

FOR THE OLD LAND.

(By CHARLES J. KICKHAM)

(CHAPTER V.)

Martin Dwyer's prosperous neighbour was not a tenant-at-will, yet he too, on hearing of the step taken by the Hon Horatio, rubbed his hands gleefully and repeated the words, "By gad, I'm glad of this," so often that his wife looked at him with some surprise.

"I thought," said Mrs Cormack, "you had your mind made up?"

"Yes," he replied, "I'd go with my landlord. But I know what a cry would be raised against me."

"Do you think Father Feehan would have minded much?" Mrs Cormack asked thoughtfully.

Her husband shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply.

"He is such a friend of ours," she added, "and such an amiable man, I don't think he would be unreasonable. He did not seem very angry when you said you would make no promise."

"Didn't he?" rejoined Ned Cormack with another shrug. "I thought you were a closer observer."

"Well, I'd be very sorry that he should fall out with us," returned Mrs Cormack, "and it would be a great shock to Margaret and Alice, who have been such favourites with him. In fact, I'd almost rather see you incur the displeasure of the landlord. What harm could he do you, as you have a lease?"

"Ah! I have laid out a great deal of money on this place," her husband replied. "You know I could only get a twenty-one years' lease; and only for the old house was going to fall, I'd never think of building with such a lease. But as you said yourself, when it should be done at all I might as well do it well."

"The old house was very nice after all," she remarked.

"Yes, for a picture" returned Ned Cormack, glancing at a sketch in water-colours that hung framed and glazed over the chimney-piece. "You made a very nice picture of it." But he looked back regretfully, for all that, to the early years of their married life which passed happily under the thatched roof, fully a yard deep, that looked so well in the picture; the "first coat" of which had been grasped in the horny hand of the reaper, before Cromwell cast his eyes upon the slope where it grew, and pronounced Ireland "a country worth fighting for."

Mrs Cormack, too, looked regretfully at the picture, and smiled as she remembered how her parasol used to come into contact with the eve, bringing down a shower of broken brown and black straw upon her. A bit of one of them was detected upon her bonnet in the chapel one Sunday by the lynx-eyed and satirical—though sensible and industrious—Miss Julia Flaherty, and she and some other young ladies were afterwards heard expressing their wonder how Ned Cormack's wife could "come in such style out of a cabin." But, as has been before indicated, the "whole country" was talking of the "style" of the young bride from Cork, and her "gold chain" and the absolute certainty of "breaking Ned Cormack, horse and foot." All this "talking," however, was thrown away, for fortunately Mrs Cormack never heard a word of it. That extraordinary young woman amazed and indeed frightened Molly Manogue by telling her one day, just as Molly was coming to the kernel of a toothsome bit of gossip, that she "did not like story-telling." This was a staggerer. But the piano! That quite knocked the breath out of social criticism, so far as Mrs Cormack was concerned. There was a general stare of incredulous astonishment, a lifting of the hands, and a turning up of the whites of the eyes when Molly Manogue announced the arrival of the piano; and henceforward Ned Cormack's wife was looked upon as a privileged person who might do just what she liked—drive in a coach-and-four over Corriglea Bridge, for instance, or invite Lady Oakdale to an evening party—without exacting the least surprise or calling forth remark or comment other than complimentary, even from Miss Julia Flaherty and her particular friends.

It must, however be borne in mind that at the time of Ned Cormack's marriage, the parson's daughter was the possessor of a piano—not the envied possessor, people would as soon have thought of envying an angel for having wings—of the only stringed instrument in the whole parish; of course, excepting fiddles, which were more numerous than they have ever been since. We were going also to except a guitar, the property of an old lady, the widow of a Waterloo officer. But that had long ceased to come under the category of stringed instruments—ever since the veteran, during his last attack of gout, brought it into collision with his physician's head, for hazarding the opinion that the famous phrase, "Up Guards and at them," belonged to the region of fiction rather than that of history. Both the doctor and the guitar were silenced; the one for the time being, and on subjects having reference to the Battle of Waterloo; the other for ever. But the "soul of music" which was knocked out of the guitar seemed to have been knocked into the cranium, for the doctor for many years after was troubled with a singing in the head.

At least in the matter of music we have been making wonderful progress those dozen years yast. Only the other day a young friend at our request, counted no less than 22 pianos within the boundaries

of the parish. But we must confess that the gratification afforded us by these statistics was modified considerably by the further information, incidentally added, that the 22 pianos were "All out of tune." We learn, however, that a movement has been set on foot by the dispensary doctor to secure the the occasional services of a tuner from the country town. And from our personal knowledge of the doctor's popularity and energy—and bearing in mind the intrinsic goodness of the cause he advocates—we venture to predict that harmony will reign from end to end of our parish long before the Phooka takes his next annual gallop over the summits of the surrounding hills.

Cynical people may ascribe the harmonious revolution just chronicled to an unhealthy hankering after "gentility"; but we are satisfied that a genuine love of music has been at the bottom of it. Nor is this love of music confined to the fair performers themselves. The Scotch agriculturist who would only consent to his daughter's getting a piano, on the express condition that she should "do her practising while he was about the farm," has not had a single imitator in the whole parish of Shannaclough. Though perhaps the "practising" is sometimes most agreeable when softened by distance, and listened to in the intervals of a *shannachus* with an old neighbour, from the kitchen chimney-corner. And doubtless "the concord of sweet sounds" with which at such moments the bucolic soul is "moved," loses nothing of its sweetness from the reflection that it in no way interferes with the more serious domestic duties.

"I never filled so many firkins as since I bought the piano for my daughter," a thriving farmer was heard to soliloquize in the market-house a week or two ago while his eyes dwelt complacently upon the "butter ticket." "A little education, after all, doesn't do the least harm to a girl," he added, as he put the ticket into his pocket.

But better still, the humblest home—even the hearth of the poor labouring-man—is vocal with the sweetest music below the stars—Irish children's voices attuned to the melodies of their own land of song.

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After a silence of some minutes, during which both Mr Cormack and his wife unconsciously continued to gaze upon the picture over the chimney-piece, the latter said:—

"I am very glad you are not to be troubled about your vote," She took the silver thimble from her finger and laid it in its place in the work-box on the table beside her, and waited to see whether her husband happened to be in a very conversational mood. It was evident she had something particular to speak about, but did not wish to introduce it too abruptly. "It is strange," she remarked, closing the lid of the work-box noisily, "that Father Feehan should be so anxious for the return of men like this young O'Mulligan, who only want to get places, or something, for themselves."

"And their friends," said her husband with a smile, in which there was more than a suspicion of sarcasm.

"Do you think," she asked—evidently *appropos* of the last remark—"do you think does Mr O'Keeffe mean anything particular by coming here so often lately?"

"Yes," was the reply; "I have got a pretty broad hint of it."

"And what do you think?"

"I don't like it!" he answered almost harshly—drawing his little son, who was turning over the leaves of a picture-book at the table, quickly towards him, and running his fingers through the boy's crisp auburn curls. "He is too deeply in debt."

"I thought that was not his own fault, but his father's," said Mrs Cormack.

"And what difference does that make when he is in debt?" her husband asked with a look of surprise.

"Oh, it makes a great difference," she replied.

"Well, you are right," said Ned Cormack, looking admiringly at his wife, of whose clear good sense he was very proud. "It does make a great difference. But he'd be expecting too much money." And Ned Cormack passed his hand over his little son's face, and pressed his curly head against his waistcoat.

Six or seven years before, Ned Cormack would have contemplated the possibility of Mr Robert O'Keeffe, of Cloonmore, becoming his son-in-law with more than satisfaction. But that little curly head leaning against his waistcoat was not in the world then. And since its coming—all un hoped for as it was, a complete change had come over the spirit of the father's dreams. To get his daughter well and respectably married was now a very secondary ambition with Ned Cormack, of Rockview. He began to think with dismay of that "big fortune" so often spoken of in connection with his handsome daughter; and sometimes wished that she, like his first love, Ellen Dwyer, would go into a convent.

"Well, what would you think of Mr Delahunty?" Mrs Cormack asked after another interval of silence.

"Mr Delahunty has plenty of money," cried little Eddy. "He gave Jerry a half-crown for holding his horse."

"O Eddy!" exclaimed his mother, after exchanging a glance with her husband, "there is the young ass coming towards the paling. He'll put his head in and crop some of the flowers. Run out and drive him away."