for our inevitable dissolution. And now, as soon as he had spent his last few coppers upon a flask of whiskey of a specially curved and flat pattern, prepared for slipping into the breast pockets of travelers—"for use in the tunnels," as the leering barkeeper said—Lanty ceased his melodious singing of "The Young May Moon," and staggered solemnly along droning the "Adeste Fideles" in his rich and tuneful baritone.

There had been many hours of saturating rain that day, and having met his evil genius, Potter, Lanty had made the wild and wet weather a plea for spending it in drinking, treating and wild card playing. Potter had been discharged from the service of the Grand Southern Railroad for dishonesty, and had never since ceased from efforts to make Lanty commit himself. This unhappy day he had succeeded. With this wild orgie Lanty had ended all his money and all his luck; and now, as he struggled over the wire fence into the cutting, maudlinly singing the fine old Latin hymn, he smilingly pictured the cowardly, mean face of the man who had compassed his ruin when he should have heard of the "shocking accident" next morning.

"Begorra," muttered Lanty, "tis a feather in his cap it will be, if he only knew it, had scrian to him! To think of the likes of him, a whitelivered cur, drivin' in Lanty Riordan, no less, to a bloody ind! Ay! and the spalpeen will fair stiff if they tell him to pick up the pieces when they find me!"

"Well, I had my chance, an' chances on the top of it! Not alone from Mister Roche and Father Olpherts, but from Mrs. Roche herself—the blessin' o' God on her! Shure, didn't she warn me agin Potter next before the devil his master. 'Riordan,' she would say, 'when Potter sees you one day dragged in the gutter, he will rejoice over your downfall, an' rub his hands wid glee to see the master an' me made mock of because of you?' 'Two would be the thruth she spoke if I would live to see it! But the nine o'clock express will settle the business otherwise, wid my brave *Tornado* doing her fifty-five miles an hour at the head of it! Holy Mary, Mother o' God, pray for us now and in the hour of our death!"

Here Lanty paused unsteadily for a moment before the semaphore which had just rattlingly signaled "Go ahead!" with its green light to the approaching express.

Now the new coal depot, as has been indicated, was being made by the gradual filling up of a small valley which ran for some distance irregularly parallel to the line. The practice was to lay down temporary lines, upon which loaded cars were cautiously run to aid the settling process. When the surface was sound and level, the line was of course relaid at the level of the permanent way, which had formerly been upon an embankment above the depression. The heavy rains of that day would search out weak places, and be of great use in helping the settlement of new and old materials.

In his least sober moments, Lanty, from long practice, was able to stride safely amongst sleepers and rails. So, when sinking first to his ankles, and then, with a plunge, up to his knees, amongst unsupported sleepers on the main line, his intelligence of the fearful condition of things half sobered him. A subsidence had taken place in the side of the bank next to the coal depot at a point beyond the control of the semaphore; and the next train, the famous nine o'clock express would be wrecked if it reached the defective place.

"Lord a' mercy on me for a drunken swab—what in His Holy Name am I to do now!" cried Lanty. "If I had a bit of a red handkercher to put over the green light—No! even that wouldn't make a red one. Wait! I'll make a white light wid my own lantern, anyway." Dashing off toward the dismounted car

which had been his dwelling, he looked for the battered old stable lantern in which he used to place his candle, and which had that morning been thrown out of the hut. He found it amongst the sweepings and rubbish which, together with his very primitive furniture and himself, had had to give place to oil cans, iron bolts and stores of all sorts.

"The blessed saints be praised!" cried Lanty, "there's ten minutes of candle in it yet; an' the express will be here in less time."

To so heavy a smoker as Lanty Riordan, matches were a very necessity of life. Under shelter of the hut the half-sobered fellow stooped, and at the third attempt of very shaky hands, succeeded in lighting the sputtering bit of candle which Mr. Roche's coachman had given him some days before. As he stooped, the flat whisky flask fell out of his breast pocket: the neck struck a stone; and before he could pick up the bottle nearly all the spirit had gurgled out.

Snatching the flask with a haste which caused the loss of most of the remaining contents, and slightly cutting his hand on the broken neck, Lanty uttered a rueful exclamation, and made sure of the fast tea-potful by pouring it into his mouth. Then, as the light of the kindling candle increased, he saw the blood on his hand—and at the same instant he heard the rumble of the express in the deep store cutting only six miles off.

Springing to the erect position, Lanty passed through some ten seconds of the most intense mental exertion he had ever known. Then came his design and his action. At a rain pool he half filled the broken flask with water. Feeling for the blood-vessel which gave the pulse at his left wrist, he set his teeth and plunged the keen angular edge of the glass bottle-neck—keener than the finest lance or razor—into it. The lights of the express emerged from the cutting. The blood jetted from the wounded artery—none too freely for the anxious martyr who had the train to save. Much of the scarlet stream poured down the sides of the flask, even when, by the light of the candle, Lanty did what he could to direct the stream into the bottle. But at last with the rear of the train waxing louder and coming nearer, Lanty had made a rich ruby-colored fluid in the flask. Crumpling twisted paper into the broken neck, he carefully opened the lantern, placed the bottle between the flame and the glass-headed net at all the jutting artery, and stepped on to the line in front of the express.

"Now, may God send that I get enough to give them time to see the sign an' pull up!" moaned Lanty. "This liquor that's a curse; an' me head is reelin' as I can't hardly hold the lantern steady! An' now, if the Mother o' God doesn't strengthen me knees, I can't go far enough to do any good! They'll see the big green light; but who would notice this poor red glimmer—anyway in time? What! Glory be to God! they're whistlin'!"

And so it was! Yonder, about a mile off, the keen-eyed driver of the big-wheeled engine *Tornado* had caught sight of poor, tottering Lanty's feeble red light. He need no longer strain forward upon those trembling limbs. Straddling his legs apart so that he might at least stand the more firmly—raising his lamp high in his left hand, and pressing a round pebble into the wound in the wrist with his right there he stood! Never did seconds seem so like minutes. Lanty felt his limbs failing. A dew which was not all rain, trickled down his forehead. Indeed, the cool rain, which might have refreshed him, had abruptly ceased.

"St. Michael, St. Patrick, and all angels, succor me now for God's dear love! Oh! His holy curse, an' my black curse be on the drink this blessed an' dread-ful minute! Father in heaven! give me strength to hold up till I stop th' express! Resave my soul if it ends me! An' hear my vow: if it stops short and spares itself an' meself, the drain of drink I took five minutes ago will be the last forever, by the Sacraments of God. Amen! Ah, merciful Lord! 'tis blind I'm gettin'! Let me put the lantern safe down on the sleeper! There! Ah, Glory be to God the signalman has seen it, an' changed the signal! Th' express is stoppin'! I—am—dy!"

The great hissing engine *Tornado* pulled up within sixty yards of Lanty Riordan's red light. The stoker and the guard ran forward, and found the poor fellow unconscious from loss of blood beside it. The scarlet spray from the jetting artery had closely spotted his face and dress. Two of the passengers were eminent surgeons. The artery was instantly compressed and quickly tied. Others soon found the landslip and explained what had happened.

But when flasks were produced, and it was attempted to give the brave fellow some stimulant, he feebly turned his pale clammy face away, pushed the liquor aside, and said:

"Wather, if ye please! Wid my last dyin' words I put my blackest curse on the drink; an' die I will, please God, afore I throw His mercy back in His face wid the breakin' of my word. Wather!"

"You are not going to die, my brave fellow!" said the great surgeon, as he wiped his own hands after the operation.

(Continued on Page 7.)

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