

Hertford O'Donnell's Warning

Charlotte Riddell

Many a year ago, before chloroform was thought of, there lived in an old, rambling house, in Gerard Street, Soho, a young Irishman called Hertford O'Donnell.

After Hertford O'Donnell he was entitled to write M.R.C.S., for he had studied hard to gain this distinction, and the older surgeons at Guy's (his hospital) considered him, in their secret hearts, one of the most rising operators of the day.

Having said chloroform was unknown at the time this story opens, it will strike my readers that, if Hertford O'Donnell were a rising and successful operator in those days, of necessity he combined within himself a larger number of striking qualities than are by any means necessary to form a successful operator in these.

There was more than mere hand skill, more than even thorough knowledge of his profession, needful for the man who, dealing with conscious subjects, essayed to rid them of some of the diseases to which flesh is heir. There was greater courage required in the manipulator of old than is at present altogether essential. Then, as now, a thorough mastery of his instruments — a steady hand — a keen eye — a quick dexterity were indispensable to a good operator; but, added to all these things, there formerly required a pulse which knew no quickening — a mental strength which never faltered — a ready power of adaptation in unexpected circumstances — fertility of resource in difficult cases, and a brave front under all emergencies.

If I refrain from adding that a hard as well as a courageous heart was an important item in the programme, it is only out of deference to general opinion, which amongst other delusions, clings to the belief that courage and hardness are antagonistic qualities.

Hertford O'Donnell, however, was hard as steel. He understood his work, and he did it thoroughly; but he cared no more for quivering nerves and contracting muscles, for screams of agony, for faces white with pain, and teeth clenched in the extremity of anguish, than he did for the stony countenances of the dead which

sometimes in the dissecting-room appalled younger and less experienced men.

He had no sentiment, and he had no sympathy. The human body was to him an ingenious piece of mechanism, which it was at once a pleasure and a profit to understand. Precisely as Brunei loved the Thames Tunnel, or any other singular engineering feat, so O'Donnell loved a patient on whom he operated successfully, more especially if the ailment possessed by the patient were of a rare and difficult character.

And for this reason he was much liked by all who came under his hands, for patients are apt to mistake a surgeon's interest in their cases for interest in themselves; and it was gratifying to John Dicks, plasterer, and Timothy Regan, labourer, to be the happy possessors of remarkable diseases, which produced a cordial understanding between themselves and the handsome Irishman.

If he were hard and cool at the moment of hewing them to pieces, that was all forgotten, or remembered only as a virtue, when, after being discharged from hospital like soldiers who have served in a severe campaign, they met Mr. O'Donnell in the street, and were accosted by that rising individual, just as though he considered himself nobody.

He had a royal memory, this stranger in a strange land, both for faces and cases; and like the rest of his countrymen he never felt it beneath his dignity to talk cordially to corduroy and fustian.

In London, as at Calgillan, he never held back his tongue from speaking a cheery or a kindly word. His manners were pliable enough if his heart were not; and the porters, and the patients, and the nurses, and the students at Guy's all were pleased to see Hertford O'Donnell.

Rain, hail, sunshine, it was all the same; there was a life and a brightness about the man which communicated itself to those with whom he came in contact. Let the mud in the streets be a foot deep, or the London fog thick as pea-soup, Mr. O'Donnell never lost his temper, never muttered a surly reply to the gate-keeper's salutation, but spoke out blithely and cheerfully to his pupils and his patients, to the sick and to the well, to those below and to those above him.

And yet, spite of all these good qualities — spite of his handsome face, his fine figure, his easy address, and his unquestionable skill as an operator, the dons, who

acknowledged his talent, shook their heads gravely when two or three of them in private and solemn conclave talked confidentially of their younger brother.

If there were many things in his favour, there were more in his disfavour. He was Irish — not merely by the accident of birth, which might have been forgiven, since a man cannot be held accountable for such caprices of Nature, but by every other accident and design which is objectionable to the orthodox and respectable and representative English mind.

In speech, appearance, manner, habits, modes of expression, habits of life, Hertford O'Donnell was Irish. To the core of his heart he loved his native land which he, nevertheless, declared he never meant to revisit; and amongst the English he moved to all intents and purposes a foreigner, who was resolved, so said the great prophets at Guy's, to go to destruction as fast as he could, and let no man hinder him.

"He means to go the whole length of his tether," observed one of the ancient wiseacres to another; which speech implied a conviction that Hertford O'Donnell, having sold himself to the Evil One, had determined to dive the full length of his rope into wickedness before being pulled to the shore where even wickedness is negative — where there are no mad carouses, no wild, sinful excitement, nothing but impotent wailing and useless gnashing of teeth.

A reckless, graceless, clever, wicked devil — going to his natural home as fast as in London a man can possibly progress thither: this was the opinion his superiors held of the man who lived all alone with a housekeeper and her husband (who acted as butler) in his big house near Soho.

Gerard Street was not then an utterly shady and forgotten locality: carriage patients found their way to the rising surgeon — some great personages thought it not beneath them to fee an individual whose consulting rooms were situated on what was even then the wrong side of Regent Street. He was making money, and he was spending it: he was over head and ears in debt — useless, vulgar debt — senselessly contracted, never bravely faced. He had lived at an awful pace ever since he came to London, at a pace which only a man who hopes and expects to die young can ever travel.

Life! what good was it? Death! was he a child, or a woman, or a coward, to be

afraid of that hereafter? God knew all about the trifle which had upset his coach better than the dons at Guy's; and he did not dread facing his Maker, and giving an account to Him even of the disreputable existence he had led since he came to London.

Hertford O'Donnell knew the world pretty well, and the ways thereof were to him as roads often traversed; therefore, when he said that at the day of judgment he felt certain he should come off better than many of those who censured him, it may be assumed that, although his views of post-mortem punishment were vague, unsatisfactory, and infidel, still his information as to the peccadilloes of his neighbours was such as consoled himself.

And yet, living all alone in the old house near Soho Square, grave thoughts would intrude frequently into the surgeon's mind — thoughts which were, so to say, italicized by peremptory letters, and still more peremptory visits from people who wanted money.

Although he had many acquaintances he had no single friend, and accordingly these thoughts were received and brooded over in solitude, in those hours when, after returning from dinner or supper, or congenial carouse, he sat in his dreary rooms smoking his pipe and considering means and ways, chances and certainties.

In good truth he had started in London with some vague idea that as his life in it would not be of long continuance, the pace at which he elected to travel could be of little consequence; but the years since his first entry into the metropolis were now piled one on the top of another, his youth was behind him, his chances of longevity, spite of the way he had striven to injure his constitution, quite as good as ever. He had come to that time in existence, to that narrow strip of tableland whence the ascent of youth and the descent of age are equally discernible — when, simply because he has lived for so many years, it strikes a man as possible he may have to live for just as many more, with the ability for hard work gone, with the boon companions scattered abroad, with the capacity for enjoying convivial meetings a mere memory, with small means perhaps, with no bright hopes, with the pomp and the equipage, and the fairy carriages, and the glamour which youth flings over earthly objects faded away like the pageant of yesterday, while the dreary ceremony of living has to be gone through today and tomorrow and the

morrow after, as though the gay cavalcade and the martial music, and the glittering helmets and the prancing steeds were still accompanying the wayfarer to his journey's end.

Ah! my friends, there comes a moment when we must all leave the coach, with its four bright bays, its pleasant outside freight, its cheery company, its guard who blows the horn so merrily through villages and along lonely country roads.

Long before we reach that final stage, where the black business claims us for its own especial property, we have to bid good-bye to all easy, thoughtless journeying, and betake ourselves with what zest we will, to traversing the common of Reality. There is no royal road across it that ever I heard of. From the king on his throne to the labourer who vaguely imagines what manner of being a king is, we have all to tramp across that desert at one period of our lives, at all events; and that period usually is when, as I have said, a man starts to find the hopes, and the strength, and the buoyancy of youth left behind, while years and years of coming life lie stretching out before him.

Even supposing a man's spring time to have been a cold and ungenial one, with bitter easterly winds and nipping frosts, biting the buds and retarding the blossoms, still it was spring for all that — spring with the young green leaves sprouting eagerly, with the flowers unfolding tenderly, with the songs of birds and the rush of waters, with the summer before and the autumn afar off, and winter remote as death and eternity; but when once the trees have donned their summer foliage, when the pure white blossoms have disappeared, and a gorgeous red and orange and purple blaze of many-coloured flowers fills the gardens, then if there come a wet, dreary day, the idea of autumn and winter is not so difficult to realise. When once twelve o'clock is reached, the evening and night become facts, not possibilities; and it was of the afternoon, and the evening and the night, Hertford O'Donnell sat thinking on the Christmas Eve when I crave permission to introduce him to my readers.

A good-looking man ladies considered him. A tall, dark-complexioned, black-haired, straight-limbed, deeply, divinely blue-eyed fellow, with a soft voice, with a pleasant brogue, who had ridden like a Centaur over the loose stone walls in Connemara, who had danced all night at the Dublin balls, who had walked over the Bennebeola mountains, gun in hand, day after day without weariness, who had

led a mad, wild life while 'studying for a doctor' — as the Irish phrase goes — in Dublin, and who, after the death of his eldest brother left him free to return to Calgillan and pursue the usual utterly useless, utterly purposeless, utterly pleasant life of an Irish gentleman possessed of health, birth, and expectations, suddenly kicked over the paternal traces, bade adieu to Calgillan Castle and the blandishments of a certain beautiful Miss Clifden, beloved of his mother, and laid out to be his wife, walked down the avenue without even so much company as a gossoon to carry his carpet-bag, shook the dust from his feet at the lodge-gates, and took his seat on the coach, never once looking back at Calgillan, where his favourite mare was standing in the stable, his greyhounds chasing one another round the home paddock, his gun at half-cock in his dressing-room, and his fishing-tackle all in order and ready for use.

He had not kissed his mother or asked for his father's blessing; he left Miss Clifden arrayed in her brand-new riding-habit without a word of affection or regret; he had spoken no syllable of farewell to any servant about the place; only when the old woman at the lodge bade him good morning and God-blessed his handsome face, he recommended her bitterly to look well at it, for she would never see it more.

Twelve years and a half had passed since then without either Nancy Blake or any other one of the Calgillan people having set eyes on Master Hertford's handsome face. He had kept his vow made to himself; he had not written home; he had not been indebted to mother or father for even a tenpenny-piece during the whole of that time; he had lived without friends, and he had lived without God — so far as God ever lets a man live without him — and his own private conviction was that he could get on very well without either. One thing only he felt to be needful — money, money to keep him when the evil days of sickness, or age, or loss of practice came upon him. Though a spendthrift, he was not a simpleton. Around him he saw men who, having started with fairer prospects than his own, were nevertheless reduced to indigence; and he knew that what had happened to others might happen to himself.

An unlucky cut, slipping on a bit of orange-peel in the street, the merest accident imaginable, is sufficient to change opulence to beggary in the life's programme of an individual whose income depends on eye, on nerve, on hand; and besides the consciousness of this fact, Hertford O'Donnell knew that beyond a

certain point in his profession progress was not easy.

It did not depend quite on the strength of his own bow or shield whether he counted his earnings by hundreds or thousands. Work may achieve competence; but mere work cannot, in a profession at all events, compass wealth.

He looked around him, and he perceived that the majority of great men — great and wealthy — had been indebted for their elevation more to the accidents of birth, patronage, connection, or marriage, than to personal ability.

Personal ability, no doubt, they possessed; but then, little Jones, who lived in Frith Street, and who could barely keep himself and his wife and family, had ability, too, only he lacked the concomitants of success.

He wanted something or someone to puff him into notoriety — a brother at court — a lord's leg to mend — a rich wife to give him prestige into society; and, lacking this something or someone, he had grown grey-haired and faint-hearted in the service of that world which utterly despises its most obsequious servants.

"Clatter along the streets with a pair of hired horses, snub the middle classes, and drive over the commonalty — that is the way to compass wealth and popularity in England," said Hertford O'Donnell, bitterly; and, as the man desired wealth and popularity, he sat before his fire, with a foot on each hob, and a short pipe in his mouth, considering how he might best obtain the means to clatter along the streets in his carriage, and splash plebeians with mud from his wheels like the best.

In Dublin he could, by reason of his name and connection, have done well; but then he was not in Dublin, neither did he want to be. The bitterest memories of his life were inseparable from the name of the Green Island, and he had no desire to return to it.

Besides, in Dublin, heiresses are not quite so plentiful as in London; and an heiress Hertford O'Donnell had decided would do more for him than years of steady work.

A rich wife could clear him of debt, introduce him to fashionable practice, afford him that measure of social respectability which a medical bachelor invariably lacks, deliver him from the loneliness of Gerard Street, and the

domination of Mr. and Mrs. Coles.

To most men, deliberately bartering away their independence for money seems so prosaic a business that they strive to gloss it over even to themselves, and to assign every reason for their choice, save that which is really the influencing one.

Not so, however, with Hertford O'Donnell. He sat beside the fire scoffing over his proposed bargain — thinking of the lady's age — her money-bags — her desirable house in town — her seat in the country — her snobbishness — her folly.

"It would be a fitting ending," he sneered; "and why I did not settle the matter tonight passes my comprehension. I am not a coward, to be frightened with old women's tales; and yet I must have turned white. I felt I did, and she asked me whether I was ill. And then to think of my being such an idiot as to ask her if she had heard anything like a cry, as though she would be likely to hear that — she, with her poor parvenu blood, which, I often imagine, must have been mixed with some of her father's strong pickling vinegar. What the deuce could I have been dreaming about? I wonder what it really was?" and Hertford O'Donnell pushed his hair back from his forehead, and took another draught from the too familiar tumbler, which was placed conveniently on the chimneypiece.

"After expressly making up my mind to propose, too!" he mentally continued. "Could it have been conscience — that myth, which somebody, who knew nothing of the matter, said, 'makes cowards of us all?' I don't believe in conscience; and even if there be such a thing capable of being developed by sentiment and cultivation, why should it trouble me? I have no intention of wronging Miss Janet Price Ingot — not the least. Honestly and fairly I shall marry her; honestly and fairly I shall act by her. An old wife is not exactly an ornamental article of furniture in a man's house; and I do not know that the fact of her being well gilded makes her look any more ornamental. But she shall have no cause for complaint; and I will go and dine with her tomorrow, and settle the matter."

Having arrived at which resolution, Mr. O'Donnell arose, kicked down the fire — burning hollow — with the heel of his boot, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, emptied his tumbler, and bethought him it was time to go to bed. He was not in the habit of taking his rest so early as quarter to twelve o'clock; but he felt unusually weary — tired mentally and bodily — and lonely beyond all power of expression.

“The fair Janet would be better than this,” he said, half aloud; and then with a start and a shiver, and a blanched face, he turned sharply round, whilst a low, sobbing, wailing cry echoed mournfully through the room. No form of words could give an idea of the sound. The plaintiveness of the Eolian harp — that plaintiveness which so soon affects and lowers the highest spirits — would have seemed wildly gay in comparison to the sadness of the cry which seemed floating in the air. As the summer wind comes and goes amongst the trees, so that mournful wail came and went — came and went. It came in a rush of sound, like a gradual crescendo managed by a skilful musician, and it died away like a lingering note, so that the listener could scarcely tell the exact moment when it faded away into silence.

I say faded away, for it disappeared as the coast line disappears in the twilight, and there was utter stillness in the apartment.

Then, for the first time, Hertford O'Donnell looked at his dog, and beholding the creature crouched into a corner beside the fireplace, called upon him to come out.

His voice sounded strange even to himself, and apparently the dog thought so too, for he made no effort to obey the summons.

“Come out, sir,” his master repeated, and then the animal came crawling reluctantly forward, with his hair on end, his eyes almost starting from his head, trembling violently, as the surgeon, who caressed him, felt.

“So you heard it, Brian?” he said to the dog. “And so your ears are sharper than hers, old fellow? It's a mighty queer thing to think of, being favoured with a visit from a banshee in Gerard Street; and as the lady has travelled so far, I only wish I knew whether there is any sort of refreshment she would like to take after her long journey.”

He spoke loudly, and with a certain mocking defiance, seeming to think the phantom he addressed would reply; but when he stopped at the end of his sentence, no sound came through the stillness. There was utter silence in the room — silence broken only by the falling of the cinders on the hearth and the breathing of his dog.

“If my visitor would tell me,” he proceeded, “for whom this lamentation is being made, whether for myself, or for some other member of my illustrious family,

I should feel immensely obliged. It seems too much honour for a poor surgeon to have such attention paid him. Good heavens! What is that?" he exclaimed, as a ring, loud and peremptory, woke all the echoes in the house, and brought his housekeeper in a state of distressing dishabille, "out of her warm bed," so she subsequently stated, to the head of the staircase.

Across the hall Hertford O'Donnell strode, relieved at the prospect of speaking to any living being. He took no precaution of putting up the chain, but flung the door wide. A dozen burglars would have proved welcome in comparison to that ghostly intruder; and, as I have said, he threw the door open, admitting a rush of wet, cold air, which made poor Mrs. Coles' few remaining teeth chatter in her head.

"Who is there? — what do you want?" asked the surgeon, seeing no person, and hearing no voice. "Who is there? — why the devil can't you speak?"

But when even this polite exhortation failed to elicit an answer, he passed out into the night and looked up the street, and down the street, to see nothing but the driving rain and the blinking lights.

"If this goes on much longer I shall soon think I must be either mad or drunk," he muttered, as he re-entered the house, and locked and bolted the door once more.

"Lord's sake! what is the matter, sir?" asked Mrs. Coles, from the upper flight, careful only to reveal the borders of her nightcap to Mr. O'Donnell's admiring gaze. "Is anybody killed? — have you to go out, sir?"

"It was only a runaway ring," he answered, trying to reassure himself with an explanation he did not in his heart believe.

"Runaway! — I'd runaway them," murmured Mrs. Coles, as she retired to the conjugal couch, where Coles was, to quote her own expression, "snoring like a pig through it all." Almost immediately afterwards she heard her master ascend the stairs and close his bedroom-door.

"Madam will surely be too much of a gentlewoman to intrude here," thought the surgeon, scoffing even at his own fears; but when he lay down he did not put out his light, and he made Brian leap up and crouch on the coverlet beside him.

The man was fairly frightened, and would have thought it no discredit to his manhood to acknowledge as much. He was not afraid of death, he was not afraid of trouble, he was not afraid of danger; but he was afraid of the banshee; and as he lay with his hand on the dog's head, he thought over all the stories he had ever heard about this family retainer in the days of his youth. He had not thought about her for years and years. Never before had he heard her voice himself. When his brother died, she had not thought it necessary to travel up to Dublin and give him notice of the impending catastrophe. "If she had, I would have gone down to Calgillan, and perhaps saved his life," considered the surgeon. "I wonder who this is for! If for me, that will settle my debts and my marriage. If I could be quite certain it was either of the old people, I would start for Ireland tomorrow." And then vaguely his mind wandered on to think of every banshee story he had ever heard in his life — about the beautiful lady with the wreath of flowers, who sat on the rocks below Red Castle, in the County Antrim, lamenting till one of the sons died for love of her; about the Round Chamber at Dunluce, which was swept clean by the banshee every night; about the bed in a certain great house in Ireland, which was slept in constantly, although no human being ever passed in or out after dark; about that general officer who the night before Waterloo, said to a friend, "I have heard the banshee, and shall not come off the field alive tomorrow; break the news gently to poor Carry;" and who, nevertheless, coming safe off the field, had subsequently news about poor Carry broken tenderly and pitifully to him; about the lad who, aloft in the rigging, hearing through the night a sobbing and wailing coming over the waters, went down to the captain and told him he was afraid they were somehow out of their reckoning, just in time to save the ship, which, when morning broke, they found but for his warning would have been on the rocks. It was blowing great guns, and the sea was all in a fret and turmoil, and they could sometimes see in the trough of the waves, as down a valley, the cruel black reefs they had escaped.

On deck the captain stood speaking to the boy who had saved them, and asking how he knew of their danger; and when the lad told him, the captain laughed, and said her ladyship had been outwitted that time.

But the boy answered, with a grave shake of his head, that the warning was either for him or his, and that if he got safe to port there would be bad tidings waiting for him from home; whereupon the captain bade him go below, and get

some brandy and lie down.

He got the brandy, and he lay down, but he never rose again; and when the storm abated — when a great calm succeeded to the previous tempest — there was a very solemn funeral at sea; and on their arrival at Liverpool the captain took a journey to Ireland to tell a widowed mother how her only son died, and to bear his few effects to the poor desolate soul.

And Hertford O'Donnell thought again about his own father riding full-chase across country, and hearing, as he galloped by a clump of plantation, something like a sobbing and wailing. The hounds were in full cry; but he still felt, as he afterwards expressed it, that there was something among those trees he could not pass; and so he jumped off his horse, and hung the reins over the branch of a fir, and beat the cover well, but not a thing could be found in it.

Then, for the first time in his life, Miles O'Donnell turned his horse's head from the hunt, and, within a mile of Calgillan, met a man running to tell him Mr. Martin's gun had burst, and hurt him badly.

And he remembered the story also, of how Mary O'Donnell, his great aunt, being married to a young Englishman, heard the banshee as she sat one evening waiting for his return; and of how she, thinking the bridge by which he often came home unsafe for horse and man, went out, in a great panic, to meet and entreat him to go round by the main road for her sake. Sir Everard was riding along in the moonlight, making straight for the bridge, when he beheld a figure dressed all in white upon it. Then there was a crash, and the figure disappeared.

The lady was rescued and brought back to the hall; but next morning there were two dead bodies within its walls — those of Lady Eyreton and her still-born son.

Quicker than I write them, these memories chased one another through Hertford O'Donnell's brain; and there was one more terrible memory than any which would recur to him, concerning an Irish nobleman who, seated alone in his great town-house in London, heard the banshee, and rushed out to get rid of the phantom, which wailed in his ear, nevertheless, as he strode down Piccadilly. And then the surgeon remembered how he went with a friend to the Opera, feeling sure that there no banshee, unless she had a box, could find admittance, until suddenly

he heard her singing up amongst the highest part of the scenery, with a terrible mournfulness, with a pathos which made the prima donna's tenderest notes seem harsh by comparison.

As he came out, some quarrel arose between him and a famous fire-eater, against whom he stumbled; and the result was that the next afternoon there was a new Lord —, vice Lord —, killed in a duel with Captain Bravo.

Memories like these are not the most enlivening possible; they are apt to make a man fanciful, and nervous, and wakeful; but as time ran on, Hertford O'Donnell fell asleep, with his candle still burning, and Brian's cold nose pressed against his hand.

He dreamt of his mother's family — the Hertfords, of Artingbury, Yorkshire, far-off relatives of Lord Hertford — so far off that even Mrs. O'Donnell held no clue to the genealogical maze.

He thought he was at Artingbury, fishing; that it was a misty summer's morning, and the fish rising beautifully. In his dream he hooked one after another, and the boy who was with him threw them into the basket.

At last there was one more difficult to land than the others; and the boy, in his eagerness to watch the sport, drew nearer and nearer to the brink, while the fisher, intent on his prey, failed to notice his companion's danger.

Suddenly there was a cry, a splash, and the boy disappeared from sight.

Next instant he rose again, however, and then, for the first time, Hertford O'Donnell saw his face.

It was one he knew well.

In a moment he plunged into the water, and struck out for the lad. He had him by the hair, he was turning to bring him back to land, when the stream suddenly changed into a wide, wild, shoreless sea, where the billows were chasing one another with a mad demoniac mirth. For a while O'Donnell kept the lad and himself afloat. They were swept under the waves, and came forth again, only to see larger waves rushing towards them; but through all the surgeon never loosened his hold until a tremendous billow engulfing them both, tore the boy from him.

With the horror of that he awoke, to hear a voice saying quite distinctly:

“Go to the hospital! — go at once!”

The surgeon started up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. The candle was flickering faintly in its socket. Brian, with his ears pricked forward, had raised his head at his master's sudden jump.

Everything was quiet, but still those words were ringing in his ear —

“Go to the hospital! — go at once!”

The tremendous peal of the bell over-night, and this sentence, seemed to be simultaneous.

That he was wanted at Guy's — wanted imperatively — came to O'Donnell like an inspiration.

Neither sense nor reason had anything to do with the conviction that roused him out of bed, and made him dress as speedily as possible, and grope his way down the staircase, Brian following.

He opened the front door, and passed out into the darkness. The rain was over, and the stars were shining as he pursued his way down Newport Market, and thence, winding in and out in a south-east direction, through Lincoln's Inn Fields and Old Square to Chancery Lane, whence he proceeded to St. Paul's.

Along the deserted streets he resolutely continued his walk. He did not know what he was going to Guy's for. Some instinct was urging him on, and he neither strove to combat nor control it. Only once had the thought of turning back occurred, and that was at the archway leading into Old Square. There he had paused for a moment, asking himself whether he were not gone stark, staring mad; but Guy's seemed preferable to the haunted house in Gerard Street, and he walked resolutely on, determining to say, if any surprise were expressed at his appearance, that he had been sent for.

On, thinking of many things; of his wild life in London; of the terrible cry he had heard overnight — that terrible wail which he could not drive away from his memory even as he entered Guy's, and confronted the porter, who said —

“You have just been sent for, sir; did you meet the messenger?”

Like one in a dream, Hertford O'Donnell heard him; like one in a dream, also, he asked what was the matter.

"Bad accident, sir; fire: fell off a balcony — unsafe — old building. Mother and child — a son; boy with compound fracture of thigh." This, the joint information of porter and house-surgeon, mingled together, and made a roar in Mr. O'Donnell's ears like the sound of the sea breaking on a shingly shore.

Only one sentence he understood perfectly — "Immediate amputation necessary." At this point he grew cool; he was the careful, cautious, successful surgeon in a moment.

"The child, you say?" he answered; "let me see him."

In the days of which I am writing, the two surgeons had to pass a staircase leading to the upper stories. On the lower step of this staircase, partially in shadow, Hertford O'Donnell beheld, as he came forward, an old woman seated.

An old woman with streaming grey hair, with attenuated arms, with head bowed forward, with scanty clothing, with bare feet; who never looked up at their approach, but sat unnoticed, shaking her head and wringing her hands in an extremity of grief.

"Who is that?" asked Mr. O'Donnell, almost involuntarily.

"Who is what?" demanded his companion.

"That — that woman," was the reply.

"What woman?"

"There — are you blind? — seated on the bottom step of the staircase. What is she doing?" persisted Mr. O'Donnell.

"There is no woman near us," his companion answered, looking at the rising surgeon very much as though he suspected him of seeing double.

"No woman!" scoffed Hertford. "Do you expect me to disbelieve the evidence of my own eyes?" and he walked up to the figure, meaning to touch it.

But as he essayed to do so, the woman seemed to rise in the air and float away, with her arms stretched high up over her head, uttering such a wail of pain,

and agony, and distress, as caused the Irishman's blood to curdle.

"My God! did you hear that?" he said to his companion.

"What?" was the reply.

Then, although he knew the sound had fallen on deaf ears, he answered —

"The wail of the banshee! Some of my people are doomed!"

"I trust not," answered the house-surgeon.

With nerves utterly shaken, Mr. O'Donnell walked forward to the accident ward. There, with his face shaded from the light, lay his patient — a young boy, with a compound fracture of the thigh.

In that ward, in the face of actual pain or danger capable of relief, the surgeon had never known faltering nor fear; and now he carefully examined the injury, felt the pulse, inquired as to the treatment pursued, and ordered the sufferer to be carried to the operating room.

While he was looking out his instruments he heard the boy lying on the table murmur faintly —

"Tell her not to cry so — tell her not to cry."

"What is he talking about?" Hertford O'Donnell inquired.

"The nurse says he has been speaking about some woman crying ever since he came in — his mother, most likely," answered one of the attendants.

"He is delirious, then?" observed the surgeon.

"No, sir," pleaded the boy, excitedly. "No; it is that woman — that woman with the grey hair. I saw her looking from the upper window before the balcony gave way. She has never left me since, and she won't be quiet, wringing her hands and crying."

"Can you see her now?" Hertford O'Donnell inquired, stepping to the side of the table. "Point out where she stands."

Then the lad stretched forth a feeble finger in the direction of the door, where clearly, as he had seen her seated on the stairs, the surgeon saw a woman standing

— a woman with grey hair and scanty clothing, and upstretched arms and bare feet.

“A word with you, sir,” O’Donnell said to the house-surgeon, drawing him back from the table. “I cannot perform this operation; send or some other person. I am ill: I am incapable.”

“But,” pleaded the other, “there is no time to get anyone else. We sent for Mr. — before we troubled you, but he was out of town, and all the rest of the surgeons live so far away. Mortification may set in at any moment, and —” then Hertford O’Donnell fell fainting on the floor.

How long he lay in that death-like swoon I cannot say: but when he returned to consciousness, the principal physician of Guy’s was standing beside him in the cold grey light of the Christmas morning.

“The boy?” murmured O’Donnell, faintly.

“Now, my dear fellow, keep yourself quiet,” was the reply.

“The boy?” he repeated, irritably. “Who operated?”

“No one,” Dr. — answered. “It would have been useless cruelty. Mortification had set in, and —”

Hertford O’Donnell turned his face to the wall, and his friend could not see it.

“Do not distress yourself,” went on the physician, kindly. “Allington says he could not have survived the operation in any case. He was quite delirious from the first, raving about a woman with grey hair, and —”

“Yes, I know,” Hertford O’Donnell interrupted; “and the boy had a mother, they told me, or I dreamt it.”

“Yes, bruised and shaken, but not seriously injured.”

“Has she blue eyes and fair hair — fair hair all rippling and wavy? Is she white as a lily, with just a faint flush of colour in her cheek? Is she young, and trusting, and innocent? No; I am wandering. She must be nearly thirty, now. Go, for God’s sake, and tell me if you can find a woman that you could imagine having been as a girl such as I describe.”

"Irish?" asked the doctor; and O'Donnell made a gesture of assent.

"It is she, then," was the reply; "a woman with the face of an angel."

"A woman who should have been my wife," the surgeon answered; "whose child was my son."

"Lord help you!" ejaculated the doctor. Then Hertford O'Donnell raised himself from the sofa where they had laid him, and told his companion the story of his life — how there had been bitter feud between his people and her people — how they were divided by old animosities and by difference of religion — how they had met by stealth, and exchanged rings and vows, all for nought — how his family had insulted hers, so that her father, wishful for her to marry a kinsman of his own, bore her off to a far-away land, and made her write him a letter of eternal farewell — how his own parents had kept all knowledge of the quarrel from him till she was utterly beyond his reach — how they had vowed to discard him unless he agreed to marry according to their wishes — how he left his home, and came to London, and pushed his fortune. All this Hertford O'Donnell repeated; and when he had finished, the bells were ringing for morning service — ringing loudly — ringing joyfully: "Peace on earth, good will towards men."

But there was little peace that morning for Hertford O'Donnell. He had to look on the face of his dead son, wherein he beheld, as though reflected, the face of the boy in his dream.

Stealthily he followed his friend, and beheld, with her eyes closed, her cheeks pale and pinched, her hair thinner, but still falling like a veil over her, the love of his youth, the only woman he had ever loved devotedly and unselfishly.

There is little space left here, to tell of how the two met at last — of how the stone of the years seemed suddenly rolled away from the tomb of their past, and their youth arose and returned to them even amid their tears.

She had been true to him, through persecution, through contumely, through kindness, which was more trying; through shame, and grief, and poverty, she had been loyal to the lover of her youth; and before the new year dawned there came a letter from Calgillan, saying that the banshee had been heard there, and praying Hertford, if he were still alive, to let bygones be bygones, in consideration of the long years of estrangement — the anguish and remorse of his afflicted parents.

More than that, Hertford O'Donnell, if a reckless man, was an honourable one; and so, on the Christmas Day when he was to have proposed for Miss Ingot, he went to that lady, and told her how he had wooed and won in the years of his youth one who after many days was miraculously restored to him; and from the hour in which he took her into his confidence he never thought her either vulgar or foolish, but rather he paid homage to the woman who, when she had heard the whole tale repeated, said, simply "Ask her to come to me till you claim her — and God bless you both."