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TURLOUGH O'BRIEN;

OR, THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER. CHAPTER XIV.—THE ASSAULT.

While this is passing without, the reader must pardon us if we transport him for one moment within the castle walls, on which, from place to place, are posted some score of sentinels, armed, vigilant, and anxious—their weapons glancing, and their forms showing darkly in the uncertain moonlight. He must follow us into the great hall of the castle. It is a long and broad stone-floored chamber, with a low oaken ceiling sustained by heavy beams, blackened by age and smoke; at each end yawns a capacious hearth, in which rears an edifying cloud of smoke; and sparkles, and flickering flame, as the piles of turf and crackling bogwood glow and blaze, like rival bonfires, beneath their opposing chimneys. A mighty oaken table stretches down the centre of this great chamber, so vast that in the flaming smoky torch-light one can scarcely see clearly from end to end. Huge dishes, high piled with savory fare, poultry and mighty joints, and pyramids of potatoes, and dishes of the now obsolete 'cob-lady,' send up their savory canopy of steam, which overhangs in genial festoonery of cloud the busy guests, fully a hundred in number, who with their weapons beside them, and in strange and grotesque variety of demi-military equipment, sit upon stout oak stools upon either side, and with knives and forks raise such a din and clatter on the pewter plates, as well nigh drown the obstreperous clangor of voices raised in jest, or disputation, or excited narrative, and the uproar of laughter, and good wishes, and the ringing of goblets when the guests pledge one another in cordial revelry, and altogether there swells and thunders such a volume of festive uproar, as might have stunned a miller in his tuck-mill.

At the upper end of the board, as befits the host, sits the stout Sir Hugh, and at his right and left those of the highest consideration among his visitors. Casks of good wine, as well as of mighty ale, propped along the walls, yielded to the simple appliance of the faucet and spigot their delicious burthens, which foamed in many a silver and many a pewter tankard, cup and flagon; and all this scene of hilarity and festive cheer was heightened and exaggerated by the exciting consciousness of approaching conflict and companionship in danger; and in its picturesque effect mellowed and enriched by the warm and lurid glare of torches, flaming redly from their sockets in the walls over the warlike and variously attired banqueters.

'Nevertheless,' continued Stepany of Annagh—a white-headed old gentleman, with full, red, stolid cheeks, small grey, good-humored eyes, shaggy eyebrows, and almost no forehead at all, looking gravely upon Sir Hugh, 'nevertheless, I think it were well to sally forth, and lay about us. Trust me, there is nothing like a vigorous sally.'

'We have no right to assault them till they have first attacked us,' replied Sir Hugh; 'and all I seek is to defend my house against them.—God forbid that I should shed one drop of blood more than our protection requires. Besides—besides,' he continued with a mournful shake of the head, 'I would not set my child's safety upon the precarious chances of such an enterprise.'

'What if they try to burn us out of the place?' urged the old man.

'If it be possible to burn the house,' said Percy Neville, glancing upward at the torches which flared within a few feet of the ceiling, 'which seems to me a problem, methinks we're like to save the gentlemen that trouble.'

'I fear them not,' said old Sir Hugh; 'my trust is in the Almighty. My family, in time past, have suffered sore distresses and dreadful extremities within this very house of Glin-darragh, yet the old towers stand firm as ever, and a Willoughby is here to-night to guard them with his own right arm.'

'And a Neville, too, by my faith, said the young man, briskly, and with a flashing eye.—Then as instantaneously relapsing into his usual careless vein, he added—

'A Neville, too, as the devil would have it—wherever kicks and cuffs are plentiful, there my benignant star is sure to carry me. But meanwhile does it not strike you, cousin Willoughby, that while we are swilling and cramming here, the castle might be stormed, and the sentries all impaled, and we know nothing of the matter, until our own turn came to die upon these piles of beef and poultry; for my part, I could not hear so much as the crack of that old cannon on the—what d'ye call it—tower?'

'Smuggling Dick has the culverin in charge,' said Stepany, pompously.

'Then smuggling Dick is not long for this world,' rejoined Neville; 'they have loaded it to the very mouth, and never believe me, or it will burst like an egg-shell. Reserve the culverin, good cousin Hugh, I beseech you, to the last act of the tragedy, and when things are al-

together desperate, and you have made up your mind to put the garrison out of pain, and blow the old castle into infinite space, then, and not till then, give smuggling Dick the signal, spring the culverin, and so discharge us, castle and all, with eclat, into the clouds.'

'You're a brave lad, though somewhat hair-brained,' replied Sir Hugh, gravely; 'but there is reason in much that you have said, and so methinks it were well that we were stirring, and this supper ended.'

As he thus spoke, a messenger from without, his long hair whiped and straggling wildly from the wind, and his face scared and pale, stood at the door, and shouted in accents that rose above the din and clatter of the feast, as with uplifted arms he gazed eagerly toward Sir Hugh—

'The Irish are coming! the Irish! the Irish! A hundred voices in wild confusion caught up and echoed the startling summons. At the instant every face darkened with the stern reality and presence of danger; wild and savage was the hubbub—the clang of weapons, as in breathless haste each guest resumed his own—the scrambling of men across the table, amid crashing dishes and rolling tankards—the tumbling of stools and barrels, and the hoarse cries of 'the Irish!—the rapparees—Ned o' the Hills! Let them come on, they're welcome; we're ready for them. We'll give them a belyful. Hurrah!—hola—buzza!'

Thus shouting in terrible and deadly excitement, hurrying and hustling along, and jostling one another, they poured forth into the castle-yard, and each mounted to his post of vantage, with the deep, stern curiosity of men, who in the tempest hear on a sudden the dreadful words, 'the ship is on a rock,' and climb breathless to the deck to see for themselves the dangers which surround them. With feelings such as these, but toned by regular daring and indomitable self-reliance, did the little garrison mount to the various posts assigned them on the walls and towers, and in the narrow embrasures from which their musketry could tell.

Let us glance for a moment at another group. While this boisterous and desultory meal, so abruptly concluded, was yet proceeding, old Con Donovan, the butler, was enjoying, in the privacy of his chamber, a pleasant booze with Dick Goslin and Tim Dwyer, the two squires who, as we have already mentioned, in their several capacities, followed the fortunes of Percy Neville. The butler's chamber was a small stone-vaulted apartment in one of the flanking towers, with a single narrow casement peering, like a miniature tunnel, through the thickness of the wall, and commanding a circumscribed but pleasant view of the quaint white statues and trim yew hedges of the formal flower garden we have already mentioned. All was, however, dark without;—and in the butler's snuggerly no blinking candle, with lengthening wick and feeble ray, gleamed dimly upon the jolly party; but their carousal was meetly lighted by the joyous blaze of wood and turf, flaming in the hearth, strong, fierce and roaring as the spirit of revelry itself. By a clumsy, strong-jointed table, stored with flasks and cups, and seated upon stout old ponderous stools, the three companions glowed in genial confidence and growing jollity before the warm blaze of the fire, that murmured and sputtered in comfortable rivalry with the fitful moaning of the chill night wind.

Tim Dwyer had never looked so red, so quizzical, and so good-humored in all his life before. Even the bluish, sharp-faced Londoner seemed touched and kindled with the expanding influences of good fellowship. And as for Con Donovan, he was the very picture of an ancient butler. Sack, sherry, canary, and claret, not to mention brandy and usquebaugh, burned and beamed in his ruby visage, and twinkled and sparkled from under his bushy grey brow.—Mingling in the jolly character of his visage, was an expression, half ludicrous, half severe, which spoke of fifty years of exquisite and unimpeachable tasting, and as many of absolute domination over the keys of office. There was not a pimple on his nose that did not represent whole dozens of emptied wine-flasks; nor a wrinkle on his thoughtful face that did not indicate the subtle critic and the judge supreme;—while his long fine hair of snowy white bespoke his own venerable and racy antiquity of date.

Here, then, in this calm retreat which might have made a cell for old Friar Tuck, the three companions plunged without restraint headlong into the joys of giddy wassail. Vain were it, in sooth, to follow Con through all his rambling lore about the O'Briens and the castle; every chamber in the old place had its appropriate tradition—the story of the banshee's tower, and the 'the room of the candle,' Crobore's cellar, the 'far na pishogue,' and the spirit of the Slasher that haunted certain chambers of the castle; these and hundred other tales of wonder and mystery the old domestic recounted to his listening guests.

But as their potations waxed deeper, their conversation waxed louder and more brilliant. Con told his very best stories in his very best style, though his utterance grew somewhat indistinct towards the close; but that did not prevent his enjoying their point prodigiously himself, and laughing in proportion. From this mood he gradually slid into another, grew amorous, and sung a piteous love ditty, which, however, was so interpolated with hiccupps as to be scarce connected and intelligible. Tim Dwyer, in a pathetic vein, with touching confidence, ran through his past career, and shed copious floods of tears, while he fervently wrung the hands of his companions, much to their inconvenience. Even Dick Goslin grew loquacious and took a valiant turn, challenging in his own proper person the whole four provinces of Ireland to mortal combat, and defying them to come on. In this defiance, however, he was interrupted by losing his equilibrium, and falling along with his stool upon the floor, where he continued, nevertheless, with unabated courage to challenge and defy the whole Irish population, together with all the barbarous nations of ancient and modern times, with every species of provocative and contumely most calculated to goad them to the conflict. His two companions, who were themselves hardly in a better plight, had scarcely succeeded in helping him to his feet, when the door opened, and a pair of honest yeomen, hot and out of breath, entered with the alarming intelligence that Drumgunnion was in a blaze and the rapparees already in sight.

This astounding announcement was wonderfully sobering in its effects. Dick Goslin, too, in a somewhat serpentine course, made his way out of the room, and neither designing to share in the glories of the triumph, if such it should prove, nor yet to be in the way and visible in case the 'land savages,' as he called them, should get in, he directed his course to a small and deserted kitchen which he had that day reconnoitred, and shoving aside the cover of a large metal boiler, upon which he had pitched as his destined asylum in the hour of need, he tumbled himself into it, and with a little trouble slid the cover back again into its place, and here, comfortless and cramped as was his posture, the heaviness of his free libations gradually prevailed, and he sank into a profound and death-like slumber.

Meanwhile the excitement of preparation everywhere continued within the castle walls, and amid all the hurry-scurry, the brave old Sir Hugh, his iron grey locks escaping from beneath his broad-leaved hat, and his short cloak drawn tightly round his shoulders, armed with carbine and pistols, and accompanied by the stout old Stepany at one side, and at the other by his cousin Percy Neville, crossed the court-yard with a cool and steady pace, and mounting the steep stairs, entered the narrow stone-floored and stone-vaulted chamber which overhung the great gate, and placing himself at the central loop-hole looked forth upon the steep avenue which led upward from the foot of the bridge to the castle, and commanded a wide prospect of the surrounding country.

'As I hope for grace,' said Sir Hugh, vehemently striking the butt of the weapon which he carried upon the floor, 'the villains have fired honest Tisdal's house—that blaze is from Drumgunnion; pray heaven the trusty fellow may not have fallen into their hands.'

They all looked wistfully in the direction which the old knight had indicated, and plainly saw the volumes of smoke rolling and heaving in lurid masses, while showers of sparks and broad sheets of flame from time to time illumined the dusky glow with a more dazzling brightness.

'Neville,' said the old knight, with sudden alacrity, after a lengthened pause—'Neville, your young eyes are fitter for this misty light than mine; see you anything yonder on the bridge near the farther side of the river; methinks I see a horseman.'

'Two horsemen, Sir Hugh, unless I see double,' rejoined the young man; 'and as well as I can perceive, a sort of mob about them, moving slowly this way.'

Had they at that moment been enabled to scan the area around the castle walls, upon the other side of the building, they would have beheld much more formidable demonstrations of the enemy; for stealing onward among the orchard trees, and through the garden, and at the opposite side of the river, were seen gathering and thickening, moment after moment, dark, dense masses of human figures until the very copse and underwood seemed instinct with life; and the number of assailants thus silently accumulating, vast as they undoubtedly were, were rendered terrifically undefined by the deep, impenetrable shadows and cover of the surrounding trees and brushwood, which for anything to the contrary appearing, might all be occupied by the same threatening masses whose van at every side, in sinister silence, began to close round the devoted build-

ing. Still, too, as death, the little garrison within, in breathless suspense, awaited the expected assault of what, with the dreadful sinkings of dismay, they inwardly felt to be an overpowering force; and many a man who had not prayed for fully a year before, now muttered fervent appeals to the God of battles, as glancing along the dark line of copse which straggled from the dense wood around the ancient fortress, he marked the gradual swelling of the noiseless and stupendous multitude, and the slow, onward stealing of their dark and ominous front. As this awful and noiseless inundation of human hatred and vengeance rolled onward and rose, as it were, gradually but steadily around the doomed building, the hearts of even the bravest within it beat fast and thick; and every man of the comparatively little garrison felt, as with set teeth and riveted gaze he breathlessly watched, as under some horrible fascination, the slow advance of the living tide which was sweeping onward, that he would have gladly exchanged the hideous tranquility of that lulled and quiet approach for all the roar and clangor of the fiercest danger and the maddest strife of actual conflict. Meanwhile Sir Hugh and those who along with him tenanted the small stone chamber which we have described, watched with cool but anxious scrutiny the movements of the group who had appeared upon the bridge.

Two horsemen, as well as the now fast descending moonlight would allow them to discover, well mounted, and equipped like gentlemen, and surrounded by a rabble rout of some hundred men, turned slowly up the approach to the castle gate, and dismounting at the far end, left their horses there; and so with a jaunty swagger they both strode up the broken ascent, followed by their wild myrmidons. The one was a stout, ill-looking, broad-shouldered fellow; the other a dark, swarthy-featured man, of light and wiry build.

The reader needs not to be told that he beheld in them, 'Captain' Hogan and the redoubtable Eamon-a-Knuck, or Ned Ryan of the Hills—O'Moel-Ryan of the race of Cabur-More.—Side by side they approached the great gate, and had already come within some ten paces of the arch, when a stern voice from the embrasure over the gate-way challenged the leaders of this sinister party.

'Hold!' cried Sir Hugh, for it was he who spoke—'what seek you here, sirs, at this unseasonly hour?'

'We demand admission under a search-warrant,' replied Ned Ryan, as promptly and as sternly.

'A search-warrant!—search—and for what?' demanded the old knight from the narrow embrasure.

'What for?—why, for my grey coppel?' retorted the burly ruffian, Hogan, staggering in front of his slighter companion—'for my coppel beg greagh and my elegant cow, Drimandhu. My darlin' girl, will I never see your blue coat and the white twist iv your horn again! Och, von! agus ochone, Drimandhu!'

The end of this apostrophe went off into the Irish chorus of the well-known humorous song, which he chanted with stentorian lungs, and a burlesque exaggeration of the extremest woe.—There was a cool insolence in this buffoonery which stirred the blood in the old knight's veins.

'Have a care, fellow,' said he, with difficulty mastering his rage, 'have a care, sarrab, and keep your ribaldry within your teeth. It is no light matter, as you shall find, in troublous times like these, and at such an hour, to beset a gentleman's dwelling. Show me the authority on which you presume to disturb the quiet of my household, or, by St. George, I'll make my people clear the road, and set you singing to another tune.'

'Then you are old Willoughby in person?' said Ryan.

'I am Sir Hugh Willoughby, fellow!' replied the knight.

'Well, old Hugh,' continued the rapparee, 'you shall be gratified. You want to see the warrant?'

'I demand it,' replied he.

'Then look at it,' retorted the rapparee, folding the paper closely, and fixing it firmly upon a pike's point, he raised it to the aperture within which Sir Hugh was standing.

The old knight, in the now declining beams of the moon, was with difficulty enabled to decipher a few words of the warrant, but at the foot of it he read in large and marked characters the hated name of 'Miles Garrett.' Without uttering one syllable he tore the paper across and across, and stretching his arm from the casement, with indignant vehemence, he flung the fragments to the night wind, which whisked them up, and whirled them in an instant over the battlements in a mimic snow shower.

'Is it so you treat the warrant of the king's justice, old rebel?' fiercely exclaimed the redoubtable Edmund Ryan, who had now fallen back a little, and resumed his station close in front of the crowd who had accompanied him.

'Ay, and even so will I give your soul to the night blast, robber and murderer, if you loiter here another minute,' retorted Sir Hugh, bitterly.

The rapparee turned to the crowd who followed him, waved his hand, and in a moment the dense mob had dissolved and glided under cover of the bushes, and the turf and corn stacks which stood ranged along the steep road. At the same instant he blew a piercing whistle which rung through the old walls, and awoke the shrill echo of the wood, until it was lost in the wail of the raising wind.

'Och, voh, agus och houe, Drimandhu!' struck up the burly companion of Ned o' the Hills, as with a dramatic assumption of the most extravagant transports of grief and desolation, he walked down the broken road to a more prudent distance, where he suddenly threw himself flat in the grass behind a furze.

'You refuse, then, peremptorily, to admit this poor gentleman, and to open your door to the king's warrant?' said Ned o' the Hills, slightly hitching his shoulders, and squaring himself like a man preparing for action.

'I refuse to admit notorious ruffians, and their hordes of savage banditti within my house, now and at all times,' replied the old knight, firmly.

'Then you are a traitor to King James, detected, avowed and punished.'

As he spoke the last word, with the quickness of light, he levelled and discharged his carbine fell at the shot-hole at which the master of Glin-darragh had conducted this strange parley.

The bullet ran shrilly through the low crown of the old man's hat, grazing the very hair of his head, and without further effect smote upon the opposite wall, and fell flat as a crown piece upon the floor. The sharp report of the rapparee's shot had hardly ceased to vibrate in the echoes, when half a dozen muskets flashing with rapid explosion from the walls, sent their leaden missiles chirping by his ears, as, cowering, low, he ran for little space down the roadway, and throwing himself under cover, whistled again and again the same shrilly signal. And now were seen dense, formidable masses pouring over the bridge, and at a running pace beginning to traverse the upward road towards the castle gate, while from the walls the musketry rattled sharply, and the returning fire from the roadside covered the wild advance of the desperate column who rushed upward toward the gate; and now from every side growing, swelling, as the darkness deepened, arose the wild and fearful yell of the assailants, gathering and strengthening, and rolling in stunning confluence over the old building like conflicting thunders, and piercing the ear of night with the savage hootings of hate and defiance. Spreading and peeling, and soaring rose the sound, in an uproar so terrific and gigantic, that the very storm seemed to sink in hushed dismay; and it grew almost a marvel that the ancient walls did not rock and topple to the ground like those of Jericho of old, under the stupendous vibrations of the mighty chorus of wild menace and vengeance that rushed, and trembled and towered in the troubled night air. Within the intervals of this fearful hurricane, but comparatively faint, as the "wild farewell" of the crew over whom are closing for ever the black waves of the ocean, might be heard the answering shout of the garrison from the walls and towers and shot holes, as with resolute defiance they anxiously awaited the decisive tug of actual conflict.

And now, with terrific hubbub and thundering war-whoop the dark and savage multitude, bearing in their van a ponderous beam, dislodged from the mill close by, came rushing madly like a dark wave rolling and peeling up the shingles on the shore toward the castle gate; bang, bang, goes the musketry from the castle; rattle go the shots in return from the cover; hiss and whistle—the bullets sing through the darkness air and now the dense multitudes are up—are thronging and hustling one another beneath the very walls, and cover in undulating masses of heaving black the deep surface of the road from the bridge, a sea of wild haggard heads swaying and rolling this way and that, and flowing like conflicting tides, so that those who from the castle walls beheld the giddy spectacle, felt their very brains to swim and sicken as they looked. The assailants drive madly onward; they rush and thunder at the oak gate of the castle, driving the huge beam they bear with crashing and stunning reverberation and infernal uproar, against the ancient and iron-studded planks.—Well was it for those within that they so effectually propped and strengthened it in time, with solid stone and rubbish; and carts and logs heaped up and packed together in dense and deep support, else the good planks, hard and massive as they were, must have yielded to the gigantic concussions under which the very walls seemed to ring and tremble.

And now, with a stunning report, the cannon on the flanking tower, explodes; and wraps the gate and its assailants alike, for a moment, in