

## LITERATURE.

## THE FATAL BRIDE.

BEING A CONTRIBUTION FROM THE REMINISCENCES  
OF A BACHELOR.

(Founded on an event which actually occurred.)

(Continued.)

I had left a pleasant party, somewhere about one o'clock at night, and without having positively transgressed the limits of sobriety, I had taken just wine enough to predispose me to embark in any exciting enterprise which might turn up. I was quite alone; and as the reader is probably aware, the streets of Dublin were no means so safe at night-time in the period of which I speak as they now are; but relying upon the sword, which the fashion of those days made a necessary appendage, and in whose use I was a tolerably accomplished proficient, I rather courted than avoided such adventures as chance might possibly present. And in this spirit, instead of pursuing the open streets, I threaded the narrow alleys and back lanes with a careless sort of swagger, and a pugnacious disposition, the very remembrance of which, even at this time of day, makes me blush for the reckless folly of my youth. The perversity of fortune was, however, in this instance, as in many others, apparent—silence and solitude encountered my advance. I was now just entering, in my devious ramble, a dingy stable-lane, whose entire length was enlivened by three twinkling oil-lamps, whose dusky radiance scarcely extended a yard around the wooden posts that supported them. This dismal and silent alley ran immediately behind the west side of St. Stephen's-green; and I observed the figure of a man walking up and down, as it seemed to me, with cautious and suspicious tread. I could perceive nothing of him, however, in the dusky light, except that as he passed and repassed immediately under one of the lamps, the faint rays fell upon a broad-brimmed hat, and a great coat, in which the figure was enveloped. My vague suspicions were confirmed, by observing that this man withdrew himself with cautious haste as I advanced, and was soon lost to my sight. I was standing, still looking in the direction in which the figure had disappeared, when a little wicket, in one of the gates opening upon the lane, was drawn back close to where I stood, and a suppressed female voice inquired—

'Are you there?'

'Yes,' answered I, promptly; now, for the first time, beginning to feel that an adventure was coming, and inclined to bear my part in it to the close, end how it might.

'Where?' repeated the voice.

'Here,' I answered, approaching the aperture.

A female, muffled in a cloak and bonnet, was passing through the wicket, and making me a sign to draw nearer, she said, hurriedly—

'Here take it—and then wait for us where you are.'

At the same time she placed a small bundle in my hands, which I received, nothing doubting that I was innocently made a partner in some night robbery, whose true accomplice was the man whom I had seen walking to and fro, as I described, and for whom doubtless the woman had mistaken me. With a secret satisfaction at the surprise I was about to give the party, I held the parcel fast, and took a few turns up and down, before the spot where I had received it, awaiting the further progress of the affair.

While thus engaged, I was nearly met, face to face, by the man whom I had at first seen, and who, hearing some noise, doubtless, at the appointed place of rendezvous, had hurried back. On descriing me, however, he instantly retired as before: and I, fearing to interrupt the current of the adventure, forebore in any wise to obstruct his escape. I walked thus backward and forward, bundle in hand, for eight or ten minutes, when the wicket was opened once more, and the woman I had spoken to already, stepped out into the lane, and said—

'Stand back a little bit, an' follow us, and don't for the life of you drop that.'

Almost at the same time two other figures came forth muffled as carefully as the first, and I heard a female voice from within the wicket, pouring forth, as it seemed to me, prayers and blessings, interrupted with sobs. The door was cautiously closed from the inside, and I heard the key slowly and carefully turned in the rusty lock; and as these sounds were audible, the little party began to move forward, while I, in obedience to orders, brought up the rear, carrying the parcel carefully in my arms.

The person in the centre of the three appeared to be feeble, and to advance with pain, and as she did so, leaned heavily upon the others.

Thus we proceeded, until we reached the end of this lane, and turned into another as solitary and ill-lighted. As the party before me passed under the lamp at the corner, one of the women upon whom she in the middle was leaning, exclaimed—

'Give me them, my jewel; they are better off where we are going.'

And thus saying, she drew off two or three rings that glittered upon the fingers that pressed her arm, and slipped them into her pocket. This done, they relapsed into total silence, and, full of curiosity for the issue, I followed close upon their steps.

We had now walked, though very slowly, for nearly

ten minutes, when in a dark spot, close under a broad gateway, they stopped.

'Thank God, we are so far,' said one of the women; 'sit down on that, my darling, for a minute;' and so saying, she laid a shawl, which she folded up into the fashion of a cushion, upon the top of one of the short upright stones which protected the corners of the piers; and upon this rude seat, the silent, and as it seemed, exhausted figure, sank down. The woman who had just accosted me, now beckoned me to her, and taking the bundle from me said—

'Now run down there, and bring up a chair from the stand at the second corner.'

She indicated the direction with her hand, and I—exerting myself to the full as much as if I had a personal stake in the enterprise, in which I thus found myself, through sheer wantonness actively involved—ran at my utmost speed upon the errand, and quickly returned with the desired conveyance.

Into this the feeble woman who had been resting as I have described, was hurried, and the chairmen having received directions to follow the two others, and I in turn to follow them, we all trudged onward, for forty minutes and upwards, in absolute silence.

By that time we had penetrated considerably beyond Werburgh-street, and were now entering the Liberties, and turning abruptly into a short, dark, dilapidated street, the woman stopped in front of a tall, dingy house, and after inspecting its exterior, and interchanging a few words, they signed to the chairman to set down their conveyance. Some one had probably been watching for its arrival, from one of the many dark windows which overlook the street, for she who had sat in it was hardly disengaged from the chair, when the hall door was stealthily opened, and a grim, suspicious looking girl, with a wretched candle in one hand, and shading her eyes with the other, peeped out.

'Give me that,' said the woman who had spoken to me, and who seemed to have the command of the expedition, at the same time entering, and taking the candle from her, while she drew the door fully open.

'All right?' she added inquiringly, glancing significantly upwards.

'Ay, everything,' rejoined the other sleepily; at the same time the other two women entered and passed silently on toward the stairs.

'Pay the men, now, and come in yourself,' added the woman, addressing me. I fortunately had about me enough change to satisfy the chairmen, which, as it seemed, was my province to do, and having dismissed them I followed my conductress into the house, and surrendered the bundle into her hands.

She turned the key in the hall door, and beckoned me into a dilapidated wainscoted back room, on the window-sill of which she placed the dip candle, which faintly lighted this inhospitable apartment, and pointing to the only piece of furniture that garnished its walls, a solitary clumsy chair, placed there I suppose in anticipation of my arrival, she said—

'Wait there, my good man, till I come back by and bye, and you know the rest.'

As she spoke to me, I for the first time saw her countenance, which was about as ugly and sinister a one as I ever beheld; very nearly resembling the lineaments usually ascribed in fairy tales, and other such authentic records, to witches of the malignant kind; a yellow skin, hooked nose, a wide mouth, with a few carious fangs, and a marvellous prominence of chin, gave additional effect to a pair of eyes, whose fierce and rat-like vivacity seemed scarcely reconcilable with the evident antiquity of her other features; and though her head was somewhat sunk upon her chest, yet her original wiry activity seemed to have suffered little abatement from years. This woman's countenance, I confess, impressed me most unfavourably with respect to the object of these arrangements; and I could not help entertaining a vague and unpleasant suspicion of meditated foul-play, and impending mischief, as the glance of this ill-favoured hag continued to haunt my fancy long after she had left me to the dreary solitude of the apartment. There was something, perhaps, a little wounding to the self-love of a young man in being thus coolly set down, as I clearly was, for a lackey; but this I must do myself the justice to say, that I was buttoned up in a great coat, fashioned more with a view to comfort than to elegance; and provided with a hat which had seen a great deal of rough night-duty.

The interest I felt in the denouement of the adventure, however, prevented my troubling about this: and seating myself, pursuant to the old woman's directions, in the solitary chair, I was left alone to keep watch in this singularly bleak and comfortless apartment.

Insensibly I began to grow sleepy; and adjusting myself in as easy an attitude as my uncomfortable position would permit, I fell into an uneasy doze, in which the ill looking hag who had left me, was, in my sleeping fancy, hovering about me, and offering me share of the rings I had seen her take, on condition of my being accessory to some infernal crime which she was always on the point of confiding to me, yet somehow or other never divulged, when I was startled from my dreams by a piercing cry. For a moment I forgot where I was; the sound was still ringing in my ears, and the candle, the snuff of which out-topped its blaze, afforded but an imperfect and shadowy light. Full of uneasy apprehension, I walked softly into the hall, and made my way to the foot of the stairs, where I stood, listening breathlessly for the sound of a human voice, but in vain. I

thought, indeed, I could distinguish in some remote upper-room the shuffling of feet, but of this I could not, on account of the constant rattling of the old window-frames in the wind, be perfectly certain. After waiting for a considerable time, I was about to abandon my new position, or to return to my post in the parlour, when I once more distinctly heard the same piercing cry of agony which had at first startled me. Without one moment's hesitation, I drew my sword, strode by three-at-a-time up the stairs, the cries continuing as I ascended; and just as I reached the room from which they were issuing, they subsided into a moan, and I heard the tread of steps as before.

I rushed directly to the door, sword in hand, and pushing it open, was some paces towards the centre of the chamber before I could arrest my advance. I had good reason to be astounded. A fire was lighted, and several wax candles were burning in the room, and illuminated abundance of furniture, somewhat dingy to be sure, but still, as it struck me, comfortable and respectable in appearance; there were curtains carefully drawn across the windows, a carpet on the floor, and a large bed, at one side of which stood, the one a little in advance of the other, the two women I had accompanied, now divested of their bonnets and cloaks; at the other, Doctor Robertson; and in the bed itself, flushed, exhausted, and as it seemed to me, well nigh dying—heavens! could I believe it—Miss Chadleigh herself.

I stood for several moments absolutely petrified with amazement; and those upon whose offices I had thus unexpectedly intruded, in so warlike an attitude, returned my look with a gaze of scarcely less astonishment than mine. The poor young lady, who lay quite motionless, with her eyes just closed, appeared, however, wholly unconscious of the intrusion. Before I had recovered sufficiently from the stupefaction of this extraordinary discovery, Doctor Robertson had taken me roughly by the collar, and drew, or rather pushed me out of the apartment.

In reply to his angry interrogatories, which he had suppressed until I had reached the lobby, I offered the best explanation, namely, the simple truth. 'Robbers, indeed!' he muttered—'more likely to be one of the gang yourself—'

And calling out one of the women, and having exchanged a few words in a whisper with her, I presume touching myself, he appeared satisfied, and told me to get down again as fast as I could, and to beware how I came again where I was not wanted. Sustaining as well as I could the character assigned me, as it were, by common consent, I conducted myself under this rebuke, as a respectful lackey might be supposed to do. I was so much shocked, that on reaching the chamber where I had been directed to wait, I could scarcely collect my thoughts. Only to think of Miss Chadleigh's being reduced to a situation so strange and deplorable!—she whom I had last seen the admired of all beholders—the life and the ornament of the gay and elegant in which she moved. Merciful heaven! how repulsive, degrading and melancholy was the contrast. A prey to a thousand conflicting and tumultuous feelings, I leaned upon the old chimney-piece, gazing upon the black and empty grate, lost, not in conjecture or surmise, but in mere confusion, amazement, and I might almost add, consternation.

While thus engaged, I was tapped on the shoulder by the old woman, whose entrance I had not perceived.

'Poor young lady!' said I—'how is she now?'

'Bad enough,' said the woman—'don't you hear her?'

'Poor thing! she seems very ill, indeed!' I answered.

'Ay, ay,' she repeated with a smile, for which I could have strangled her, 'it's all one, rich or poor, on that bed. She's in the hands of God now, an' nothing but Him and patience to look to—'

'God help her—God help her!' I repeated.

'Och, never fear of her,' said she, snuffing the candle with her bony fingers; and then putting her hand in her pocket, she gave me a note, saying—

'You're to bring that to him the minute the child's born: and mind, you're to tell him—for the foolish creature sets her heart on it—that she wrote it the very last minute she could hold a pen, do you mind? and don't go until I come back and tell you whether it's a boy or a girl; though, God knows, I don't see much differ it makes.'

With this remark she withdrew, and I, with intense curiosity, approached the candle to read the address of the billet. 'Richard Hamilton Jennings, Esq.,' was written with a trembling hand upon it, and fortunately for my incognito, his address in full subscribed. I now began, for the first time, fully to appreciate the extreme awkwardness and embarrassment of the very equivocal position into which my precipitate folly had led me. I had become possessed of a secret, involving the reputations, perhaps the lives of others, and by a coincidence which, however purely accidental and unpremeditated upon my part, I yet could not help perceiving might, at the same time, expose me to the most painful and disreputable surmises and misconstruction. It was, however, too late now to extricate myself, without possibly doing still further mischief; my now withdrawing could effect no possible good; and on the whole, I judged it best to perform the services committed to the domestic whose place I had so foolishly taken, and then to confide in Doctor Robertson, (whose character, as well as his appearance, I perfectly knew, although I had no actual acquaintance with himself,) the exact nature of my position in the affair, believing, as I still think, with