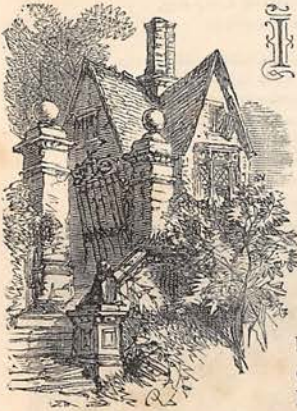




TREASURE HID IN THE FIELD.



IN a lonely farmhouse among the bleak hills of Cavan lived James McAlister, a descendant of one of the earliest Scotch settlers in that unfertile county. By dint of extreme thrift and industry his ancestors had managed to hold their own: the once barren farm had been cultivated till it became productive: an acre had been reclaimed from

the bog by James's grandfather; his father had ravished another from the mountain. Hostile Celtic neighbours, the original possessors of the land, coveted it more than ever when it became really worth possessing; and James felt that, in order to hold what his forefathers had made, he ought to work with a sword in one hand and a spade in the other.

It was in the end of April, 1798, just before the Rebellion broke out, when the very air around the unprotected farmhouses of the Scotch-Irish, as well as around the more stately homes of their landlords, seemed to breathe panic. James and his sons, Sandy and Robert, lads of seventeen and nineteen, were already enrolled in their landlord's band of yeomanry, and duty took them a good deal from home. They trembled for the wife and mother, left quite alone to guard the younger children; for the Irish servant, Biddy Farrelly, had been dismissed through fear of her treachery. But their defenceless co-religionists in the more disturbed counties looked to them for protection; and where duty called, they felt that they must go.

May advanced. The terror of the Protestants grew more and more intense, the exultation of the Catholics more evident. Biddy Farrelly came back to the lonely farmhouse on pretence of paying a friendly visit; but as she was leaving, she turned back to say, "The boys will be up soon; an' then there won't be one of yours left in Ireland. Wait a wee! We'll have our own again."

The anxious days wore round to the 23rd of May,

when the Rebellion broke out in fury. James was ordered off to the south with his comrades. Leaving poor Mrs. H—— in the Castle to her trembling faith in the protection of the soldiers in garrison ten miles away, let us glance at Mary McAlister in the humble farmhouse, standing in the midst of its corn, flax, and potato fields, with its byre and stable behind the thatched dwelling, and three elder-bushes at the dairy window. There was no sheltering plantation to hide it from the passers-by. No cattle grazed near, for the farmer's cows had been "houghed" that spring, and he had been afraid to leave his single remaining cow out of doors, by day or night. The place had a helpless, desolate look.

James was a brave man: no thought of danger to himself crossed his mind; but the tears coursed down his rough face as he clasped his poor wife in his arms to say farewell.

"There's that money, Mary," he faltered. "It's thankful I am that it's all in gold: it'll take nae harm if I bury it; an' if it please Him that we shall yet see quiet days, it'll be to the fore for the childer."

He went to a box always pushed under his bed at night, and brought out a bag containing all the savings of his thrifty, hard-working life.

"Call Sandy," said he, "for he ought to know where we bury it if anything happens to me."

"Whisht, whisht, James, dear!" cried the poor woman, laying her hand upon his lips.

Sandy accompanied his parents to the potato-field, carrying the bag of guineas. They stepped twenty feet out in a straight line from the poplar in the hedge, and there they dug deeply, and buried the money, looking round to see that no hostile eyes were watching. Then the parting moment arrived.

"Mary, woman," said James, again taking her in his arms, "mind weel where we hid the money; but dinna forget there's a treasure in the heavens that faileth not."

James and his sons fought well under their brave landlord. They passed ruined Protestant farmhouses in the county of Wexford, and saw blackened corpses lying across their thresholds; and then overwhelming anxiety for their own poor lonely dwelling weighed down their spirit; but for the wicked deeds of the rebels they brought punishment, and they continued to hope that Cavan was still quiet.

At length the Rebellion was crushed in Wexford, and James and his son Robert were then free to return home.

"How will I tell yer mother that Sandy's killed?" said the father, as they climbed the hill whence they could first catch a glimpse of the farmstead. James paused when he reached the summit, and his heart beat so tumultuously that he could hardly see plainly. There were the three elder-bushes at the dairy window, but how black they looked! There was the roof of the house, but how enveloped in smoke! Misgiving filled his mind, and he and Robert hurried on. Alas! their worst fears were realised. Mary and the little boys lay dead upon the kitchen floor beneath the smouldering rafters.

James's grief was wild, and he fell into a brain-fever, from which it was thought he could not recover. Life, however, was spared: he slowly got back his bodily health, but his memory was gone. It was, indeed, very well for him that he might pass the remainder of his days in a state of semi-consciousness, instead of for ever picturing the dead wife and children lying bleeding under their blackened roof.

Only one incident of his former life seemed to haunt him, and puzzle his shrouded intellect: he remembered having buried his money, but could not remember where. Sitting by the fireside smoking his pipe, he would sometimes look piteously at Robert, and, in the words of the one Book with which he had been familiar, repeat over and over again, "Treasure hid in the field—treasure hid in the field."

"I know, father—the money you buried," Robert used to reply; "but *where* is it?"

No answer. The poor old man passed his hand slowly over his brow, as if to woo back his memory, but in vain. The secret died with him. He found, let us hope, a "treasure in the heavens that faileth not."

Generations passed away. Each McAlister in succession told his son about the old man's buried money, and search was often made for it, but it was not discovered. In the year 1875 a servant-girl heard her master talk to his family about the tradition of the buried money. She listened with attention. It was the season of the potato-digging, and the field where James's gold had lain so long was again bearing a potato crop; but the hedge with the old poplar had been removed years before—indeed the whole place was so changed that James would not have known it, for years of tranquil industry had greatly improved the farm.

Rosanna the servant was one of the potato-gatherers. She suddenly caught sight of a gleam of gold. Sitting

down instantly upon the spot, and taking her right foot in her hands, she exclaimed, sobbing—

"Oh, I've hurt me foot! Me foot's sore hurt! What 'ill I do! what 'ill I do, any-way!"

"Take off yer shoe, an' see if you can see what's wrong," advised Joseph McAlister, who was digging close to her. "Here, Jane," he continued, "come you an' tak' Rosanna's place for awhile."

So Rosanna slowly took off her shoe and stocking, and, crying all the time, proceeded to rub and examine her foot. Meantime the master and his labourers moved further off. She waited until they had reached the other side of the field, and then she eagerly clutched at the buried gold. She dug in the clay with torn hands and broken finger-nails, till she recovered every buried coin. She rolled the treasure up in her petticoat, and when the group of labourers turned to come up the field again, they saw her limping towards the farmhouse, moving apparently with the greatest difficulty.

To dispose of the spoil secretly was her first object; and with cunning caution she waited until the usual time for leaving her place. Instead of seeking a new service, she went home to her own parish, and visited a usurer who had become very rich by means of extortionate money-lending. Having begun his career with but a few pounds, he was now owner of many hundreds.

The ignorant girl did not guess the value of the balloon guineas she unfolded from her petticoat; and she considered herself very fortunate when the man gave her twenty pounds for her entire find. With this sum she provided herself with what she thought a magnificent wardrobe, took her passage to America, and left the country as speedily as possible.

But for the usurer's vanity, the McAlisters would have remained in happy ignorance of the whole affair; but on a certain evening, when whiskey had opened his heart, he could not refrain from boasting that he had made four hundred pounds out of twenty. The intimate crony to whom he made the boast spoke in other companies of his friend's cleverness, and thus the story got wind, passed the borders of Rosanna's parish, and was wafted to the ears of the McAlisters.

Their annoyance may be imagined. They spoke of the tradition, handed down from father to son, that money had been buried somewhere upon the farm; but they could not prove that it had been there, nor swear that it had been found. They had neither seen the girl remove it nor the usurer receive it, and had nothing but rumour to go upon. It was a long time before their disappointment and vexation died away.

L. MCCLINTOCK.

