

that it may go off. If you don't turn the muzzle down I shall be compelled in self-defence to strike you over the wrist with my stick."

"What the devil brought you here, then?" he asked, in a more composed voice, putting his weapon back into his bosom. "Can't a gentleman live quietly without your coming to peep and to pry? Have you no business of your own to look after, eh? And, my daughter? how came you to know anything of her? and what have you seen trying to squeeze out of her. It wasn't chance that brought you here."

"No," said I, boldly, "it was not chance which brought me here. I have had several opportunities of seeing your daughter and of appreciating her many noble qualities. We are engaged to be married to each other, and I came up with the express intention of seeing her."

Instead of blazing into a fury, as I had expected, the General gave a long whistle of astonishment, and then leaned up against the railings, laughing softly to himself.

"English terriers are fond of playing with worms," he remarked at last. "When we used to bring them out to India, they used to trot off into the jungle and begin sniffing at what they imagined to be worms there. But the worm turned out to be a venomous snake, and so poor doggy paid the penalty. I think you'll find yourself in a somewhat analogous position if you don't look out."

"You surely don't mean to cast an aspersion upon your own daughter?" I said, flashing with indignation.

"Oh, Gabrielle is all right," he answered, carelessly. "Our family is not one, however, which I should recommend a young man to marry into. And, pray, how is it that I was not informed of this snug little arrangement of yours?"

"We were afraid, sir, that you might separate us," I replied, feeling that perfect candour was the best policy under the circumstances. "It is possible that we were mistaken. Before coming to any final decision I implore you to remember that the happiness of both of us is at stake. It is in your power to divide our bodies, but our souls shall be for ever united."

"My good fellow," said the General, in a not unkindly tone, "you don't know what you are asking for. There is a gulf between you and anyone of the blood of Hesterstone which can never be bridged over." All trace of anger had vanished now from his manner, and had given place to an air of somewhat contemptuous amusement.

My family pride took fire at his words. "The gulf may be less than you imagine," I said, coldly. "We are not clodhoppers because we live in this out-of-the-way place. I am of noble descent on one side, and my mother was a Buchan of Buchan. I assure you that there is no such disparity between us as you seem to imagine."

"You misunderstand me," the General answered. "It is on our side that the disparity lies. There are reasons why my daughter Gabrielle should live and die single. It would not be to your advantage to marry her."

"But surely, sir," I persisted, "I am the best judge of my own interests and advantages. Since you take this ground all becomes easy, for I do assure you that the one interest which overrides all others is that I should have the woman I love for my wife. If this is your only objection to our match, you may surely give us your consent, for any danger or trial which I may incur in marrying Gabrielle will not weigh with me one featherweight."

"Here's a young bantam!" exclaimed the old soldier, smiling at my warmth. "It's easy to defy danger when you don't know what the danger is."

"What is it, then?" I asked, hotly. "There is no earthly peril which will drive me from Gabrielle's side. Let me know what it is and test me."

"No no. That would never do," he answered with a sigh, and then, thoughtfully, as if speaking his mind aloud: "He has plenty of pluck, and is a well-grown lad too. We might do worse than make use of him." He went on mumbling to himself with a vacant stare in his eyes as if he had forgotten my presence.

"Look here, West," he said presently. "You'll excuse me if I spoke hastily a little time ago. It is the second time that I have had occasion to apologise to you for the same offence. It shan't occur again. I am rather over particular, no doubt, in my desire for complete isolation; but I have good reasons for insisting on the point. Rightly or wrongly, I have got it into my head that some day there might be an organised raid upon my grounds. If anything of the sort should occur I suppose I might reckon upon your assistance?"

"With all my heart."

"So that if ever you got a message such as 'Come up,' or even simply 'Cloomber!' you would know that it was an appeal for help, and would hurry up immediately, even if it were in the dead of the night?"

"Most certainly I should," I answered. "But might I ask you what the nature of the danger is which you apprehend?"

"There would be nothing gained by your knowing. Indeed, you would hardly understand it if I told you. I must bid you good day now, for I have stayed with you too long. Remember, I count upon you as one of the Cloomber garrison now."

"One other thing, sir," I said, hurriedly, for he was turning away; "I hope that you will not be angry with your daughter for anything which I have told you. It was for my sake that she kept it all secret from you."

"All right," he said, with his cold, inscrutable smile. "I am not such an ogre in the bosom of my family as you seem to think. As to this marriage question, I should advise you as a friend to let it drop altogether, but if that is impossible I must insist that it stand over completely for the present. I is impossible to say what unexpected events may take. Good-bye!" He plunged into the wood and was quickly out of sight among the dense plantation.

Thus ended this extraordinary interview, in which this strange man had begun by pointing a loaded pistol at my breast and had ended by partially acknowledging the possibility of my becoming his future son-in-law. I hardly knew whether to be cast down or elated over it. On the one hand he was likely, by keeping a closer watch

over his daughter, to prevent us from communicating as freely as we had done hitherto. Against this there was the advantage of having obtained an implied consent to the renewal of my suit at some future date.

But this danger—this shadowy, unspeakable danger—which appeared to rise up at every turn, and to hang day and night over the towers of Cloomber! Back my brain as I would I could not conjure up any solution to the problem which was not puerile and inadequate. One fact struck me as being significant. Both the father and the son had assured me, independently of each other, that if I were told what the peril was I would hardly realise its significance. How strange and bizarre must the fear be which can scarce be expressed in intelligible language. I held up my hand in the darkness before I turned to sleep that night, and I swore that no power of man or devil should ever weaken my love for the woman whose pure heart I had the good fortune to win.

(To be continued.)

## SEND A GIFT TO PARNELL.

(From the New York Sun.)

It ought to be distinctly recognised that the present brief suspension during the holiday season of the sittings of the Parnell Commission offers us the last opportunity of defending the man who personifies the Irish cause against the combined attack of the London *Times* and the British Government. Do Americans intend to let the judgment of the Commission and, what is of far greater import, the verdict of English opinion go by default? If not, it behoves us to bestir ourselves, and head the appeals that come to us from those who understand how closely the success of the Home Rule movement is bound up with the triumphant exultation of the Irish chief.

The investigation undertaken by this Commission is practically a trial, in which Mr. Parnell and his principal Nationalist colleagues in Parliament are defendants. They stand accused of offences which, if brought home to them, would irremediably strip them of the respect and sympathy which Gladstonians now feel for them, and which they have laboured so long and faithfully to win. Their accuser, the London *Times*, commands almost unlimited pecuniary resources of its own, and in its search for incriminating evidence is, secretly or openly, assisted by the Tory Government. Much of such evidence is, no doubt, of a flimsy or fictitious character, but the fact must be demonstrated in a legal way and at the proper juncture. Such a demonstration requires an array of expert attorneys and distinguished counsel, besides a multitude of agents employed in uncovering the antecedents of the plaintiff's witnesses and in collecting counter testimony. This means, in view of the huge fees expected by leaders of the English Bar, a vast current expenditure, which in the case of Mr. Parnell is computed not to fall short of 2,500 dollars a day. We do not believe that one-tenth part of those unavoidable daily disbursements have been met by Irish-Americans, in spite of urgent and incessant requests for help.

It is a strangely ill-chosen moment in which to leave Mr. Parnell in the lurch. Never since June, 1886, have Irish Patriots stood more in need of American friendship and support. Mr. Gladstone has been forced by the condition of his health to leave England for the south of Europe, and is likely to be absent many weeks. At the by-election held in Stockton last week the Gladstonian majority was cut down almost two-thirds. The Suakin programme of Lord Salisbury has been so successfully carried out that the Ministers are more self-confident than ever, and their one dangerous critic, Lord Randolph Churchill, may have to fall back on his formerly-announced intention of wintering in South America. So defiant have the Government become of public comment on their invidious relations to the *Times*, that last week they procured the passage of a resolution that the roll of the House of Commons should be taken before the Commission, in the hope of thereby proving the genuineness of Mr. Parnell's signature to certain incriminating letters. The inference is that preparations are now making on the part of the *Times* and its official patrons for a desperate effort to make good their principal charge on the re-assembling of the Commission.

Such is the stress of the aggression to which will be exposed, after the lapse of a few weeks, the man who has come nearer than any other Irishman since Grattan of wringing justice from Great Britain.

How do the fervent friends of Ireland in New York propose to use the interval? Have they no Christmas gift for him who has devoted his life to his country? Will they send to Mr. Parnell no pledge of hope and of affection for the New Year that is at hand?

The Congress of the Bengalees, at Allahabad, has been criticised by a section of the British Liberal Press as a national movement looking toward self-government in India. Resolutions were adopted aimed at a reform of the Legislative Council, making half the members subject to general election and half to nomination by the Crown Council. Suggestions were also offered for making laws to control the finances of the country and all questions of war. The leaders of the movement are fomenting an agitation for the reduction or abolition of taxes. The means which they employ to this end are "seditious" pamphlets for those who can read, and itinerant preachers of "sedition," who circulate among the masses inciting the people to refuse to pay taxes and to destroy the English rule.

Rome, December 30.—Opening with the words "*Escounte jam anno*," the Papal encyclical thanks God for the consolations which the jubilee rejoicings have brought to the Pope, and his Holiness thanks the Catholic world for its tokens of affection and devotion. Turning to religious matters, the encyclical observes that the tendency of the age is toward material interests, and that the tendency is strengthened by worldly pride, an evil Press and drama, demoralisation of the arts and changed education in schools, materialistic and atheistic teaching obscuring true notions of right, Socialism, Nihilism, and Communism, it says, are also outcomes of this addition to material things. The Pope attended the *Te Deum* service in St. Peter's to-day to mark the close of the jubilee year. Fifty thousand tickets had been issued and 50,000 persons were present.