

**THE GHOST-HUNTER
AND HIS FAMILY**

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The Ghost-Hunter and His Family by John Banim

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LXX.

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BY

JOHN BANIM,

AUTHOR OF "TALES BY THE O'HARA FAMILY," ETC.

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THE GHOST-HUNTER

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CHAPTER I.

ABOUT fifty years ago, Randal Brady lived in a suburb lane of a considerable city in the south-west of Ireland; and, compared with the lowly domiciles around him, his was a house which boasted superior advantages. His "aharluch glohn agus thinagh, vohn brightal'tha"* became the focus of attraction for those who relished an evening spent in innocent chat; and, during the cold nights, his latch was often raised by many whose own homes afforded them but little warmth. Under his roof, indeed, a poor neighbour's face never proved unwelcome; nay, the poorer the visitor, the more cordial was his reception; so that "the warmest corner" was not given as the world generally bestows its favours, but rather was allotted to him who most needed its aid in counteracting the shiverings of poverty.

Let us be permitted to describe the interior of the good Randal's house. Although thatched, it was tolerably

* "Aharluch glohn agus thinagh, vohn brightal'tha" is an Irish phrase, bearing this translation—"a tidy hearth and a pleasant bright fire," which, in its full meaning, always supposes the accompaniment of a cheerful group, enjoying, in a winter's night, the comforts of the merry blaze.

large, affording two sleeping-chambers on the first floor, and two on an upper story, which, however, were gained by the humble agency of a step-ladder: but the greater portion of the lower floor was occupied by *the* apartment which served—like the cobbler's stall—“for parlour, and kitchen, and all.” According to general usage, the chimney of this widely-envied room occupied almost the whole extent of the gable farthest from the door. Beneath it was a large grate for the winter's fire, embraced by capacious hobs; and, as a mark of economy, there was also a stove, or smaller fireplace, only occasionally used in summer. Goldsmith's notices of his country are generally conveyed in a sneer. He says that,

*In some Irish houses, where things are so-so,
One gammon of bacon hangs up for a show.*

Now, if a contrary display may be taken as denoting circumstances above the taunt of “so-soishness,” Randal Brady was an independent man; for not only gammons, and hams, and fitches, made a goodly appearance above and in the chimney, but there were also among them sundry sides of beef and salted legs of mutton—the which we can recommend to our inexperienced English readers as materials for a very capital dish at a solid, sensible dinner. As to the furniture of the apartment, excepting its unusual state of tidiness, it was pretty much like that of other “comfortable” houses in Ireland at the time we treat of. The “dresser” was well adorned with shining pewter; the seats were by no means of uniform size or character; there were four or five sycamore chairs, as white as old mortar and assiduity could make them; there was one arm-chair of black oak; and there were many stools and straw “bosses,”*—the latter great favourites of certain old women, who, in their wandering incursions into Randal's house in an evening, pretended to choose them as the lowly resting-points of conscious poverty, which, at the same time, afforded a closer affinity to the

* Low seats made of twisted straw ropes.

fire than stool, chair, or arm-chair itself. The floor was compounded of mortar, and of something else, which we forget, kept in good repair, and always well swept; the walls were evenly plastered and constantly white-washed—characteristics of some rarity; but a few articles, disposed by way of decoration around, hinted at peculiar traits of the mind and accomplishments of the master of the house. On brackets, suspended by the walls, stood plaster casts of various figures, somewhat rude, it is admitted; yet, having been moulded by Randal Brady "his own self," highly admired by his neighbours for their execution, if, indeed, they were not considered as master-pieces of art. The top of the dresser boasted similar ornaments; but the grand result of the good man's united talents as sculptor, mechanist, and philosopher, remains to be honourably noticed. Merely with his penknife he had shaped out two little men, to a perfection of form and feature which surprised all observers; and he had given to each a pair of coal-black eyes, using a heated knitting-needle as his tool, and from between their joined hands protruded a notched piece of wood, vividly representing a saw, and to each point of the saw was affixed a potato of calculated weight; and thus—the legs and feet of the figures being secured to the shelf of the dresser by wires—the little sawyers, once set agoing, bent forward and regained their upright positions, incessantly, to the wonder and delight of every visitor. His honest neighbours were, indeed, convinced that Randal Brady had discovered the perpetual motion; and, simple as was his work, perhaps he came as near to the puzzling desideratum as any dreamer we remember to have heard of.

Whether in festivity or devotion, Randal was very particular in observing the customary pranks, or rites, of each season of the year. On Shrove-Tuesday night, the ring was hidden in the peculiarly-made "Irish pancake;" and it would irk us to refrain from noticing, in this place, a little occurrence which happened on a particular Shrove-tide, inasmuch as it marks a feature of the character of