

A MAN'S FOES :

A TALE OF

The Siege of Londonderry

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CHAPTER I.

BEGINNING, IRISH FASHION, AT THE END OF THE STORY.

STRANGE and very strange it is to reflect upon the changes that one year, one very short year with twelve little months in it, may bring forth. A foam-bell on a stormy sea, were it endowed with sense and memory, might have some such experiences as ours to recall at the end of its day of life. Now on the crest of the wave, now in the trough; now sliding up the slope of the tossing water, now sliding down; now sparkling in a flying ray of sunshine, now dark in the sudden gloom; whelmed under the plunging wave one moment, the next slipping into the free light once more, and in the next after that whirled, perhaps, clean into the air by the wind. The likeness is apt enough between such an existence as this and the life we have been leading for the last twelve months.

A year; and that of the shortest, as it seems when I look back upon it: and yet what long days have been therein—days that seemed to hold months of ordinary life; yes, and that will count for more in our lives than months of ordinary life. Perhaps it needed more than the strength that will carry one through months of quietness to live through one such day; perhaps our lives have been shortened by just so much. And yet, could the choice be allowed one, to have been in the thick of the fight or quite out of it—a foam-bell on the crest of a wave or a foam-bell on the eddy of a sheltered brook, where hardly even the sound of the storm can reach it—would one choose the calm? I would not, woman though I be; for such days as these were filled—ay, to overflowing—with real life; it was worth living to have the chance of such. And that which hath been done is worth the casting away of a dozen lives, if one had them; how mean and inglorious seems the common round of daily business after the fate of a nation hath hung upon our actions! And yet how sweet and gracious is the orderly succession of daily duties, tame and trivial though they be. It doth seem to me that I never so much enjoyed the rarest junketing and holiday-making before our troubles, as I now do the ordering of my family and the arranging of my house. Interruption and derangement do give a new zest to everyday interests, that is certain; as that little foam-bell might be figured, after its day of storm, to find blessed rest in the calm that had only wearied it before.

I said something like this to Margery, my maid, who came into my chamber as I sat with paper and ink before me, ready to begin to write.

"Our storm left much wreckage behind it, and caused much devastation," said I. "But the wreckage is well-nigh cleared away, and soon the havoc will all be repaired. Even the very gray hairs, which you were so grieved to see in my head, will soon disappear, I think."

I spoke something gaily, for Margery doth keep so grave a face that I am sorry for her; nor doth it indicate a right sense of all the mercies of Providence towards us. If we have suffered, have we not been richly repaid?

She came up to me before she answered, and pushed back my hair, looking to see if that which I had said were true.

"I should not wonder, madam," said she. "Peace and happiness work wonders."

"Peace and happiness would almost seem to make the years run backwards, wouldn't they?" said I. "What haggard old, grief-stricken creatures we seemed, both you and I, when we came back to Clonally three months ago! And yet now, though no doubt we have lost much that we shall never regain, we don't seem to have lost our youth, after all; for that is coming back to us."

"You may get back your round cheeks and your pretty colour, madam," said Margery; "and even your hair may come back to what it was—who knows? but your eyes will never be what they were—never. They used to sparkle like the sun on the lough," said this foolish woman, who used to think far too highly of my looks, and now doth think far too highly of me. "And now," says she, "they're not the eyes of a young woman at all."

"What," said I, "are they so spoilt as that?" And being, I fear, for all we have come through, but a vain woman still, I bade her give me from my table a little mirror, that I might look at them. Then I said: "I don't think they look so wonderfully old, Margery,

after all. I believe they could sparkle yet, if ye were to try a bit of flattery." For I wanted to get a smile from her.

"Ah, they're a bit sunken," said she; "but it's not that. 'Tis the years that are to come that one can see in them, more than the years that are past! There's a look in them now," says she, beginning to shed tears, "that I'll know you by in heaven, when I see you there faith, madam, 'tis not age you have in your eyes, but immortality."

"There, there, now, Margery! you've fairly beat yourself at praising me," said I, trying to make a joke of it, but 'twas of no use. She cried, and I cried too—partly from sympathy, and partly because even my waiting-woman, with all her partiality, could not help showing me that mine eyes were no longer as pretty as they once were.

"In truth," I said through the shower, "our immortality was very near us those last days of the siege, wasn't it? Our hearts were so full of it that we could not keep it all out of our faces; though death," said I by an afterthought, "put his signmanual there as well, to witness his prior claim."

"'Twas the thing that kept us living, the thought of our immortality," said Margery.

"And it was pretty near all we had to live on!" I could not help rejoicing, thought I know that Margery hates flippancy. She is no longer like a servant to me; nor was she formerly a mere ordinary servant, being a connection, though a poor and very distant one, of my husband's family. But when mistress and maid have passed together through such perils and privations as have happened to us, there is thenceforward a bond of friendship between them, as well as of service rendered and received. Therefore I drew Margery's face down to mine and gave her a little kiss of peace before I sent her out of my chamber, to give me solitude for my writing. It hath ever been a tendency of mine to give to serious matters a streak, as it were, of a smile; and whether it be innocent and rather praiseworthy than evil (as making them bear less heavy on the spirits), or altogether a snare, I have never been able rightly to make up my mind. But even in the depths of our troubles there were times when I could not quite govern my tongue into seriousness; but now and then a saying that had the savour of a jest would escape me in my own despite.

At the first, when we came back into this our house at Clonally, and were here established, I was all eagerness to begin writing down of my remembrance; yet now there have passed nigh upon three months, and to-night is the first time that I have taken pen in hand for that purpose. To be sure, there hath been much to see to, much to set in order; for our house, though it was not altogether dismantled, like so many that neighbour it, and yet suffered severely by the occupation of the enemy, having had a garrison of them posted therein. And what such house-keepers as these were like to make of their abode, sure anybody can tell well enough, without description from me. Oh, my pretty withdrawing room, with its chairs of tapestry-work, wrought by the hands of my dear mother and aunts; with the spinet and the beautiful Italian cabinet that Captain Hamilton caused to be brought from London, all the way, to adorn our home withal; nor to mention the gewgaws and chaneys that his mother gave us! What a state it was in when I came back to it out of Derry! The costly hangings of Italian silk, that were a present from my lord Duke, my husband's kinsman and friend, sent to us from his palace in Scotland, I had fortunately saved, taking them with me among my mails when we removed into the city before the siege. But the floor that was the pride of Margery's heart for its shining (which to maintain cost the maids so much hard rubbing with the cicely seeds from the river-bank)—'twas of the same colour as the road to the waterside of Derry, and not a wit brighter; and the stair-case of polished oak was in the same condition. Throughout the house everything was in like case, as was to be expected; but the rest of the furniture, being more solid than that in my closet, it hath suffered less actual damage, and is now restored to something like its former state. My pretty silk hangings are once more in their old places; many of the other things have been repaired marvellously neatly; some pieces even of the chaneys have been found, and Margery hath mended them with a mysterious stuff that she makes from the pounded lime of shells, mixed with the white of an egg, and I know not what else. They will scarce bear handling, but they stand in their old places. Everywhere, to be sure, there are scars and scratches—you can see them when you look for them—nor would I wish to be rid of them entirely, they being, as it were, a kind of written history. But to a casual eye the house appears but little difference from what it was a year ago—on the

day, to wit, that my Lord Mountjoy came to it with my husband out of Derry, to sup here and lie all night, on his way to Dublin.

Whenever I find myself disposed to murmur at the destruction that hath been wrought in my house, I have nothing more to do than to think of the case of so many of our neighbours, whose houses are for the most part either burnt down or sacked to the bare walls. By what means ours escaped the like treatment I do not know. 'Tis true that a person of very great consideration was quartered here for a time—no less than the French Ambassador himself. But since I have heard the very headquarter residence itself—Sir Matthew Bridge's house of Brookhall, to wit—was razed to the ground by the Irish army at its leaving, I well perceive that this cannot have been the reason it was spared. And, indeed, from all I can learn of Monsieur le Comte d'Avaux, he is one much more like to have cancelled the destruction of any place that might harbour us, and even urged it, than to have said a word in favour of leaving it standing, he counting all that have borne arms against King James the enemies of King Louis as well. Howsoever the marvel is to be explained, it is a truth that we have a roof to cover us, and under it no small share of the convenience of life, and when I hear murmuring from any of my people, I spare not to point them to numbers of poor neighbours who are every day at our door imploring succour, persons that were every one of them in the possession of a good competency before the war. No doubt their losses will be all made up to them ere long, and more, for none can doubt that their Majesty's King William and Queen Mary (God bless them!) have the will to be not only just but generous, as witness his Majesty's gracious letter that was read in the Diamond of Derry in the early days of the month of September. But in the meantime they suffer much hardship and many privations; and it is much my will to be very sparing in our own proper outlays, that so we may have the more power to give them relief. Having come together through so great rigour and straitness, sure 'tis a pleasure at one's very heart to share prosperity with them that were our fellow sufferers.

It is indeed one of my dearest blessings that I have the wherewithal to be serviceable to these poor friends; nor should I have had so much had I not plucked up a spirit to withstand Major General Kirke, our very tardy deliverer, in his exactions. For as soon as he had fairly succoured Derry—that I should ascribe it to him, who, for aught that hath appeared, had more the will to look on at its destruction than to make any honest endeavour to relieve it!—no sooner, at any rate, was the city relieved, than the Major-General sent parties of soldiers in all directions to seize the cattle and sheep that remained to the country people, upon the pretence that they were the abandoned booty of the enemy. Why he did a thing so tyrannous none can say, save that it hath ever been his want to pillage upon any pretext or none. To be sure, he brought great plenty into Derry. Perhaps he thought that in the sudden abundance the people might forget the famine that had there been endured so lately, mainly through his tardiness. If this was his reason, he had better have left it alone, for the common people throughout all the district have been reduced to such extremity thereby, that now they say that King James's soldiers are better neighbours by far than King William's. And the welfare of the province had been so undermined that, now that all he gathered together hath been consumed in the city, there is but little in the country that can be brought into market, so that again there is a scarcity, not in the city only, but in the country as well. And thus for every good word that Kirke got in Derry in the time of plenty he now gets ten hard ones in the city, and a hundred in the country. And that is much more his due, as I think, than praise for anything he hath ever done here in Ireland.

In due course, as was to be looked for, these legalized marauders came to my house at Clonally, where there was, one way and another, a considerable number of cattle. When we were forced to go into Derry before the siege, we left our stock in the charge of some known departments and tenants, who chose rather to remain without the city and take protection from the enemy. Much of our young cattle we sent away into the hill-country, where they still are; but as soon as we were known to be at home again, those that had the charge of our cattle sent them back—such of them at least, as the enemy had spared to seize. Thus we had a goodly number both of cattle and sheep when General Kirke's marauders came our way.

I could not imagine what there was to do that morning, what with the lowing of bestial and shouting of men in the courtyard without, and the tumult of voices within the house. I was still in my chamber, not hav-