

"Listen to that," replied the woman; "do you think, now, he's not asleep? And even if he was sitting at the fire beside us, devil a syllable we said he could understand. I spoke to him in English, when he came in, but he didn't know a word I said."

"Well, then, let the old fellow sleep away; I won't touch him."

"Why, now, that's a good boy—go home to your barracks, and take a good sleep yourself."

"Aye, yes, certainly; but have you Reilly's clothes safe—shoes, silver buckles, and all?"

"Aye, as safe as the head on your shoulders; and, upon my soul, a great dale safer, if you rob any more sheriffs."

"Where are they, then?"

"Why, they're in my flat box behind the bed, where nobody could see them."

"Very well, Molly, that will do; I may want them want more," he replied, pointing again with his thumb over his shoulder, towards Whitecraft's residence; "so good night, be a good girl, and take care of yourself."

"No," she replied; "but you be a good boy, and take care of yourself." And so they parted for the night.

The next day, Fergus, possessed of very important evidence against the Rapparee, was travelling along the public road, not more than half a mile from the residence of Sir Robert Whitecraft, when whom should he meet but the identical sheriff, on horseback, whom the Rapparee had robbed. He put his hand to his hat, and asked him for charity.

"Help a poor ould man, for the love and honor of God?"

"Why don't you go work—why don't you go work?" replied the sheriff.

"I am not able, sir," replied Fergus; "it wouldn't be good for my health, your honor."

"Well, pass on, and don't trouble me; I have nothing for you."

"Ah! thin, sir, if you'd give me a trifle, maybe I'd make it worth your while."

"What do you mean?" asked the sheriff, who knew that persons like him had opportunities of hearing and knowing more about local circumstances, in consequence of their vagrant life, than any other class of persons in society. "What do you mean by what you have just said?"

"Aren't you the sheriff, sir, that was robbed some time ago?"

"I am."

"Ah, sir, I see you are dressed in black; and I had of the death of the mistress, sir."

"Well, what has that to do with what you have just now said—that you would make it worth my while if I gave you alms?"

"I said so, sir, and I can, if you will be guided by me."

"Speak out; I don't understand you."

"Would you like to see the man that robbed you, sir? And would you know him if you did see him?"

"Unquestionably, I would know him. They say it was Reilly, but I have seen Reilly since, and although the dress was the same which Reilly usually wears, yet the faces were different."

"Is your honor goin' far?" asked Fergus.

"No, I am going over to that farmhouse, Tom Brady's. His family are all ill of fever, and I wish to do something for him. I am about to make him my land bailiff."

"What stay will you make there, your honor?"

"A very short one—not more than ten or fifteen minutes."

"Would it be inconvenient for your honor to remain there for an hour, or maybe a little longer?"

"For what purpose? You are a mysterious old fellow."

"Bekaise, if you'd wish to see the man that robbed you, I'll undhertake to show him to you, face to face, within that time. Will your honor promise this?"

The sheriff paused, upon this proposal, coming as it did from such an equivocal authority. "What," thought he, "if it should be a plot for my life, in consequence of the fines which I have been forced to levy upon the Catholic priests and bishops, in my official capacity? God knows I feel it to be a painful duty."

"What is your religion?" he asked. "And why should a gentleman in my condition of life place any confidence upon the word of a common vagrant like you, who must necessarily be imbued with all the prejudices of your creed—for I suppose you are a Catholic?"

"I am, sir; but, for all that, in half an hour's time I'll be a rank Protestant."

The sheriff smiled, and asked, "How the devil's that?"

"You are dressed in black, sir, in mournin' for your wife. I have seen you go into Tom Brady's, to give the

sick creatures the rites of their Church. I give notice to Sir Robert Whitecraft that a priest is there, and my word to you, he and his hounds will soon be upon you. The man that robbed you will be among them—no, but the foremost of them; and if you don't know him, I can't help it—that's all, your honor."

"Well," replied the sheriff, "I shall give you nothing now, because I know not whether what you say can be relied upon or not. In the meantime, I shall remain an hour, or better, in Brady's house; and if your words are not made good, I shall send to Sir Robert Whitecraft for a military party to escort me home."

"I know, your honor," replied Fergus, "that Sir Robert and his men are at home to-day; and if I don't fulfil my words, I'll give your honor lave to whip me through the country."

"Well," said the sheriff, "I shall remain an hour, or an hour and a-half, in Brady's; but I tell you that if you are deceiving me you shall not escape me; so look to it, and think if what you propose to me is honest or not; if it be not, woe betide you."

Fergus immediately repaired to Sir Robert Whitecraft, to whom he represented himself as a poor Protestant of the name of Bingham, and informed him that a Popish priest was then in Tom Brady's house, administering the rites of Popery to those who were sick in the family.

"I seen him, your honor, go into the house; and he's there this minute. If your honor makes haste you'll catch him."

In less than a quarter of an hour, Sir Robert and his crew were in stirrups, and on their way to Tom Brady's; and in the meantime, too, the sheriff, dressed as he was in black, came outside the door, from time to time, more in apprehension of a plot against his life than of a visit from Whitecraft, which he knew must end in nothing. Now, Whitecraft and his followers, on approaching Brady's house, caught a glimpse of him—a circumstance which not only confirmed the baronet in the correctness of the information he had received, but also satisfied the sheriff that the mendicant had not deceived him. Rapid was the rush they made to Brady's house, and the very first that entered it was the Red Rapparee. He was about to seize the sheriff, whom he pretended not to know; but in a moment, Sir Robert and the rest entered, when, on recognising each other, an explanation took place, with all due apologies to the functionary, who said:—

"The mistake, Sir Robert, is very natural. I certainly have a clerical appearance, as I am in mourning for my wife. I trust you will neither hang nor transport me."

"I am very sorry, indeed, Mr. Oxley; but I only acted on information received."

"And I don't doubt, Sir Robert," replied the sheriff, "that the person who gave you the information may have been deceived himself by my ecclesiastical dress. I am sorry you have had so much trouble for nothing; but, upon my soul, I feel extremely delighted that I am not a priest."

In the meantime, the sheriff had recognised the Rapparee, by a single glance, as the man that had robbed him. He was now certain; but he took care not to bestow the least sign of recognition upon him; so far from that, he appeared to pay no attention whatsoever to the men, but chatted with Sir Robert for some time, who returned home deeply disappointed, though without imputing blame to his informant, who, he thought, was very naturally misled by the dress of the sheriff. Fergus, however, apprehensive of being involved in the prosecution of the Rapparee, and thus discovered, made a point to avoid the sheriff, whose cross-examination a consciousness of his previous life led him to dread. Still, he had, to a certain extent—though not definitely—resolved to become evidence against him; but only on the condition of previously receiving a full pardon for his own misdeeds. For upwards of a month, however, the sheriff was confined to his bed, having caught, whilst in Brady's, the malignant fever which then raged throughout the country.

CHAPTER XVIII.—SOMETHING NOT VERY PLEASANT FOR ALL PARTIES.

The position of England at this period was anything but an easy one. The Rebellion of '45 had commenced, and the young Pretender had gained some signal victories. Independently of this, she was alarmed by the rumor of a French invasion on her southern coast. Apprehensive lest the Irish Catholics, galled and goaded as they were by the influence of the penal laws, and the dreadful persecution which they caused them to suffer, should flock to the standard of Prince Charles, himself a Catholic, she deemed it expedient, in due time, to relax a little, and accordingly she "checked her hand, and changed her pride." Milder measures were soon resorted to, during