

IRISH LITERATURE

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BRAM STOKER.

ABRAHAM STOKER is the second son of the late Abraham Stoker, of the Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin Castle, and was educated at Rev. W. Wood's school, Dublin, and at Trinity College. At the university he was Auditor and President of the Historical and the Philosophical Societies, and athletic champion.

He is a barrister of the Inner Temple, and holds the medal of the Royal Humane Society for life-saving. He entered the Civil Service in 1866, where he became Inspector of Petty Sessions. While thus engaged he was critic and reviewer for several papers, and editor of an evening newspaper. In 1878 Mr. Stoker threw in his fortunes with those of Sir Henry Irving in his management of the Lyceum Theater. He has published 'Under the Sunset,' 'The Snake's Pass,' 'The Watter's Mou,' 'The Shoulder of Shasta,' 'Dracula,' and 'Miss Betty.'

THE GOMBEEN MAN.

From 'The Snake's Pass.'

In the midst of the buzz of conversation the clattering of hoofs was heard. There was a shout, and the door opened again and admitted a stalwart stranger of some fifty years of age, with a strong, determined face, with kindly eyes, well-dressed, but wringing wet and haggard, and seemingly disturbed in mind. One arm hung useless by his side.

"Here's one of them!" said Father Peter.

"God save all here," said the man as he entered.

Room was made for him at the fire. He no sooner came near it and tasted the heat than a cloud of steam arose from him.

"Man! but ye're wet," said Mrs. Kelligan. "One'd think ye'd been in the lake beyant!"

"So I have," he answered, "worse luck! I rid all the way from Galway this blessed day to be here in time, but the mare slipped coming down Curragh Hill, and threw me over the bank into the lake. I wor in the wather nigh three hours before I could get out, for I was forninst the Curragh Rock, an' only got a foothold in a chink, an' had to hold on wid me one arm, for I fear the other is broke."

"Dear! dear! dear!" interrupted the woman. "Sthrip yer coat off, acushla, an' let us see if we can do anythin'."

He shook his head as he answered:

"Not now; there's not a minute to spare. I must get up the Hill at once. I should have been there be six o'clock. But mayn't be too late yit. The mare has broke down entirely. Can any one here lend me a horse?"

There was no answer till Andy spoke:

"Me mare is in the shtable, but this gentleman has me 'an her for the day, an' I have to lave him at Carnaclif to-night."

Here I struck in:

"Never mind me, Andy. If you can help this gentleman, do so. I'm better off here than driving through the storm. He wouldn't want to go on with a broken arm if he hadn't good reason."

The man looked at me with grateful eagerness.

"Thank yer honor kindly. It's a rale gentleman ye are! An' I hope ye'll never be sorry for helpin' a poor fellow in sore trouble."

"What's wrong, Phelim?" asked the priest. "Is there anything troublin' you that any one here can get rid of?"

"Nothin', Father Pether, thank ye kindly. The trouble is me own intirely, an' no wan here could help me. But I must see Murdock to-night."

There was a general sigh of commiseration; all understood the situation.

"Musha!" said old Dan Moriarty, *sotto voce*. "An' is that the way of it? An' is he, too, in the clutches iv that wolf—him that we all thought was so warrum? Glory be to God! but it's a quare wurrl'd, it is; an' it's few there is in it that is what they seems. Me poor frind, is there any way I can help ye? I have a bit iv money by me that yer wilkim to the lend iv av ye want it."

The other shook his head gratefully.

"Thank ye kindly, Dan, but I have the money all right; it's only the time I'm in trouble about!"

"Only the time, me poor chap! It's be time that the divil helps Black Murdock an' the likes iv him, the most iv all! God be good to ye if he has got his clutch on yer back, an' has time on his side, for ye'll want it!"

"Well, anyhow, I must be goin' now. Thank ye kindly, neighbors all. When a man's in throuble, sure the goodwill of his frinds is the greatest comfort ye can have."

"All but one, remember that—all but one!" said the priest.

"Thank ye kindly, Father, I shan't forget. Thank ye, Andy, an' you, too, young sir; I'm much beholden to ye. I hope some day I may have it to do a good turn for ye in return. Thank ye kindly again, and good-night." He shook my hand warmly, and was going to the door, when old Dan said:

"An' as for that black-jawed ruffian, Murdock—" He paused, for the door suddenly opened, and a harsh voice said:

"Murtagh Murdock is here to answer for himself!" It was my man at the window.

There was a sort of paralyzed silence in the room, through which came the whisper of one of the old women:

"Musha! talk iv the divil!"

Joyce's face grew very white; one hand instinctively grasped his riding-switch, the other hung uselessly by his side. Murdock spoke:

"I kem here expectin' to meet Phelim Joyce. I thought I'd save him the throuble of comin' wid the money." Joyce said in a husky voice:

"What do ye mane? I have the money right enough here. I'm sorry I'm a bit late, but I had a bad accident—bruk me arrum, an' was nigh dhrownded in the Curragh Lake. But I was goin' up to ye at once, bad as I am, to pay ye yer money, Murdock." The Gombeen Man interrupted him:

"But it isn't to me ye'd have to come, me good man. Sure, it's the sheriff himself that was waitin' for ye', an' whin ye didn't come"—here Joyce winced; the speaker smiled—"he done his work."

"What wurrk, acushla?" asked one of the women. Murdock answered, slowly:

"He sould the lease iv the farrum known as the Shleenanaher in open sale, in accordance wid the terrums of his notice, duly posted, and wid warnin' given to the houldher iv the lease."

There was a long pause. Joyce was the first to speak:

"Ye're jokin', Murdock. For God's sake, say ye're jokin'! Ye tould me yerself that I might have time to git the money. An' ye tould me that the puttin' me farrum

up for sale was only a matther iv forrum to let me pay ye back in me own way. Nay, more, ye asked me not to tell any iv the neighbors, for fear some iv them might want to buy some iv me land. An' it's niver so, that whin ye got me aff to Galway to rise the money, ye went on wid the sale, behind me back—wid not a soul by to spake for me or mine—an' sould up all I have! No, Murtagh Murdock, ye're a hard man, I know, but ye wouldn't do that! Ye wouldn't do that!"

Murdock made no direct reply to him, but said, seemingly to the company generally:

"I ixedpected to see Phelim Joyce at the sale to-day, but as I had some business in which he was consarned, I kem here where I knew there'd be neighbors—an', sure; so there is."

He took out his pocket-book and wrote names: "Father Pether Ryan, Daniel Moriarty, Bartholomew Moynahan, Andhrew McGlown, Mrs. Katty Kelligan—that's enough! I want ye all to see what I done. There's nothin' underhand about me! Phelim Joyce, I give ye formil notice that yer land was sould an' bought be me, for ye broke yer word to repay me the money lint ye before the time fixed. Here's the sheriff's assignment, an' I tell ye before all these witnesses that I'll proceed with ejectment on title at wanst."

All in the room were as still as statues. Joyce was fearfully still and pale, but when Murdock spoke the word "ejectment" he seemed to wake in a moment to frenzied life. The blood flushed up in his face, and he seemed about to do something rash; but with a great effort he controlled himself and said:

"Mr. Murdock, ye won't be too hard. I got the money to-day—it's here—but I had an accident that delayed me. I was thrown into Curragh Lake and nigh dhrowned, an' me arrum is bruk. Don't be so close as an hour or two; ye'll never be sorry for it. I'll pay ye all, and more, and thank ye into the bargain all me life. Ye'll take back the paper, won't ye, for me children's sake—for Norah's sake?"

He faltered; the other answered with an evil smile:

"Phelim Joyce, I've waited years for this moment. Don't ye know me betther nor to think I would go back on

meself whin I have shtarted on a road? I wouldn't take yer money, not if every pound note was spread into an acre and cut up in tin-pound notes. I want yer land—I have waited for it, an' I mane to have it! Now don't beg me any more, for I won't go back; an' tho' it's many a grudge I owe ye, I square them all before the neighbors be refusin' yer prayer. The land is mine, bought be open sale; an' all the judges an' coorts in Ireland can't take it from me! An' what do ye say to that now, Phelim Joyce?"

The tortured man had been clutching the ash sapling which he had used as a riding-whip, and from the nervous twitching of his fingers I knew that something was coming. And it came; for, without a word, he struck the evil face before him—struck as quick as a flash of lightning—such a blow that the blood seemed to leap out round the stick, and a vivid welt rose in an instant. With a wild, savage cry the Gombeen Man jumped at him; but there were others in the room as quick, and before another blow could be struck on either side both men were grasped by strong hands and held back.

Murdock's rage was tragic. He yelled, like a wild beast, to be let get at his opponent. He cursed and blasphemed so outrageously that all were silent, and only the stern voice of the priest was heard:

"Be silent, Murtagh Murdock! Aren't you afraid that the God overhead will strike you dead? With such a storm as is raging as a sign of his power, you are a foolish man to tempt him."

The man stopped suddenly, and a stern, dogged sullenness took the place of his passion. The priest went on:

"As for you, Phelim Joyce, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Ye're not one of my people, but I speak as your own clergyman would if he were here. Only this day has the Lord seen fit to spare you from a terrible death; and yet you dare to go back of his mercy with your angry passion. You had cause for anger—or temptation to it, I know—but you must learn to kiss the chastening rod, not spurn it. The Lord knows what he is doing for you as for others, and it may be that you will look back on this day in gratitude for his doing, and in shame for your own anger. Men, hold off your hands—let those two

men go; they'll quarrel no more—before me at any rate, I hope.”

The men drew back. Joyce held his head down, and a more despairing figure or a sadder one I never saw. He turned slowly away, and, leaning against the wall, put his face between his hands and sobbed. Murdock scowled, and the scowl gave place to an evil smile as, looking all around, he said:

“Well, now that me work is done, I must be gettin' home.”

“An' get some one to iron that mark out iv yer face,” said Dan. Murdock turned again, and glared around him savagely as he hissed out:

“There'll be iron for some one before I'm done—mark me well! I've never gone back or wakened yit whin I promised to have me own turn. There's thim here what'll rue this day yit! If I am the Shnake on the Hill—thin beware the Shnake. An' for him what shtruck me, he'll be in bitther sorra for it yit—him an' his!” He turned his back and went to the door.

“Stop,” said the priest. “Murtagh Murdock, I have a word to say to you—a solemn word of warning. Ye have to-day acted the part of Ahab towards Naboth the Jezreelite; beware of his fate! You have coveted your neighbor's goods; you have used your power without mercy; you have made the law an engine of oppression. Mark me! It was said of old that what measure men meted should be meted out to them again. God is very just. ‘Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.’ Ye have sowed the wind this day; beware lest you reap the whirlwind! Even as God visited his sin upon Ahab the Samaritan, and as he has visited similar sins on others in his own way, so shall he visit yours on you. You are worse than the land-grabber—worse than the man who only covets. Saintough is a virtue compared with your act. Remember the story of Naboth's vineyard, and the dreadful end of it. Don't answer me! Go and repent if you can, and leave sorrow and misery to be comforted by others, unless you wish to undo your wrong yourself. If you don't, then remember the curse that may come upon you yet!”

Without a word Murdock opened the door and went out,

and a little later we heard the clattering of his horse's feet on the rocky road to Shleenanaher.

When it was apparent to all that he was really gone, a torrent of commiseration, sympathy, and pity broke over Joyce. The Irish nature is essentially emotional, and a more genuine and stronger feeling I never saw. Not a few had tears in their eyes, and one and all were manifestly deeply touched. The least moved was, to all appearance, poor Joyce himself. He seemed to have pulled himself together, and his sterling manhood and courage and pride stood by him. He seemed, however, to yield to the kindly wishes of his friends, and when we suggested that his hurt should be looked to he acquiesced :

“ Yes, if you will. Betther not go home to poor Norah and distress her with it. Poor child ! she 'll have enough to bear without that.”

His coat was taken off, and between us we managed to bandage the wound. The priest, who had some surgical knowledge, came to the conclusion that there was only a simple fracture. He splinted and bandaged the arm, and we all agreed that it would be better for Joyce to wait until the storm was over before starting for home. Andy said he could take him on the car, as he knew the road well, and that as it was partly on the road to Carnacliff, we should only have to make a short detour and would pass the house of the doctor, by whom the arm could be properly attended to.

So we sat around the fire again, while without the storm howled, and the fierce gusts which swept the valley seemed at times as if they would break in the door, lift off the roof, or in some way annihilate the time-worn cabin which gave us shelter.

There could, of course, be only one subject of conversation now, and old Dan simply interpreted the public wish when he said :

“ Tell us, Phelim—sure, we're all friends here—how Black Murdock got ye in his clutches? Sure, any wan of us would get you out of thim if he could.”

There was a general acquiescence. Joyce yielded himself, and said :

“ Let me thank ye, neighbors all, for yer kindness to me and mine this sorraful night. Well, I 'll say no more

about that; but I'll tell ye how it was that Murdock got me into his power. Ye know that boy of mine—Eugene?"

"Oh, and he's the fine lad, God bless him! an' the good lad, too!"—this from the women.

"Well, ye know, too, that he got on so well whin I sint him to school that Dr. Walsh recommended me to make an ingineer of him. He said he had such promise that it was a pity not to see him get the right start in life, and he gave me, himself, a letther to Sir George Henshaw, the great ingineer. I wint and seen him, and he said he would take the boy. He tould me that there was a big fee to be paid, but I was not to throuble about that; at any rate, that he himself didn't want any fee, and he would ask his partner if he would give up his share too. But the latther was hard up for money. He said he couldn't give up all the fee, but that he would take half the fee, provided it was paid down in dhry money. Well, the regular fee to the firm was five hundhred pounds, and as Sir George had giv up half, an' only half, th' other half was to be paid, if that was possible. I hadn't got more 'n a few pounds by me; for what wid dhrainin' and plantin' and fencin', and the payin' the boy's schoolin' and the girl's at the Nuns' in Galway, it had put me to the pin iv me collar to find the money up to now. But I didn't like to let the boy lose his chance in life for want of an effort, an' I put me pride in me pocket an' kem an' asked Murdock for the money. He was very smooth an' nice wid me—I know why now—an' promised he would give it at wanst if I would give him security on me land. Sure, he joked an' laughed wid me, an' was that cheerful that I didn't mistrust him. He tould me it was only forrums I was signin' that 'd never be used." Here Dan Moriarty interrupted him:

"What did ye sign, Phelim?"

"There wor two papers. Wan was a writin' iv some kind, that in considheration iv the money lent an' his own land—which I was to take over if the money wasn't paid at the time appointed—he was to get me lease from me; an' the other was a power of attorney to Enther Judgment for the amount if the money wasn't paid at the right time. I thought I was all safe, as I could repay him in the time named, an' if the worst kem to the worst I might borry the money from some wan else—for the lease is worth the

sum tin times over—an' repay him. Well, what's the use of lookin' back, anyhow? I signed the papers—that was a year ago an' one week. An' a week ago the time was up!" He gulped down a sob, and went on:

"Well, ye all know the year gone has been a terrible bad wan, an' as for me it was all I could do to hould on—to make up the money was impossible. Thru, the lad cost me next to nothin', for he arned his keep be exthra work, an' the girl, Norah, kem home from school and labored wid me, an' we saved every penny we could. But it was all no use; we couldn't get the money together anyhow. Thin we had the misfortin wid the cattle that ye all know of; an' three horses that I sould in Dublin up an' died before the time I guaranteed them free from sickness." Here Andy struck in:

"Thru for ye! Sure, there was some dhreadful disordher in Dublin among the horse cattle, intirely; an' even Misther Dochter Perfesshinal Ferguson himself couldn't git undher it!" Joyce went on:

"An' as the time grew nigh I began to fear, but Murdock came down to see me whin I was alone, an' tould me not to throuble about the money, an' not to mind about the sheriff, for he had to give him notice. 'An', says he, 'I wouldn't, if I was you, tell Norah anythin' about it, for it might frighten the girl; for weemin is apt to take to heart things like that that's only small things to min like us.' An' so, God forgive me, I believed him; an' I niver tould me child anything about it—even whin I got the notice from the sheriff. An' whin the notice tellin' iv the sale was posted up on me land, I tuk it down meself, so that the poor girl wouldn't be frightened—God help me!" He broke down for a bit, but then went on:

"But somehow I wasn't asy in me mind, an' whin the time iv the sale dhrew nigh I couldn't keep it to meself any longer, an' I tould Norah. That was only yisterday, and took at me to-day! Norah agreed wid me that we shouldn't trust the Gombeen, an' she sent me off to the Galway Bank to borrey the money. She said I was an honest man an' farmed me own land, and that the bank might lind the money on it. An', sure enough, whin I wint there this mornin' be appointment, wid the Coadjuthor himself to inthroduce me, though he didn't know

why I wanted the money—that was Norah's idea, and the Mother Superior settled it for her—the manager, who is a nice gentleman, tould me at wanst that I might have the money on me own note iv hand. I only gave him a formal writin', and I took away the money. Here it is in me pocket in good notes; they're wet wid the lake, but, I'm thankful to say, all safe. But it's too late, God help me!" Here he broke down for a minute, but recovered himself with an effort:

"Anyhow, the bank that thrusted me mustn't be wronged. Back the money goes to Galway as soon as iver I can get it there. If I am a ruined man, I needn't be a dishonest wan! But poor Norah! God help her! it will break her poor heart."

There was a spell of silence, only broken by sympathetic moans. The first to speak was the priest:

"Phelim Joyce, I told you a while ago, in the midst of your passion, that God knows what he is doin', and works in his own way. You're an honest man, Phelim, and God knows it, and, mark me, he won't let you nor yours suffer. 'I have been young,' said the Psalmist, 'and now am old; and I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread.' Think of that, Phelim; may it comfort you and poor Norah. God bless her, but she's the good girl! You have much to be thankful for, with a daughter like her to comfort you at home and take the place of her poor mother, who was the best of women; and with such a boy as Eugene, winnin' name and credit, and perhaps fame to come, even in England itself. Thank God for his many mercies, Phelim, and trust him!"

There was a dead silence in the room. The stern man rose, and coming over took the priest's hand.

"God bless ye, Father!" he said, "it's the true comforter ye are."

The scene was a most touching one; I shall never forget it. The worst of the poor man's trouble seemed now past. He had faced the darkest hour; he had told his trouble, and was now prepared to make the best of everything—for the time at least—for I could not reconcile to my mind the idea that that proud, stern man, would not take the blow to heart for many a long day, that it might even embitter his life.