

LILY LASS

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Lily Lass by Justin Huntly McCarthy

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LILY LASS

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LILY LASS

BY
JUSTIN HUNTLY MCCARTHY, M. P.

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"Of a surety, if thou nurturast the tree of
nobility thou mayest certainly hope to eat of its
fruit."—*Su'adi (The Boston)*

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1890

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PROLOGUE.

BY GEOFFREY LONGSTAFF, OF NEW YORK, AUTHOR.

WHEN General Brian Fermanagh, of the ninth corps of the Grand Army of the Republic, fell in the last of the many desperate charges which he led his regiment up the heights of Fredericksburgh, it came to the lot of certain of his brothers-in-arms to look after his affairs and make the necessary arrangements with regard to the property he possessed.

Brian Fermanagh was unmarried; he had no relations in the United States; it was only after considerable difficulty that his executors discovered some distant connections in the old country, to whom his few possessions, his farm in Illinois, and what little money he had saved, finally went. He had not made much money: he never seemed to care for money or for the things that money gives; he had lived, until the war broke out, the tranquil life of a man who might have been a philosopher but who was a soldier in somewhat stirless times. When the war did come, he flung himself into the struggle with the keenest enthusiasm. He fought with reckless bravery; he planned with rare military skill. In words like those which Freiligrath used about the German poet Platen, he lay dead in the South while the North was ringing with his praise.

Among the General's closest friends was a young journalist from New York, who had abandoned his profession at the outbreak of the war to fight for the Stars and Stripes. He was by Fermanagh's side when the Confederate bullet found

its billet in the best and bravest bosom that ever throbbed beneath a soldier's coat. His knee pillowed for a few moments the weary, handsome head; his tears, and he was not ashamed of them, fell on the worn face, whose eyes were closed as if in sleep.

There came a momentary lull in the pitiless hail of lead, the repulsed remnant of Fermanagh's regiment had rallied again, a mere handful of survivors, and charged once more with a wild cheer, their tattered green flag flying still, up the heights where most of their comrades lay reddening the trampled grass with their blood. As the cheers died away, Fermanagh's dying eyes opened, seemed to rest for a moment on the green flag fluttering on the wind, and then turned their gaze up into the face of his friend. A smile crept over Brian's pale face; he lifted his hand, wet with his life's current, a little from his side, moved his lips as if trying to speak, and then faintly whispering the one word "Sarasfield," let it fall again.

The sobs of his friend vexed not the ears of the dead man. To that friend, Brian Fermanagh, in the few hurried lines which were found in his tent after his death, and which he had evidently written in half-prophetic anticipation of his fate—to him Brian Fermanagh committed the care of all his papers. The papers referred to in this rough will were contained in a strong iron box which the young journalist opened, in Fermanagh's farmhouse in Illinois, some months later, when a wound from which he was slowly recovering had enforced absence from the field.

The contents of the box were varied and curious. Old cuttings from the *Nation*, minutes of revolutionary meetings, packages of correspondence, were huddled together in considerable confusion. Among them, conspicuous by the careful way in which they were tied up and kept together, were two packages of letters—one in a woman's hand, the other in a man's. With these was a small note-book, filled with minute, exquisite writing in some Oriental character. I have since ascertained that it is a copy of the Persian text of the *Gulistan of Sa'adi*. On the front page in a fine

scholarly hand is written, "To Murrongh MacMurchad, from his friend, Edward Geraldine."

Over all lay a sheet of paper in Brian Fermanagh's handwriting. It seemed apparently to be the opening lines of an account of the rebellion of 1848, which he had often spoken to his friends of executing at some time. The intention was, however, never carried further than these few lines; at least, nothing further was ever discovered among the General's papers.

The lines, written in the large, rapid characters of Fermanagh, ran thus :

"I do not know if Irishmen will ever again be joined together in a determined effort to free themselves. Please God, they may, again and again, until the end. I hope, and indeed believe, that the day will come when the great quarrel between the two countries will be changed to a great friendship, that men will arise in England and in Ireland who will see and will realize the dreamed-of brotherhood. But, no matter who they be, the men who will yet serve Ireland, I say this, and I say it from a full heart, that they cannot be better, braver, truer, and nobler than those who struggled and suffered for liberty in the name of Young Ireland. I have heard words spoken among our brothers here in the great American cities which lead me to think that a green flag may yet again flutter over Irish meadows; that pikes may be trailed, and muskets levelled on the hillsides yet. Well, I am no longer young; the hot blood of my youth has cooled; I should like to think that justice might come without strife, that in the fulness of time Englishmen and Irishmen might join hands in a common freedom and a common love. But let no man believe that the Irish hopes are crushed. Ireland is not dead; she is only sleeping, and something tells me that she is well nigh on the point of waking. May I be there to see. But if I am called away before then, I should like to let those who come after me know all that I can tell them of the last stand that was made for Ireland, the last fight fought for her, the last time her flag floated over our own fields; the

last blow struck in the battle that Smith O'Brien (God's grace be on his soul!) began."

Here the paper in the General's handwriting came to an end, and no further investigation discovered any other writing of the General's on the same subject. The young journalist, however, carefully preserved all the papers in the box; sealed the box itself carefully, and deposited it in a place of safety, intending on some further occasion to study more closely all the documents it contained in the hope of finding out that his dead friend had done more towards his dreamed-of purpose than that solitary fragment.

But the young journalist recovered from his wound and went back to the war, and the war dragged on its weary length, and when it came to an end the young journalist had his living to make, and the sweetheart who had waited for him all through the dreary years of civil war became his wife, and he begat sons and daughters, and had his way, a hard way sometimes, to make. He made it at last; he thinks he may say with pardonable pride that there is no more admired writer on the New York Press than your humble servant, Geoffrey Longstaff—for to be plain I was the young journalist of whom I speak—that his novels contain the truest pictures of American society that he at least is acquainted with, and that his favourite volume, "Manhattan Essays," is destined to a niche in the temple of fame not too far removed from those of Emerson and of Carlyle.

But while that way was being made, while those novels were being written, while those excellent and exemplary essays were being slowly and laboriously evolved in hours of philosophic reflection, Brian Fermanagh's strong box was, I am sorry to say, forgotten. Not exactly forgotten, but it lay in the lumber-room of my memory together with the materials for my great tragedy in blank verse on the subject of George Washington, of which to this day not a line has ever been put on paper, and my contemplated history of Mexico.