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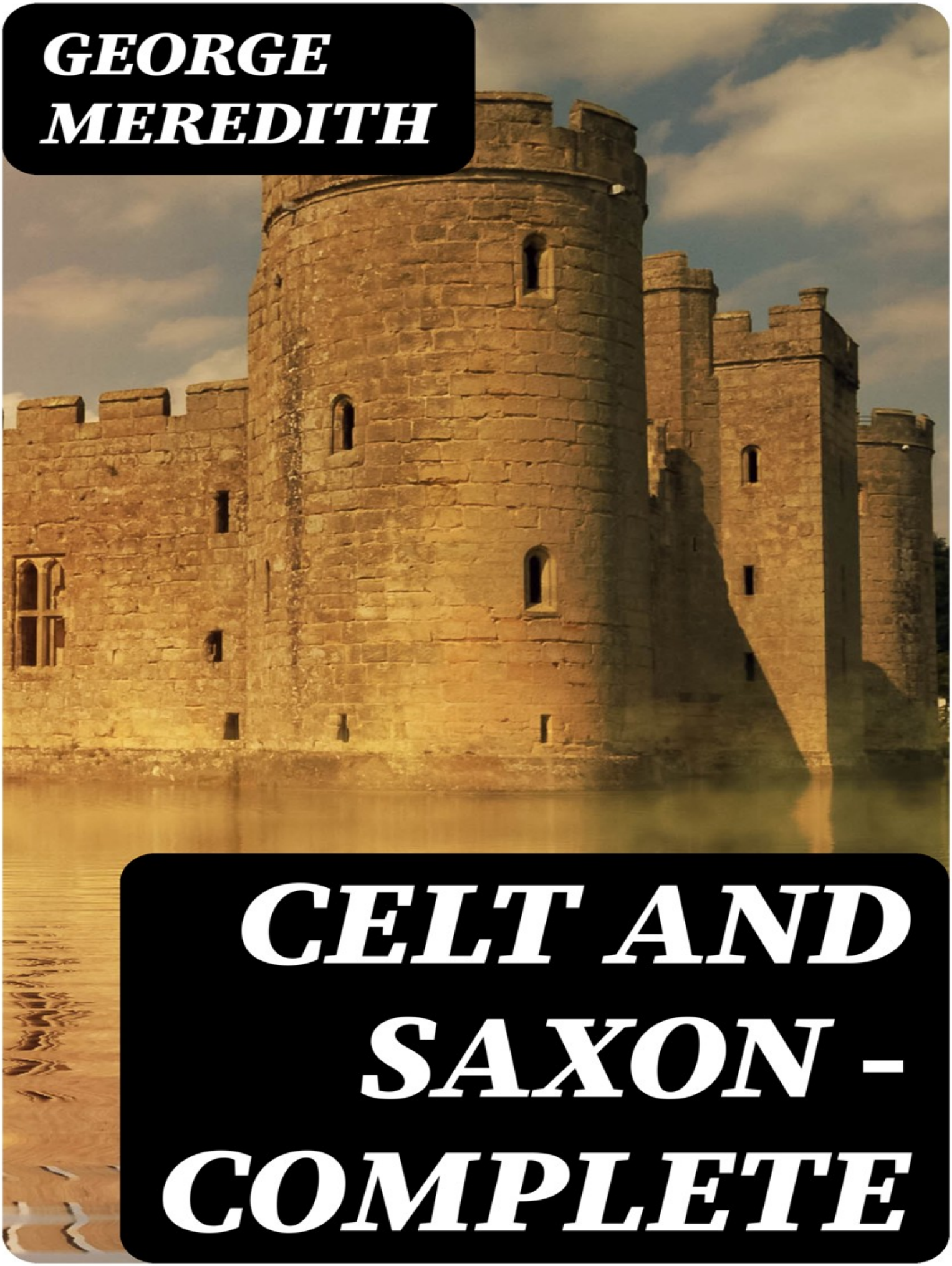

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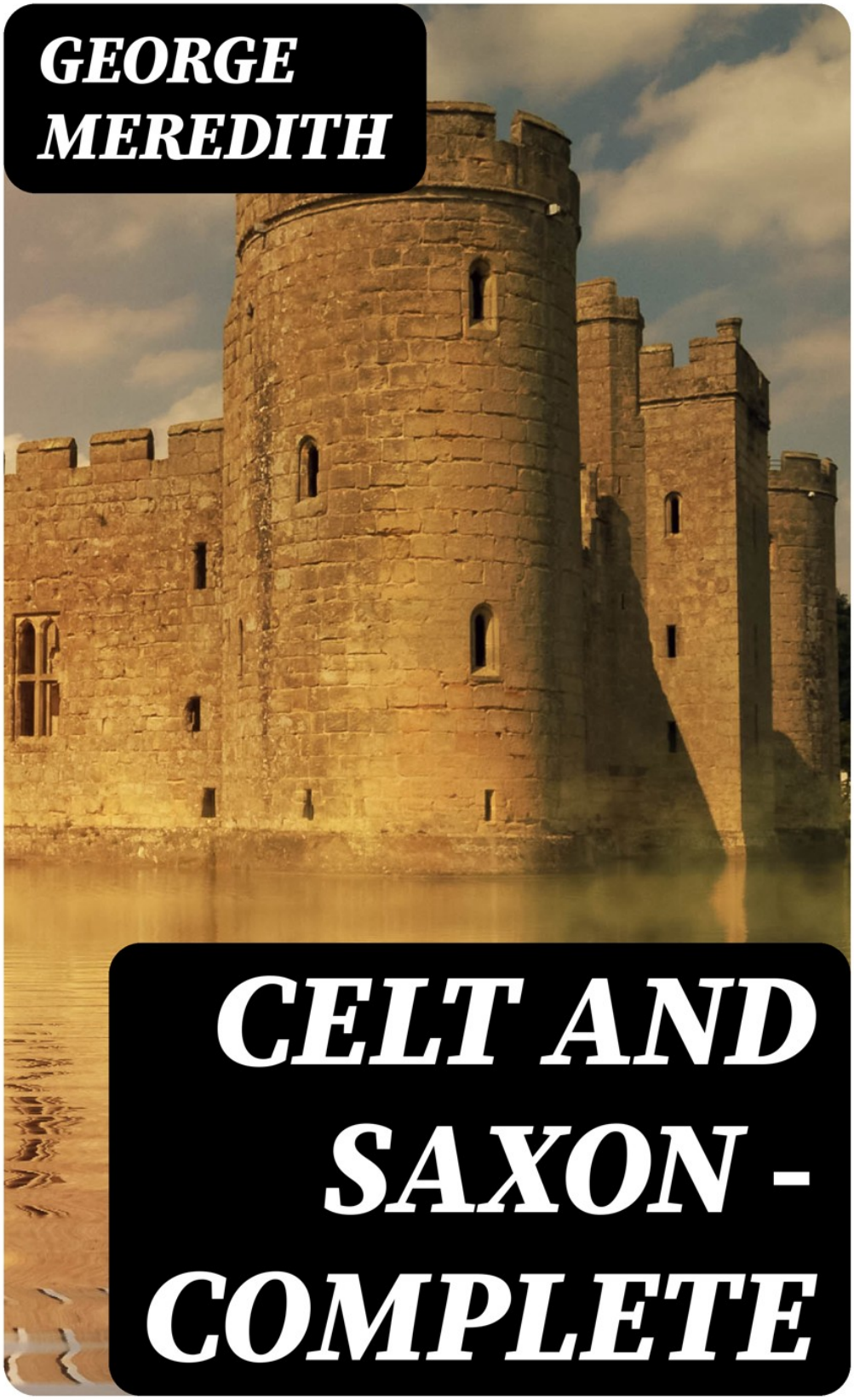

CELT AND SAXON - COMPLETE

George Meredith

Celt and Saxon — Complete

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CHAPTER I. WHEREIN AN EXCURSION IS MADE IN A CELTIC MIND

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A young Irish gentleman of the numerous clan O'Donnells, and a Patrick, hardly a distinction of him until we know him, had bound himself, by purchase of a railway-ticket, to travel direct to the borders of North Wales, on a visit to a notable landowner of those marches, the Squire Adister, whose family-seat was where the hills begin to lift and spy into the heart of black mountains. Examining his ticket with an apparent curiosity, the son of a greener island debated whether it would not be better for him to follow his inclinations, now that he had gone so far as to pay for the journey, and stay. But his inclinations were also subject to question, upon his considering that he had expended pounds English for the privilege of making the journey in this very train. He asked himself earnestly what was the nature of the power which forced him to do it—a bad genius or a good: and it seemed to him a sort of answer, inasmuch as it silenced the contending parties, that he had been the victim of an impetus. True; still his present position involved a certain outlay of money simply, not at all his bondage to the instrument it had procured for him, and that was true; nevertheless, to buy a ticket to shy it away is an incident so uncommon, that if we can but pause to dwell on the singularity of the act, we are unlikely to abjure our fellowship with them who would not be guilty of it; and therefore, by the aid of his reflections and a remainder of the impetus, Mr. Patrick O'Donnell stepped into a carriage of

the train like any ordinary English traveller, between whom and his destination there is an agreement to meet if they can.

It is an experience of hesitating minds, be they Saxon or others, that when we have submitted our persons to the charge of public companies, immediately, as if the renouncing of our independence into their hands had given us a taste of a will of our own, we are eager for the performance of their contract to do what we are only half inclined to; the train cannot go fast enough to please us, though we could excuse it for breaking down; stoppages at stations are impertinences, and the delivery of us at last on the platform is an astonishment, for it is not we who have done it—we have not even desired it. To be imperfectly in accord with the velocity precipitating us upon a certain point, is to be going without our heads, which have so much the habit of supposing it must be whither we intend, when we go in a determined manner, that a doubt of it distracts the understanding—decapitates us; suddenly to alight, moreover, and find ourselves dropped at the heels of flying Time, like an unconsidered bundle, is anything but a reconstruction of the edifice. The natural revelry of the blood in speed suffers a violent shock, not to speak of our notion of being left behind, quite isolated and unsound. Or, if you insist, the condition shall be said to belong exclusively to Celtic nature, seeing that it had been drawn directly from a scion of one of those tribes.

Young Patrick jumped from the train as headless as good St. Denis. He was a juvenile thinker, and to discover himself here, where he both wished and wished not to be, now

deeming the negative sternly in the ascendant, flicked his imagination with awe of the influence of the railway service upon the destinies of man. Settling a mental debate about a backward flight, he drove across the land so foreign to his eyes and affections, and breasted a strong tide of wishes that it were in a contrary direction. He would rather have looked upon the desert under a sand-storm, or upon a London suburb yet he looked thirstingly. Each variation of landscape of the curved highway offered him in a moment decisive features: he fitted them to a story he knew: the whole circle was animated by a couple of pale mounted figures beneath no happy light. For this was the air once breathed by Adiante Adister, his elder brother Philip's love and lost love: here she had been to Philip flame along the hill-ridges, his rose-world in the dust-world, the saintly in his earthly. And how had she rewarded him for that reverential love of her? She had forborne to kill him. The bitter sylph of the mountain lures men to climb till she winds them in vapour and leaves them groping, innocent of the red crags below. The delicate thing had not picked his bones: Patrick admitted it; he had seen his brother hale and stout not long back. But oh! she was merciless, she was a witch. If ever queen-witch was, she was the crowned one!

For a personal proof, now: he had her all round him in a strange district though he had never cast eye on her. Yonder bare hill she came racing up with a plume in the wind: she was over the long brown moor, look where he would: and vividly was she beside the hurrying beck where it made edges and chattered white. He had not seen, he could not imagine her face: angelic dashed with demon beauty, was

his idea of the woman, and there is little of a portrait in that; but he was of a world where the elemental is more individual than the concrete, and unconceived of sight she was a recognised presence for the green-island brain of a youth whose manner of hating was to conjure her spirit from the air and let fly his own in pursuit of her.

It has to be stated that the object of the youngster's expedition to Earlsfont was perfectly simple in his mind, however much it went against his nature to perform it. He came for the purpose of obtaining Miss Adister's Continental address; to gather what he could of her from her relatives, and then forthwith to proceed in search of her, that he might plead with her on behalf of his brother Philip, after a four years' division of the lovers. Could anything be simpler? He had familiarised himself with the thought of his advocacy during those four years. His reluctance to come would have been accountable to the Adisters by a sentiment of shame at his family's dealings with theirs: in fact, a military captain of the O'Donnells had in old days played the adventurer and charmed a maid of a certain age into yielding her hand to him; and the lady was the squire of Earlsfont's only sister: she possessed funded property. Shortly after the union, as one that has achieved the goal of enterprise, the gallant officer retired from the service nor did north-western England put much to his credit the declaration of his wife's pronouncing him to be the best of husbands. She naturally said it of him in eulogy; his own relatives accepted it in some contempt, mixed with a relish of his hospitality: his wife's were constant in citing his gain by the marriage. Could he possibly have been less than that? they exclaimed.

An excellent husband, who might easily have been less than that, he was the most devoted of cousins, and the liberal expenditure of his native eloquence for the furtherance of Philip's love-suit was the principal cause of the misfortune, if misfortune it could subsequently be called to lose an Adiante.

The Adister family were not gifted to read into the heart of a young man of a fanciful turn. Patrick had not a thought of shame devolving on him from a kinsman that had shot at a mark and hit it. Who sees the shame of taking an apple from a garden of the Hesperides? And as England cultivates those golden, if sometimes wrinkled, fruits, it would have seemed to him, in thinking about it, an entirely lucky thing for the finder; while a question of blood would have fired his veins to rival heat of self-assertion, very loftily towering: there were Kings in Ireland: cry for one of them in Uladh and you will hear his name, and he has descendants yet! But the youth was not disposed unnecessarily to blazon his princeliness. He kept it in modest reserve, as common gentlemen keep their physical strength. His reluctance to look on Earlsfont sprang from the same source as unacknowledged craving to see the place, which had precipitated him thus far upon his road: he had a horror of scenes where a faithless girl had betrayed her lover. Love was his visionary temple, and his idea of love was the solitary light in it, painfully susceptible to coldair currents from the stories of love abroad over the world. Faithlessness he conceived to be obnoxious to nature; it stained the earth and was excommunicated; there could be no pardon of the crime, barely any for repentance. He conceived it in the

feminine; for men are not those holy creatures whose conduct strikes on the soul with direct edge: a faithless man is but a general villain or funny monster, a subject rejected of poets, taking no hue in the flat chronicle of history: but a faithless woman, how shall we speak of her! Women, sacredly endowed with beauty and the wonderful vibrating note about the very mention of them, are criminal to hideousness when they betray. Cry, False! on them, and there is an instant echo of bleeding males in many circles, like the poor quavering flute-howl of transformed beasts, which at some remembering touch bewail their higher state. Those women are sovereignly attractive, too, loathsomely. Therein you may detect the fiend.

Our moralist had for some time been glancing at a broad, handsome old country mansion on the top of a wooded hill backed by a swarm of mountain heads all purple-dark under clouds flying thick to shallow, as from a brush of sepia. The dim silver of half-lighted lakewater shot along below the terrace. He knew the kind of sky, having oftener seen that than any other, and he knew the house before it was named to him and he had flung a discolouring thought across it. He contemplated it placably and studiously, perhaps because the shower-folding armies of the fields above likened its shadowed stillness to that of his Irish home. There had this woman lived! At the name of Earlsfont she became this witch, snake, deception. Earlsfont was the title and summary of her black story: the reverberation of the word shook up all the chapters to pour out their poison.

CHAPTER II. MR. ADISTER

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Mr. Patrick O'Donnell drove up to the gates of Earlsfont notwithstanding these emotions, upon which light matter it is the habit of men of his blood too much to brood; though it is for our better future to have a capacity for them, and the insensible race is the oxenish.

But if he did so when alone, the second man residing in the Celt put that fellow by and at once assumed the social character on his being requested to follow his card into Mr. Adister's library. He took his impression of the hall that had heard her voice, the stairs she had descended, the door she had passed through, and the globes she had perchance laid hand on, and the old mappemonde, and the severely-shining orderly regiment of books breathing of her whether she had opened them or not, as he bowed to his host, and in reply to, 'So, sir! I am glad to see you,' said swimmingly that Earlsfont was the first house he had visited in this country: and the scenery reminded him of his part of Ireland: and on landing at Holyhead he had gone off straight to the metropolis by appointment to meet his brother Philip, just returned from Canada a full captain, who heartily despatched his compliments and respects, and hoped to hear of perfect health in this quarter of the world. And Captain Con the same, and he was very flourishing.

Patrick's opening speech concluded on the sound of a short laugh coming from Mr. Adister.

It struck the young Irishman's ear as injurious and scornful in relation to Captain Con; but the remark ensuing

calmed him:

'He has no children.'

'No, sir; Captain Con wasn't born to increase the number of our clan,' Patrick rejoined; and thought: By heaven! I get a likeness of her out of you, with a dash of the mother mayhap somewhere. This was his Puck-manner of pulling a girdle round about from what was foremost in his head to the secret of his host's quiet observation; for, guessing that such features as he beheld would be slumped on a handsome family, he was led by the splendid severity of their lines to perceive an illimitable pride in the man likely to punish him in his offspring, who would inherit that as well; so, as is the way with the livelier races, whether they seize first or second the matter or the spirit of what they hear, the vivid indulgence of his own ideas helped him to catch the right meaning by the tail, and he was enlightened upon a domestic unhappiness, although Mr. Adister had not spoken miserably. The 'dash of the mother' was thrown in to make Adiante, softer, and leave a loophole for her relenting.

The master of Earlsfont stood for a promise of beauty in his issue, requiring to be softened at the mouth and along the brows, even in men. He was tall, and had clear Greek outlines: the lips were locked metal, thin as edges of steel, and his eyes, when he directed them on the person he addressed or the person speaking, were as little varied by motion of the lids as eyeballs of a stone bust. If they expressed more, because they were not sculptured eyes, it was the expression of his high and frigid nature rather than any of the diversities pertaining to sentiment and shades of meaning.

'You have had the bequest of an estate,' Mr. Adister said, to compliment him by touching on his affairs.

'A small one; not a quarter of a county,' said Patrick.

'Productive, sir?'

''Tis a tramp of discovery, sir, to where bog ends and cultivation begins.'

'Bequeathed to you exclusively over the head of your elder brother, I understand.'

Patrick nodded assent. 'But my purse is Philip's, and my house, and my horses.'

'Not bequeathed by a member of your family?'

'By a distant cousin, chancing to have been one of my godmothers.'

'Women do these things,' Mr. Adister said, not in perfect approbation of their doings.

'And I think too, it might have gone to the elder,' Patrick replied to his tone.

'It is not your intention to be an idle gentleman?'

'No, nor a vagrant Irishman, sir.'

'You propose to sit down over there?'

'When I've more brains to be of service to them and the land, I do.'

Mr. Adister pulled the arm of his chair. 'The professions are crammed. An Irish gentleman owning land might do worse. I am in favour of some degree of military training for all gentlemen. You hunt?'

Patrick's look was, 'Give me a chance'; and Mr. Adister continued: 'Good runs are to be had here; you shall try them. You are something of a shot, I suppose. We hear of gentlemen now who neither hunt nor shoot. You fence?'

'That's to say, I've had lessons in the art.'

'I am not aware that there is now an art of fencing taught in Ireland.'

'Nor am I,' said Patrick; 'though there's no knowing what goes on in the cabins.'

Mr. Adister appeared to acquiesce. Observations of sly import went by him like the whispering wind.

'Your priests should know,' he said.

To this Patrick thought it well not to reply. After a pause between them, he referred to the fencing.

'I was taught by a Parisian master of the art, sir.'

'You have been to Paris?'

'I was educated in Paris.'

'How? Ah!' Mr. Adister corrected himself in the higher notes of recollection. 'I think I have heard something of a Jesuit seminary.'

'The Fathers did me the service to knock all I know into me, and call it education, by courtesy,' said Patrick, basking in the unobscured frown of his host.

'Then you are accustomed to speak French?' The interrogation was put to extract some balm from the circumstance.

Patrick tried his art of fence with the absurdity by saying: 'All but like a native.'

'These Jesuits taught you the use of the foils?'

'They allowed me the privilege of learning, sir.'

After meditation, Mr. Adister said: 'You don't dance?' He said it speculating on the' kind of gentleman produced in Paris by the disciples of Loyola.

'Pardon me, sir, you hit on another of my accomplishments.'

'These Jesuits encourage dancing?'

'The square dance—short of the embracing: the valse is under interdict.'

Mr. Adister peered into his brows profoundly for a glimpse of the devilry in that exclusion of the valse.

What object had those people in encouraging the young fellow to be a perfect fencer and dancer, so that he should be of the school of the polite world, and yet subservient to them?

'Thanks to the Jesuits, then, you are almost a Parisian,' he remarked; provoking the retort:

'Thanks to them, I've stored a little, and Paris is to me as pure a place as four whitewashed walls:' Patrick added: 'without a shadow of a monk on them.' Perhaps it was thrown in for the comfort of mundane ears afflicted sorely, and no point of principle pertained to the slur on a monk.

Mr. Adister could have exclaimed, That shadow of the monk! had he been in an exclamatory mood. He said: 'They have not made a monk of you, then.'

Patrick was minded to explain how that the Jesuits are a religious order exercising worldly weapons. The lack of precise words admonished him of the virtue of silence, and he retreated—with a quiet negative: 'They have not.'

'Then, you are no Jesuit?' he was asked.

Thinking it scarcely required a response, he shrugged.

'You would not change your religion, sir?' said Mr. Adister in seeming anger.

Patrick thought he would have to rise: he half fancied himself summoned to change his religion or depart from the house.

'Not I,' said he.

'Not for the title of Prince?' he was further pressed, and he replied:

'I don't happen to have an ambition for the title of Prince.'

'Or any title!' interjected Mr. Adister, 'or whatever the devil can offer!—or,' he spoke more pointedly, 'for what fools call a brilliant marriage?'

'My religion?' Patrick now treated the question seriously and raised his head: 'I'd not suffer myself to be asked twice.'

The sceptical northern-blue eyes of his host dwelt on him with their full repellent stare.

The young Catholic gentleman expected he might hear a frenetic zealot roar out: Be off!

He was not immediately reassured by the words 'Dead or alive, then, you have a father!'

The spectacle of a state of excitement without a show of feeling was novel to Patrick. He began to see that he was not implicated in a wrath that referred to some great offender, and Mr. Adister soon confirmed his view by saying: 'You are no disgrace to your begetting, sir!'

With that he quitted his chair, and hospitably proposed to conduct his guest over the house and grounds.

CHAPTER III. CAROLINE

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Men of the Adister family having taken to themselves brides of a very dusty pedigree from the Principality, there were curious rough heirlooms to be seen about the house, shields on the armoury walls and hunting-horns, and drinking-horns, and spears, and chain-belts bearing clasps of heads of beasts; old gold ornaments, torques, blue-stone necklaces, under glass-cases, were in the library; huge rings that must have given the wearers fearful fists; a shirt of coarse linen with a pale brown spot on the breast, like a fallen beech-leaf; and many sealed parchment-skins, very precious, for an inspection of which, as Patrick was bidden to understand, History humbly knocked at the Earlsfont hall-doors; and the proud muse made her transcripts of them kneeling. He would have been affected by these wonders had any relic of Adiante appeased his thirst. Or had there been one mention of her, it would have disengaged him from the incessant speculations regarding the daughter of the house, of whom not a word was uttered. No portrait of her was shown. Why was she absent from her home so long? where was she? How could her name be started? And was it she who was the sinner in her father's mind? But the idolatrous love between Adiante and her father was once a legend: they could not have been cut asunder. She had offered up her love of Philip as a sacrifice to it: Patrick recollected that, and now with a softer gloom on his brooding he released her from the burden of his grand charge of unfaithfulness to the truest of lovers, by

acknowledging that he was in the presence of the sole rival of his brother. Glorious girl that she was, her betrayal of Philip had nothing of a woman's base caprice to make it infamous: she had sacrificed him to her reading of duty; and that was duty to her father; and the point of duty was in this instance rather a sacred one. He heard voices murmur that she might be praised. He remonstrated with them, assuring them, as one who knew, that a woman's first duty is her duty to her lover; her parents are her second thought. Her lover, in the consideration of a real soul among the shifty creatures, is her husband; and have we not the word of heaven directing her to submit herself to him who is her husband before all others? That peerless Adiante had previously erred in the upper sphere where she received her condemnation, but such a sphere is ladder and ladder and silver ladder high above your hair-splitting pates, you children of earth, and it is not for you to act on the verdict in decrying her: rather 'tis for you to raise hymns of worship to a saint.

Thus did the ingenious Patrick change his ground and gain his argument with the celerity of one who wins a game by playing it without an adversary. Mr. Adister had sprung a new sense in him on the subject of the renunciation of the religion. No thought of a possible apostasy had ever occurred to the youth, and as he was aware that the difference of their faith had been the main cause of the division of Adiante and Philip, he could at least consent to think well of her down here, that is, on our flat surface of earth. Up there, among the immortals, he was compelled to shake his head at her still, and more than sadly in certain

moods of exaltation, reprovingly; though she interested him beyond all her sisterhood above, it had to be confessed.

They traversed a banqueting-hall hung with portraits, to two or three of which the master of Earlsfont carelessly pointed, for his guest to be interested in them or not as he might please. A reception-hall flung folding-doors on a grand drawing-room, where the fires in the grates went through the ceremony of warming nobody, and made a show of keeping the house alive. A modern steel cuirass, helmet and plume at a corner of the armoury reminded Mr. Adister to say that he had worn the uniform in his day. He cast an odd look at the old shell containing him when he was a brilliant youth. Patrick was marched on to Colonel Arthur's rooms, and to Captain David's, the sailor. Their father talked of his two sons. They appeared to satisfy him. If that was the case, they could hardly have thrown off their religion. Already Patrick had a dread of naming the daughter. An idea struck him that she might be the person who had been guilty of it over there on the Continent. What if she had done it, upon a review of her treatment of her lover, and gone into a convent to wait for Philip to come and claim her?—saying, 'Philip, I've put the knife to my father's love of me; love me double'; and so she just half swoons, enough to show how the dear angel looks in her sleep: a trick of kindness these heavenly women have, that we heathen may get a peep of their secret rose-enfolded selves; and dream 's no word, nor drunken, for the blessed mischief it works with us.

Supposing it so, it accounted for everything: for her absence, and her father's abstention from a mention of her,

and the pretty good sort of welcome Patrick had received; for as yet it was unknown that she did it all for an O'Donnell.

These being his reflections, he at once accepted a view of her that so agreeably quieted his perplexity, and he leapt out of his tangle into the happy open spaces where the romantic things of life are as natural as the sun that rises and sets. There you imagine what you will; you live what you imagine. An Adiante meets her lover another Adiante, the phantom likeness of her, similar to the finger-tips, hovers to a meeting with some one whose heart shakes your manful frame at but a thought of it. But this other Adiante is altogether a secondary conception, barely descried, and chased by you that she may interpret the mystical nature of the happiness of those two, close-linked to eternity, in advance. You would learn it, if she would expound it; you are ready to learn it, for the sake of knowledge; and if you link yourself to her and do as those two are doing, it is chiefly in a spirit of imitation, in sympathy with the darting couple ahead....

Meanwhile he conversed, and seemed, to a gentleman unaware of the vaporous activities of his brain, a young fellow of a certain practical sense.

'We have not much to teach you in: horseflesh,' Mr. Adister said, quitting the stables to proceed to the gardens.

'We must look alive to keep up our breed, sir,' said Patrick. 'We're breeding too fine: and soon we shan't be able to horse our troopers. I call that the land for horses where the cavalry's well-mounted on a native breed.'

'You have your brother's notions of cavalry, have you!'

'I leave it to Philip to boast what cavalry can do on the field. He knows: but he knows that troopers must be mounted: and we're fineing more and more from bone: with the sales to foreigners! and the only chance of their not beating us is that they'll be so good as follow our bad example. Prussia's well horsed, and for the work it's intended to do, the Austrian light cavalry's a model. So I'm told. I'll see for myself. Then we sit our horses too heavy. The Saxon trooper runs headlong to flesh. 'Tis the beer that fattens and swells him. Properly to speak, we've no light cavalry. The French are studying it, and when they take to studying, they come to the fore. I'll pay a visit to their breeding establishments. We've no studying here, and not a scrap of system that I see. All the country seems armed for bullying the facts, till the periodical panic arrives, and then it 's for lying flat and roaring—and we'll drop the curtain, if you please.'

'You say we,' returned Mr. Adister. 'I hear you launched at us English by the captain, your cousin, who has apparently yet to learn that we are one people.'

'We 're held together and a trifle intermixed; I fancy it's we with him and with me when we're talking of army or navy,' said Patrick. 'But Captain Con's a bit of a politician: a poor business, when there's nothing to be done.'

'A very poor business!' Mr. Adister rejoined,

'If you'd have the goodness to kindle his enthusiasm, he'd be for the first person plural, with his cap in the air,' said Patrick.

'I detest enthusiasm.

'You're not obliged to adore it to give it a wakener.

'Pray, what does that mean?'

Patrick cast about to reply to the formal challenge for an explanation.

He began on it as it surged up to him: 'Well, sir, the country that's got hold of us, if we 're not to get loose. We don't count many millions in Europe, and there's no shame in submitting to force majeure, if a stand was once made; and we're mixed up, 'tis true, well or ill; and we're stronger, both of us, united than tearing to strips: and so, there, for the past! so long as we can set our eyes upon something to admire, instead of a bundle squatting fat on a pile of possessions and vowing she won't budge; and taking kicks from a big foot across the Atlantic, and shaking bayonets out of her mob-cap for a little one's cock of the eye at her: and she's all for the fleshpots, and calls the rest of mankind fools because they're not the same: and so long as she can trim her ribands and have her hot toast and tea, with a suspicion of a dram in it, she doesn't mind how heavy she sits: nor that 's not the point, nor 's the land question, nor the potato crop, if only she wore the right sort of face to look at, with a bit of brightness about it, to show an idea inside striking alight from the day that's not yet nodding at us, as the tops of big mountains do: or if she were only braced and gallant, and cried, Ready, though I haven't much outlook! We'd be satisfied with her for a handsome figure. I don't know whether we wouldn't be satisfied with her for politeness in her manners. We'd like her better for a spice of devotion to alight higher up in politics and religion. But the key of the difficulty's a sparkle of enthusiasm. It's part business, and the greater part sentiment. We want a rousing

in the heart of us; or else we'd be pleased with her for sitting so as not to overlap us entirely: we'd feel more at home, and behold her more respectfully. We'd see the policy of an honourable union, and be joined to you by more than a telegraphic cable. That's Captain Con, I think, and many like him.'

Patrick finished his airy sketch of the Irish case in a key signifying that he might be one among the many, but unobtrusive.

'Stick to horses!' observed Mr. Adister.

It was pronounced as the termination to sheer maundering.

Patrick talked on the uppermost topic for the remainder of their stroll.

He noticed that his host occasionally allowed himself to say, 'You Irish': and he reflected that the saying, 'You English,' had been hinted as an offence.

He forgot to think that he had possibly provoked this alienation in a scornfully proud spirit. The language of metaphor was to Mr. Adister fool's froth. He conceded the use of it to the Irish and the Welsh as a right that stamped them for what they were by adopting it; and they might look on a country as a 'she,' if it amused them: so long as they were not recalcitrant, they were to be tolerated, they were a part of us; doubtless the nether part, yet not the less a part for which we are bound to exercise a specially considerate care, or else we suffer, for we are sensitive there: this is justice but the indications by fiddle-faddle verbiage of anything objectionable to the whole in the part aroused an irritability that speedily endued him with the sense of sanity