



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. X.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 27, 1860.

No. 50.

SHAWN NA SOGGATH; OR, THE PRIEST-HUNTER. AN IRISH TALE OF THE PENAL TIMES.

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CHAPTER I.

It was a late October day, in the year 17—, that two persons approached, from different directions, the little inlet of Kinglass, on the western coast of Ireland. It was a day of cloud and wind. Heavy masses of rack swept incessantly across the sky, while the waters of the generally calm and peaceful inlet, impelled by the fitful gusts, came tumbling and breaking in foam and spray on the rock-strewn shore, mingling their voice, in wild and melancholy accordance with those of the wind and sea-birds, as the latter circled and screamed unceasingly, as if rejoicing in the rising gale.

One of the persons alluded to, after looking intently seaward for a moment, turned his steps towards a solitary cabin, that stood beneath the shelter of a small hill, where the inlet, just close to its extremity, makes a slight bend. On reaching this he entered, while the other continued abroad, watching eagerly the movements of some boats immediately beyond the opening of the little bay, that, nothing checked by wind or wave, were plying rapidly between a neighboring island and a vessel, whose masts were just visible, rising beyond the high headland at the mouth of the inlet.

There was a mixture of fun and fierceness in the expression of his broad and generally good-humored countenance, as he turned his gaze frequently and impatiently from the boats inland, while traversing to and fro a few yards of smooth beach, at a pace that threatened, despite the keenness of the ocean blast, to extract "the big drops" plentifully, should the movement last any length, from a body diametrically the reverse of "high in bone and low in flesh."

"By the hand of my father," he exclaimed, half jocularly, half seriously, "the vagabonds are doing me famously, and there will not be a pound or a gallon left by the time those lazy rascals come up, if they come at all." He looked again impatiently inland. "The curse of my grandmother and her seven generations on Cornet Ffolliot and his shot," he continued: "it has given them the alarm completely. The vessel will be emptied speedily, and then I may whistle for my share of the cargo, which was to have made the fortune of Charley Rorke; and the said Charley Rorke must continue a paltry gauger to the end of his natural life, should I be allowed to make a quiet exit. I wish I had remained with those lazy, big-booted troopers, instead of bolting on before them. They'll be sure to lose their way or flounder in a bog, to be revenged on me for putting them on the road so early this morning. Well, at all events, I'll have the comfort of reporting the puppy Ffolliot's conduct to the board, as his shot must have been meant for a warning, and so to balk me. But what chance has a still half-suspected Conformist of being credited, in opposition to so staunch a Protestant as the grandson of one of Cromwell's lucky sifers?—Phew! there goes Charley's fortune to the moon," he concluded, as the vessel, having discharged her last boat-load, instantly tacked to seaward, almost right in the wind's eye; and I only wish I had the trial of those lazy ruffians by court martial. May be I wouldn't teach them more speed on the next occasion. But there's no use now in waiting any longer, to be deluged as an addition to our comfort." The rain was beginning to drive fiercely, and casting a last lingering look at the vessel, which was making way, despite the gale, on a southwest tack, he moved for the cabin, on entering which he found the first visitor ensconced at the fire, while the other occupants—an aged woman and two or three half-naked urchins—were gazing at his sinister countenance with something of fear, as he deepened the smoky atmosphere around by whiffs from the pipe he was enjoying.

There was no customary salutation between the visitors, though the person of each was well known to the other. But there was a villainous grin on the face of the smoker, as Charley Rorke, desiring the *colligh* (old woman) jocularly to clear the way, drew a three-legged stool to the opposite side of the hearth, while a slight shudder agitated his portly frame, on finding himself in such close contact with his fellow-visitor. "Och, Mr. Mullowny," he exclaimed, after seating himself and looking up at his undesired companion, as if he had only then recognized him, "I didn't expect to see you so far from head-quarters."

"Poo! Mr. Rorke, we've both our own game to look after. But I'm afraid that shot o' Cornet Ffolliot's spoiled it on us both this turn. The devil reward his ould skin-flint father's son for it."

"How do you know it was Ffolliot fired?"
"Only becase we seen him do it, as we wor hurryin' on to kill two birds with one stone, while we had the sogers; an' we'd report him, too, for previatin' the king's service, barrin' that there'd be but little chance o' gettin' satisfaction o' sich a loyalist an' a favorite o' Sir John's, as the Cornet, by sich as us."

"Whom do you mean by us, fellow?"
"Why jist yourself", to be sure, that every one knows has half the Pope in yer belly still, an' ourself that's well known to be the best friend o' the Pope and his breed in all Connaught, an' Ireland to boot!"—he grinned villainously again.

"How dare a low ruffian, like you, put yourself on a level with a gentleman born and bred?" asked Rorke angrily, his choleric completely raised.

"Arrah be aisy now, gauger Rorke," said Mullowny, with the most impudent coolness;—"aren't we both in the king's service? You're employed to hunt smuggled whiskey, an' we're employed to hunt smuggled priests, that's beginnin', to our grief, to grow rather scarce ov late: an' I'd be glad to see the day ye'd be able to prove that we're not a better man nor ever stood in the shoes o' yer father's son, an' that we didn't do more sarvice to king an' country nor all the drunken gaugers in Connaught."

"Insolent ruffian! don't you know I'm on duty, and armed!" exclaimed Charley, in a voice almost inarticulate with rage, as he sprang from the stool and half unsheathed the blade of a sword-cane he carried.

"We're on duty as well as you, an' not impty-handed either, ye'll find, said Mullowny, in the same cool tone, springing also from his stool at the same time, and drawing forth a large pistol from his breast. The colligh and the urchins now rushed from the hearth to the door, uttering wild cries of "murder, murder." But the disputants proceeded not to use their weapons, readily as they had appealed to them. The apprehension of what might be the result of the encounter, and its consequences, seemed to flash on the minds of both simultaneously, as they stood exchanging looks of defiance; but each, from various motives and in different degrees, feeling reluctant to commence, for so trivial a cause, an affray so likely to be a deadly one, from the weapons and personal strength and daring of the opponents. Charley Rorke was a man of powerful bone and muscle, though now, to be sure, a good deal encumbered with flesh, which did not, however, deprive him of that freedom of motion and high degree of activity frequently seen to accompany great fullness of body, particularly among persons leading active lives; and, from his fearless character, and the nature of his profession, he was well habituated to personal encounters.

Of his opponent's remarkable personal appearance we shall present the readers with a somewhat more lengthened portrait, as he is to play a conspicuous part in our pages. In stature he was rather under the middle size, while the shoulders, which supported a short, thick neck, surmounted by a bullet-shaped head, were by no means on a level; one aspiring some inches above the other. But then his arms were of unusual length, his chest of ample breadth, and the legs, that formed the pedestals to this superstructure, of that bowed description generally indicative of much strength and firmness of footing.

It was the countenance, however, that constituted the portion of Mullowny's person that, once seen, could not be easily forgotten. His complexion was colorless, and his features heavy and massive, though not deformed. But it was his deep-set eye, with its overhanging, heavy brow, the numerous surmounting furrows that belonged not to his years—for he was a young man, though with but little of the lightness or buoyancy of youth in his person or aspect—and the character of his large and prominent mouth—that most eloquent of all our features, that told, as distinctly and more truly than words might tell, that within rioted passions, which had never been checked, fierce, relentless, uncontrollable, though at times there was a cat-like expression of cunning mingled with the ferocity of the aspect.

During the moment or two that the intended combatants stood "in gloomy opposition set," it struck Rorke that there was neither credit nor advantage with "the ruling powers" to be gained by a conflict with Mullowny, while the latter recollected that the gauger was a person high in favor with the governor of the province and others in authority, owing to his pleasantness as a boon-companion and skill as a sportsman. Accordingly, the blade was again returned to its sheath and the pistol to its former resting place; and each party resumed his seat, after Charley had ascertained at the door that it still rained violently, and that none of his party was yet in sight.

They had sat but a few minutes in angry silence when two other visitors entered the cabin;

the one a young man with open expressive features, though bearing evident marks of long exposure to sun and wind. He was arrayed in a sailor's garb, and had altogether that bold, careless bearing indicative of a seafaring life. His companion was a tall, thin man, much more advanced in years, and of a pale and mild, but penetrating, countenance, as far as could be judged from the portion of it distinguishable between the collar of the ample cloak, in which he was muffled, and the overshadowing hat which descended over his forehead to the very brows of a pair of deep-set bright, grey eyes.

There was an expression of welfish joy in Mullowny's face, as he glanced triumphantly at Charley, on the entrance of the strangers. This feeling was, however, by no means reciprocated by the gauger, who rose courteously from his seat to make room for the new visitors.

"A disagreeable day for travelling, gentlemen," he observed, as they seated themselves.

"Unpleasant enough, certainly, for those that wish for dry skins," rejoined the younger stranger, shaking the rain from the jacket liberally around him; "but it is no new story to have wet days on the Irish coast—at least such used to be the case."

"Then you have but lately arrived on our shores."

"'Tis more than three years since I set foot on them before, and I fear that, during that interval, neither the climate nor the people have improved."

"Why, to be sure, the soil doesn't thrive with tories—raparees—smugglers, or priests that's now banished clone from among us, like as St. Patrick banished the venomous serpents," observed Mullowny, with one of his malignant grins.

"Mr. Mullowny is good authority on that head at least," remarked the gauger, laying a marked emphasis on the name of his late opponent, which he was determined the strangers should be apprized of, though he cared not to make his warning more distinct.

"I perceive saucy tongues still thrive in it, at all events," said the younger stranger, by a great effort, curbing himself using more violent language, while the blood rushed to his embrowned cheek and forehead, as he fastened his flashing eyes on Mullowny's countenance.

"It's yourself that's crowing saucily, my young bantam, an' if you can't give a better account o' yourself an' yer comrade than I suspect you can, ye'll be like soon to meet with something worse than words," rejoined Mullowny, returning the stranger's gaze with a fierceness equal to its own.

The stranger clapped his hand fiercely on the hanger attached to his side. But the gauger interposed, saying, "This is the second time, within an hour, that you, Mullowny, have endeavored to provoke bloodshed; and with perfect strangers in the present instance, which I shall take care to inform Sir John of, this very day, by the hand of my father."

"An' which ov us 'll Sir John be afther believin', seein' he had often reason to know before which ov us is the loyalist? An' may be I can't give information that you could guess as well as me, that these gentlemen wor the laist taste suspicious, though you want to smother the law from them."

"Never mind the lubber, sir," said the younger stranger, addressing Charley, "I'll soon teach him to pipe to a civiler tune;" and he drew his hanger.

"No, no, Frank—William—there must be no rioting. Recollect the business you are on," said the elder stranger, who had not before spoken, but had remained silently scrutinizing, with desultory but searching glances, the appearance and persons of the gauger and Mullowny. "Gentlemen," he continued, addressing himself to them, his voice having at once quieted his companion, "we are peaceful journeymen after long travel, that have dropped in here, perchance, to obtain a brief shelter from wind and rain;—and it is neither our inclination nor interest to brawl. We are entire strangers to each other, too, as the gentleman has said, and 'stranger' was wont to be a sacred name in Ireland. Surely, then, there can be no necessity that we, who may never probably meet again, should quarrel. Let us part then, in God's name, as we have met, in peace."

"We'll not part as aisy as that comes to, I suspect, me ould buck," muttered Mullowny—and he looked as if he was about to spring at the throat of the last speaker. He did not, however, as he was aware that, in the case of a scuffle, he was more likely to experience hostility than assistance from the gauger, after what had passed; and, notwithstanding that the figure of the younger stranger was slight, it gave promise of much activity and endurance, while daring fearlessness spoke in every line of his frank, open countenance, besides that he was evidently armed to the teeth.

"As we are not agreeing, the sooner we se-

parate the better," observed Rorke, looking expressively from the elder stranger to the younger, as, from his own position, he first got sight of Ffolliot and the party, on the summit of a near hill. "Frank Lynch, you are in dangerous company, and those that are coming are not likely to be more friendly," he added in a whisper, as he passed the strangers and dashed away towards the approaching dragoons, at a pace not easily reconcilable with a person that would have scarcely required the aid of stuffing, to represent adequately the figure of the fat knight, honest Jack Falstaff himself.

The young man started, as if thunderstruck, on hearing the whispered name. But he recovered himself instantly; and his eye, too, having caught the military party, he pointed them out silently to his companion; and they left the cabin immediately after; he moving out the last of the three, with a smile of defiance at Mullowny, and touching his hanger and pistol significantly as he went out.

Slowly they went along the beach, the younger turning repeatedly towards the cottage, like some bold animal of chase suspicious of attack, but still prepared to battle to the death. There apprehensions were groundless, however, for the present, as Mullowny, after having stood a moment at the cabin door, glaring from them to the gauger, and then moved some yards after them, as if determined to commit an assault at all risks, suddenly changed his direction and set off in the wake of Charley Rorke, and at a speed overtopping even his; leaving the terrified crone and urchins, who were stationed at the rear of the cabin, to venture into it again.

"Cornet," whispered Rorke, as he panted up to the party, "I will forgive you even that cursed shot, though you blew away clean with it the best chance Charley Rorke ever had, or ever may have, if you balk that scoundrel, Mullowny, who, you see, is breaking his bones to lead you on another scent."

"But if he has Sir John's orders."

"That's all in my eye and Betty Martin. You know you came on my requisition—I wish (in an under tone) you were stuck in a bog-hole when I asked you—and if there's a chance of doing anything still, it must be by our scattering ourselves in this direction, to try to intercept some of the rascals."

"Halt—halt—I have orders for you, Lieutenant Ffolliot," was now loudly heard from Mullowny, who was nearing them fast.

"Recollect, Cornet, you are at present on the revenue service," said Rorke, eagerly.

"To the left wheel—scatter yourselves, men," said Ffolliot; and instantly the party pushed on separately, each man using the best speed he might, in a direction opposite to that taken by the strangers, who, having shaped their steps inland, speedily disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

The ensuing day was Sunday. It was likewise a day of cloud and storm. The gale of the preceding day had died into an intense calm towards morning; and a mist, dense and impenetrable as the curtain that separates life from immortality, overspread sky and ocean, concealing island and peak and headland. But towards noon the wind rose again, like a warrior after his repose, scattering the mist before it, and driving the waves, with turbulence and uproar, into an ocean cavern, in which were assembled, among others, two of the persons presented to the reader in the last chapter.

It was a wild and impressive scene, in which stood, among a considerable group, Frank Lynch and Father Bernard Kilger; for the elder stranger was, as Mullowny suspected, an Irish priest who was returning to his native parish from Portugal, in the teeth of all danger and proscription. The waters had worn themselves a spacious entrance into an isolated cliff of the wild and lonely shore. Into this lofty and extended cavern the billows of the Atlantic, unbroken by rock or isle in their transit from the western world, poured at times, sweeping with them, with terrific noise, stones of various sizes, up from the depths of the ocean, and shooting up columns of spray to the height of many feet, through two perforations worn in the cavern-roof.

Here, from its wild and remote situation, was Mass wont to be occasionally celebrated for the widely-scattered peasantry, at that dark and dreary period of Ireland's history, when it can scarcely be new to any reader that the worship of God, after the manner of his fathers, was visited on the Irish peer and peasant with penalty and fine—when their priests were hunted over the face of the land with an ardor far fiercer, because in the end greatly more remunerative, than that of the wolf hunt in elder times; and when expatriation was the law's merciful award for uttering the words of salvation to a proscribed people.

Here now were gathering stealthily, and one by one, a large portion of the population of that wild coast, while, here and there scattered over

the waters, was seen straggling, well-filled boat, struggling with the waves; for, with the rapidity of the highland *firocross*, the word had spread that Mass would be celebrated on this day, for the first time during many months, in the cavern of *Poulnathampul*; and the hardy and devoutly inclined islanders were resolved to brave all perils from ocean and discovery, in order to be once more listeners to the prohibited word of God.

At the inner extremity of the cavern, a large detached rock served for an altar. Behind it stood or knelt the priest, the space for a few yards around him being in general dry, except during stormy spring-tides, when its occupants had often run no small risk of being dashed to pieces by the stones hurled in by the tumultuous waves, and piles of which—the accumulation of ages—were now heaped in various directions.—The day we now treat of, however, chanced to be one of neap-tide; and, though the wind was high, there was space for the members of the congregation to kneel along the side of the cavern on the slippery and weed-covered stones that bordered the agitated mid-stream.

The candles were lighted, and as their rays were reflected in quivering and broken lines on the tossed waters—and partially revealed and partly threw into deeper shadow its rugged sides and splintered roof—the cavern, into which the light of the gloomy day had penetrated but dimly, with its grouping and coloring, as well as its external adjuncts, would have offered to the painter's eye a most striking picture.

The tall figure and pale features of the priest, looking still paler in the dim light; the male peasants bowed in devotion, with ear erect to catch the remotest *unaccustomed* sounds, among whom were distinguishable a few, besides Frank Lynch, in sailor's garb; and the females in their blue and scarlet cloaks with kerchieved heads—these formed the figures of the interior; while abroad, as the mist was swept momentarily away, were distinguishable the boundless reach of tempestuous ocean, with an occasional boat borne triumphantly on, or tumbling amid its waves, and a casual glimpse of the gigantic mountain-range looming in the far-off distance.

The ceremony proceeded, and the screams of the restless sea-fowl sweeping round the cliff, added a wilder solemnity to it; while the roar of the waves, as they rushed into the cavern or broke thunderingly against the neighboring cliffs, might have seemed to the imaginative ear no inappropriate organ-peak for that wild cavern-cathedral.

The Mass was scarcely half concluded, when the voice of the scout, who had been left abroad to give warning, should danger approach, was heard above winds and waves shouting "the troopers—the bloody troopers, an' *Shawn na Soggarth!*"

Instantly there was wild terror and confusion in the cavern. Prayers were arrested in their utterance. The candles were quenched—the sacred book closed—the wine spilled—the vestments stripped; and the priest and flock, male and female, the aged and the young, were scrambling amid the slippery rocks in their eagerness to escape. Some fled along the shore, in various directions; others pushed off in the boats, to buffet with wind and tide; while a few were necessitated to betake themselves to swimming after the nearest boat, to escape the dreadful troopers, who were advancing rapidly under the guidance of the far and evil-famed *Shawn na Soggarth*, the redoubted priest-hunter, and who was no other than Mullowny, the reader's acquaintance of yesterday.

Either the scout had been negligent, or the troopers had used great precaution in their approach, as they had neared the cliff closely when his alarm was given. Yet so rapid had been the movements of the terrified congregation from the cavern, that when the party came up, there were, out of nearly three hundred, but two individuals still scrambling at the mouth of the cavern—the one a very aged and nearly blind female peasant, the other, her grandson, a fine athletic young fellow who had remained, in spite of all danger, to aid her tottering steps.

"*Michaül ma graw* (my love), lay me here. Bad as they are, the sogers 'll not mind to harm a poor ould blind colligh. But do you make off, as they'd surely hurt you, or drag you to jail like as they did Aody Horkan last aisther, an' thin what ud your poor granny do?"

"No, granny, I wont stir an inch till you're safe; why they'd make no more bones o' skiverin' you than they'd make o' gutting a dog. But have courage for a minnit or two, an' we'll be both safe. Wan o' the boats is pattin' back for us—hiloo!"

"*Michaül*, they're on us inready, for I hear their steps. Lay me down, a *vich ma chree* (son of my heart). Av they kill me idsel', what matters an ungnified ould colligh? An maybe I'd never be so fit to die as this blessed minnit."

Without wasting more words, *Michaül* took