

**KERRIGAN'S  
QUALITY**

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Kerrigan's quality by Jane Barlow

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**JANE BARLOW**

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BY  
JANE BARLOW

AUTHOR OF  
"IRISH IDYLS," "BOGLAND STUDIES," ETC.



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## KERRIGAN'S QUALITY.

### CHAPTER I.

WHEN it became known throughout the neighbourhood that Martin Kerrigan had bought the Big House, dissatisfaction prevailed dispersedly, concentrating itself in the one double and one single row of roofs which form the nucleus of Glenore. It was the unpopular act of an unpopular person. There were obvious reasons why the purchase, by whomsoever effected, should be generally disapproved. The house had stood empty time out of mind; that is to say, only venerable people like old Juggy Caffrey remembered when it used to be now and then occupied by Sir John Hutchinson, the last of his line. Since his death the demesne had lain practically derelict, and to the inhabitants of Glenore had in some measure become what the conveniently situated wreck has been to the castaways of fiction, from Robinson Crusoe downwards. It was not, of course, a quarry for quite such varied and appropriate stores; still, its simpler products often came in happily

enough. The overgrown shrubberies and groves, for instance, supplied "bits of sticks," one of which sometimes made so good a two men's load that its end had to be let dump down occasionally on the way, while the bearer said, "Och, murder alive! stop a minute there; me back's entirely broke"—and this was no trivial matter in a place where the nearest turf-bog is reached by a long row, not always accomplished without danger. Then a bit of grazin' for th' ould ass, or the little goat, was to be come by very handily just t'other side of the dilapidated boundary wall; and "musha good gracious, sorra the taste of a harm the crathur done except aitiu' down the grass that was growin' beyond its own len'th to loss from year's end to year's end."

At first these thrifty trespassers used to be kept warily within probable straying distance of the roadside; but in course of time their owners grew less circumspect, until beasts were tethered boldly deep down the lawns, and young Joe Molloy and Andy Gallaher once fought wildly on the very steps of the mansion about the pasturage of their respective charges. But old Corny Nolan went further still, for shortly before the sale of the property he planted himself a tidy little patch of potatoes in the slip of ground at the back of the gate-lodge on the lough-road. This step was admired respect-



fully by his neighbours, who would no doubt have imitated it, had not circumstances so regrettably altered. As it was, Corny had to ruefully lift his crop, which had done grandly, a little prematurely, for the lilac blossoms were only just appearing when the unwelcome news spread through the village. Seated on the adjacent low wall to watch Corny's digging, neighbours opined that it was divil a much more convenience they'd have the chanst to be gettin' out of th' ould place now Kerrigan had grabbed a hould of it. He was the sort of man 'ud purvint the bits of midges of dancin' through other under his trees, if he could have his own way. And Corny, as he stopped at intervals to shake the crumbling dark mould off his dangling bunches of delicate brown balls, responded, "Ay, bedad, it's himself's the pernicious ould naygur."

If anybody had asked for direct proof of Kerrigan's ould naygurliness, I doubt whether his neighbours would have made many charges more specific than those above quoted, though they perhaps might have mentioned his propensity for sitting "wid niver a word out of him, no more than if he was an ould bog-stump stuck up on end in the corner, lookin' as bitter as sut." But in Glenore, as in some other places, a person's character depends largely upon his command of countenance and conversational

gifts ; and, moreover, even if Kerrigan had not been glum and silent, the fact that he had lived for nearly twenty years in Australia would have tended to make him an object of suspicion, as likely to have "took up wid the idee his own cuntry wasn't good enough for him."

This was rather hard lines, since his expatriation had not been by any means of his own choosing. He had gone out lothfully, a dispirited lad of eighteen, in response to a summons from his uncle, who was doing well at sheep-farming, and wanted a subordinate partner. That was a chance not to be let slip, and hence, after vainly going the rounds of the long Kerrigan family, thrust more than half compulsorily upon Martin's acceptance. Apparently, however, he did not turn it to much account. He never got on at all satisfactorily with his uncle, and in a few years parted from him on scarcely cordial terms.

"I'll quit to-morrow," he said one evening, when they stood facing a sultry December sunset, which threw the sheep-shadows in attenuated arches on the dusty grass as the flock swarmed over their illimitable pasture, with here and there a tall, outlandish shape vaulting through them ; for this run was far up the country, in the region of kangaroos.

"More power !" said his uncle, who was also short of speech, and had a sharp edged temper.

whetted, perhaps, by his habit of living on black boiled mutton hung in a bag, and indefinitely stewed tea. And nothing more ever passed between them.

After this Kerrigan had a long spell of rough experiences. His luck was bad, and he learned to believe it so, which made it worse; and nature had equipped him ill for the manner of life he led. Circumstances forced him into situations which could not but abound in wretchedness for a man who was constitutionally lazy and low-spirited, who hated novelty in places and people, and who conjoined a lack of self-sufficiency with an incapacity for finding friends. Long lonely journeys from strange station to station, where temporary jobs offered hard work among unfamiliar surroundings; aimless loafing between whiles in town-squalor, with a study of humanity's dregs presented as an employment for his leisure, risky exploring expeditions through doleful wastes, where the blank monotony was only broken when privation and fatigue rising to torture pitch made the boon of "going on and not to die" seem a dubious one, even while struggled for most desperately--these things came into his life, and their passage left in the gallery of his memory some pictures which he looked at too often for his peace of mind. One in particular continued to draw him with a haunting fascination, and that not