

WATCHING BY THE SEA.

THE 18th of August 1854 proved an eventful day in the local annals of the fishing-village of L—, situate on the west coast of Ireland. The morn gave every promise of an unusually fine day, and the sea was so placid as to hardly present a ripple on its surface. The village itself wore, on this particular morning, a more than usually cheerful aspect; and, from the appearance of things generally, it was evident to even the most indifferent of observers that some important event was imminent. Groups of maidens flitted from house to house, each possessed of some article of finery which she was eager to submit to the admiring gaze of friends and neighbours. The secret of all this merry bustle and excitement lay in the approaching marriage-day of Ellen Raymond; hence the display of maidenly finery, which the town-carrier had brought over-night,—not, however, without having forgotten a few of the many orders given to him to execute, a circumstance which brought him no trifle of abuse. His ready excuse, “Sure I was so bothered out of my life intirely, that I couldn’t rimimber the half of the things I had to fitch; so, darlint jewils, don’t be hard on a poor boy, and Miss Ellen’s marriage so near to the fore—God spare her and hers many hundred years to come! amin and amin!” did not avert the storm; and he was forgiven only on promising to return at once for the forgotten gauds. Ellen was an orphan, left at a tender age to the fostering care of her grandfather, who was the wealthiest man in the place. She was an especial favourite with everyone; nor could Aunt Dorothy, crusty old maid as she was, be proof against her winning ways or artless innocent wiles, on occasions when it became necessary for her to seek her aid, counsel, or help. Ellen was to wed young Phelim Flynn, who was reported “the handsomest boy in the country for miles around;” while the popular verdict respecting him and Ellen was, that “they were the purtiest couple in all Ireland.” He was a rising youth, and owned several luggers, and hitherto had been prosperous in his undertakings.

Ellen loved him because he was a noble-hearted, brave, and generous youth, his worldly possessions influencing her not at all in her choice. His fame in the place was fully established by an heroic act, performed by him with exceeding risk to his life; for it was his noble example that impelled others to join in its accomplishment. A boat and its crew were missing one stormy night. He and a few other hardy fishermen ventured out to seek them, while the friends and relations of the missing crew stood on the beach, with wild despair in their looks, expecting never again to behold those who were so dear to them. It was to Phelim’s forethought and prudence that the ultimate safety of the whole party was owing. A dangerous reef of rocks extended almost across the bay, a clear passage of from twenty to thirty feet only admitting a boat’s entry in safety. He directed those who remained on shore to fix lanterns and torches on poles opposite the opening in the reef, that their return might be guided thereby. He had also to combat the fears of his own crew. Finding the sea so boisterously rough, and the breakers dashing with such terrific force ahead, they wanted to return. But, standing up in the boat, and pointing with his finger to the beach, Phelim said: “Boys, there’s them waiting there as expects us to do our duty.” The missing boat was picked up and brought in in safety. There were many,

very many rejoicing hearts in the village that night, and all owing to Phelim's noble example, forethought, and exertions. It was for this and such-like deeds that Ellen loved him; and it was for her equally noble nature and affectionate disposition that he claved to her with all the intense affection of his manly heart. It was hardly to be wondered at then that, in a place where its inhabitants were under such deep obligations to the lovers, there should be such public manifestations in honour of their approaching wedding. On this morning, the 18th of August, Phelim and several others put to sea, some fishermen having reported large shoals of fish to be near the place. It has been shown that the morning broke with every promise of its being an unusually fine day. Towards noon, however, a cloud as big as a man's hand appeared in the sky, gradually enlarging its proportions, until at length its shadow lowered upon the earth with a scowling blackness. The wind, too, which hitherto had wooed the sea with soft melodious accents, became unusually boisterous, sending forth that moaning, whistling, shrieking storm-note so well known to dwellers on the sea-coast. It lashed the sea into a thousand furies, impelling the foam-crested waves with mad impetuosity towards the shore, against which they dashed with awful violence and a deafening roar.

A crowd—an anxious, excited crowd—stood on the beach. Eager, expectant glances were cast off on the sea. All the fishing-boats had returned but two, one of which was Phelim Flynn's. It was indeed an anxious time, and many a prayer ascended to that God who holds the winds in the hollow of His hand, and who alone can say to the raging sea, "Peace, be still."

Old Mr. Raymond stood amid the crowd, and by his side was Ellen. She looked anxiously into his face as she said in imploring accents, extremely touching to hear: "Is there no hope, grandfather?" He shook his head mournfully as he pointed to the opening in the reef, and said: "In twenty minutes' time—maybe sooner, God alone knows—no boat that ever was made by the hand of man can live in those breakers." She wrung her hands despairingly.

"There's one of them!" was the exclamation which burst from the lips of many persons in the crowd, as fingers were pointed to a speck on the sea, now visible, now hidden in its trough. It was one of the missing boats. "A good nerve now, my brave fellows, a steady hand at the helm, and with the blessing of Providence you are safe," were Mr. Raymond's words, as he watched its approach. It was an awfully grand sight just at this time. The breakers rushed over the reef with mad speed, and by their very violence hurled aloft in mid air volumes of spray, which almost hid from view the mighty proportions of the waves beyond them. The lightning shot athwart the sky; the thunder rolled with deafening peals, the noise at times seeming to come from the raging sea itself, so closely did each of the combatants in this elemental strife grapple the other. The helmsman evidently understood his business well, for with firm nerve and steady hand he guided his frail bark towards the opening in the reef. One awfully agonising moment of suspense. "She's lost, she's lost!" was the cry, as the frail planks were swallowed up in the mighty volume of water. "No, they're safe! Hurrah! hurrah!" Twenty strong hands seized the boat as it was cast upon the shore, and before the next wave could reach it, it was high and dry on the beach. Ellen gazed into the faces of its crew, and then swooned. *It was not Phelim's boat.*

Gently they bore her home, while the hearts of those who still stood watching for the missing boat feared to utter the forebodings which filled their minds. At length all left the beach, being fully convinced that if they watched all night the missing ones would not return to reward their vigils. There were many sad as well as rejoicing hearts in the town of L—— that night, and few, if any, of its inhabitants slept. The

relations of the saved ones gathered around them ; their wives clasped them in a fond embrace ; their little ones clung to their knees, and looked the joy they could hardly express. Amid this gladness, however, sad thoughts intruded. Brave, noble-hearted Phelim Flynn and his crew, where were they by this time ? Where, ah, where ? None hardly dared to think. By noon the following day the storm had visibly abated, and night saw nature settling down into quiet repose again. It made one wonder whether this calm sea was the same which only a few hours before was lashed into fury,—this gentle wind allied to that which at that time had rushed mightily along the face of the deep, stirring up its wrath, and seemingly breaking up the great depths themselves. Hard and insensible must have been the nature which could contemplate the wonderful change unmoved, and whose heart did not go out in reverential awe and wonder to that mighty Being on whose word a thousand worlds hang. To return to Ellen. She was only aroused from one fit of insensibility to fall into another. Medical aid was summoned. The doctor pronounced her state very alarming. For days her life was despaired of. Many were the kind and affectionate inquiries made during this time, many the utterances of condolence for the poor bereaved one. The wedding-day that was to have been was a peculiarly sad one, owing to Phelim's fate and Ellen's critical state. Nothing short of an actual miracle could bring Phelim Flynn to life again. So thought and said the neighbours as they stood at their doors, and spoke of that eventful day—the 18th of August 1854. Days, weeks, nay, months passed, and Ellen Raymond was not the girl she had been. Her life was spared, certainly ; but it appeared to be a burden to her. She wandered by the sea sadly,—O, so sadly,—and looked wistfully upon it, as if half expecting to see something approaching. She watched for Phelim's return. Her favourite seat was on a rock, just facing the opening in the reef, where she sat for hours at a time, regardless of passing events, and absorbed in one longing, hopeful, fearful glance outwards. The minister of the parish endeavoured to soothe her grief by offering her religious consolations, drawn from a source which has never yet been known to fail. Her mind, however, seemed utterly incapable of appreciating such help. It had room only for one thought, and that thought was about her brave noble-hearted Phelim. She wasted away slowly. The doctors pronounced her case hopeless ; and all the grandfather or aunt could do for her was to try, by every means in their power, to make her pathway to the tomb as smooth as possible. The neighbours, too, passed her with a commiserating glance, and a " God bless you, Miss Ellen !" nor intruded ever on her loneliness.

It was just a twelvemonth from the eventful 18th of August 1854 that she was on the rock, watching as usual. A small boat rounded the headland, and made for the opening in the reef. She saw it, listlessly enough at first ; then, as it gained the shore, she seemed impelled by an irresistible impulse to move from her seat to the water's edge. A young man stepped out of the boat. With a loud cry she rushed forward, and, throwing herself into his outstretched arms, said : " Phelim, my own Phelim !" then sank insensible on his breast. He bore her in his arms to the town, refusing the proffered aid of the boatman. His burden was too precious to allow of anyone else sharing it with himself. As he gazed on her pale face, wan and thin, and stamped with the traces of poignant grief, his heart sank within him at the thought that he had returned only to find her fast fading to the tomb.

On knocking at Mr. Raymond's door, it was opened by Aunt Dorothy, who recognised Phelim instantly, and was half inclined at first to disbelieve the evidence of her senses, until she bethought herself that ghosts could not carry such as Ellen in their arms. With a shout almost, so loud did she say it, she announced his arrival with " Father, father, here's Phelim—our own Phelim back again !"

Words cannot describe the scene that followed. The old man, for a time, could do

nothing but gaze upon the face of the returned one, as he clasped his hand in his. Aunt Dorothy bustled about, and, by the application of proper restoratives, brought Ellen back to consciousness. The news spread like wildfire throughout the village, and soon eager faces clustered around the door, to verify for themselves the truth of what had been told them about the missing Phelim's return. He went out to them. There was then such shaking of hands, such affectionate hugs, and other demonstrations of welcome, eminently characteristic of the people of Ireland, that really poor Phelim was glad enough when it was all over.

How was it that he was still in the land of the living, when everyone believed him dead? On that eventful day—the 18th of August 1854—his craft had outsailed the others. When the storm broke he was many miles from land. His boat was driven before it, and but for the great skill and bravery displayed by him in steering her, she would soon have been swallowed up by the sea. As it was, they lost one of their hands overboard, which reduced their numbers to two,—Phelim and Tim Cassidy.

On the storm subsiding, they found themselves out of sight of land, with no compass to guide them, it having been washed away by the sea—a fate Phelim would have shared had he not taken the precaution of having himself lashed to the helm. To add to their discomfort and danger, they found that the vessel had sprung a leak, and it required all their efforts to keep her from filling. They got her pretty free from water at last, and Phelim managed to decrease the extent of the leakage by means of a spare sail. After the storm came a great calm. Not a breath of air filled the sail, which hung listlessly from the mast. This was a serious evil. Their stock of provisions and water was very scanty, and unless they could soon reach the land, or be picked up by some vessel, it was evident they must succumb to hunger and thirst. This dreaded catastrophe eventually occurred to one of them. Tim Cassidy died. Poor Phelim hadn't the heart to throw the corpse overboard, for even the sight of the inanimate clay took off some of the loneliness of his situation. At last he, too, felt himself sinking. Before laying himself down to die,—for death seemed inevitable,—he wrote the following words on a slip of paper, put it into a bottle, and corked it tightly:

“Driven out to sea by the storm of the 18th August 1854. Donovan washed overboard. Becalmed. Cassidy died from exposure and want. I am expecting death shortly. May God bless my dear Ellen and all friends! PHELM FLYNN.”

By way of a postscript he added: “Whoever finds this, be kind enough to send it on to Mr. John Raymond, L——, County Galway, and earn a dying man's blessing.” After committing this message to the sea, he laid himself down, and, owing to his sufferings from want and exposure, soon became insensible. He remembered nothing more until he found himself on board a large outward-bound vessel. The ship California, bound for Australia, was becalmed off the coast of Ireland. A breeze sprang up, and she went merrily on her way, bounding over the waves like a thing instinct with life. The “look-out” descried Phelim Flynn's boat, and reported the circumstance to the officer of the watch, who communicated it to the captain. The vessel's course was altered, and she hove to a short distance from it. A boat was lowered, and pulled towards it. They towed it to the ship, around the sides of which were clustered curious faces as Phelim was hoisted, by means of slings, on to her deck. “Thank God, he breathes!” said the captain. He received prompt and skilful attention at the hands of the ship's surgeon, and at length returned to consciousness. On recovering his strength sufficiently to speak, Phelim asked if he could not be put ashore either in England or Ireland. The captain told him this was impossible, as the vessel was a good distance from either of those places, and intended touching nowhere until her arrival at Sydney. This was sad news to Phelim. Nothing of consequence occurred

during the passage, which was a remarkably quick one, and in due time the vessel arrived at her destination. From Sydney the California was bound for India. The captain offered to take Phelim as an able seaman, if he chose to accompany him. This offer he refused, his one desire being to get home. On this the captain very generously interested himself in his behalf, and procured him a passage in a vessel about to start for England. Phelim wrote to Ellen as soon as he had arrived in Sydney, but, owing to some unaccountable mischance, she never received the letter. After taking an affectionate farewell of his kind friend the captain, he embarked on board the Argo for England. The vessel experienced very bad weather on her passage, which was a long and hard one. How delighted Phelim was when they sighted Land's-end, and went merrily by the Eddystone Lighthouse and up Channel! He was so impatient to disembark that, on the vessel putting into Plymouth, he left her and travelled by rail to Holyhead, thence by steam to Dublin, and by train to within a short distance of the town of L——, his own and Ellen's native place. The distance by land was eight or ten miles. By going by water some distance would be saved. He hired a boat, therefore, and arrived, as has been described, in time to meet her by the sea who had so long waited and watched for his coming.

It was six months after Phelim's return ere Ellen was sufficiently restored to be led by him to the altar, a blushing bride. As all the finery which had been provided for the previous wedding-day had been otherwise disposed of, the town-carrier's services were in great request again. This time he made no mistake, for he had a vivid remembrance of the storm which broke upon his head on the former occasion. It was a "grand day intirely,"—as was commonly expressed,—the wedding-day of Phelim Flynn and Ellen Raymond; and the marriage-bells rung out joyous peals on the occasion. Some months after their marriage they were walking on the sea-beach, when Phelim's foot struck against some hard substance. He stooped, removed the sand, and found the bottle containing his message from the sea. The sea had borne it to this spot, and delivered it into the hands of him who had sent it. It is strange, this true story of Phelim and Ellen, but there are stranger events happening around us every day than our narrative of "watching by the sea."

