

SHROVE-TIDE IN IRELAND.

BY NARISSA ROSAVO.

WE were a Saxon invasion of tourists to Ireland. Being determined to see it thoroughly we were not in too great a hurry. Having therefore waited a reasonable time, by diligent search we at length accomplished one object of our visit. We came upon a conventional cottage. Vast hillocks and morasses of sandy manure fronted it. Green water flowed from this on to the road, in the midst of which a party of half-naked children played, busy with a rotten old wheelbarrow, which had just collapsed; and over whose decrepitude they were far merrier than young scions of noble houses often are in their gilded nurseries. "Is your mother at home?" we asked.

"Noa."

The lady we were in quest of, however, appeared just then at her half-door, a contrivance manufactured and used in Ireland to keep out the hens and let in *some* light; but not too much to reveal home secrets. As our guide was a kind patroness she was warmly welcomed, and requested to come "the clane way, your honour!" This was a very dirty path indeed, but we were rewarded. An immense sow lay by the fire, over which the "prathies" boiled; and near her gambolled twelve boniffs, all as happy within doors as were the children without.

It was Shrove Tuesday, and the eldest "boy" was to be married that night. "Would we not honour the wedding with our presence?" We accepted the invitation with the utmost delight; and, indeed, but for one contretemps must have completely enjoyed the frolic. It was a very late one. The priest was so busy all day, what with marrying, burying, and confessing, that our ceremony could not come off until so near midnight that the bride was to remain over Lent with her own people—being fetched at Easter by the husband and friends at what is called the Hauling Home festival, performed amid singing, drinking, shouting and bonfiring: all riding in procession, in couples: a man and woman on each horse.

The night was very dark. As we reached the ugly, unadorned chapel, the crowd grew more and more dense, but the utmost deference was shown to us, "the quality." We were ushered immediately into the vestry, as a mark of respect. There sat the bride by a gloomy little fire. She was very plain indeed, with high cheek bones and a deep fixed red colour, but her cloak was of finest black cloth, the hood being lined with the best satin. Our hostess, who was mistress of the soil here, sat down to make talk kindly for

this very uninteresting lady, to whose wedding we had come. She was rather inclined to be affable and communicative.

"I suppose you know Cornelius very well?"

"Pretty fair, thin."

"When did you see him first?"

"Why, thin, on Thursday last."

"But you have seen a good deal of him since, I suppose?"

"Noa thin, niver at all, but just now I saw him at the door there."

"And do you like him?"

"I do, thin; he's a purty lad."

"And does it cost much to get married?"

"It do this; twelve pound we pays to-night. It comes hard enough this bad year, and Corney he wanted his rivirence to wait until the harvest for the money; but, says he, 'Corney,' says he, 'tis for the love I have for ye I can't do it, boy; I done it three times,' says he, 'and it were a bad job for 'em all, those couples. One, the pair they died,' says he, 'afore the harvest, and t'other, why, they quarrelled like,' says he, 'and the third'—why, glory be to God, your honour, ma'am, I forget what he said on the third; but says Cornelius, 'Your honour's rivirence, Johanna an' me we'll make the money out somehow,' says he, 'an' the champagne too, for your rivirence to drink our health in.'"

Meantime the eventful hour was approaching. Johanna stood as the priest entered, and dropped a low curtesy. He was a nice-looking elderly man. His sacristan, the chapel wardeness, was a very old and horribly dirty woman. From some obscure and mouldy corner she drew forth Father John's vestments and got him into them. She then took, from the vestry chimney board, the rush candle stuck in a bottle by whose light we had all sat and talked, and she conducted us into the chapel. What she held made the only glimmer thrown upon the proceedings. The chapel corners, and the end of the aisle, or nave, gloried in complete obscurity. A great many steps led to the altar. Up these we were taken (somewhat to our distress) by the old woman and the priest. More by far was made of us heretics than of the principal personages in the drama. It was insisted upon that we should take seats within the sacarium. We had to yield. Through the whole ceremony the old woman waved her rushlight in its bottle, and fluttered rays and grease in every direction as far as they would go.

The marriage was all over in about ten minutes or so, and the bridegroom, who was even uglier than the bride, kissed his lady with a loud, merry smack. His rivirence prepared for a fresh couple, and we were allowed to mingle with the crowd. As we lingered over our departing, watching and listening, and being greatly entertained, we overheard a conversation between two men, who, it is to be supposed from the sequel, had taken more liquor than was wholesome.

"And why don't you get married to-night, Timsey?"

"'Taint none o' my fault. 'Tis nine of the colleens I asked to marry me to-day; and they refused me."

"The night's not over yet, man. Can't ye look about ye still."

This was rather difficult considering the semi-darkness, but to our consternation the speaker pointed out the tallest, who was also the largest of our party. "There's a fine, cliver, strapping young ooman. Maybe she'd have ye, boy."

Before we could escape the other had advanced and tapped the object of their admiration on the shoulder. "Come now, my girl, what do you say to our being spliced to-night, afore the Lent?" he observed coaxingly.

The kind old priest had his eye upon our safety, however. He advanced, and leaving the next couple to wait his leisure he ordered the rude clown to move off. "An' now, boys," he added, calling to all present in stentorian and dictatorial tones: "Now, boys, I'll have none o' ye building them little walls outside. Remember, when the ladies, and *Protestant ladies*, honour us with their presence you must treat them as such." What he here alluded to was an almost universal practice pursued on a marriage night, of putting up obstructions in the road for the wedding couples and guests to fall over and thereby cause laughter.

In accordance with his orders we were now conducted with all honour to the bride's home, and through the outer room, laid with long tables of food, to an inner and grander sanctum, specially prepared for such honourable guests. Piles of potatoes were heaped against the walls, but space for four chairs and a small round table had been left near the doorway.

Oranges, lump sugar, and a bottle of bad wine were laid ready for us to partake of and linger over. These viands are the regulation fare for the quality, who, while they sit sucking or crunching the sugar, are supposed to amuse themselves watching the feasting in the room without, where all goes on in a most "flawhule" style—"lashins," or abundance, of very fat pork being the staple commodity. And it is not a good feast unless so much is provided that a great deal must be left. To say "there was lashins and lavins" means, therefore, that all things were as they should be at the banquet.

When they could all eat no more, the tables were cleared away, and a door was taken off its hinges for the dancing. The smaller the space your feet cover in a jig or a hornpipe the more your skill is praised. Presently an old man made his way through the crowd to our alcove. He had no coat on, but made up the deficiency with three waistcoats, and two hats pressed tight down on his head. He seized and wrung our host's hand with much fervour. "Faith an' 'tis yourself I'm glad to see here, and I'd sooner shake hands with your honour than with the finest gentleman in the land, an' 'tis a wonder entirely to see me here to-night, at all at all. They asked

myself, sure enough, your honour, but niver a one of my boys. So I thought I'd bring 'em all wid me, just to show them ignorant Carties I had the finest four lads in the country."

The boys in question ranged in age betwixt thirty and forty, and had families of their own. They were introduced to us. Their old father was a great friend and admirer of his young mistress.

A few months later he was taken with his death sickness—a bad attack of bronchitis. The young lady was very sorry, and sent him down some jujubes, following them herself next day. "Well, Darby, and I hear you are very ill! I am so grieved. Did you take those things I sent you down, and did they do you good?"

The poor old gentleman lay smothering in his dirty bed, himself the dirtiest and most miserable thing in the house; but he must have his joke to the last, and this time it was a pathetic one. "Faith, thin," he muttered, "sure they did. And I'm thinkin', faith, that, though I'm an ugly ould savage of a lad, anything your honour gave me would do me good; an' if 'twas a kiss from your honour 'twould maybe set me up altogether."

His old wife was so shocked at this sally that the young lady had to retire as soon as might be, for quietness sake.

This old lady had a favourite hen, and when Darby had died she attached herself to it very exclusively, and would take it with her to hear mass. One day, unfortunately, while the office was proceeding, Mrs. Hen laid an egg, and talked too loudly of her performance. When next the priest met her he requested that in future the old woman should leave her pet at home.

"Sure maybe, your rivirence, 'tis the way the neighbours might steal it off me."

"Well, then, keep it quiet in future under your cloak, Biddy." And she did so.

