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THE FAIR MAID OF KILLARNEY.

A TALE OF ROSS CASTLE.

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

Among the almost innumerable objects of interest that come under the observation of the tourist during his sojourn in Killarney and its neighborhood, there is scarcely one whose examination will afford more pleasure than Ross Castle. Too many travellers there are, however, who either do not visit it at all, or, when they do so, pass it by with a glance, thoughtless and cursory. One, for instance, half-bewildered by the countless beauties of our Irish fairyland, will hurry away with a confused remembrance floating in his brain, of wild pass, silvery lake, rainbow-tinted island, and sunlit, sky-piercing mountain: another equally alive to the natural beauties of that glorious scenery, but with an eye also for objects of legendary, antiquarian, and historical interest, will return to his home, the object of his tour only half-accomplished, for want of proper and reliable information regarding the various points of attraction he has met with during his visit.—By far the greater number, however, with garulous and flimsy guide-book in hand, sit about from Mucurus to the Devil's Punch Bowl, from the Gap of Dunloe to the Castle of Ross, from island to island, and from mountain peak to lowland shore; and carry away with them on their departure an incongruous medley of badly told historical facts, hackneyed legends, and newly-invented nonsensical stories, all of which, they, of course, scatter liberally among their friends, both here and at the other side of the water, to the great discredit of that famed region which an erratic old gentleman of our acquaintance calls in his rapture, the 'tourist's paradise.' With the purpose of supplying to the tourist a few items of information of a less hackneyed character, we give, as a preliminary to our story, a short account of the spot in which its principal incidents were enacted.

Ross Castle consisted of a strong keep and other stout buildings, both of a domestic and military nature, surrounded by the usual bawn wall, with its breastworks and circular flanking towers at the corners. It is situated upon a peninsula, on the eastern shore of the lower lake, and commands a view on every side of the wildest beauty and sublimity. Right before it, to the west, the lofty Reeks of Magillacuddy throw up their savage summits into the ever-varying sky; while to the south and east the horizon is broken by the steep, pyramidal crests of the Paps, and the Mangerton, range of mountains. To the north, a number of abrupt and irregular summits shut in the view; and the traveller who looks from the time-worn battlements of the ancient stronghold will see around him a panorama of crag and wood, curving shore, fairy island, and glittering wave, far surpassing even the pictures of his wildest dreams of splendor and beauty.

The Ross, or peninsula, on which the castle is built, was converted, if we may so speak, into an island, by means of a deep channel cut through the marshy neck by which it joined the mainland. This channel, or ditch, was filled by the waters of the lake, and formed the chief defence of the castle on the land side. It was crossed by a drawbridge, no traces of which now exist. Regarding the precise date of the foundation of the castle, or the name of its founder, history is silent. It was probably built by some warlike chief of the O'Donoghoe sept, in the midst of whose immense territory it stands. From the style of its masonry, and other characteristics, it does not seem older than the latter part of the fourteenth century. About that date, and in several parts of Ireland before it, the Irish chieftains began to adopt some of the manners of their powerful Norman neighbors; and upon the site of their wooden 'caburgs,' or fortresses, built strong castles of stone, in which they stood many a gallant siege; and from which, at the head of their followers, they often rode forth in wil array, to protect their borders from those mail-clad invaders whose trade was war, and whose perpetual law was the strong hand, and the might of battle-axe and sword.

During the vengeful wars that then raged throughout the length and breadth of Ireland, Ross Castle frequently changed owners. From the O'Donoghoe More, by one of whose ancestors it seems to have been erected, it passed into the hands of Mac Carthy More, by whom it was transferred in the year 1538, to Sir Valentine Browne, ancestor of the present House of Kenmare. Passing over its various reverses during the latter Desmond wars, we will proceed at once to the most remarkable period of its history; namely, its surrender to the parliamentary forces under Lieut. Gen. Edmond Ludlow, in the year 1652.

After the dismemberment of the Confederation of Kilkenny, several of the generals who had fought under its banners still held out stoutly for their native land, against the Puritans. Among these was Donogh Mac Carthy, Lord of Muskerry, chief commander, in Munster, of the Catholic forces. After his defeat at the battle of Knocknightsby, in the county of Cork, he led fifteen hundred men across the mountains, and 'brew himself into Ross Castle, the last stronghold of importance at that time in possession of the Irish. Thither he was followed by Gen. Ludlow, into whose possession the castle fell after a short siege. The manner in which the castle yielded to the parliamentary general will be best understood by a perusal of our story.

At the commencement of the great insurrection of 1641, Ross Castle and the surrounding territory belonged to Sir Valentine Browne. Sir Valentine was at that time a minor, under the guardianship of his uncle, who was afterwards slain in one of the battles fought during that destructive and protracted war. The warden of the castle, towards the termination of the war, in 1652, was a distant relation of Sir Valentine, named Richard Browne, a captain in the confederate army. Capt. Richard Browne had an only child, a daughter, named Mabel, who lived with him in the castle. Mabel, at the time, was just verging into womanhood, and was a lovely girl; so beautiful, indeed, that she was called by the surrounding people, of every degree, 'The Fair Maid of Killarney.' It will not be at all wondered at, therefore, that the young officers who commanded under her father in the garrison should have been smitten by her beauty. Foremost among those who paid her homage was a young man, Raymond Villiers, a lieutenant of musketeers, and a descendant of a stout English settler who had come into that country about a century before.

Raymond Villiers was the possessor of a small but good estate, lying upon the shore of the Main, a river that empties into Dingle Bay.—The veteran warden of the castle was well acquainted with the circumstances of the young lieutenant of musketeers, and looked favorably upon his attentions to Mabel; but the latter persisted in receiving the homage of her suitor with no small amount of coolness, the reason of which will be understood presently. Thus matters stood between the young pair, until the day of the battle of Knocknightsby, in which, as was seen above, the forces of Lord Muskerry were defeated by the troops of the parliament, under Ludlow.

The sun of that disastrous day was setting beyond the wild mountains of Dingle, as Capt. Browne was standing upon the battlements of the castle, taking a survey of the warders beneath as they walked to and fro, in their monotonous avocation, behind the breastworks of the massive bawn wall beneath. Lake and island and giant hill lay bathed in a flood of golden glory around him. The blue smoke from the tall chimneys of the castle curled up in airy columns through the calm summer sky, and the slumbering quietness of the whole scene seemed to exert its soothing influence upon the mind of the gray-haired warden; for, after taking a quick survey of the sentinels below, he said to himself upon a small brass falconet, or cannon, that commanded the drawbridge, and began musing silently for some moments.

'By my faith,' said he at last, 'but I wish this war was ended, and my daughter married to young Raymond Villiers! I could then sit down quietly for the remainder of my days, and turn

my thoughts to another world, which, alas! I have little time to think of in this time of foraging and slaying. Rory,' continued he aloud to a wiry little sunburnt boy who usually attended him on his rounds, 'go and tell Mistress Mabel that I am here, and that I want to speak with her for a few moments.'

Rory disappeared in an instant down the winding stairway; and, after a little time Mabel Browne made her appearance on the flat space on the summit of the castle, and sat down beside her father.

'Mabel,' said the latter looking affectionately upon his daughter, 'I have been thinking that this wooing of Raymond Villiers has gone far enough, and that you ought to give him a favorable answer.'

Now it must be premised that Mabel, only child as she was, took some liberties on that account, and usually contrived to have her own way in the end, no matter how her father threatened and stormed. Whenever she saw his brows darkening, she usually succeeded by dint of alternate crying, coaxing in brightening them again; but, on the present occasion, she knew, by the fixed look of determination in her father's face, that he was at last bent on carrying his point.

'I cannot tell, father,' she answered, 'why it is that you are so eager to get rid of me in these troublesome times. As for myself, I would rather stay with you to the end of my days; and you know, also, very well, that you cannot do without me. Think,' continued she, with a smile of mingled reproach and fondness upon her lovely face, 'only think of the time, two years ago, when you sent me to spend the summer with my aunt in Tralee, how you fretted and neglected yourself during my absence, and how, at last, you had to send for me, and could not bear me away ever since.'

'No matter,' answered her father. 'Times are changing now, Mabel. I am growing old and infirm, and there is no knowing the day that I may fall in battle, or die of this cough that is now continually troubling me; and he pointed to his stout chest, which, if the truth must be told, showed but small signs of the ravages of the complaint to which he alluded. 'It should come to that,' continued he, 'whom will you have to protect you during the troubles? And he looked into his daughter's face knowingly, as if he defied her to get over the stumbling block he had propounded.

'Oh, as for that, father,' answered Mabel, 'I trust in God there is but little fear of it, seeing that you are still the strongest man in the garrison. Remember that I saw you myself last week, leaping your horse over the Wolf's Hollow, a feat that does not show very much weakness or infirmity; and she gave the gratified old soldier another of her fond, roguish smiles.

'I tell you, Mabel,' rejoined he, trying to look sour in spite of himself, 'no matter how affairs go with me, it has come to this, that I have set my heart upon your marrying Raymond Villiers; and marry him you shall, for he is in every way worthy of you.'

'I am sure he is,' returned Mabel; 'and desiring of a far better wife than I would make him; but—'

'But what?' interrupted her father. 'That's the way you are always putting me off. I hope, Mabel,' he continued in a yet more energetic tone, 'that you are not still thinking of that wild spendthrift, Donogh of Glenmourne.'

A bright blush overspread the features of Mabel Browne at the sound of that name. She looked upon her father reproachfully, her eyes all the while gradually filling with tears.

'If I am, father,' she said mournfully, 'I cannot help it now and then. You know there was once a time when you did not forbid me to do so. However,' she continued with a sigh, 'I try to forget him since you wish it; but I cannot, I cannot give my heart to Raymond Villiers, because—'

'Because he is not worthy of it, I suppose you will say,' said her father somewhat bitterly. 'But know, Mabel, that Donogh Mac Carthy of Glenmourne is now landless, and has naught save his sword to depend on; and, by our lady,

but that's but a weak prop to depend on in these dangerous times!'

'I know it,' returned Mabel, her eyes brightening as she thought of her absent lover. 'I know that he has been robbed of his estate by Cromwell; but that is no reason why I should play him false.'

'I knew that was the answer you would make,' said her father; 'but, notwithstanding, you must wed, and that soon, with Raymond Villiers.—Ha! what is that I see? Look, Mabel, look! I trust in God, whoever it is, that he brings us good news!' And he pointed towards a slope at the eastern side of the castle, down which a horseman was riding in furious haste.

'There must have been a battle fought,' exclaimed Mabel, looking eagerly upon the approaching courier, as he still rode on, his helmet and trappings glittering in the red beams of the setting sun. 'See! he is facing directly for the drawbridge. My God! it is he, it is he!'—And again the red blood mounted to her cheeks, and the tears sparkled in her eyes, as she became conscious of exhibiting such unusual emotion before her father.

'Who is it?' asked the latter eagerly. 'Your eyes are sharper than mine, Mabel; and I do not know him yet.'

'It is Donogh of Glenmourne!' exclaimed Mabel, scarcely able to restrain herself from darting down the stair to welcome the coming of the young horseman.

'I know him now,' said her father. 'Look at his horse all covered with foam and mire!—Look at his plume shorn off, and the sad plight he is in! He is the bearer of bad news.' And with that the old veteran left his seat upon the cannon, and hurried down stairs, followed by his daughter.

With a hasty step, he strode to the drawbridge, which, by his orders, was immediately let down to give ingress to Donogh of Glenmourne, who, in a few moments afterwards, rode inwards, and dismounted in the courtyard; where he was soon surrounded by an eager throng, all burning to hear the news with which he was sent thither. The tidings he brought were sorrowful enough; and shouts of anger, and execrations deep and fierce, were muttered by his hearers, as he told them how, that morning, Lord Muskerry was vanquished in the battle of Knocknightsby. After giving this disagreeable bit of information with a soldier's brevity, he followed the warden of the castle to a private room in order to deliver some further instructions with which he had been charged by his general after the battle.

Donogh of Glenmourne was as good a specimen of the young Irish officer of the time as could well be seen. He was about twenty-five years of age, strikingly handsome, tall of stature, and had that bold, frank bearing that so well became his degree, which was that of a captain of cavalry. To the owner of a pair of bright eyes that watched him eagerly from a little window overhead, he now appeared doubly interesting as he walked forth once more in his battle-soiled armor, and joined a little knot of officers who were conversing in the courtyard. For a few moments only, Mabel regarded him, and then hastened down to her father to hear the tidings.

'I fear, Mabel,' said her father, 'that you will have but a sorry time of it henceforth.—Lord Muskerry is now marching with the remnant of his forces across the mountains, and will be here early to-morrow. He will, of course, be followed by Gen. Ludlow; so I think you had better get ready and go to your aunt at once; for we are about to stand a siege.'

'I cannot leave you, father,' said Mabel; 'so do not send me away. Whatever happens, I would rather stay with you; and, besides, you know that I am safer here than I should be in Tralee.'

'Perhaps it may be so,' returned her father; 'but we will think it over. In the mean time, I must go and give directions to have the castle ready for Lord Muskerry and the somewhat large force he is bringing with him.' And he walked out, and speedily called the garrison to arms. The noise of preparation soon ran from end to end of the huge fortress. At last, night settled down upon hill and lake and tower; and

all became still, save the tread of the weary sentinels as they paced to and fro along the ramparts.

About the noon of the following day, Lord Muskerry arrived with his forces and a great prey of cattle, which they had taken during their retreat from the bloody field of Knocknightsby. The ramparts of Ross Castle were now crowded with men; and all was busy preparation for the expected siege. The outworks at the land side were strengthened, additional provisions were gathered hastily but abundantly in from the surrounding country, guns were placed commanding every available approach; and at length the castle seemed capable of holding out stoutly against the well-appointed forces of the enemy. Some of the broken Irish regiments were also encamped in the surrounding woods; so that Gen. Ludlow, when he invested the castle with an army of about six thousand men, had a game to play as difficult as it was dangerous. In such a state of affairs, the siege went on slowly, scarcely a cannon having been fired on either side for several days after the arrival of the parliamentary army. Outside the castle, however, continual skirmishing was going on between the enemy and the Irish troops, who occupied several advantageous positions amongst the woods and hills.

Matters were in that condition, when one evening Mabel stole up to the battlements of the castle in order to obtain a view of the hostile camp. Plainly enough it lay, almost beneath her, towards the east; the arms of its occupants all flashing and glittering in the sun, and the painted banners flouting proudly in the evening breeze. As she stood gazing with curious eye upon that martial scene, she heard a light step behind her, and, turning round, beheld Raymond Villiers approaching from the stairway, with a somewhat troubled look upon his dark and handsome features. He sat himself upon the battlement beside her, and for some time neither spoke. His troubled and somewhat diffident manner might be easily accounted for by the fact that he had then and there determined to try his last chance of getting a favorable answer from Mabel. The single warden who watched from the summit of the castle was standing upon a small planet, or tower, at the opposite side, and could not bear their conversation, which at last Raymond Villiers wound up his courage to begin.

'I have sought you, Mabel,' he said, 'for many reasons. This siege must soon be ended; for I am sure the fortress cannot hold out against yonder splendid and brave army, and then there will be many changes. You will see, then, why I am anxious to understand your sentiments towards me.'

'I pray you,' returned Mabel, with a cold smile, 'to explain to me, Master Villiers, why the castle cannot hold out. Surely, Lord Muskerry is strong enough to hold his own here at least, where he has a deep lake, a goodly trench, and a brave castle crowded with men to back him.'

'That may be,' said Villiers. 'But there seems to be some curse upon our cause. Every thing goes badly with us; and why should this castle hold out when stronger ones have fallen?'

'This is language that ill befits a soldier,' answered Mabel, smiling contemptuously. 'You, Master Villiers, were wont to boast loudly enough whilst the enemy was far off. Now that he is near us, it seem strange that you cannot keep your heart up like a brave man in the emergency. Do not expose yourself too much, I pray you,' she added, with another smile of contempt. 'Keep in shelter of that battlement beside you, else yonder gun that the enemy seems arranging in the battery on the height may pick you off ere the siege is well begun.'

Nothing is so maddening to a lover as a word or a smile of contempt from the woman he loves. The temper of Raymond Villiers was hot and violent; and Mabel's tone and look enraged him beyond measure, though he strove to hide his anger.

'I did not come to discuss military tactics,' he said, with a forced smile. 'I am here, Mabel, to decide my fate with regard to you; and