

# DOROTHY OF THE MILL

**A** PAINTING of Kinross Mill might truthfully have been labelled "Peace." It occupied a romantic situation near the head of the valley. Above it lay the large mill-pond, or small lake, just as you choose to call it, placid in the moonlight, its margin, however, shaded by drooping trees, whose branches bent to drink, as it seemed, of the clear, still water. The pond was needed as a reservoir of power, for the mill was far up that valley, and the stream at this height was small. Lower down, where the rivulet became a river, there were mills in plenty that had no pond, and needed nothing more than a narrow channel cut to feed their small wheels. But Kinross Mill, to make the most of what water it had, possessed a wheel of great diameter, that the leverage of its spokes might make the most of the liquid force at its command. The stone mill itself was overgrown with ivy, and overshadowed by tall elms, and coming from the north, one would not suspect its existence, were it not for that mirror of a pond, which seemed framed with a green girdle. But the southern end of the mill was bare white stone in its lower story, overtopped by timber and plaster in the gable, and was a landmark for miles to any traveller coming up the winding road by the stream, he seeing the mill with its fringe of trees topping the upper valley.

It was a scene emblematic of the sweetest peace, yet was far from being typical of the state of affairs in England, for that grim fighter, Cromwell, himself, was camped but half an hour's ride away down this vale of seeming content, resting from his latest battle, where he had put to flight those who scorned him, scattering them like chaff before the wind, and Dorothy, as with her fingers she rubbed the white dust from the semi-obscured end window of the mill, saw a mounted man and a dozen foot soldiers hurrying up the road towards the mill. Dorothy was disconcerted with Cromwell, and thought him a most unreasonable man, yet had she cause for congratulation if she had only paused to think. Only the day before had a great fear been lifted from herself and her mother. News of a fierce battle had come to them, and after that, silence and racking anxiety, for her father and her two stalwart brothers were all three among Cromwell's forces. News of the conflict had been carried to that secluded vale by men who brought cartloads of wheat which were weighed into the mill, each man accepting a statement on paper of the weight of his load, written by the miller's wife. The incursion of grain was entirely unexpected by the two women in the cottage on the opposite side of the road to the mill, and all the bringers could say was that they had been ordered by the officers of the Parliamentary army to deliver what wheat they had to Kinross Mill. One wise yeoman said he thought it was because the mill stood so secluded, thus less likely to fall into the hands of the Royalists, noted throughout the land as being scandalously ignorant of their own country, while every inch of the acre was known to the Cromwellian soldiers, and in this surmise the old yeoman was doubtless right. These men said a terrible battle had been fought, but what the outcome was not one of them knew. Their duty was to bring wheat to the mill, and they were inclined to suppose that the less they interfered in the affairs of the mighty, the better for them, for no man yet knew how the cat was to jump, although all admitted Cromwell seemed to be having the best of it.

The first tidings that all was well with their own folk came by mounted messenger up the valley, hurrying his horse so that the women, seeing him come, had their worst moment ere he spoke, their tremor of fear augmented rather than assuaged by seeing on nearly approach that the speeding messenger was a neighbour's son, Standfast Standish by name; and yet in spite of this, suspense Dorothy's fair cheeks coloured,

## Robert Barr in "The Idler"

and her eyes were downcast as young Standish sprang from his horse.

"What has befallen? What has befallen?" cried the miller's wife.

"The Lord has given us a great victory," said Standish solemnly, "and has crushed the ungodly."

"Yes, yes," cried the woman, "but what about my man and my two sons?"

"They are well," said Standish, "untouched, though they were in the thick of it."

"Thank God, thank God," repeated the wife two or three times, and then Dorothy looked up, saying with something almost of reproach in her tones—

"Why, then, did you ride so fast? You frightened us."

"I ride, Doll, under orders that are not to be slighted. When Cromwell himself gives the word, horseflesh or manflesh must not be spared. His orders are to grind, grind, grind, and turn the corn into meal; the army must be fed."

"How are we to grind?" demanded the girl, "when he has taken our millers from us?"

"There lies the water; there stands the mill. Is there no corn?" asked the young man.

"Corn enough; the mill is full of it," replied the girl.

"Then Cromwell says 'Grind.'"

"Does he expect me to do it?" she asked.

"He cares not who does it, so 'tis done. That is Cromwell's way," replied the lad.

"You will eat here before going farther?" interrupted Mistress Mitford.

"I go no farther," said the lad.

"Surely you go to your own home; if but to let them see you are safe and sound?" protested the miller's wife.

"I have no such leave," replied Standish, "and must return at once; indeed, I scarce dare spare time to eat, but if you have a mug of ale—"

"Tut, tut," cried the good woman, "come in. There is ale in plenty, and a meat pie on the table such as you do not get in the army. Dorothy will hold your horse till you come out again."

"Indeed," said the young man, archly, "I shall put her to no such task, but shall tie the horse's bridle to this ring in the wall, so that Dorothy may accompany us within; and he cast a meaning glance from under his steel cap at the girl, who tossed her head indifferently.

"You need not so trouble yourself, Mr Standish," she said; "I make nothing of holding a horse, even for so long a time as you take to a meal."

The young man made no reply to this flippant remark, but securely tied the leather strap to the iron ring, then, turning to her, the mother having disappeared within the cottage, he said earnestly—

"Doll, my time is short, but I hope it will be long enough for the small word 'yes.'"

"Indeed," said she, "'tis the longest word in the language for what it entails. Become a general, Standfast, and I'll say yes right speedily. You know how ambitious I am, yet imprisoned here in this dull valley, with nothing happening."

"You do not value your good fortune," said the young man, solemnly. "Things happen elsewhere that are ill to look upon. Thank God for the quiet of the valley."

"I do," said the girl, instantly, falling into his own mood of seriousness, "I do whenever I think of what is beyond."

"Then, Doll dear, will you not make the day brighter for one who has to go beyond, by saying the word I ask of you?" and with a flimsy attempt at lightness he added, "Something will happen at once in this quiet valley if you do." Thereupon he made an attempt to encircle her waist with his arm, but she whisked away from him. "The word 'no,'" she said, "is even

shorter than the one you mentioned. If you wish for brevity why not accept that?"

Before he could reply Mistress Mitford appeared at the door.

"I thought you were hurried," she said. "Your meat and malt are waiting for you."

"You will come in with me!" he whispered, pleading to the girl, who with flushed cheeks kept the distance more than arm's length between them.

"Yes, I shall come," she pouted, "I think I am safer by my mother's side than by yours," and so the two entered the cottage, the valiant Standish attacking the pie with no less valour than he had displayed in battle a few days before.

Mistress Mitford sat opposite him, and Dorothy some distance apart, the elder woman plying him with questions regarding the fight, which Standish answered with some reluctance, evidently wishing to forget it all. He had been a farmer before he was a fighter, and was not yet hardened to slaughter.

"'Tis none so bad," he said, "when the fight is on, and one's blood is up, but afterwards, when the night falls and the groaning is heard while we search the battlefield, 'tis a doleful business, and, after all, whoever is right, and whoever is in the wrong of it, 'tis sad to see Englishmen fight Englishmen. Frenchmen, now, were a different matter."

"We are all God's creatures," said the woman, shaking her head in despondency.

"Not Frenchmen," protested young Standish, "and neither of the two women was sure enough about it to contradict him."

After the meal the young man rode down the valley again, satisfied in body, if not in spirit.

And now the two women were confronted with the problem of working the mill. "Grind," commanded Cromwell, and he was not one to be disobeyed. It is likely that if the miller had not been blessed with two strong sons who acted as his assistants, wife and daughter might have understood better the machinery of the mill, but as it was they were at a loss how to proceed. If they turned on the water, they might wreck the machinery, and thus, although obeying in the letter, there would be disobeying in the spirit, with the problem of feeding the army thereby rendered more acute.

After much labour they filled with grain the huge bin shaped like an inverted pyramid, through which the wheat flowed to the stones, and then they determined to send a messenger to camp and request the presence of either the father or one of the two sons. This was done the morning after the visit of Standish, and now Dorothy stood by the flow-obscured window, rubbing its panes with her apron, watching the approaching cavalcade and wondering if this were the expedition sent to her rescue. In that case Cromwell was slightly overdoing it; she had asked for one man, not for a dozen.

As the procession came near, she recognised her father among the foot soldiers. A miller never distinguishes himself on horseback, so old Mitford trailed a pike instead of being one of Cromwell's mounted Ironsides.

A cavalryman took his stand in the middle of the road, while the foot soldiers rapidly surrounded the mill. The upper half of the door was open, Mitford, followed by two or three men, gazed from the lower leaf and entered, his daughter coming forward to meet them.

"Why is the mill not working, Dorothy?" he asked, anxiously. "Didn't you get the General's command?"

"Mother and I were afraid to let on the water, fearing we might destroy the mill, instead of making meal."

"Tut, tut," cried the old man, impatiently, "the mill would come to no harm. I'll show you what to do, when

we have finished our business. Have you seen any loiterers about?"

"No."

"None in cavalier dress?"

"Not one."

"Lord Dorincourt was taken prisoner, and has escaped. He is thought to have come up the valley, and may be concealed in the mill. Come, my lad; I know every nook and cranny where even a rat might hide. If his lordship is here, we'll soon have him out."

The old building was searched from rafters attics to moss-covered cellars dripping with water, but no trace of the Royalist was found within its walls.

"He is not here, I'll vouch for that," reported the begrimed miller to the man on horseback.

Everyone was then set at beating the bushes and thicket surrounding the pond, but this, too, was labour lost. Meanwhile the miller turned on the water; the great wheel slowly revolved and the flour came pouring out.

"There's naught to do but keep the hopper full and work till the pond runs dry, which it will not do for some weeks yet," said the father.

Then the man on horseback gathered his followers, and departed fruitlessly down the hill again. Dorothy stood by the transparent pane and watched them until they were finally shut out from her sight.

With a sigh she turned from the window, and then was startled by hearing a half-smothered voice cry:

"In the Friend's name, Madam, are they gone? If so, I beg of you stop the mill."

She knew not from whence the voice came, but instinctively she turned to the lever, shut off the water, and the roar of machinery ceased.

"Who are you, and where are you?" she demanded.

For answer there were various sounds as of a man trying to clear his mouth so that he might speak. Then two hands appeared over the edge of the bin, whose load of wheat was still not perceptibly diminished; and a dour head of blond, curling hair rose up between the hands until a pair of sparkling eyes regarded her.

"A thousand thanks, my lady, for stopping the grinding stones. A moment more I had been gone between them, and the flower of my youth pulverised into flour for the Parliamentarians; curse them."

"You were in no danger," said the girl severely. "How came you here?"

"Are you alone, my lady?"

"Yes," replied the girl, backing towards the door.

"Let us thank God for that. Will you place me under further obligation by closing the door? Someone might pass, and really my apparel is in such a disarray that I have no anxiety to receive company."

"You are Lord Dorincourt," she said accusingly, without moving to realise his request.

"Oh, no, no, my fair girl," replied the unseen mouth, while the visible eyes laughed. "I am in reality Oliver Cromwell, but am so ashamed of the title that only the duress in which I find myself compels me to admit it."

"You are Lord Dorincourt," she repeated, with conviction.

"I was, once, my lady, but not now, not now. I assure you I am a changed man, and I defy my dearest friend to recognise me. My doubt is as full of corn as ever were the tightest boots of the most bunion-footed Puritan that ever stepped."

"How dare you speak with levity, considering your danger?"

"Madam, you have just informed me that I am safe from the millstones."

"Yes, but not from the upper and nether millstones of the law."

"Dorothy, I am in no trouble from that source. To reach the hands of the rebels I must first be betrayed, and there is too much kindness in your eyes to send even so worthless a fellow-creature as I to his death. In those charming and beautiful eyes I read, alas, disapproval of myself, but I see there is no capital sentence. Mademoiselle Dorothy?"

He had now raised himself up among the slanting boards until his head and shoulders were above the rim of the