DEAREST IS DEAREST.

BY T. PRESTON BATTERSBY.

CHAPTER III.

It was a hot day in July—a year and nine months after the ovents recorded in the foregoing chapter. Ballinalack had not changed for the better. If anything, there were more broken windows, more ragged children, more public-houses. The last, it is true, were not so full as we have already seen them, but then most of the able-bodied men and women in the village were hay-making in the water-meadows. The ring of the scythe-blade as the ragstone was drawn along it sounded on every side, and the faint delicate scent of the fresh-cut hay perfumed the air. If the village of Ballinalack could have been wholly wiped away from the face of the earth, the day and the prospect would have been perfection. As it was, there was something depressing about the contrast.

Charles Dardas was riding through the street on his thoroughbred mare. He looked many years older than when we last saw him, and his forehead was furrowed by lines that had not been there then. It was scarcely to be wondered at, for of late he had had much anxiety, and many wakeful nights. Only three months remained of the two years allowed him by his uncle's will for finding a well-dowered bride, and he was obliged to confess to himself that he would find it difficult to fulfil the condition.

As for Mary Davidson, he had forgotten her, or rather persuaded himself that he had. At first, he had attempted, by writing long and specious letters, to shake her determination; but to them he got no answer. Then he made a journey to Dublin and called at the house where she was acting in the capacity of a nursery governess. The servant told him she was not at home. Having made two more calls with a like result, he reluctantly came to the conclusion that she did not choose to see him, and accordingly went home, to busy himself with the care of his fortune and estate.

In the temper in which he then was, he was not at all likely to prove an over-indulgent landlord and so the people soon found. He quickly became more unpopular in the neighbourhood than even his uncle had been; for the old man, though hard as the nether millstone, yet took a keen interest in his neighbour's affairs, which often flattered their pride. And his nephew took none at all. In fact with few exceptions, he did not actually know his own tenants by sight. He insisted on their rents being paid on the day they were due, and that being done, he was satisfied. Ballinalack was not likely to alter for the better under him. As he had set his heart upon money, money came to him. He prospered greatly. His stock and shares rose in the market; there were good farming seasons; and his bargains in horse-flesh turned out prizes.

The one thing needed now was a wife, with a dowry sufficient to secure him in the possession of the property for ever.

Lawyer D—— had done his best for him, and had even gone so far as to give him, in strict confidence, a list containing the names of all the marriageable young ladies of whose fortunes he had personal knowledge. It was not a long list, and the youug man determined to pay a series of visits at the houses indicated and choose for himself. He found it easy enough to procure invitations, for the people of Westmeath knew all about. The will, and had little difficulty in surmising the object of the handsome Squire's "duty calls." As for the young ladies, they, as in honour bound, effected perfect ignorance even to their own parents, wondered "why that stupid Mr. Dardas calls so often," and in their own competitors for with jealousy of the other competitors for the prize. Charles Dardas was not a fool; and after a year of visiting he knew pretty certainly that there were six girls of reasonable age, each possessed of a fortune over five thousand pounds, and any of whom would be only too happy to marry him! And still he did not propose.

The fact was that, like most human beings, he expected too much. As he could not have his own Mary Davidson and his uncle's money, he wished to have a wife as like her as possible. As Mary Davidsons are scarce in this world, it was not at all likely he would find one. He had not the slightest affection for any of his heiresses—the only question was which would be the most bearable with whom to pass the rest of his existence!

At last, one morning, after a restless night, he decided desperately in favour of her whom he considered the least objectionable. She was the daughter of a gentleman-farmer living not far from Mullingar—Ellen Cooney by name. Little was known of her father, beyond the fact tnat he had made his money somewhere in business, and had bought very cheaply the estate on which he now resided. But Lawyer D—was well acquainted with the money matters of the family, and guaranteed the five thousand pounds at least. Ellen was a plump, good-natured girl, not given to extravagant habits, and above all, not 'fast." It would be hard if a man could not get on with her as the mistress of his house.

Nevertheless, the young man was far from happy as he rode out that July day to make his formal proposal. Do what he would to crush the nobler instincts of his soul, it was very hard to conceal from himself that he was acting a most unworthy part. Not caring to meet any one whom he knew, he put spurs to his steed, and galloped through the village of Ballinalack at a pace which caused the few people who were about to gaze after him, and wonder at the recklessness with which he risked the limbs of his valuable mare on the had road. When once fairly beyond the houses, he allowed the spirited animal to drop into a gentle trot.

As he reached the turning to the vicarage, he saw the Rector driving towards him in his car. There was a lady with him, whom Charles Dardas thought, from the casual glance he took, resembled Mary Davidson. Of course that was impossible; but he was far from willing to meet the Rector, who had paid him more than one call since his uncle's death, and had put before him some most inconvenient home-truths. The young man again spurred his mare and galloped on past the turning. In his haste, he did not notice that a stone had dropped from the arch of a culvert over a little stream which passed under the road. There was no excuse for his carelessness, for the stone had been out for a month or more, threatening all passers-by by the dangerous hole left in the roadway. The farmer who had contracted for the keeping in repair of that piece of the highway, had, as usual, cared far more for saving his hay than for the lives and limbs of Her Majesty's subjects, and had postponed the repairs till the first wet day. It was an unfortunate postponement for Charles Dardas for his steed in her wild gallop put her off fore-foot in the yawning chasm. Crash! down she came, breaking her leg in the fall, and her unfortunate rider was pitched over her head and on to his own. Where he fell he lay, motionless and senseless, on the hard road.

The Rector, and the lady with him, saw the catastrophe. He uttered a sharp cry, and whipped up his horse. She said nothing; but her face grew very white, and she clasped her hands together till the nails dug into the white flesh. In a few moments they had reached the catastrophe, and both sprang down and went to the side of the man. He still breathed, slowly and regularly; but there were no other signs of life. The lady seated herself on the road and took his head in her lap.

"Drive to Ballinalack, quick!" she said to the Rector, "and get a door, a mattress, anything to carry him home on. I will take care of him till you come back."

He obeyed without a word, and she remained alone with the inanimate form n her arms. She looked up and down the road. There was no one in sight, and the Rector's car was far on its way to the village. Then she broke down utterly into a fit of passionate weeping. She kissed the pale face again and again, on forehead, cheeks, and eyes. She called to him by name and adjured him to look up; but the set face, like a stone mask, remained cold irresponsive to her caresses. Then she joined her hands and prayed.

It was not very long, though it seemed hours to her, before the Rector's car returned at a brisk trot with four men and an improvised stretcher. They carried the body of Charles Dardas to his comfortless house and laid it on his bed. The doctor, hastily sent for, made an examination, and declared that there was a severe fracture of the skull, and that, in his opin on, there was no hope whatever of the patient's recovery.

"He may linger on like this for days, or weeks," said he to the Rector, "if he is carefully attended to and fed regularly—that is, supposing that you find he can eat! But Nature can't cure a fracture of the skull—nothing can except trepanning in such a case as this, and that would be almost certain death, the bone is so cracked. I would leave him to die in peace!"

"He shall *not* die!" said the lady. "Help me, Mr. Clarke! *You* do not believe that God will let him die like this without a chance of repentence. I am quite, quite sure He will not! I will stay and nurse him; and if the doctor consents, I will have the best surgeons in Dublin to see him."

"I shall be only too glad, miss!" answered the doctor. "But I should advise you to leave him alone for a while, and see if he, by any miracle, recovers consciousness without any operation. Trepanning, I am convinced, would only mean certain death. It cannot be put off too long unless there are signs of inflammation setting in, or unless he is visibly sinking."

"Do you think that you ought to stay here as his nurse, after all that was passed Miss Davidson?" asked the Rector, drawing her aside.

Why not? He is not sensible; he will not know me!" she answered, with a sob in her voice. "I will leave the moment he recovers consciousness; I promise you that."

"I can say no more!" said the Rector feelingly.

After that came a long, long time of weary and monotonous watching. The injured man took food without much difficulty; but his condition remained absolutely unchanged. But for the regular, slow breathing he might have been taken for a corpse. As it was, he was more like a helpless automaton, wound up to perform one unvarying function, and capable of nought beside. Mary Davidson watched by his side night and day. The doctor came now and then, saw no change, and went away. And so the months drew on, and the oats began to turn yellow in the fields, and the nine days' wonder that had caused so much interest and gossip in the neighbourhood was half forgotten.

"I have had a letter from Lawyer D—-, Miss Davidson," said the doctor, coming in one morning. "I understand from him that unless my patient there is married by the 14th November, he loses a fine property. Do you not think it is time that we tried to get a surgeon who would undertake the trepanning operation? There is just one chance in twenty that it may cure him, and I have long given up hopes of any miracle of nature."

"If it do not cure him, it will kill him?" said Mary musingly.

"Yes."

It flashed upon her how entirely impossible it would be for her to decide on such a question. Had she had her will, she would have been content to nurse him—unconscious as he was—for years, rather than run the risk.

"You must decide, doctor," she said.

"Then I will write to Dr. K——to-day He is the best surgeon in Dublin."

"I will stay by him till the last minute, anyhow," thought poor Mary rebelliously. She dared not think of what the probable end of her watching was to be!

Two days after, Dr. K—— arrived. He was a short, fat, fussy little man, with strong hands and a clever head. He held a long consultation with the village practitioner, and then declared that he would risk the operation, as there was absolutely no chance for the patient otherwise.

"I must have two capable men to assist me, who won't faint at the sight of blood," he said, in his sharp way. "You'll do for one, doctor; but who else can we get?"

The doctor's eyes fell upon the Rector, who had come to take Mary away.

"I will assist gladly," said he simply. "But I came here to drive Miss Davidson to the station. Is there any one who can do so if I stay here?"

"Who is Miss Davidson?" asked Dr. K—— sharply. "Not the lady who, I am told, has been nursing the patient."

"Yes," the Rector answered. "There are important reasons why she cannot possibly continue her functions here."

"Important fiddlesticks!" said Dr. K——. "What is more important than a man's life? Some girlish nonsense and prudery, I suppose! I tell you, sir, if I have not a good nurse on the spot, I won't operate at all. She seems to have a turn that way, and she shall stay. You may just unharness your trap."

The Rector was in a difficulty. Miss Davidson had originally called on him to learn what news he could tell her of Charles Dardas. He had promised her not to betray her visit to the young man, and now he was on the horns of a dilemma.

"I must ask her!" he said nervously.

"I'll ask her?" said the surgeon, and threw open the door of the sick room. "Miss Davidson!" he said, "I am master here at present, being in charge of the case I mnst have a good nurse, and they don't grow such commodities in Ballinalack. You must just make up your mind to stay."

Mary looked at the Rector. His eyes were cast down, and carefullyy avoided meeting hers. A slight flush rose on her cheek, and then subsided again, leaving it very pale. "Very well sir I will stay!" she said

An hour later, all was over—successfully. Mary had sat on the stairs while the men were busy in the sick-room—a mass of quivering nerves, her ears straining to catch the slightest sound. She heard nothing but murmured words, and occasionally the voice of the surgeon speaking sharply. And then at last there was a pause and a great stillness; and after that, came down the stairs to her, as to the prophet Elijah, the sound of a still, small voice. "Mary!" it said.

Then she rushed up the steps and into the room. Charles Dardas was lying on his bed as she had left him—pale and wan—but his eyes were open, and in them again the glorious light of reason. "Thank God! Oh, thank God!" she cried, and fainted, failing on the floor.

"This is your nurse!" said the surgeon with great disgust, looking at the doctor.

The Rector stayed with Charles till the evening. Perfect quiet had been enjoined, and he absolutely refused to reply to any questions the sick man put to him. At last Mr. Dardas gave it up as hopeless, any ceased to worry his brain about time or place. The window was open, and the warm south-west wind stole in and touched his hot forehead like a kiss of peace. When he woke it was dark, and there was a night light burning on the table. By his side sat Mary Davidson, her busy fingers employed in knitting, while her eyes followed the pages of a book on her knees. He watched her for a moment unobserved, and then she looked up, and her eyes met his.

"Mary!" he said.

"Do you want anything?" she asked, standing up, and turning her face from the light to hide the tell-tale blush that mounted in it.

"I want *you*!" he answered. "Oh Mary! can you ever forgive me? What a fool I have been! Don't go away and leave me, or I shall die!"

"I will not go till morning; I promise you that!" she said. "But you must not talk now; the doctor forebade it. Lie still, and try if you can sleep again."

"I think I can, if I hold your hand!" he said, with a faint smile. "Then I shall know that you are here, and have not left me."

She gave him her soft warm hand, and sat quite, her face still turned away. He watched her for a while, and then his weary eyes closed again, and he slept.

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Great was the surprise of the neighbours when the banns were published of Charles Dardas and Mary Davidson. No one knew who the bride elect was; and the Rector, whose kind heart was brimming over with joy, kept his own counsel. To the great disappointment of the people, the time of the wedding was kept a secret, and the ceremony was only witnessed by a few lucky individuals who happened to be in the vicinity of Inny Church when the cars drove up. But the news spread like wildfire; and when the bride and bridegroom left the building, there was quite a concourse of villagers assembled, and whole showers of blessing were heaped on Mary as she passed through them. With the true Irish instinct, they recognized the fact that a change had occurred, and that it promised better for them all.

Charles Dardas paused at the church door and whispered to his wife. "Mary," he said, "I have not done my duty to these poor people; I have been hard on them, and now I have lost the opportunity of ever repairing the wrong. Do you not think I had better tell them I am sorry, and that if I were their landlord again I would act differently? It is but poor reparation; but I feel I must do it."

"I don't think you need, Charles!" said Mary smiling, "because—because—is not this the 12th of November?"

"Yes; but"——

"Oh Charles! you never heard that my aunt left me seven thousand pounds when she died, three years ago. Of course, I could not tell you. I waited to see if you wanted me or your uncle's money; and now you will have both! You are not angry with me?"

"Angry!" He took off his hat, and looking solemnly upwards. "May God register my vow, that since he has given me another chance to repair my wrongdoing in the past, I will from henceforth look upon money only as a trust from Him to be used for his service. He has been far more merciful to me than I have deserved."

"That is true, Mr. Dardas," said the Rector. "But which of us cannot say the same?"

(THE END)

Pressed to Death by His Gold.

Of misers who rolled in their gold I have often heard, but it is surely a new experience for one to die from the pressure of his accumulated specie. A poor-looking third-class passenger in the train from Paris to Turin was a week ago taken seriously ill al the latter place was neared. He was still alive when Turin station was reached and was carried off at once to a sofa in the waiting-room where he soon died. On examination it was found he was wearing a belt containing no less than 30,000 francs in gold, and death had evidently been caused by the pressre of this belt with its precious contents. The dead man had also rouleaux of gold under his armpits, though he was dressed in rags and so far no clew to his identity has been discovered.—[London Figaro.

Clearing Railroad Tracks.

An electric device for clearing a railroad track of obstructions is among the newest ideas. It consists of a triangular steel folding frame, over which a net is stretched. This is placed on the front of a locomotive and can be opened at will, catching the obstruction upon it.

ODDS AND ENDS.

London has 15,000 cabmen.

A parasite which kills forty grashoppers an hour is to be imported in large numbers from Australia.

Electric lights have been introduced into every house in Hammerfest, Norway, the northernmost village in Europe.

The constitution of Ohio gives the Governor no veto power, a distinction enjoyed by no other State save Rhode Island.

Soapstone is used in various ways. It gives color to rubber goods, is used in paper to gain weight and in making fire-proof paints.

Petitions requesting the Legislature to abolish contract work and enforce the eight-hour law are being very largely signed in New York.

The glassmakers of Thebes forty centuries ago possessed the art of staining glass and they produced the commodity in the ut nost profusion.

At Heidelberg the merchants, in deference to the many English and Americans residing there, will close their stores on Sunday, keeping open, however, from 8 to 9 A. M. and from 11 A. M. to 2 P. M.

A Pontiac (Mich) man, who applied for a pension twelve years ago, sends a postal card every day to President Harrison and the Commissioner of Pensions in order to remind them that he is still looking for it.

The newest remedy for seasickness is the homeopathic one of drinking sea-water, and in Jacksonville Fla., a number of fat men are getting rid of superfluous fat by imbibing copious draughts of rain water.

The term "Tabby cat" is derived from Atab, a famous street in Bagdad, inhabited by the manufacturers of silken stuffs called atabi, or taffety. This stuff is woven with waved markings or watered silks, resembling a "tabby" cat's coat.

In the Yoruba country, West Africa, the natives send messages by means of shells, feathers, peppers, corn, stones, coal, razors, powder and shot and many other things. The meaning of each object is known, and all of them together make up a sort of "code," by which intelligence relating to anything whatsoever may be transmitted.

Some years ago a rich Glasgow merchant named Buchanan left money to build and maintain a suburban home for sixteen unfortunate business men or other deserving citizens of Glasgow, the only stipulation being that they should bear the name of Buchanan. The place is now ready for occupancy. There is a park of three acres, a handsome building, accommodations for sixteen men in perfect style, and an annual revenue of $6,000. The only thing lacking is impoverished Buchanans. There are lots of that name in the city, but none who needs help, and the trustees are going to apply to the courts for permission to install unfortunates with other names.

PEARLS OF TRUTH.

He who knows most grieves most for wasted time.

Pride, generally, is at the bottom of all great mistakes.

Even vinegar has to work in order to be worth anything.

Etiquette is the invention of wise men to keep fools at a distance

No man is so worthy of envy as he that can be cheerful in want.

Good clothes make the impresson, but they don't make the man.

Don't lose sight of an honorable enemy; he'll make a good friend.

No man ever yet minded his own business who didn't get into trouble.

Never put yourself in the power of a man who will kick a dog for fun.

Two enemies to one friend is about the right dose to make a man successful.

There is a great deal of good luck in industry and a great deal of bad luck in laziness.

Never ask the devil to dinner unless you are willing to take him for a regular boarder.

The man who "knows it all" wouldn't be such a bad fellow if he only kept it to himself

Home is next to the last place a man can go. If he can't go home, he goes to the dogs.

Just as soon as a man loses all his property, then we all recollect at once that he was always a fool.

Two-thirds of the pity in this world is nothing more than a secret satisfaction that some is worse off than we are.

In order to lay up treasure in heaven it is not necessary to prevent others with whom you have dealings from laying up a few shillings on earth.

PROGRESS IN SCIENCE.

A German professor recommends the following receipt for a liquid soap for medicinal use in wounds, &c.: One part of caustic potash dissolved in an equal weight of water. To this add four parts of olive oil and one-fourth part of alcohol. Stir thoroughly for ten minutes, shaking repeatedly. After about an hour mix with an equal quantity of water. Let it then stand several days, then filter it, and it is ready for use.

It now requires but thirteen pounds of water converted into steam with a pressure of 175 to 200 pounds in the boiler to secure one horse-power with a triple expansion engine. By the use of one-third more coal the pressure in the boiler and the horse-power can be doubled.

A new parasite has been discovered which infects paper money and is found nowhere else. It is invisible to the unassisted eye, does not attach itself to persons, but multiplies at a rapid rate.

A peculiar mineral has been found in Montana. When taken from the ground it has much the appearance of iron ore, but upon being exposed to the air it takes fire and consumes itself.

A Polish chemist has discovered that liquid oxygen is not colorless. In a layer of it thirty millimetres thick, he finds that it has a bright sky-blue color.

Electrician Nikola Tesla says that the time is not far distant when a vessel at sea will be able to telegraph to either shore without any direct connection.

AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH.

Some Terrible Pictures of the Last Struggle in Doomed Pompeii.

Some years ago, in a small street, the workmen employed in the excavations at Pompeii discovered an empty space of an unusual form, in which were some skeletons. Before disturbing them they called Signor Florelli, who was fortunately at hand. A singularly happy thought struck him. He had the empty space filled with liquid plaster of Paris and repeated the process in the case of some other openings which presented a similar appearance. As soon as the plaster was hardened the surrounding ashes were removed and displayed the perfect casts of four human bodies. All four are now in the museum there, and a more singular and affecting sight is, perhaps, not to be seen in the world. The plaster was hardened around the ashes so perfectly in shape of what may be termed the mold formed by the fallen ashes round the living bodies that the whole aspect of the dying frame is preserved, even to the minutest details, except that here and there the bones of the skeleton within are partially uncovered. Egyptian mummies are bare, black and hideous, and arranged in an artificial posture for their burial, while in the exhumed Pompeiians we see human beings in the very act of dying.

One of them is the body of a woman, close to whom were found a large number of coins, two silver vases, some keys and some jewels, which she was carrying with her when the falling ashes arrested her flight. It is easy to trace her head-dress and the material of her clothing, and on one of her fingers are two silver rings. Her hands were so clasped in agony that the nail had pierced the flesh. With the exception of her legs, the whole body is swollen and contracted. It is plain that she strove violently in her dying struggle. Her attitude is that of the last agony and not that of death. Behind her lay another woman and a girl, evidently of humble rank.

The elder of the two, possibly the mother, has an iron ring on one of her fingers. The signs of a dying struggle are evident, but the death seems to have been easier than in the case of the victim last described. Close to her lies the girl, almost a child in age. The details of her dress are preserved with a startling faithfulness. One can see the material and stitching of her frock, the unmended rents in her long sleeves, her dress over her head, to ward off the torrent of ashes, and falling headlong on her face had rested her head on one of her arms, and so died, apparently without a struggle.

The fourth body is that of a large and powerful man who had sat down to die with his arms and legs straight and fixed. His dress is completely preserved, his trousers are close, his sandals are laced to the feet, with nails in their soles. On one finger is an iron ring; his mouth is open, and shows that he had lost some of his teeth; his nose and cheeks are strongly marked; the eyes and hair have disappeared, but the moustache remains. The whole sight is tragic to the last degree. After the lapse of eighteen centuries the terrible death seems to be enacting itself before us with all its appalling sufferings.

Russia and England.

Sir Edwin Arnold, who by the way is meeting with very poor success in his lecturing tour through the West, has been considering the results of a war between Russia and England. If the motherland should win, Sir Edwin declares:

"It would mean that England would roll back once and forever the Russian approach on India, raze central Asia to the ground from one end to the other, restore to the Khanates their independence, thrust Russia back beyond the Caspian, free Persia from the Russian influence, rescue Khorassan, inevitably cause a revolution in Russia, and end in the overthrow of Russia's power in Europe."

On the contrary, if Russia should whip England, Mr. Creed Haymond declares it would involve the whole world in war, and the United States would be obliged to take part in it on the side of Great Britain, even though, as perhaps Mr. Haymond forgets, during our war, in the hour of our direst extremity, Russia stood our friend and England did not. Certainly if there should be war between Russia and England, France would be bound by her agreement with Russia to side with that country, and there would be an end of the good feeling between France and Great Britain. In that case, of course, Germany would side with England, and be glad of the chance. Mr. Haymond considers China a very important factor in case of war between England and Russia. The Chinese army is far more formidable than civilized nations are aware of and it would be used against Russia in case of war. Mr. Haymond continues:

"Russia and the Greek church believe themselves destined to absorb all Europe. If Russia devours Germany it will sweep all over France, and England can then be the only rescuer of France. Practically the whole English speaking world must then array itself against Russia in aid of civilization. America must aid. At such a time there can be no remembrance of the Revolution or the War of 1812.

"The army of the future, however, is in China. I believe that when the right time comes England will face Russia with a million Chinese soldiers led by English officers. In such a war of course the United States would have no part. India would be the bone of contention, and China is more interested in upholding England than Russia n that country."

A merchant named Hamboeck, at Gratz, shot and killed his two sons, aged six and seven years, and then committed suicide. Hamboeck was threatened with blindness, and his mind had become effected with the dread of being unable to support his children.

A special from Berlin says the physicians are uttering repeated warnings as to the danger of the unprofessional administration of antipyrine, which is largely used in cases of influenza. It is announced that many deaths were due to the excessive use of this drug.

The Viceroy of Kashgar, in reply to a request from the Chinese Government, has declared in favour of the English taking possession of the Pamirs. He urges that China do all in her power at the St. Petersburg conference to attain this end. He holds that Kashgar's trade with Indea will be ruined if Russia acquires the Pamirs.