

The Storyteller.

ORANGE AND GREEN.

A STORY OF NINETY-EIGHT.

THE battle of Wexford had been won and lost again. What undisciplined valour and scorn of death could do had been done; but courage, armed with pikes and pitchforks, though victorious for awhile, could not prevail against discipline protected by artillery and musketry. No the country was filled with peasantry soldiers fleeing unarmed from the vengeance of the brutal and infuriated Yeomanry. There was no quarter given, and although the more humane officers of the regular troops strove hard to keep their men from murder and pillage, the evil example of the Militia and the Yeomanry was stronger than discipline and the habit of obedience. Neither age nor sex was spared, for Papist was synonymous for rebel; and whether he carried a pike or not, every peasant was regarded as a rebel at heart.

Like the other young men of his parish, Martin O'Connor had joined the army of the Union that was to set Ireland free, and, with his heart full of hope, he had followed the green banner that was to wave over an independent nation. But a few short weeks had put an end to all these hopes, and now Martin himself was a fugitive, with little expectation of escaping the pitch cap or the rope.

So he made for his native village of Greenane, whither love drew him in spite of the folly of his steps. He hoped, too, to cross the mountains and join General Holt, who still held out, with his brave band of followers, as yet undefeated. But it was a long journey, and Martin had been sorely wounded in the leg, so that his progress was slow and painful. He was weak with hunger and fatigue, for he had not dared to enter a village to beg for food lest an enemy should meet him—and such were the conditions of the times that it was hard to distinguish a friend from an enemy.

At length he reached the top of the hill which looks down into the valley where lies the little village of Greenane. By the moonlight he could almost distinguish his father's cabin. The silence and what little there was of sound were peaceful. A sob rose in his throat when he thought how different it all seemed on the day on which he set out to take his share in the freeing of Ireland. Then the sun was shining, and he, with some half hundred of the bravest boys of the district, all in their Sunday clothes, with green cockades in their hats and green scarfs on their breasts, had marched bravely up the hill, each with his new made pike on his shoulder. The girls of the village, clad in white and green, had come to wish them God speed, and none had any thoughts of defeat. Now he had come back alone, and no sound greeted him save the bleating of sheep on the mountains far away. Weakness and despair fell upon him, so that he had no strength to go further. He crept from the road into a field and threw himself down under a tree and in a few minutes fell fast asleep. For hours he slept dreamlessly in the fading moonlight, and knew not when the dawn crept shyly over the hill and the moon grew pale and dim.

Suddenly a quiver shook his tired bones. Did he dream, or was it a real voice that sang

'The summer is come and the grass is green
The leaves are budding on every tree.
The ships are sailing upon the sea,
And I'll soon find tidings of Gramachree.'

He raised himself on his arm and looked in the direction whence the sound came. It was no dream, for at a little distance from him a young girl sat milking a cow and beguiling the task with song. Her face was turned from him, but he knew that the long, slender neck and graceful shoulders could belong to none other than to Mary Moore, the daughter of a Yeoman farmer at Greenane. Many a jig they had danced together in the old peaceful times, when the freeing of Ireland was a delightful dream of the future, and no voice had been so sweet to him as hers, although her father wore the Orange on every Twelfth of July.

But Farmer Moore was a wise man withal, and while the country was at peace he showed no disposition to quarrel with his neighbours because they were for King James and he for King William. But when the insurrection broke out it was another matter; so he took his Orange scarf and set out to join the Yeos, leaving his daughter to mind his farm. He had little fear for her, as she was much beloved; and to the United Irishmen no woman was an enemy.

These things were in Martin's mind as he watched the young girl and delayed his purpose; but sore hunger was upon him. She might betray him, but to die of hunger was as bad as any other, and maybe her heart was tender. So he rose to his feet and went towards her. His shadow fell on her, and she ceased her singing.

'Martin!' she exclaimed, and the blood left her cheeks.

'Aye, Mary, it's me. Worse luck.'

'What brought you here—?' she began.

'Hunger,' he answered, looking at the milk.

She lifted the milk pail and gave it to him. He put it eagerly to his lips and took a long draught. The warm milk was new life to him. The colour came back to his haggard cheeks.

'Thank you, Mary,' he said. 'You have saved my life, though it is of little use to me.' Then he turned away.

'Where will ye be going, Martin?' the girl cried after him.

'Where else but down to the ould cabin beyant.' 'Sure it's mad you are, Martin, to think of it.'

'Aye, maybe I am, but I would like to see the ould people again before I die.'

'Before you die, Martin?'

'Aye, before I die, Mary.'

'Then I'm thinking they'll be dead before you.'

The young man's face grew a shade paler.

'What do you mean, Mary?'

'If the Yeos hear that you have been with them they will know for sure that the ould people are United.'

Martin stood for a moment with a drooping head. Then he turned to the girl.

'You are right, Mary, and so I'd better be going over the hill.'

'Martin.'

Something in her voice struck his heart and sent the blood to his head.

'Belike you're hungry.'

'Perhaps I am, if I had time to think of it; but what's the differ to a dade man whether he's hungry or not when the cause is lost?'

'That's a coward's word, Martin.'

'Aye, that's what they call a man when he's beat; but who cares.'

'There's them that cares, Martin.'

'Mary.'

'Aye, Martin.'

'Why didn't you finish your singing?'

The girl looked questioning at him for a moment. Then her cheeks grew crimson. Without answering she broke out passionately:

'O, Martin, Martin, I love you well,
I love you better than tongue can tell;
I love my friends and relations, too,
But I'd leave them all, love, and go with you.'

'D'ye mean it, Mary?'

'Aye, do I mean it, Martin, and have, ever since the night you danced at ould Widow Malone's down beyond, and kissed me in the lane coming home, only for fun, because I was a girl and they dared you, seeing that I was my father's daughter.'

'Sure I thought, Mary, it was Bill Brown that was courting you.'

'Aye, why shouldn't he, when you had no eyes in your head.'

'I was wishing I had no ears in my head after the blow you gave me in the same lane. Why was your hand so heavy, Mary?'

'Maybe because you didn't think of kissing me sooner, but you had little thought for me, for you were always made for pikes and green cockades and banners. It is little good they have done you, Martin.'

'Little enough, Mary, now that we are beat.'

'It might be worse.'

'Aye, it might.'

'If you did not come back at all.'

'Or if you married Bill Brown.'

'Who else wants to marry me?'

'I'm a broken man, Mary.'

'You're the best dancer in the parish.'

'I was.'

'You will be again.'

'Will you marry me, Mary?'

'Aye, will I, Martin.'

'And wear the green.'

'Sure in my heart I have always worn it.'

She stood before him with the sunlight in her face. There was no shrinking in the eyes that answered his. He clasped her suddenly in his arms and kissed her cheeks and lips.

'God forgive me, Mary, if I wronged you,' he said.

'You love me, Martin?'

'Aye, Mary, I do love you.'

'Then you can do me no wrong.'

So, they went down the hill together. Albeit the sun was high and the day well begun, none met them on the way, nor was the stillness without suggestion of fear. When they reached the gate leading to the farm house, the young man paused. The girl threw open the gate and motioned him to enter; but still he hesitated.

'I misdoubt whether I ought to go in, Mary,' he said.

'It's not passing the door you'd be, like a stranger, and you tired and hungry, too.'

'T'would be better than bringing trouble on you.'

'T'wil be harder again to leave you, Mary.'

'You'll be stronger when the hunger is driven out, and no one will know but old Tom, and him you needn't fear, for he'd have been out with you if the rheumatism had let him.'

'And your father, Mary?'

A shadow fell on the girl's face.

'He's out with the Yeos, and wish he was safe at home. 'Twas hard to have to go, but he daren't refuse.'

'He went against his friends when he did.'

'Maybe he'd be dead if he didn't.'

'He might be so,' Martin rejoined sorrowfully, thinking on the many that were.

Then they entered the house, and the girl set about preparing food for him. When he had eaten, she washed and dressed his wound with much skill, for love softened her touch to the torn flesh. Then the youth was for going lest he should bring trouble on the girl he loved; but she begged him to wait till night fall, so that he might reach the mountains unperceived. So he stayed, for in truth, he found it hard enough to leave her. Then he told her of how they had fought for the Green, at first with success, until defeat followed hard on the heels of victory. Of his own part he said but little, but the girl's eyes glistened and her bosom heaved since her imagination supplied what he had omitted. She sighed, too, and wept a little over those who would never again return to the village. Her father's absence troubled her, too, albeit Martin assured her that the Yeos had little now to fear.

So they talked on unconscious of the waning day, and as if their love had been confessed long since, and not only that morning.

Suddenly the sound of voices outside interrupted them. The girl rushed to the door, and looked up the road. A boy of men