

LEGEND OF JACK-O'-THE-LANTERN.



ONCE upon a time there lived a man, whose natural disposition was churlish and morose, and the asperities of whose soul had not been softened down by the influence of a knowledge of God; and his acquirements in the things of this world did not much exceed the narrow skill which enabled him to cultivate the farm on which he lived. He was known throughout the country for his unsocial manners—his blazing hearth never cheered the wayworn stranger—and the repulsed beggar never again sought his inhospitable door. In short, he lived the reproach of humanity, and his name was a bye-word in the land.

Jack, for so this churl was named, was returning home one night from a neighboring fair, when, as he approached a dark and rapid stream at a particular ford, which the imagination of the people of that time had associated with some tales of murder and superstition, he heard a groan that, to his fancy, proceeded from some tortured spirit. He suddenly drew in the mare on which he rode—all the horrid tales recorded of that dark glen rushed to his memory—and as a second and a third sound of agony smote his ear, his bristling hair stood erect, the cold beads of dismay oozed at every pore—nor did the whiskey which he quaffed that evening in his own sordid way, prevent the current of his blood from freezing at his very heart; but when the horrid sounds were again repeated, he summoned nerve sufficient to inquire what he could do for the tortured soul that crossed his path in that glen of gloom and horror.

“For the love of heaven,” said the voice, “take me to some human habitation; for I am no tortured spirit, but a poor homeless wanderer who have lost my way on the wild moor, and have lain down here to die, for I durst not cross this rapid water.

So may mercy be shown you in your hour of need, and in the day of your distress."

Delivered from supernatural terrors, the peasant's soul softened into humanity. With an indescribable feeling of pity, which never till that hour reached his heart, he dismounted, and saw extended on the damp earth a very aged man, with a white beard, who was evidently borne down with the load of years and misery. He wrapped the aged sufferer in his warm great coat, placed him on the saddle, and then mounted on the crupper, he supported the object of his pity till he reached home. His wife smiled to behold her gruff husband engaged in the unusual office of hospitality, and wondered much what charm could have soothed his unsocial soul to kindness. The miserable stranger received every necessary that her cupboard afforded—was laid to rest in a warm bed, and in a short time his grief and infirmities were forgotten in sound repose.

About the dawn of day, Jack was awakened from his sleep by a bright blaze of light that shone through all the cabin. Unable to account for this sudden illumination, he started to his feet from the bed, when his progress was instantly checked, and his astonishment greatly augmented to behold a young man of celestial beauty, wrapt in white garments. His shoulders were furnished with wings, the plumage of which exceeded in whiteness the down of swans; and as he spoke, his words stole like the notes of a heavenly harp, to the soul of the wondering cottager.

"Mortal," said the celestial visitant, "I am one of the angels commissioned to watch over the sons of Adam. I heard thy brethren exclaim against thy unsocial temper, and utter disregard of the sacred virtue of hospitality; but I find that some generous seeds of virtue have lain uncultivated with thee. In me thou beholdest the miserable senior whom thy generous humanity relieved—I have shared thy frugal fare and lowly bed: my blessing shall remain with thy house, but to thyself in particular I bestow three wishes—then freely ask, as I shall freely give. May wisdom bound the desire of thy soul."

Jack paused for a moment, and then said, "There's a sycamore tree before the door, fair and wide-spreading, but every passer-by must pluck a bough from it—grant that every one touching it with such intent, may cling to the tree till I release him. Secondly, I do wish that any person who sits in my elbow-chair, may never be able to leave it, nor the chair to leave the ground, without my consent. There's a wooden box on the wall—I keep it to hold the thread, and awls, and hammer, with which I mend my brogues, but the moment I turn my back, every clown comes here cobbling for himself: my third request is, that the person who puts his hand into the box, might not withdraw it, and that the box may stick to the wall, during my pleasure. My wishes are ended."

The angel sighed as he granted the boon; and the legend further adds, that Jack was from that hour excluded from all hope of heaven, because he had eternal happiness within his wish, and neglected to secure the vast gift; but the angel's blessing remained with his house—his children were many, and his crops and cattle thrive with large increase.

In twenty years after, as Jack sat one evening in his elbow-chair, musing on his earthly affairs, a strange and unearthly smell of brimstone assailed his nose; and when he turned round to ascertain the cause, the appearance of a tall, dark-looking being, graced with a pair of horns, a cloven foot, and a long tail, which he carried rather genteely tucked under his arm, further increased his astonishment. The stranger immediately opened his message—mentioned Jack's exclusion from heaven, and spoke of his infernal master's anxiety to see him speedily at his own hot home.

When Jack heard these awful tidings, he repressed every symptom of alarm, and, starting to his feet, bid the stranger welcome. "I hope," he continued, "your honor won't be above sitting in the elbow-chair, and tasting a drop of poteen this cold evening, while I put on my Sunday clothes."

The demon complied.

"There," said his host, "is a real drop of the native. The

sorra a gauger ever set his ugly face on it. Why, then, would your honor tell me if ye have any gaugers in — your native place?"

"We have lots of them," replied he of the cloven hoof; but we give them other employment than still-hunting; but come, the road is long, and we must away."

So saying, he motioned to leave his seat, but found himself immovably fixed therein, while the guileful mortal set his flail to work on his captive enemy. Vain every entreaty for mercy — in vain he kicked, and flung his arms around; the swift descending instrument of vengeance smashed every bone in his skin; and it was only when exhausted, and unable to prosecute his task, that he consented to liberate the miserable being, on his solemn oath, that he would never more visit this upper world on a similar errand.

Satan has more than one courier to do his errands. A second messenger, provided with the necessary instruction for shunning the fatal chair and flail, was despatched to fetch the doomed mortal, who was ruminating, next day, on the adventure of the preceding evening, when the latch was raised, and a stranger cautiously entered. When he had explained his business, Jack requested that he would be seated, and expressed his willingness to depart when he had put a stitch or two in his old brogue. The courier was too cautious, and declined to sit; but Jack took the chair, pulled off his broken shoe, and requested the demon to hand him an awl from the small box. The infernal visitant obeyed; but found that he could neither withdraw his hand, nor remove the box from the wall. He cast a glance of dismay at his mortal antagonist, who sprung to the flail, and bestowed such discipline as forced the present visitor to submit to the same conditions for his release that his brother devil had done.

It is said that his sable majesty was greatly surprised at the discomfiture of his two trusty messengers; and, like a skilful general, he resolved to go in person and explore the enemy's camp. He ascended from the nether world, through Mangerton

mountain, near Killarney, where that barren and bottomless pool, called the Hole of Hell,* now fills up the funnel which formed his upward passage. He looked round from the lofty height into the far country, and with the sagacity of the vulture in quest of his prey, directed his course to Jack's habitation. It was a sunny morning, and a heavy frost of some days' continuance had congealed all the waters, and rendered the surface of the land hard and slippery. Aware of Jack's wiles, he rapped at the door, and, in a voice of thunder, bid the miserable mortal come forth.

"I will go whithersoever your lordship commands me," he answered, awed by the threatening voice and formidable manner of his summoner; "but the road is slippery, and you will permit me to fetch my cane; besides, I would wish to kiss my wife and little ones before I go."

The fiend was inexorable, and urged the wretched being on before him.

"If I walk without the support of a stick," he resumed, hobbling on before his captor; "I shall speedily break my bones; and if there are no carmen on the road to hell, how would your lordship wish to fetch my carcase on your princely shoulders? Oh, that I had even a bough from yonder sycamore to support my poor old limbs!"

To stay his murmuring, and furnish the desired support, Satan laid hold on a fair branch of the tree, but immediately found that he was unable either to break the bough, or quit his hold; and Jack, with a yell of joy, returned to fetch his favorite flail. In the words of the legend, whoever would come from the remote ends of the earth to hear the most fearful howlings, occasioned by the most dreadful castigation, would here have ample gratification. Jack broke his three best flails on the occasion; and, though the miserable fiend cried loudly for mercy, he continued his toil till the going-down of the sun, when, on his promising neither to seek Jack on earth, or permit his en-

* The Devil's Punch-Bowl, called by the peasantry, "The Hole of Hell."

trance into hell, the arch-fiend was released, and the fortunate man retired to rest, more fatigued from that day's thrashing than ever he had been before.

Our story draws near its close—Jack, with all his skill, could not baffle the assault of Death. He paid the debt of nature; but when his soul was dismissed to its final residence, the porter at the gate of the infernal regions stoutly denied him admittance—the fiends turned pale with affright—and even Satan himself fled within the lowest depths to hide his head from the dreaded enemy. Then, because he was unfit for heaven, and that hell refused to take him, he was decreed to walk the earth with a lantern to light him on his nightly way till the day of judgment.—Such, reader, is the legend relative to Jack-o'-the-Lantern, commonly believed by the peasantry in many districts of Ireland.

TALE OF THE OLD WARS.



WHEN the weak and vacillating James the Second made his last effort to recover that triple crown which he had so justly forfeited, many of the ancient strongholds of Ireland were as much as possible repaired, from the devastation which Cromwell or time had effected upon them, and garrisoned, each by some neighboring chieftain, who held the precarious post in the name of the denounced monarch. Among the number, the castle of Roscommon was, perhaps, the strongest in that district. It was held by one of the O'Connors, but which of them my informant does not say—however, by an O'Connor it was held, and, what is far better worth remembering than who his father was, he was himself the father of the fairest girl that Ireland, rich as she in that commodity, could boast of, before or since. When the tide of battle began to roll westward, checked only by the broken bridge of Athlone and the hitherto fordless Shannon, it