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THE CAPUCHIN OF BRUGES.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

Three monks sat by a logwood fire—
Bare were their crowns, and their garments grey;
Close sat they by that bogwood fire,
Watching the wicket till break of day.

BALDAD PORTER.

Saying the color of their garments, which, instead of grey, were of a dark brown, and the omission of any allusion to their long flowing beards, the above lines convey as accurate an idea, as any words could, of the parties that occupied the spacious gurd-chamber of the Capuchin convent of Bruges, on the last night of October, 1708.

Seated round the capacious hearth on which, without aid of grate, cheerfully blazed a pile of dark gnarled logs up from the fens, which in the days of Caesar, were shaded by the dense forests of Flanders, three lay brothers of the order kept watch for any wayfarer that might require hospitality or information, on the evening in question. Their convent stood—and a portion of it still stands—at the southern extremity of the town, close beside the present railway station.—But Bruges was not, a century and a half ago, what it is to-day. War, and the recent decline of its ancient commerce, rendered it, at the point of which we write, anything but a safe or attractive locality for either tourist or commercial traveller to visit. There was an "Hotel de Flandre" or "Fleur de Ble," or "Singe d'Or" for the weary itinerant to seek refreshment or lodging. Neither were geese-darmes in the streets, nor affable shopkeepers in their gas-lit *magasins*, as at present; to whom the benighted stranger might apply for information regarding the locality in which his friends resided. The convents and monasteries, however, with which Belgium was then, as now, studded, were ever open to the traveller, be his rank or condition what it might, and pre-eminent for their hospitality were the Capuchin Fathers.

The night was a wild one; and the dying blasts of October seemed bent on a vigorous struggle ere they expired.

"What an awful storm!" exclaimed Brother Anselm, rising to secure the huge oak window shutters that seemed, as if in terror, every moment ready to start from their strong iron fastenings.

"God preserve us! but 'tis fearful," replied one of his companions, Brother Bonaventure, "and what dreadful lightning!"

Pear after pearl of thunder resounded through the spacious hall and adjoining corridors; and, then, again came the wind beating the rain, in torrents, against door and casement, and completely drowning the chimes of the Carillon, though the market-place, where the belfry stood, was close beside them. Still not a word escaped their third companion, Brother Francis, a venerable old man who sat nearer than his younger brethren to the ample fire-place. He continued silently reciting "Ave" after "Ave" on the beads of the large rosary attached to his girdle, and seemed, in the excess of his devotion, utterly unconscious of the storm that howled without.

A loud knocking at the outer gate, followed quickly by the ringing of the stranger's bell, at length, announced the arrival of some guest. In an instant, the old man let his beads fall to their accustomed place by his side—for the rule of St. Francis gave charity towards the neighbor a first place among its spiritual observances—and hastened, as eagerly as his younger brothers, to admit the poor traveler, who must be sore distressed on such an awful night.

Lighting a lantern, they proceeded, through the court, to the outer porch, and drawing back the slide that covered a small grated aperture in the wicket, demanded who the wayfarer might be. The gleam of the lamp fell upon the uniforms of two military men, who seemed engaged in supporting a third between them, while their horses stood neighing in terror, and pawing the ground beside them. In a second, the gate was unbarred, and three of Vendoune's troopers entered the court-yard; two of them still supporting their comrade, who had been badly wounded in a skirmish with Marlborough's troops, near Audenarde, that morning. Leading Anselm with the two other soldiers to look after the horses, Brothers Francis and Bonaventure led the wounded man into the convent. He seemed weak and faint; but the cheerful blaze of the fire, and the refreshment speedily administered by the good brothers, soon restored him somewhat, though he still suffered acutely from his wound, and was utterly unable to stand without the aid of support.

For the first time Brother Francis broke silence. From the moment he caught a distinct view of the stranger's face, as he sat in the light of the fire, his gaze seemed riveted upon him; and an observer might have noticed the old man's lip quiver and his face grow paler, might have even observed a tear steal down his cheek, as he continued for a while to gaze in silence on

the pallid features of the young soldier. At length he addressed him, not in French or Flemish, but in language which to Brother Bonaventure was foreign.

The stranger's face brightened at the sound of his own tongue, and he readily made answer to the few hurried questions put to him by the old monk. Their conversation was of very brief duration; but its result seemed astounding. For when Anselm returned with the soldiers, he found Bonaventure and the stranger chafing the old man's temples as he lay in a swoon, on the bench before them.

To their inquiries as to the cause of this strange occurrence, Anselm could give no definite answer. All he knew was, that although he could not understand what passed between Brother Francis and their comrade, the conversation seemed to produce a wonderful effect on the former. He trembled from head to foot, and then smiled, and seemed about to grasp the stranger in his arms, when he suddenly fell back on the bench as they now saw him. The young soldier—he was almost a boy, and strikingly handsome—was equally puzzled. Brother Francis had merely asked him if he were Irish; and when he answered "Yes," if his name was Herbert, and if it was Gerald Herbert, and if his father and grandfather were Irish; and when he replied that his name was Gerald Walter Herbert and that his grandfather was not Irish, but English, the old man muttered something which he could not catch, and fainted. That was all he could tell them; but what had that to do with Brother Francis's fit still remained a mystery.

For a considerable time the aged monk lay senseless and almost motionless—the only symptoms of animation he presented being those afforded by the convulsive throbbing of his heart, and an occasional deep-drawn sigh. His brothers seemed deeply afflicted, and sought by every means in their power to restore him; for Francis, though few knew anything of his history was, notwithstanding the favorite of the whole community.

Towards midnight the old man revived, and his first inquiry was for the young soldier. He now embraced him, and, as he pressed him again and again to his heart, with tears and blessings called him "his son," "his dear child." Brothers Anselm and Bonaventure looked at each other in mute astonishment. They feared that their dear old friend, the patriarch of the lay-brothers, was losing his reason. They knew that for thirty years at least he had been an inmate of the cloister, while the party whom he thus lovingly called his son could at furthest number twenty birth days, if indeed he could count so many. Still greater, however, was their surprise, when, on a closer scrutiny, they could not fail to observe a marked family likeness between their aged brother and the individual on whom all his affections seemed now centred.

But this was no time for the indulgence of curiosity. The two troopers, drenched and travel-stained, must be attended to, and the wound of their comrade looked after. Fortunately their convent numbered among its inmates one of the best leeches in all West Flanders. He had been already summoned to the aid of Brother Francis, and now that he no longer required his service, he directed his attention to the other invalid, whose case seemed the less urgent of the two. In a short time his skillful hand extracted a spent ball from the sufferer's knee, and by the application of a soothing poultice, restored him to comparative ease.—Nor were Brothers Anselm and Bonaventure idle meanwhile. Piles of well-buttered *tartines*, made of wholesome bread baked in the convent, with plentiful dishes of rashers and omelets, and a flagon or two of foaming Louvain beer, soon covered the table. Cold meats, too, of various kinds, were served up in abundance; and the two dragons were soon busily engaged in satisfying appetites good at all times, but now considerably sharpened by a hard ride and a long fast. It was the first peaceful meal they enjoyed since the Duke of Burgundy got command; and they blessed their stars for having been selected to escort young Herbert to the rear.—Having completed the bandaging of his wound, and administered such medicine as he deemed best calculated to make up for the patient's loss of blood, the Infirmary led him to the chamber prepared for his reception; and Brother Francis begged to be allowed to take charge of him. His request was granted, but on the sole condition that no conversation of an exciting nature should take place between him and the invalid, till such time as all febrile and inflammatory symptoms had subsided. Day after day, and night after night, the old man watched in strict silence, beside the stranger's couch; and all were in amazement at such assiduity and attention on the part of one who, as long as any remembered him, seemed utterly detached from all earthly affections. They even saw him mingle tears with his prayers, as he knelt beside the

pillow of the sleeper. It was whispered that the Guardian knew something about the matter; for he, too, now came frequently, and looked with evident interest on the invalid. No one else ventured to speak to Brother Francis on the subject, for though generally kind and gentle, and communicative as a child, there were times when he became sad and reserved—and this seemed one of them.

Ten days passed on, and the invalid made such rapid progress, that the Infirmary and his staff pronounced him quite out of danger, in no further need of medical treatment, and only requiring the aid of the cook to recover completely his wounded vigor. The interdict was now removed, and Brother Francis seemed happy.—He could, henceforth, speak as he pleased to his protegee. The latter felt equally delighted; for he felt, he knew not why, a sort of unaccountable attachment—it was certainly more than mere gratitude—towards the old man, growing daily stronger and stronger within him. And then Brother Francis called him "my son"—but, perhaps, as an old man, that was the name by which he addressed all youngsters. At all events he loved the old monk as a child loves a father, and always felt sad when the duties of his rule obliged his venerable friend to leave him for a time.

"And so you tell me you have no recollection of your father," said Brother Francis, with a sigh as they sat together one evening—it was the eve of St. Martin—in the same apartment where we first introduced them to our readers.

"None whatever," replied his companion.—"He left France as a volunteer with D'Usson's division, and was killed at Limerick when I was but three years old. So I often heard my mother say."

The speaker did not remark the shudder that ran through the old man's frame at mention of Limerick; but only paid attention to his next question, which rapidly followed.

"And your father's father?"
"Was, as I have already said, an Englishman—but he, too, died in the wars long ago." They say he fell in Spain.

The old man could no longer restrain his feelings. Bursting into tears, and clasping his young companion to his bosom, as he had done on the night of their first meeting, he said:—
"No, my child—your grandfather, Walter Herbert, is not dead, but yet survives to give you that blessing which your own poor father could not bestow on you with his parting breath—he stands before you!"

It was a touching scene to witness—that old Capuchin monk, with his long white beard, and coarse dark gown, and leatheren cincture, and bare sandalled feet, locked in the fond embrace of the young soldier of the Brigade, on the eve of St. Martin, in the old convent of Bruges! We do not mean to intrude on the sacred privacy of domestic feeling, but leaving parent and child to commune with each other in the fullness of their hearts, will, with our readers' kind permission assume for the nonce, the province of the Senachie, and briefly relate as much of their history as we have ourselves learned, Outre Mer—and is still oftentimes related on long winter evenings by the brothers who have succeeded—literally stepped into the sandals—of Brother Francis and his comrades.

THE CAPUCHIN'S STORY.

Walter Herbert, or, as he was called in religion, Brother Francis, was the only child of an ancient family in Nottinghamshire. Entering the army at an early age, he found himself stationed, with his regiment, in Limerick, when the army of the "Confederates" sat down before that city, in the summer of 1642. He was then in his twentieth year. Forming part of Courtenay's company, when the city opened its gates to Garrett Barry and Lord Muskerry, he retired, with his commander, to King John's castle, where, though closely besieged, they resolutely held out till St. John's Eve, when Courtenay was obliged to capitulate.

In the course of the attack on the castle, a mine was sprung by the besieging party, and a turret, in which Herbert was stationed, fell to the ground with a terrific crash. For weeks he lay delirious; and when at length he awoke to consciousness, he found himself the occupant of a handsomely-fitted chamber looking out on the Church of St. Nicholas. His host was a middle-aged, gentlemanly-looking person, of grave yet affable manners. He was a widower, and his household consisted of himself, an aged housekeeper, two sons, and an only daughter.—The latter—Edy O'Brien—was the sick man's principal nurse, and no Sister of Mercy could have bestowed more care on a suffering invalid than she did on Walter Herbert—stranger though he was to her creed and country. From lengthened and almost continual intercourse, a feeling of mutual affection sprang up between the young people. Gratitude on the one hand, and sympathy for the sufferings of the handsome young officer on the other, heightened this feeling till it

grew into deep and lasting love. Like Desdemona, she loved him "for the dangers he had passed;" and he loved her, "that she did pity them." But an insurmountable obstacle to their union lay in their difference of religion. Herbert was a Protestant; and old Connor O'Brien would never bear of any child of his being united to one of that creed which, in its struggle for ascendancy, he believed to be the cause of so much suffering to his country, even though no other impediment whatever existed. A private marriage was, thus, their only alternative, and to this, in an evil hour, poor Edy consented.

Months rolled on—months of bliss to Walter and Edy—but their separation was at hand.—Important letters called Herbert away, almost at a moment's notice. He hoped, however, that his absence would be of no lengthened duration, and that he would soon return to publicly claim his beautiful Edy as his wife. But alas! his hopes were doomed to sad and bitter disappointment.

On his arrival in England, he found the entire country in arms; and as it became impossible to remain neutral, or to return to Ireland, he was forced to join the newly-formed corps just raised in his native county, by Henry Ireton, his father's landlord. Once under military discipline there was no retreating; and though all his thoughts were turned to Ireland, he was doomed to maddening suspense regarding her who alone made Ireland dear to him. All communication between the two countries was now suspended. At Edgehill and Newbury he retreated before the king's troops—and at Marston, Moor and Naseby, had a share in defeating them. But victory or defeat was alike void of interest to him. It was even with indifference he heard of his promotion for having saved his general's life at Naseby. The sole, engrossing thought of his existence was how to get back to Limerick.—That long-sought for opportunity at last arrived; but when it did, it scarcely brought joy to Herbert. He was ordered to join in the invading Parliamentary force; and when he called to mind the fierce fanatics who were to be his fellow-soldiers, love made him tremble for the Irish.

The fourteenth of June saw him on the battle-field of Naseby—the following autumn found him sailing up the Shannon—and ere the close of the year, he was gazing on the steeple of St. Mary's and the towers of Limerick from the battlements of Bunratty, which had fallen into the hands of the Parliamentarians. He had fancied he could even see the very house in which he had spent so many happy days. But beyond fancy he could not go. To reach the city was utterly impossible. All he could learn, from an Abbey fisherman whom they had taken prisoner, was that Connor O'Brien was still alive, and that his daughter was married and had a fine, beautiful little boy. Who her husband was his informant could not say; but he thought he was an officer in Earl Glamorgan's army. Herbert, however, well knew who he was, and he would have risked worlds to send back his prisoner in safety, with even one line to Limerick. But Lord Inchiquin's troops were too vigilant to allow of any communication with the city. Even this intelligence, scanty though it was, afforded him some consolation. He knew his wife was safe, and unable any longer to endure the Tartarus-like position in which he was placed, he found means of returning again to England.

His next and last visit to Ireland was in the summer of sixteen hundred and fifty. He was then pretty high in command, and had hopes, as he sat down, with Waller's army of investment before Limerick, in the July of that year, that should he be only able to effect an entrance into the town, his authority would be sufficient to protect whomsoever he pleased. But the year passed away, and still the city held out. And, had he but his wife and child without its walls, he would have counselled its burghers to hold out even still more manfully, for he well knew the iron heart and bloody hand of the execrable Hardress Waller.

The spring of the next year found him still before Limerick; and could he but communicate with any of its gallant defenders, his hatred of treachery would have urged him to expose to them the perfidy of one of their own whom they had raised to the rank of Colonel. This wretch was named Fennell; and, for his treason in selling the passes of the Shannon at Killaloe, their commander-in-chief Cromwell, had promised him and his descendants many a fair acre in Tipperary. By this pass Ireton and his myrmidons crossed the river into Clare; and with them passed Walter Herbert. Still his heart was full of hope of saving all he held dear in the beleaguered city. Spring passed away, and summer again came;—and still the assailing host made no progress towards the capture of the town which Ireton and his father-in-law regarded as the key of all the Munster territories. In the burning heat of July, while pestilence daily thinned the ranks of the besieged, an assault was ordered on the al-

most defenceless keep that guarded the northern extremity of the salmon weir, and Herbert was reluctantly obliged to form one of the storming party. His immediate senior in command was a person named Tutill—one of those heartless hypocrites who could preach and pray while his brutal soldiery were massacring the wives and children of the brave men whom the chances of war made his victims. The fort was carried by overwhelming numbers; and Herbert was doomed to witness, with horror, the butchery of the surviving defenders mercilessly ordered by Tutill—an order which he had unapprehended had no power of countermancing, but in the execution of which he took no part. Still the city held out, though the "leaguer sickness" was rapidly decimating its brave garrison. The north fortresses of Thomond bridge was next carried by assault—but to no more purpose. The townsmen succeeded in breaking down two of its arches and thus cutting off all approach to the city in that quarter, and in resisting the sortie, three hundred of their assailants perished. Winter was now fast approaching, and the plague extending from the city, in which fifty of its victims were now daily interred, commenced to thin the ranks of the besiegers themselves. Ireton had serious thoughts of raising the siege; and he would, beyond all question, have done so, were it not for treachery. Fennell, the traitor of Killaloe, was again at work—this time, unfortunately, within the walls of the city itself.

A truce of some days was agreed on; and Herbert was one of those appointed to treat with the townsmen. The deputies met on neutral ground, midway between the city and camp, and within range of the rival batteries. His heart was now full of greater hopes than ever. Could he but meet with any member of Edy's family, he hoped that his love for her would induce them to listen to his counsels. But fate, it would seem, had leagued all chances against him. Had he met them, he meant to put them on their guard against Fennell's treachery, and, without absolutely breaking trust, give them such a key to Ireton's fears and readiness to make concessions, as would, he hoped, lead to an honorable capitulation, and prevent the bloodshed which, from the shattered state of the town walls, and the additional element of treachery within those walls, he now judged to be inevitable, unless they came to terms with Ireton. But not one of them appeared; for the traitor had had his plans deeply, and succeeded in diverting them and the clerical party, to which they faithfully adhered, from anything like a compromise. He wished that the sole merit and reward of surrendering the city should be his own. And he succeeded. The conference ended fruitlessly; and Herbert returned to the camp well nigh broken-hearted.

CHAPTER II.

The plague continued its ravages meanwhile; and, day after day, within the city, the dying were brought by their relatives to the tomb of Cornelius O'Dea, where many, it was believed, were restored to health, through the intercession of that saintly prelate, who lay buried in the cathedral. Its effects were visibly traced in the ranks of the besieging army. Still Ireton, relying on treason within, pressed on the siege.—By a bridge of pontoons he succeeded in connecting the Thomond side of the river with the King's Island, where he now planted a formidable battery, to play on the eastern side of the city. Herbert had fortunately escaped witnessing the horrors of Drogheda and Wexford; but a sight almost as appalling now met his eye. In the smoke of the cannonade crowds of plague-stricken victims—principally women and children—ventured outside the city walls to catch one pure breath of air from the Shannon, on the Island bank—and there lie down and die. But when this was discovered, the heartless Waller forbade even this short respite from suffering.—By his orders, those unhappy beings, who could have no share in protracting the siege, were mercilessly flogged back by the soldiery into the plague-ravaged city—and such as refused to return were, by the same pitiless mandate, hanged within sight of their fellow-townsmen.

The daily sight of this revolting butchery was sickening to the noble heart and refined feelings of Herbert. But suffering for him had not yet reached its climax. As he was seated in his tent, one evening towards the close of October, fatigued after a long foraging excursion to the Meelick mountains, and musing sadly on the fate of her who was almost within sight of him, and yet whom, by what seemed to him an almost supernatural combination of adverse circumstances, he had not seen for years, his attention was arrested by the cries of a female who seemed struggling with her captors. His manhood was aroused by such an outrage—committed almost in his very presence—and he rose at once to rescue the victim from her assailants. But, horror of horrors! at the very door of his tent, and in the grasp of an armed ruffian, lay the fainting and all but inanimate form of his wife! To