

Mr. O'Kelly's Tale.

Charles James Lever

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Arthur O'Leary: his wanderings and ponderings in many lands

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“I can tell you but little about my family,” said my host, stretching out his legs to the fire, and crossing his arms easily before him. “My grandfather was in the Austrian service, and killed in some old battle with the Turks. My father, Peter O'Kelly, was shot in a duel by an attorney from Youghal. Something about nailing his ear to the pump, I've heard tell was the cause of the row ; for he came down to my father's, with a writ, or a process, or something of the kind. No matter—the thief had pluck in him ; and when Peter—my father that was—told him, he'd make a gentleman of him, and fight him, if he'd give up the bill of costs ; why the temptation was too strong to resist ; he pitched the papers into the fire, went out the same morning, and faith he put in his bullet, as fair, as if he was used to the performance. I was only a child then, ten or eleven years old, and so I remember nothing of the particulars ; but I was packed off the next day to an old aunt's, a sister of my father's, who resided in the town of Tralee.

“Well, to be sure, it was a great change for me, young as I was, from Castle O'Kelly to Aunt Judy's. At home, there was a stable full of horses, a big house, generally full of company, and the company as full of fun ; we had a pack of harriers, went out twice or thrice a week, plenty of snipe-shooting, and a beautiful race-course was made round the lawn: and though I wasn't quite of an age to join in these pleasures myself, I had a lively taste for them all, and relished the free-and-easy style of my father's house, without any unhappy forebodings, that the amusements there practised would end in leaving me—a beggar.

“Now, my Aunt Judy lived in what might be called, a state of painfully-elegant poverty. Her habitation was somewhat more capacious than a house in a toy-shop ; but then it had all the usual attributes of a house. There was a hall-door, and two windows, and a chimney, and a brass knocker, and, I believe, a scraper ; and within, there were three little rooms, about the dimensions of a mail-coach, each. I think I see the little parlour before me, now this minute ; there was a miniature of my father in a red coat over the chimney, and two screens painted by my aunt—landscapes, I am told, they were once ; but time and damp had made them look something like the moon seen through a bit of smoked glass ; and there were fire-irons as bright as day, for they never performed any other duty than standing on guard beside the grate,—a kind of royal beef-eaters, kept for show ; and there was a little table covered with shells and minerals, bits of coral, conchs, and cheap curiosities of that nature, and over them, again, was a stuffed macaw. Oh, dear ! I see it all before me, and the little tea-service, that if the beverage had been vitriol, a cup full couldn't have harmed you. There were four chairs ;—human ingenuity couldn't smuggle in a fifth. There was one for Father Donnellan, another for Mrs. Brown, the post mistress, another for the barrack-master, Captain Dwyer, the fourth for my aunt her-self ; but then no more were wanted. Nothing but real gentility, the 'ould Irish blood,' would be received by Miss Judy ; and if the post-mistress wasn't fourteenth cousin to somebody, who was aunt to Phelim O'Brien, who was hanged for some humane practice towards the English in former times, the devil a cup of bohea she'd have tasted there ! The priest was *ex officio*, but Captain Dwyer was a gentleman, born and bred. His great-grandfather had an estate ; the last three generations had lived on the very reputation of its once being in the family : ‘they weren't upstarts, no, sorrow bit of it ;’ ‘when they had it they spent it,’ and so on, were the current expressions concerning them. Faith I will say, that in my time, in Ireland—I don't know how it may be now—the aroma of a good property stood to the descendants long after the substance had left them ; and if they only stuck fast to the place where the family had once been great, it took at least a couple of generations before they need think of looking out for a livelihood.

“ Aunt Judy’s revenue was something like eighty pounds a year ; but in Tralee she was not measured by the rule of the ‘ income tax.’ ‘ Wasn’t she own sister to Peter O’Kelly of the Castle ; didn’t Brien O’Kelly call at the house when he was canvassing for the member, and leave his card ;’ and wasn’t the card displayed on the little mahogany table every evening, and wiped and put by, every morning, for fifteen years; and sure the O’Kellys had their own burial ground,—the ‘ O’Kelly’s pound,’ as it was called, being a square spot inclosed within a wall and employed for all ‘ trespassers’ of the family, within death’s domain. Here was gentility enough in all conscience, even had the reputation of her evening parties not been the talk of the town. These were certainly exclusive enough, and consisted as I have told you.

“ Aunt Judy loved her rubber, and so did her friends ; and eight o’clock every evening saw the little party assembled at a game of ‘ longs,’ for penny points. It was no small compliment to the eyesight of the players, that they could distinguish the cards ; for with long use they had become dimmed and indistinct. The queens, had contracted a very tatterdemalion look, and the knaves, had got a most vagabond expression for want of their noses,—not to speak of other difficulties in dealing, which certainly required an expert hand, all the corners having long disappeared, leaving the operation something like playing at quoits.

“ The discipline of such an establishment, I need scarcely say, was very distasteful to me. I was seldom suffered to go beyond the door, more rarely still, alone : my whole amusement consisted in hearing about the ancient grandeur of the O’Kellys, and listening to a very prosy history, of certain martyrs, not one of whom I didn’t envy in my heart ; while in the evening I slept beneath the whist-table, being too much afraid of ghosts to venture up stairs to bed. It was on one of those evenings, when the party were assembled as usual ; some freak of mine—I fear I was a rebellious subject—was being discussed between the deals, it chanced that by some accident I was awake, and heard the colloquy.

“ ‘ Tis truth I’m telling you, ma’am,’ quoth my aunt, ‘ you’d think he was mild as milk, and there isn’t a name for the wickedness in him.’

“ ‘ When I was in the Buffs there was a fellow of the name of Clancy—’

“ ‘ Play a spade, captain,’ said the priest, who had no common horror of the story, he had heard every evening for twenty years.

“ ‘ And did he really put the kitten into the oven ?’ inquired Mrs. Brown.

“ ‘ Worse than that : he brought in Healy’s buck goat yesterday, and set him opposite the looking-glass, and the beast, thinking he saw another, opposite him, bolted straightforward, and, my dear, he stuck his horns through the middle of it. There isn’t a piece as big as the ace of diamonds.’”

“ ‘ When I was in the Buffs——

“ ‘ ’Tis at say he ought to be—don’t you think so, captain ?’ said the priest ; ‘ them’s trumps.’

“ ‘ I beg your pardon, Father Donellan, let me look at the trick. Well I’m sure I pity you, Miss O’Kelly.’

“ ‘ And why wouldn’t you! his mother had a bad drop in her, ’tis easy seen. Sure Peter, that’s gone, —rest his soul in peace, he never harmed man nor beast ; but that child there, has notions of wickedness, that would surprise you. My elegant cornelian necklace he’s taken the stones out of, till it nearly chokes me to put it on.’

“ ‘ When I was in the Buffs, Miss O’Kelly, there was——’

“ ‘ Pay fourpence,’ said the priest pettishly, and cut the cards.—As I was saying, I’d send him to say, and if the stories be thrue, I hear, he’s not ill fitted for it ; he does be the most of his time up there at the caves of Ballybunnion, with the smugglers.’

“ My aunt crimsoned a little at this, as I could see from my place on the hearth rug: for it was only the day before, I had brought in a package of green tea, obtained from the quarter alluded to.

“ ‘ I’d send him to Banagher to-morrow,’ said he, resolutely ; ‘ I’d send him to school.’

“ ‘ There was one Clancy, I was saying, a great devil he was—’

“ ‘ And faix ould Martin will flog his tricks out of him, if birch will do it,’ said the priest.

“ ‘ ’Tis only a fortnight since he put hot cinders in the letterbox, and burned half the Dublin bag,’ said Mrs. Brown. ‘ The town will be well rid of him.’

“ This was exactly the notion I was coming to myself, though differing widely as to the destination by which I was to manage my exchange out of it. The kind wishes of the party towards me, too, had another effect—it nerved me with a courage I never felt before—and when I took the first opportunity of a squabble at the whist-table, to make my escape from the room, I had so little fear of ghosts and goblins, that I opened the street door, and, although the way led under the wall of the church-yard, set out on my travels, in a direction which was to influence all my after life.

“ I had not proceeded far, when I overtook some cars on their way to Tarbert, on one of which I succeeded in obtaining a seat ; and, by daybreak, arrived at the Shannon, the object of my desires, and the goal of all my wishes.

“ The worthy priest had not calumniated me, in saying, that my associates were smugglers. Indeed, for weeks past, I never missed any opportunity of my aunt leaving the house, without setting out to meet a party who frequented a small public-house, about three miles from Tralee, and with whom I made more than one excursion to the caves of Ballybunnion. It was owing to an accidental piece of information I afforded them—that the revenue force was on their track—that I first learned to know these fellows ; and from that moment, I was a sworn friend of every man among them. To be sure they were a motley crew. The craft belonged to Flushing, and the skipper himself was a Fleming; the others were Kinsale fishermen, Ostenders, men from the coast of Bretagne, a Norwegian pilot, and a negro, who acted as cook. Their jovial style of life, the apparent good humour and good fellowship that subsisted among them, a dash of reckless devil-may-care spirit, resembling a school-boy’s love of fun—all captivated me ; and when I found myself on board the ‘ Dart,’ as she lay at anchor under the shadow of the tall cliffs, and saw the crew burnishing up pistols and cutlasses, and making ready for a cruise, I had a proud heart when they told me, I might join, and be one among them, I suppose every boy has something in his nature that inclines him to adventure ; it was strong enough in me, certainly.

“ The hardy, weather-beaten faces of my companions—their strong muscular frames—their coarse uniform of striped Jersey wear, with black belts crossing on the chest—all attracted my admiration : and from the red bunting that floated at our gaff, to the brass swivels that peeped from our bows, the whole craft delighted me. I was not long in acquiring the rough habits and manners of my associates, and speedily became a favourite with every one on board. All the eccentricities of my venerable aunt, all the peculiarities of Father Donellan, were dished up by me for their amusement, and they never got tired laughing at the description of the whist-table. Besides, I was able to afford them much valuable information about the neighbouring gentry, all of whom I knew, either personally, or by name. I was at once, therefore, employed as a kind of diplomatic envoy to ascertain if Mr. Blennerhassett wouldn’t like a hogshead of brandy, or the Knight of Glynn a pipe of claret, in addition to many minor embassies among the shebeen houses of the country, concerning nigger-heads of tobacco, packages of tea, smuggled lace, and silk handkerchiefs.

“ Thus was my education begun ; and an apter scholar, in all the art and mystery of smuggling, could scarcely have been found. I had a taste for picking up languages; and, before my first cruise was

over, had got a very tolerable smattering of French, Dutch, and Norwegian, and some intimacy with the fashionable dialect used on the banks of the Niger. Other accomplishments followed these. I was a capital pistol-shot—no bad hand with the small swords—could reef and steer, and had not my equal on board in detecting a revenue officer, no matter how artfully disguised. Such were my professional—my social qualifications far exceeded these. I could play a little on the violin, and the guitar, and was able to throw into rude verse any striking incident of our wild career, and adapt an air to it, for the amusement of my companions. These I usually noted down in a book, accompanying them with pen illustrations and notes ; and I assure you, however little literary reputation this volume might have acquired, ‘ O’Kelly’s Log,’ as it was called, formed the great delight, of ‘ Saturday night at sea.’ These things were all too local and personal in their interest to amuse any one who didn’t know the parties ; but mayhap one day or other I’ll give you a sight of the ‘ log,’ and let you hear some of our songs.

“ I won’t stop to detail any of the adventures of my sea-faring life ; strange and wild enough they were in all conscience: one night, staggering under close-reefed canvas beneath a lee-shore ; another, carousing with a jolly set in a ‘ Schenk Hans’ at Rotterdam, or Ostende—now, hiding in the dark caves of Ballybunnion, while the craft stood out to sea—now, disguised, taking a run up to Paris, and dining in the ‘ Café de L’Empire,’ in all the voluptuous extravagance of the day. Adventure fast succeeding on adventure, escape upon escape, had given my life a character of wild excitement, which made me feel a single day’s repose, a period of *ennui* and monotony.

“ Smuggling, too, became only a part of my occupation. My knowledge of French, and my power of disguising my appearance, enabled me to mix in Parisian society, of a certain class, without any fear of detection. In this way I obtained, from time to time, information of the greatest consequence to our government; and once brought some documents from the war department of Napoleon, which obtained for me the honour of an interview with Mr. Pitt himself. This part of my career, however, would take me too far away from my story, were I to detail any of the many striking adventures which marked it ; so I’ll pass on, at once, to one of those eventful epochs of my life, two or three of which have changed, for the time, the current of my destiny.

“ I was about eighteen: the war had just broke out with France, and the assembled camp at Boulogne threatened the invasion of England. The morning we left the French coast, the preparations for the embarkation of the troops, were in great forwardness, and certain particulars had reached us, which convinced me that Napoleon really intended an attempt, which many were disposed to believe, was a mere menace. In fact, an officer of the staff had given me such information as explained the mode of the descent, and the entire plan of the expedition. Before I could avail myself of this, however, we should land our cargo, an unusually rich one, on the west coast of Ireland, for my companions knew nothing all this time of the system of ‘ spionage’ I had established, and little suspected that one of their crew was in relation with the Prime Minister of England.

“ I have said I was about eighteen. My wild life, if it had made me feel older than my years, had given a hardihood and enterprise to my character, which heightened for me the enjoyment of every bold adventure, and made me feel a kind of ecstasy in every emergency, where danger and difficulty were present. I longed to be the skipper of my own craft, sweeping the seas at my own will ; a bold buccaneer, caring less for gain than glory,—until my name should win for itself its own meed of fame, and my feats be spoken of in awe and astonishment.

“ Van Brock, our captain, was a hardy Fleming, but all his energy of character, all his daring, were directed to the one object—gain. For this, there was nothing he wouldn’t attempt, nothing he wouldn’t risk. Now, our present voyage was one in which he had embarked all his capital ; the outbreak of a war warned him that his trade must speedily be abandoned—he could no longer hope to escape the cruisers of every country, that already filled the channel. This one voyage, however, if successful, would give him an ample competence for life, and he determined to hazard everything upon it.

“ It was a dark and stormy night in November, when we made the first light on the west coast of Ireland. Part of our cargo was destined for Ballybunnion; the remainder, and most valuable portion, was to be landed in the Bay of Galway. It blew a whole gale from the south’ard and westward, and the

sea ran mountains high, not the short joggle of a land-locked channel, but the heavy roll of the great Atlantic,—dark and frowning, swelling to an enormous height, and thundering away on the iron-bound coast to leeward, with a crash, that made our hearts quiver. The ‘ Dart ’ was a good sea-boat, but the waves swept her from stem to stern, and though nothing but a close-reefed topsail was bent, we went, spinning through the water, at twelve knots. The hatchways were battened down, and every preparation made for a rough night, for as the darkness increased, so did the gale.

“ The smuggler’s fate is a dark and gloomy one. Let the breeze fall, let the blue sky and fleecy clouds lie mirrored on the glassy deep, and straight a boat is seen, sweeping along with sixteen oars, springing with every jerk of the strong arms, to his capture. And when the white waves rise like mountains, and the lowering storm descends, sending tons of water across his decks, and wetting his highest rigging with the fleecy drift he dares not cry for help; the signal that would speak of his distress, would be the knell, to toll his ruin. We knew this well. We felt that come what would, from others, there was nothing to be hoped. It was then, with agonizing suspense we watched the little craft, as she worked in the stormy sea; we saw that with every tack, we were losing. The strong land current that set in shore, told upon us, at every reach; and when we went about, the dark and beetling cliffs seemed actually toppling over us, and the wild cries of the sea-fowl, rang, like a dirge in our ears. The small storm-jib we were obliged to set, sunk us by the head, and at every pitch the little vessel seemed threatening to go down, bow foremost.

“ Our great endeavour was to round the headland, which forms the southern shore of the Shannon’s mouth. There is a small sound there, between this point and the rocks, they call the ‘ Blasquets,’ and for this we were making with all our might. Thus passed our night, and when day broke, a cheer of joy burst from our little crew, as we beheld the Blasquets on our weather bow, and saw that the sound lay straight before us. Scarce had the shout died away, when a man in the rigging cried out—

“ ‘ A sail to windward : ’ and the instant after added—‘ a man-of-war brig.’

“ The skipper sprang on the bulwark, and setting his glass in the shrouds, examined the object, which, to the naked eye, was barely a haze in the horizon.

“ ‘ She carries eighteen guns,’ said he slowly, ‘ and is steering our course. I say, O’Kelly, there’s no use in running in shore, to be pinioned,—what’s to be done ? ’

“ The thought of the information I was in possession of, flashed across me. Life was never so dear before, but I could not speak. I knew the old man’s all, was on the venture, I knew, too, if we were attacked, his resolve was to fight her to the last spar that floated.

“ ‘ Come,’ said he again, ‘ there’s a point more south’ard in the wind; we might haul her close, and make for Galway Bay. Two hours would land the cargo,—at least enough of it, and if the craft must go—’

“ A heavy squall struck us as he spoke ; the vessel reeled over, till she laid her channels in the sea. A snap like the report of a shot was heard, and the topmast came tumbling down upon the deck, the topsail falling to leeward, and hanging by the bolt-ropes over our gunwale. The little craft immediately fell off from the wind, and plunged deeper than ever in the boiling surf ; at the same instant a booming sound swept across the water, and a shot striking the sea near, ricocheted over the bowsprit, and passed on, dipping and bounding, towards the shore.

“ ‘ She’s one of their newly-built ones,’ said the second-mate, an Irishman, who chewed his quid of tobacco as he gazed at her, as coolly, as if he was in a dock-yard. ‘ I know the ring of her brass guns.’

“ A second and a third flash, followed by two reports, came almost together, but this time they fell short of us, and passed away in our wake.

“ We cut away the fallen rigging, and seeing nothing for it, now, but to look to our own safety, we resolved to run the vessel up the bay, and try if we could not manage to conceal some portions of the

cargo, before the man-o'-war could overtake us. The caves along the shore were all well known to us, every one of them had served either as a store, or a place of concealment. The wind, however, freshened every minute ; the storm jib was all we could carry, and this, instead of aiding, dipped us heavily by the head, while the large ship gained momentarily on us, and now, her tall masts and white sails lowered close in our wake.

“ ‘ Shall we stave these puncheons ? ’ said the mate in a whisper to the skipper ; ‘ she’ll be aboard of us in no time.’

“ The old man made no reply, but his eyes turned from the man-o'-war to shore, and back again, and his mouth quivered slightly.

“ ‘ They’d better get the hatches open, and heave over that tobacco,’ said the mate, endeavouring to obtain an answer.

“ ‘ She’s hauled down her signal for us to lie to,’ observed the skipper, ‘ and see there, her bow ports are open. Here it comes.’

“ A bright flash burst out as he spoke, and one blended report was heard, as the shots skimmed the sea beside us.

“ ‘ Run that long gun aft,’ cried the old fellow, as his eyes flashed and his colour mounted. ‘ I’ll rake their after-deck for them, or I’m mistaken.

“ For the first time the command was not obeyed at once. The men looked at each other in hesitation, and as if not determined what part to take.

“ ‘ What do you stare at there,’ cried he in a voice of passion, ‘ O’Kelly, up with the old bunting, and let them see who they’ve got to deal with.’

“ A brown flag, with a Dutch lion in the centre, was run up the signal-halliards, and the next minute floated out bravely from our gaff.

“ A cheer burst from the man-of-war’s crew, as they beheld the signal of defiance. Its answer was a smashing discharge from our long swivel, that tore along their decks, cutting the standing rigging, and wounding several as it went. The triumph was short-lived for us. Shot after shot poured in from the brig, which, already to windward, swept our entire decks; while an incessant roll of small arms, showed that our challenge was accepted to the death.

“ ‘ Down, helm,’ said the old man in a whisper to the sailor at the wheel—‘ down, helm ;’ while already the spitting waves that danced half a mile ahead, betokened a reef of rocks, over which at low water a row boat could not float.

“ ‘ I know it, I know it well,’ was the skipper’s reply to the muttered answer of the helmsman.

“ By this, time the brig was slackening sail, and still his fire was maintained as hotly as ever. The distance between us increased at each moment, and, had we sea-room, it was possible for us yet to escape.

“ Our long gun was worked without ceasing, and we could see from time to time, that a bustle on the deck, denoted the destruction it was dealing ; when suddenly a wild shout burst from one of our men—‘ the man-of-war’s aground, her topsails are aback,’ A mad cheer—the frantic cry of rage and desperation—broke from us ; when, at the instant, a reeling shock shook us from stem to stern. The little vessel trembled like a living thing; and then, with a crash like thunder, the hatchways sprang from their fastenings, and the white sea leaped up, and swept along the deck. One drowning cry, one last mad yell burst forth.

“ ‘ Three cheers, my boys ! ’ cried the skipper, raising his cap above his head.

“ Already, she was settling in the sea—the death notes rang out high over the storm; a wave swept me overboard at the minute, and my latest consciousness was seeing the old skipper clinging to the bow-sprit, while his long grey hair was floating wildly behind: but the swooping sea rolled over and over me. A kind of despairing energy nerved me, and after being above an hour in the water, I was taken up, still swimming, by one of the shore boats, which, as the storm abated, had ventured out to the assistance of the sloop ; and thus was I shipwrecked, within a few hundred yards of the spot, where first I had ventured on the sea—the only one saved of all the crew. Of the ‘ Dart,’ not a spar reached shore; the breaking sea tore her to atoms.

“ The ‘ Hornet’ scarcely fared better. She landed eight of her crew, badly wounded; one man was killed, and she herself was floated only after months of labour, and never, I believe, went to sea afterwards.

“ The sympathy which in Ireland is never refused to misfortune, no matter how incurred, stood me in stead now; for although every effort was made by the authorities to discover if any of the smuggler’s crew had reached shore alive, and large rewards were offered, no one would betray me; and I lay as safely concealed beneath the thatch of an humble cabin, as though the proud walls of a baronial castle afforded me their protection.

“ From day to day I used to hear of the hot and eager inquiry going forward to trace out, by any means, something of the wrecked vessel ; and, at last, news reached me, that a celebrated thief-taker from Dublin had arrived in the neighbourhood, to assist in the search.

“ There was no time to be lost now. Discovery would not only have perilled my own life, but also have involved those of my kind protectors. How to leave the village was, however, the difficulty, Revenue and man-of-war boats, abounded on the Shannon, since the day of the wreck ; the Ennis road was beset by police, who scrutinized every traveller that passed on the west coast. The alarm was sounded, and no chance of escape presented itself in that quarter. In this dilemma, fortune, which so often stood my friend, did not desert me. It chanced that a strolling company of actors, who had been performing for some weeks past in Kilrush, were about to set off to Ennistymon, where they were to give several representations. Nothing could be easier than to avoid detection in such company; and I soon managed to be included in the corps, by accepting an engagement as a ‘ walking gentleman,’ at a low salary, and on the next morning found myself seated on the ‘ van,’ among a very motley crew of associates, in whose ways and habits I very soon contrived to familiarize myself, becoming, before we had gone many miles, somewhat of a favourite in the party.

“ I will not weary you with any account of my strolling life. Every one knows something of the difficulties which beset the humble drama ; and ours was of the humblest. Joe Hume himself could not have questioned one solitary item in our budget: and I defy the veriest quibbler on a grand jury to ‘ traverse,’ a spangle on a pair of our theatrical small-clothes.

“ Our scenes were two in number : one represented a cottage interior—pots, kettles, a dresser, and a large fire, being depicted in smoke-coloured traits thereon—this, with two chairs and a table, was convertible into a parlour in a private house; and again, by a red-covered arm-chair, and an old banner, became a baronial hall, or the saloon in a palace : the second, represented two houses on the flat, with an open country between them, a mill, a mountain, a stream, and a rustic bridge inclusive. This, then, was either a Street in a town, a wood, a garden, or any other out-of-door place of resort, for light comedy people, lovers, passionate fathers, waiting-maids, robbers, or chorus singers.

“ The chiefs of our corps were Mr. and Mrs. M’Elwain, who, as their names bespoke, came from the north of Ireland,—somewhere near Coleraine, I fancy, but cannot pretend to accuracy; but I know it was on the borders of ‘ Darry.’

“ How, or what, had ever induced a pair of as common-place, matter-of-fact folk, as ever lived, to take to the Thespian art, heaven can tell. Had Mr. Mac been a bailiff, and madam a green-groceress,

nature would seem to have dealt fairly with them ;—he, being a stout, red-faced, black-bearded tyke, with a thatch of straight black hair, cut in semicircles over his ears, so as to permit character wigs without inconvenience, heavy in step, and plodding in gait. She, a tall, raw-boned woman, of some five-and-forty, with piercing grey eyes, and a shrill harsh voice, that would have shamed the veriest whistle that ever piped through a key-hole. Such were the Macbeth and the Lady Macbeth—the Romeo and Juliet—the Hamlet and Ophelia of the company; but their appearance was a trifle to the manner and deportment of their style. Imagine Juliet with a tattered Leghorn bonnet, a Scotch shawl, and a pair of brown boots, declaiming somewhat in this guise—

“ ‘ Come, *gante* night, come loving black-browed night,
Gie me my *Romo* ! and when he shall *dee*,
Tak’ him, and cut him into *leetle* stars,
And he will *mak’* the face of heaven *sae* fine,
That *a’* the *warld* will be in *lo’e* with him.’

“ With these people I was not destined long to continue. The splendid delusion of success was soon dispelled; and the golden harvest I was to reap, settled down into something like four shillings a week,—out of which came stoppages of so many kinds and shapes, that my salary might have been refused at any moment, under the plea, that there was no coin of the realm, in which to pay it.

“ One by one, every article of my wardrobe went to supply the wants of my stomach; and I remember well my great coat, preserved with the tenacity with which a shipwrecked-mariner hoards up his last biscuit, was converted into mutton, to regale Messrs. Iago, Mercutio, and Cassius, with Mesdames Ophelia, Jessica, Desdemona, and Co. It would make the fortune of an artist, could he only have witnessed the preparations for our entertainment.

“ The festival was in honour, of what, the manager was pleased by a singular figure of speech to call, my ‘ benefit;’—the only profit accruing to me from the aforesaid benefit, being, any satisfaction I might feel in seeing my name in capitals, and the pleasure of waiting on the enlightened inhabitants of Kilrush, to solicit their patronage.

“ There was something to me of indescribable melancholy in that morning’s perambulation, for independent of the fact, that I was threatened by one with the stocks, as a vagabond, another, set a policeman to dog me, as a suspicious character, and a third, mistook me for, a rat-catcher; the butcher, with whom I negotiated for the quarter of mutton, came gravely up, and examined the texture of my raiment, calling in a jury of his friends to decide, if he wasn’t making a bad bargain.

“ Night came, and I saw myself dressed for Petrucio, the character in which I was to bring down thunders of applause, and fill the treasury to overflowing. What a conflict of feelings was mine—now rating Catherine in good round phrase, before the audience—now slipping behind the flats to witness the progress of the ‘ cuisine,’ for which I longed, with the appetite of starvation,—how the potatoes split their jackets with laughing, as they bubbled up and down, in the helmet of Coriolanus, for such I grieve to say was the vessel used on the occasion; the roasting mutton was presided over by ‘ a gentleman of Padua,’ and Christopher Sly was employed in concocting some punch, which, true to his name, he tasted so frequently, it was impossible to awake him, towards the last act.

“ It was in the first scene of the fourth act, in which, with the feelings of a famished wolf, I was obliged to assist at a mock supper on the stage, with wooden beef, parchment fowls, wax pomegranates, and gilt goblets, in which only the air prevented a vacuum. Just as I came to the pas-sage—

‘ Come, Kate, sit down—I know you have a stomach,
Will you give thanks, sweet Kate, or else shall I ?
What is this—mutton ?

“ At that very moment, as I flung the ‘ pine-saddle,’ from one end of the stage to the other, a savoury odour reached my nose; the clatter of knives, the crash of plates, the sounds of laughter and merriment, fell upon my ears—the wretches were at supper ! Even the ‘ first servant,’ who should

have responded to my wrath, bolted from the stage like a shot, leaving his place without a moment's warning; and 'Catherine, the sweetest Kate in Christendom, my dainty Kate,' assured me with her mouth full, 'the meat was well, if I were so contented.' Determined to satisfy myself on the point—regardless of every thing but my hunger, I rushed off the stage, and descended like a vulture, in the midst of the supper party; threats, denunciations, entreaties, were of no use,—I wouldn't go back; and let the house storm and rage, I had helped myself to a slice of the joint, and cared for nobody. It was in vain they told me, that the revenue officer and his family were outrageous with passion; and as to the apothecary in the stage box, he had paid for six tickets in 'senna mixture;' but heaven knows, I wasn't a case for such a regimen.

"All persuasions failing, Mr. M'Elwain, armed all in proof, rushed at me with a tin scimitar, while Madame, more violent still, capsized the helmet and its scalding contents over my person, and nearly flayed me alive. With frantic energy I seized the joint, and, fighting my way through the whole company, rushed from the spot. 'Romans,' 'countrymen,' and 'lovers,' 'Dukes,' 'duennas,' 'demi-gods,' and 'dancers,' with a loud yell, joined in the pursuit. Across the stage we went, amid an uproar, that would have done credit to Pandemonium. I was 'nimblest of foot,' however, and having forced my way through an 'impracticable' door, I jumped clean through the wood, and having tripped up an 'angel' that was close on my heels, I seized a candle, 'thirty-six to the pound,' and applying it to the edge of the kitchen aforementioned, bounded madly on, leaving the whole concern wrapped in flames. Down the street I went, as if bloodhounds were behind me, and never stopped my wild career until I reached a little eminence at the end of the town; then I drew my breath, and turned one last look upon the 'Theatre Royal.' It was a glorious spectacle to a revengeful spirit—amid the volumes of flame and smoke that rose to heaven, (for the entire building was now enveloped,) might be seen the discordant mass of actors and audience, mixed up madly together—Turks, tailors, tumblers, and tidewaiters, grandees and grocers, imps and innkeepers;—there they were all screaming, in concert, while the light material of the 'property-room' was ascending in myriads of sparks. Castles and forests, baronial halls and robbers' caves, were mounting to mid-heaven, amid the flash of blue lights, and the report of stage combustibles.

"You may be sure, that however gratifying to my feelings this last scene of the drama was, I did not permit myself much leisure to contemplate it,—a very palpable conviction staring me full in the face, that such a spectacle might not exactly redound to my 'benefit,' I, therefore, addressed myself to the road, moralizing as I went, somewhat in this fashion: I have lost a respectable, but homely suit of apparel; and instead, I have acquired a green doublet, leathern hose, jack boots, a douched hat and a feather. Had I played out my part, by this time I should have been strewing the stage with a mock supper. Now, I was consoling my feelings with real mutton, which, however, wanting its ordinary accompaniments, was a delicacy of no common order to me. I had not it is true, the vociferous applause of a delighted audience to aid my digestion as Petruccio. But the pleasant whisper of a good conscience, was a more flattering reward to Con O'Kelly. This balanced the account in my favour; and I stepped out with that light heart, which is so unequivocal an evidence of an innocent and happy disposition.

"Towards day-break, I had advanced some miles on the road to Killaloe; when before me I perceived a drove of horses, coupled together with all manner of strange tackle, halters, and hay ropes. Two or three country lads were mounted among them, endeavouring as well as they were able, to keep them quiet; while a thick, short, red-faced fellow, in dirty 'tops,' and a faded green frock led the way, and seemed to preside over the procession. As I drew near, my appearance caused no common commotion; the drivers fixing their eyes on me, could mind nothing else; the cattle, participating in the sentiments, started, capered, plunged, and neighed fearfully. While the leader of the corps, furious at the disorder he witnessed, swore like a trooper, as with a tremendous cutting whip he dashed here and there through the crowd, slashing men and horses, with a most praiseworthy impartiality. At last, his eyes fell upon me, and for a moment, I was full sure my fate was sealed; as he gripped his saddle closer, tightened his curb-rein, and grasped his powerful whip with redoubled energy.

"The instincts of an art are very powerful; for seeing the attitude of the man, and beholding the savage expression of his features, I threw myself into a stage position, slapped down my beaver with one hand, and drawing my sword with the other, called out in a rich melodramatic howl, 'Come on,

Macduff !' my look, my gesture, my costume, and above all my voice, convinced my antagonist that I was insane; and, as quickly the hard unfeeling character of his face relaxed, and an expression of rude pity passed across it.

“ 'Tis Billy Muldoon, sir, I'm sure,' cried one of the boys, as with difficulty he sat the plunging beast under him.

“ ‘ No, sir,' shouted another, ‘ he's bigger nor Billy, but he has a look of Hogan about the eyes.’

“ ‘ Hould your prate,' cried the master. ‘ Sure Hogan was hanged at the summer assizes.’

“ ‘ I know he was, sir,' was the answer, given as coolly, as though no contradiction arose on that score.

“ ‘ Who are you,' cried the leader ? ‘ where do you come from ?’

“ ‘ From Ephesus, my lord,' said I, bowing with stage solemnity, and replacing my sword within my scabbard.

“ ‘ Where ?’ shouted he, with his hand to his ear.

“ ‘ From Kilrush, most potent,' replied I, approaching near enough to converse without being overheard by the others: while in a few words I explained, that my costume and appearance were only professional symbols, which a hasty departure from my friends prevented my changing.

“ ‘ And where are you going now ?’ was the next query.

“ ‘ May I ask you the same,' said I.

“ ‘ Me, why I'm for Killaloe—for the fair tomorrow.’

“ ‘ That's exactly my destination,' said I.

“ ‘ And how do you mean to go ?’ retorted he, ‘ It's forty miles from here.’

“ ‘ I have a notion,' replied I, ‘ that the dark chesnut there, with the white fetlock, will have the honour of conveying me.’

“ A very peculiar grin, which I did not half admire, was the reply to this speech.

“ ‘ There's many a one I wouldn't take under five shillings from, for the day,' said I; ‘ but the times are bad, and somehow I like the look of you. Is it a bargain ?’

“ ‘ Faix, I'm half inclined to let you try the same horse,' said he. ‘ It would be teaching you something, any how. Did ye ever hear of the Playboy ?’

“ ‘ To be sure I did. Is that he ?’

“ He nodded.

“ ‘ And you're Dan Moone,' said I.

“ ‘ The same,' cried he, in astonishment.

“ ‘ Come, Dan, turn about is fair play. I'll ride the horse for you to-morrow—where you like, and over, what you like—and in reward, you'll let me mount one of the others as far as Killaloe : we'll

dine together at the cross roads.’—Here I slipped the mutton from under the tail of my coat.—‘ Do you say done ?’

“ ‘ Get upon the gray pony,’ was the short rejoinder; and the next moment I was seated on the back of as likely a cob as I ever bestrode.

“ My first care was to make myself master of my companion’s character, which I did in a very short time, while affecting to disclose my own, watching, with a sharp eye, how each portion of my history told upon him. I saw that he appreciated, with a true horse-dealer’s ‘ onction,’ any thing that smacked of trick or stratagem; in fact, he looked upon all mankind as so many ‘ screws,’ he being the cleverest fellow who could detect their imperfections, and unveil their unsoundness. In proportion as I recounted to him the pranks and rogueries of my boyish life, his esteem for me rose higher and higher ; and, before the day was over, I had won so much of his confidence, that he told me the peculiar vice and iniquity of every horse he had, describing with great satisfaction the class of purchasers, he had determined to meet with.

“ ‘ There is little Paul there,’ said he, ‘ that brown cob, with the cropped ears, there isn’t such a trotter in Ireland; but somehow, though you can see his knees from the saddle when he’s moving, he’ll come slap down with you, as if he was shot, the moment you touch his flank with the spur, and then there’s no getting him up again, till you brush his ear with the whip—the least thing does it—he’s on his legs in a minute, and not a bit the worse of his performance.’

“ Among all the narratives he told, this made the deepest impression on me. That the animal had been taught the accomplishment, there could be no doubt; and I began to puzzle my brain in what way it might best be turned to advantage. It was of great consequence to me to impress my friend at once with a high notion of my powers; and here was an admirable occasion for their exercise, if I only could hit on a plan.

“ The conversation turned on various subjects, and at last, as we neared Killaloe, my companion began to ponder over the most probable mode I could be of service to him, on the following day. It was at last agreed upon, that, on reaching town, I should exchange my Petrucio costume for that of a ‘ squireen,’ or half gentleman; and repair to the ordinary at the ‘ Green-man,’ where nearly all the buyers put up, and all the talk on sporting matters went forward. This suited me perfectly, I was delighted to perform a new part, particularly when the filling up was left to my own discretion. Before an hour elapsed after our arrival, I saw myself attired in a very imposing suit—blue coat, cords and tops,—that would have fitted me for a very high range of character in my late profession. O’Kelly was a name, as Pistol says, ‘ of good report,’ and there was no need to change it; so I took my place at the supper-table, among some forty others, comprising a very fair average of the raffs and raps, of the county. The mysteries of horse-flesh, were, of course, the only subject of conversation; and before the punch made its appearance, I astonished the company by the extent of my information, and the acuteness of my remarks. I improvised steeple-chases over impossible countries, invented pedigrees for horses yet unfoaled, and threw out such a fund of anecdote about the ‘ turf’ and the ‘ chace,’ that I silenced the old established authorities of the place, and a general buzz went round the table of, ‘ Who can he be, at all—where did he come from ?’

“ As the evening wore apace, my eloquence grew warm—I described my stud and my kennel, told some very curious instances of my hunting experience, and when at last a member of the party, piqued at my monopoly of the conversation, endeavoured to turn my flank by an allusion to grouse-shooting, I stopped him at once, by asserting with vehemence, that no man deserved the name of sportsman who shot over dogs—a sudden silence pervaded the company, while the last speaker turning towards me with a malicious grin, begged to know how I bagged my game, for that, in *his* county, they were ignorant enough to follow the old method.

“ ‘ With a pony of course,’ said I, finishing my glass.

“ ‘ A pony !’ cried one after the other—how do you mean?’

“ ‘ Why,’ resumed I, ‘ that I have a pony sets every species of game, as true as the best pointer that ever “ stopped.”’ ”

“ A hearty roar of laughing followed this declaration, and a less courageous spirit than mine would have feared that all his acquired popularity was in danger.

“ ‘ You have him with you, I suppose,’ said a sly old fellow from the end of the table.

“ ‘ Yes,’ said I carelessly—‘ I brought him over here to take a couple of days’ shooting, if there is any to be had.

“ ‘ You would have no objection,’ said another insinuatingly, ‘ to let us look at the beast ?’

“ ‘ Not the least,’ said I.

“ ‘ Maybe you’d take a bet on it,’ said a third.

“ ‘ I fear I couldn’t,” said I,—‘ the thing is too sure—the wager would be an unfair one.’

“ ‘ Oh! as to that,’ cried three or four together, ‘ we’ll take our chance, for even if we were to lose, it’s well worth paying for.’

“ The more I expressed my dislike to bet, the more warmly they pressed me, and I could perceive that a general impression was spreading that my pony was about as apocryphal as many of my previous stories.

“ ‘ Ten pounds with you, he doesn’t do it,’ said an old hard-featured squire.

“ ‘ The same from me,’ cried another.

“ ‘ Two to one in fifties,’ shouted a third, until every man at table had proffered his wager, and I gravely called for pen, ink, and paper, and booked them, with all due form.

“ ‘ Now, when is it to come off ?’ was the question of some half dozen.

“ ‘ Now, if you like it—the night seems fine.’

“ ‘ No, no,’ said they, laughing, ‘ there’s no such hurry as that; to-morrow we are going to draw Westenra’s cover ; what do you say if you meet us there, by eight o’clock, and we’ll decide the bet.’

“ ‘ Agreed,’ said I; and shaking hands with the whole party, I folded up my paper, placed it in my pocket, and wished them good night.

“ Sleep was, however, the last thing in my thoughts; repairing to the little public-house where I left my friend Dan, I asked him if he knew any one well acquainted with the country, and who could tell, at a moment, where a hare, or a covey was to be found. “ ‘ To be sure,’ said he at once ; ‘ there’s a boy below knows every puss and every bird in the country. Tim Daly would bring you, dark as the night is, to the very spot where you’d find one.’

“ In a few minutes I had made Mr. Tim’s acquaintance, and arranged with him to meet me at the cover on the following morning,—a code of signals being established between us, by which, he was to convey to me the information of where a hare was lying, or a covey to be sprung.

“ A little before eight I was standing beside ‘ Paul’ on the appointed spot, the centre of an admiring circle, who, whatever their misgivings as to his boasted skill, had only one opinion about his shapes and qualities.

“ ‘Splendid forehead’—‘what legs’—‘look at his quarters’—‘and so deep in the heart’—were the exclamations heard on every side—till a rosy-cheeked fat little fellow growing impatient at the delay, cried out—

“ ‘Come, Mr. O’Kelly, mount if you please, and come along.’

“ I tightened my girth—sprang into the saddle—my only care being, to keep my toes in as straight a line as I could, with my feet. Before we proceeded half a mile, I saw Tim seated on a stile, scratching his head in a very knowing manner; upon which, I rode out from the party, and looking intently at the furze cover in front, called out—

“ ‘Keep back the dogs there—call them off—hush, not a word.’

“ The hounds were called in, the party reined back their horses, and all sat silent spectators of my movements.

“When suddenly I touched ‘ Paul’ in both flanks, down he dropped, like a parish clerk, stiff and motionless as a statue.

“ ‘What’s that ?’ cried two or three behind.

“ ‘He’s setting, said I, in a whisper.

“ ‘What is it, though ?’ said one.

“ ‘A hare !’ said I, and at the same instant I shouted to lay on the dogs, and tipping Paul’s ears, forward I went. Out bolted puss, and away we started across the country, I leading, and taking all before me.

“We killed in half an hour, and found ourselves not far from the first cover ;—my friend Tim, being as before in advance, making the same signal as at first. The same performance was now repeated. ‘Paul’ went through his part to perfection; and notwithstanding the losses, a general cheer saluted us as we sprung to our legs, and dashed after the dogs.

“Of course I didn’t spare him: everything now depended on my sustaining our united fame; and there was nothing too high or too wide for me, that morning.

“ ‘What will you take for him, Mr. O’Kelly ?’ was the question of each man, as he came up to the last field.

“ ‘Would you like any further proof ?’ said I. ‘ Is any gentleman dissatisfied ?’

“ A general ‘No’ was the answer; and again the offers were received from every quarter, while they produced the bank-notes, and settled their bets. It was no part of my game, however, to sell him; the trick might be discovered before I left the country, and if so, there wouldn’t be a whole bone remaining in my skin.

“ My refusal evidently heightened both my value and his, and I sincerely believe there was no story I could tell, on our ride back to town, which would not have met credence that morning; and, indeed, to do myself justice, I tried my popularity to its utmost.

“ By way of a short cut back, as the fair was to begin at noon, we took a different route, which led across some grass fields, and a small river. In traversing this, I unfortunately was in the middle of some miraculous anecdote, and entirely forgot my pony and his acquirements; and as he stopped to drink, without thinking of what I was doing, with the common instinct of a rider, I touched him with the spur. Scarcely had the rowel reached his side, when down he fell, sending me head foremost over his neck into the water. For a second or two the strength of the current carried me along, and it was

only after a devil of a scramble I gained my legs, and reached the bank wet through, and heartily ashamed of myself.

“ ‘Eh, O’Kelly, what the deuce was that ?’ cried one of the party, as a roar of laughter broke from amongst them.

“ ‘Ah !’ said I, mournfully, ‘ I wasn’t quick enough.’

“ ‘Quick enough !’ cried they. ‘ Egad, I never saw anything like it. Why, man, you were shot off like an arrow.’

“ ‘Leaped off, if you please,’ said I, with an air of an offended dignity—‘leaped off—didn’t you see it ?’

“ ‘See what ?’

“ ‘The salmon, to be sure. A twelve-pounder, as sure as my name’s O’Kelly. He “ set” it.’

“ ‘Set a salmon !’ shouted twenty voices in a breath. ‘ The thing’s impossible.’

“ ‘Would you like a bet on it ?’ asked I drily.

“ ‘No, no—damn it ; no more bets ; but surely——’

“ ‘ Too provoking, after all,’ muttered I, ‘ to have lost so fine a fish, and get such a ducking’; and with that I mounted my barb, and, waving my hand, wished them a good-bye, and galloped into Killaloe.

“ This story I have only related, because, insignificant as it was, it became in a manner the pivot of my then fate in life. The jockey at once made me an offer of partnership in his traffic, displaying before me the numerous advantages of such a proposal. I was a disengaged man—my prospects not peculiarly brilliant—the state of my exchequer by no means encouraging the favourite nostrum of a return to cash payments, and so I acceded, and entered at once upon my new profession with all the enthusiasm I was always able to command, no matter what line of life solicited my adoption.

“ But it’s near one o’clock, and so now, Mr. O’Leary, if you’ve no objection, we’ll have a grill and a glass of Madeira, and then, if you can keep awake an hour or so longer, I’ll try and finish my adventures.”

Arthur O’Leary: his wanderings and ponderings in many lands (1912)

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