



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 30, 1869.

No. 51.

THE MASTER OF LISFINRY.

From "Legends of the Wars in Ireland," by Robert Dwyer Joyce, M.D.

CHAPTER I.

One sweet June evening in the year 1579, the sentinels were ranged for watch and ward along the walls of Youghal; some leaning in an indolent and listless manner against the parapets and over the breastworks, others walking quietly to and fro, their buff-coats and armor half unbraced, and their long halberds glittering in the soft and merry sunshine.

On the northern ramparts, two sentinels were sitting, engaged in a quiet, half-dreamy conversation. They were both aged men. Their faces were turned to a dark bronze by constant exposure to both war and weather; but their bodies seemed still strong and stalwart, stronger, perhaps, and more capable of endurance, than when they first donned the helmet and sword, and took the wandering trade of a soldier.

'Gurth of the Stream,' said one, addressing his comrade, 'I would we were both back again in our own blithe braes of Northumberland! I do not like this cooped life of ours, ever within stone walls, and waiting, always waiting, for the war-cry of the Irishry, that has not sounded on my ears since last Christmas-tide.'

'Ralph Goodwyn,' said Gurth, 'from my heart I wish your wish. By the axe of my father, but it is enough to sour a man's blood in his veins to sit here, like a Yorkshire churn when its last butter is made, and find any one thing for our hands to do, save sharpening our swords, that, God wot, are sharp enough for the work they have to do, and brightening our tasses and breast-plates! Ah! those were merry days when we chased the deer together through the South Forest, and courted the blithe lasses by the Brig o' Reed.'

'Blithe they were, and merry,' rejoined Ralph Goodwyn. 'Dost thou remember the day I fought Simon o' the Mill for the love of bonnie Alice of Elsdon?'

'A bright day it was, Ralph, but a black day for Simon o' the Mill.'

'But it was near being the same for me, too, Gurth. When our good swords were shivered, and we went to work with the dirk, he got his point between the bars of my basnet, and gave me this,' and he pointed to a great scar across his face. 'He fell, Gurth, and I had no rival for the love of my bonnie Alice. But, alas! it was too short, and she died, poor thing, ere the autumn-tide; and ever since I am a wanderer, and a man of the sword, like yourself.'

'As for me,' rejoined Gurth, 'I took the plume, and followed the tuck of drum, to feed my own wild fancy. I could never love maiden like you, Ralph, though the gleam and the blink of her eye were as bright as the steel of my dirk. But what is that?' he exclaimed, starting to his feet, and pointing northward to the skirt of the ancient forest that stretched along the bank of the Blackwater. Both looked in the direction to which he pointed, and beheld the glitter of swords and spears and the waving of plumes, and the flutter of advancing banners, as if a great army were approaching. And so it was. Even as they looked, a large body of light-armed footmen, or 'kerne,' emerged from the wood, and formed in a body on the clear plain outside. Long lines of horsemen followed, with fluttering banners and glistening armor, then other bodies of foot; then, again, horsemen, falling into regular positions as they came, until at length a large and numerous army lay formed before them on the plain, but far beyond the range of the light cannon on the walls.

'Fire the alarm-gun,' cried Ralph, 'and call up the captain of the guard.'

A small falconet on one of the towers was fired by Gurth; and, in a few moments, the ramparts were thronged with men, the different officers running to and fro, giving their commands, and putting the now anything but lazy soldiers into their proper order.

'Ho!' exclaimed the captain of the guard, a tall, stern-looking soldier, when the proper arrangements were made, 'they seem still unwary in their intentions; for here comes a courier with a flag of truce, and, God wot, I suppose a civil message. Better had they thrown us the

gauge of battle at once in the shape of a pill of iron from the mouth of one of their falconets, than come thus with a white kerchief on the point of a lance; for we can hold no parley and have no truce with those wild Irishry.'

As he spoke, a knight from the Irish forces rode forth, accompanied by a mounted gilly, or henchman, and came at an easy gallop towards the walls. He was clad in a suit of bright armor, his helmet being surmounted by a tall red plume; and in his hand he held his long spear aloft, on the point of which fluttered a white kerchief, like a small banneret. He was soon within speaking distance of the walls, and, reining in his steed, stood, like a tall statue of iron, motionless, his gilly close behind him, looking with fierce eyes upon the formidable array of men-at-arms upon the walls. In a few moments, he raised his visor, and with a voice loud and clear as the tones of a trumpet, addressed himself to those whom he considered to be the leaders of the town.

'Vassals of the Red Queen,' he said, 'the high and mighty prince, John of Desmond, sends ye greeting by me, James, Knight of Lisfinry, and bids ye to depart in peace from his town of Youghal. He gives ye two days to embark.—If, at the end of that time, ye still remain, he considers ye are his, for death or life, with your possessions in the town. God and the right!'

'Give him,' exclaimed the commander of the town, who was now standing on the rampart, 'give him one sample of the medicine that the Red Queen, as he calls her, sends to her rebellious subjects, to cure their contumacy. Gurth of the Stream, point that falconet, and shoot him down!'

Gurth was ready at the word; and the sound of the falconet's explosion was scarcely ringing in their ears, when they beheld the Knight of the Red Plume stretched upon the plain. He was not hurt, however, though the ball had killed his horse, which, falling, brought the knight to the ground, partly under him. The gilly was determined not to remain idle, however. It was amazing to see with what dexterity he extricated his master from beneath the body of the dead steed, and mounted him on his own; then, as the knight spurred away, half-stunned by the fall, the faithful attendant ran by his side with the agility of a deer, until they reached the halting-place of their brothers-in-arms.

Night had fallen upon the town; but the sentinels were still watchful upon the walls. They could distinguish no indications of a stir among the Irish, save that, ever and anon, a slight murmur arose outside, at some distance from where they walked their rounds; and black masses, which they took for the waving shadows of trees, appeared to move to and fro in every direction, amid the copse-wood and scattered forest. The morning soon explained what these black, moving masses indicated. The sun had scarcely risen, when the ramparts were again thronged with officers and men-at-arms; and, looking out, they beheld huge piles of earth and brushwood, behind which the Irish forces lay crouched, secure themselves, but close enough, and in positions, to pick off with musketry the defenders of the walls. No horses could be seen,—they were picketed in the thick forest behind; but here and there the mouths of cannons protruded from the brushwood and clayey ramparts, while the shock heads of the fierce array outside, with a gleaming helmet occasionally among them, might be seen popping up at intervals from the covert, and examining the fortifications. All at once a wild war cry arose which seemed to proceed from every part of the forest. This was followed by the rolling cracks of the match locks and musketoons, and the loud roar of cannon, which, with the answering explosions from the walls, made a din that soon awoke the town, and struck terror into its inhabitants. All day the firing continued with considerable loss to the besieged.—I several places the walls were partially breached; but, in one part, the foundations seemed to have entirely given way, a few perches of it lying almost level with the ground. Up this breach, on the evening of that day, a large body of the Irish were rushing, headed by the knights and gentlemen who composed the officers of Desmond's army. They were met gallantly by the English, and driven back almost to their intrenchments. On they came again, however, crowding up the breach like the waves of the sea. To and fro swayed the combatants, reinforcements pouring in to each side, until the whole battle seemed concentrated round that breach. The Irish were again beginning to waver, when a cry arose among them, 'Crom Aboo! Follow the Red Feather! Hurrah for Lisfinry and the Red Plume!' and, looking up, they saw the Master of Lisfinry far above them at one side; his long plume waving, and his heavy sword clutched in both hands, as he harked and hewed at the English who surrounded him. A simultaneous rush was made by the Irish towards this point; and the English, by absolute dint of pressure, body to body, were at length

forced to give way, and retreat from the walls, the Irish following with a wild shout into the town. At this moment, Gurth of the Stream, who had not abandoned his beloved gun till the last extremity, leaped, with a heavy battle-axe in his hand, from the rampart, and, coming behind the Knight of Lisfinry, with one blow brought him to the ground. Friend and foe went in one rush over the body of the knight; but he heeded them not, for sorely wounded by the axe of Gurth, and half-smothered by his helmet, he soon sank into a deep swoon, and lay as heedless and as quiet as those who had fared even worse, and lay dead around him. The battle was soon over. The English were almost entirely cut to pieces, very few of them escaping to their ships in the harbor; and as night fell, the entire town and its environs were occupied by the Irish army.

When the Knight of the Red Plume awoke to something like consciousness from his stupor, it was in the house of Hugh Walsh, an old and worthy burgess of the town, who had been favorable to the interest of the Earl of Desmond, and was, therefore, now left in peaceable possession of his property. The room in which the knight woke was somewhat small in its dimensions. It was floored and wainscoted with oak of an extremely dark color; but its gloom was dissipated by a beautifully-carved, stone-sashed window, which threw the morning light, in a cheerful stream, upon the wall and floor. The knight's first sensation on awaking was of a racking pain in his head and every member of his body. He endeavored to turn himself upon his curtained bed, but could not; while, at the same time, he was half-conscious of the presence of another person in the room, whom he tried to speak to, but, in a few moments, fell into a half-awake and dreamy stupor again. While this lasted, he was aware of a voice singing beside him in a low, sweet cadence; and, as he recovered again, he could distinguish the words of the song. They floated through his mind with a soothing sweetness, rendered doubly sweet by the clang and crash of battle that rang so loudly in his ears on the evening before. The voice sang as follows the words of an old love song of the period:—

I met within the greenwood wild
My own true knight that loved me dearly
When summer airs blew soft and mild,
And linnets sang, and waves rolled clearly;
And, oh! I pledged such loving vows
In moss-grown glades, all green and rillyr,
Where lightly waved the rustling boughs
'Mid thy dear woods, sweet Imokilly!

I met my love in festive hall,
Mid lords and knights and warriors fearless;
And there my love, among them all,
To my fond heart was ever peerless;
And he was fond, and time could never
His love for me make cold and chilly:
Ah! then I knew no grief nor care,
'Mid thy green woods, sweet Imokilly!

From Rincree's turret, high and hoar,
When autumn floods were wildly sweeping,
I saw my love ride to the shore,
I saw him in the torrent leaping,
To meet me 'neath the twilight dim,
In bowery nook, secure and stilly;
But the ruthless waters swallowed him,
By thy green woods, sweet Imokilly!

The knight now made an endeavor to see the person of the singer; but, in turning over for that purpose, he threw his weight upon his left arm, which had been broken on his falling beneath the axe of Gurth, and the sudden spasm of pain occasioned by the movement made him fall backward with a heavy groan. He was, however, on looking up once more, more than compensated for the pain he caused himself. A young and beautiful girl was bending over him, and regarding him with a look in which a modest shyness was blended with anxiety and compassion. Her long yellow hair, falling in shining tresses upon her shoulders, almost touched the face of the knight as he looked up half-wonder-struck; and she adjusted the bed-covering so gently, and handled his wounded arm so tenderly, that he began to think himself in a dream, in which some bright angel had come near, and was ministering to his wants. But the effects of the swoon were now gradually disappearing from his brain; and he began to recollect himself; and to remember the events of the preceding day. He now began to raise himself with more care, and endeavored to ask a few questions; but the young girl put her hand to her lips, and motioned him that he was to keep silence, and to try and sleep once more. He lay back, and fell into a sweet and long sleep, from which he was only awakened towards evening by the step of some one entering the room. It was the kind leech, an old monk, who had set his arm the preceding night, and bound up the great ax-wound in his head; and he was now coming to see how his patient was progressing.

'James of Lisfinry,' said the monk, 'the town is in possession of my kinsman, the Desmond, who has declared, that, were it not for thy tact and thy bravery, he would be outside the walls still.'

'Who art thou?' answered the knight. 'Art thou Gerald the monk, whose life I saved at the foray of Sliabh Gua?'

'I am Gerald the Franciscan,' said the monk; 'and, by God's special grace, I am enabled and preserved to pay back the debt,—to set thy broken arm aright, and to bind up the great wound in thy head, through which thy life was fast oozing last eventide.'

'Hast thou found the child of thy brother, the murdered Knight of Barna?' asked the knight. 'No,' said the monk. 'It was in my wanderings to find her that the vassals of Ormond caught me at Sliabh Gua, and took me for a spy; and then my wanderings would have ceased, were it not for thy onslaught on my captors. Alas! since the night of the murder of my brother and his followers, in his House of Barna, I have wandered for years, but can find no traces of the poor little maiden. It is ten years now since the murderers confessed before they died, that they forgot and left her behind at their camping place in the forest. She was but seven years old then, and, ah me! I fear she died of hunger and cold, or that the wolves fell upon her; and she was the last remnant of a once brave and gallant house. As for thee, knight,' he continued, after a pause, 'thou wantest but quiet and sleep, and a good nurse, and thou wilt soon be able to take into thy hands and wield that good sword of thine, that did thy word so well upon our persecutors yesterday.'

'Ah!' said the knight, 'had I the nurse that watched over me this morning!' But he recollected himself, and changed the conversation. 'Think you,' he continued, 'that the English will return again, and attempt to recapture the town? Would that I were sound in head and limb ere they did so!'

'I know not,' answered the monk. 'But, in the mean time, your best chance, under a watchful Providence, for getting into bodily soundness again, is to speak little, and to keep quiet, and free from mental trouble.'

CHAPTER II.

We shall now leave the Knight of the Red Plume to his repose, and follow for a time the fortunes of the old monk's niece, the Orphan of Barna. About ten years anterior to the time of the foregoing incident, there stood an old castle lated mansion in a deep gap, or pass, on the southern declivity of Sliabh Gua, or Knockmeledown Mountains. In this mansion dwelt Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, or as he was more frequently called the Knight of Barna; together with his young daughter, and a few followers. The knight's wife, had died a few years before; and he, disabled by wounds and hardships in the Desmond wars, had retired to spend the remainder of his life in his House of Barna, and to bring up his young daughter, the sweetest little flower that ever bloomed in that wild turbulent district.

The district was, in fact, another Debatable Land, under the jurisdiction, at one time, of the Earl of Desmond, and at others overrun and held in subjection by the great rival House of Ormond; so that the only protection for any man, lord, or vassal holding territory there, was his own watchfulness, cunning, or bravery. The Knight of Barna, however, deemed himself secure enough, being a near kinsman of the Earl of Desmond, and therefore less liable to the chances of being plundered than the other followers of that great earl; and, dwelling also on that slope of the mountains farthest from the territory of Ormond, he therefore retained but a few followers in his service, who could, at best, keep but scant watch and ward around his dwelling of the gap; but time showed him the bitter foolishness of such neglect.

One March night, the Robber of Coumfay, a fierce and implacable enemy of the Desmond vassals, sat with his followers upon the summit of a steep hill that overlooked the House of Barna. The robber himself was in the act of addressing his worthy comrades; and it was evident, from his remarks, that he had just held a council of war, and were now making preparations for attacking the mansion beneath them.

'For myself,' said the robber, at the conclusion of his address,—'for myself, I want but the head of the burning old murderer himself. He hanged my brother at the gate of Youghal; and he would have broken myself upon the wheel, had I not mused my dungeon and fled,—and fled, to have this night of plunder and sweet revenge!'

'He burnt my home by the banks of Nier,' exclaimed a wild-looking young fellow from the centre of the throng; 'and he lopped off my father's head with one sweep of his sword, at the ford of Dangan; and I say, burning for burning, and head for head!'

who bore down like a torrent with his men-at-arms upon us, and gave me this with a back-slash of his sword,' continued he, baring his breast, and exhibiting to those about him the mark of a great wound extending from the shoulder across his breast-bone. 'But to-night we can pay back all.'

'Yes, and pay yourselves,' exclaimed the Robber of Coumfay; 'for the old wolf of Barna has more gold in his house than the mad Knight of Dangan, who shod his horse with it. Down, then, and follow me; and each man shall have his own revenge, and the fair share of spoil that pertains to his degree among us.'

Not a word was spoken as the robbers descended the hill towards the devoted House of Barna. No watch-dog howled from the courtyard, no sentinel looked forth, as that fierce and merciless body of marauders surrounded the house, and blocked up the gate and every outlet by which the hapless sleepers inside might have a chance of escaping. The night was intensely dark, notwithstanding which the robbers crouched down closely by the walls and hedges, while their chief, advancing from the gateway, with his long cloak muffled closely around him, sat himself quietly down in the middle of the courtyard. Here he set up a long, wild, wailing cry, like that of a woman in distress, and continued it, louder and shriller, until at length a small window or spy-vent was opened beside the door of the mansion, and a head protruded through the orifice.

'What dost thou here, thus so late and untimely?' said a voice which the robbers recognized at once as that of the Knight of Barna. 'What bringest thou here, woman? and why dost thou disturb my house with thy mad wailing?'

'Lord of Barna,' answered the robber, feigning with practised skill the voice of a woman, 'I am Oona, the wife of Shane Gar of the Glen. The robbers from the Ormond's land beset our house at the nightfall; they burned all, and killed my husband and my children; and I am here for shelter and vengeance!'

There was now a prolonged undoing of bolts at the strong, iron-studded door, during which the Robber of Coumfay stole over and stood silently over and stood silently beside the jamb, under the black shadow of the porch. The door was now cautiously opened, and the knight, half-dressed, stepped forth; but scarcely had he done so, when a strong hand clutched him by the naked throat, and the robber's dagger was plunged and drawn, and plunged quickly again into his heart. He fell across his own doorstep with one heavy groan, and never stirred more. The robber now yelled out a wild and exulting cry, at which his companions, rushing from their hiding-places, broke into the house, and began to plunder. The affrighted servants were all killed, either in their beds, or defending themselves upon the staircases; and the robbers, now having their fill of plunder, assembled in the courtyard, and prepared to set fire to the house.

'The daughter, the daughter!' exclaimed several voices, as they recollected that she was still unbound, and inside. 'Bring her out, and we'll yet have a ransom for her!'

'Leave her inside,' said the small dark man who had spoken at the consultation upon the hill. 'Leave her inside, I say; and then we'll have our revenge upon the old wolf of Barna, root and branch.'

The expected ransom, however, carried the motion against the last speaker; and, in a few moments, the knight's daughter was found, cowering, and almost dead with fright, upon the stairs, and brought into the midst of her father's murderers. One of them brought out a small cloak, and, wrapping it around the child, took her in his arms, and, by the order of his chief, prepared for their wild journey homeward through the forest. The house was now set fire to in several places; and, by the light of the blazing roof, the robbers, with their spoil, turned off quickly toward the mountains.

There was a small green glade by the bank of a little stream that fell into the Suir, down that declivity of the Knockmeledown Mountains facing the plain of Tipperary, and farthest from the luckless House of Barna. Here, some time before daybreak, the robbers halted in order to divide the spoil, and to take some refreshment after their night of fatigue and blood. The man that held the young Orphan of Barna, now laid her down under a tree by a small pathway, where, tired out by the motion of the wild retreat across the mountains, the poor little thing fell into a deep and quiet slumber. Little did the poor child dream at that moment, on her chilly bed, that the headless body of her father, and her father's vassals, and her native home of Barna, were one undistinguishable mass of black and burnt ashes, and that the eyes that once looked pleasantly upon her were dim and rayless, and the lips that often kissed her pretty cheeks were bloodless, and parted by the agony of a violent death, a few perches beneath her upon the green