



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 1863.

No. 35.

THE HERMIT OF THE ROCK.

A TALE OF CASHEL.

BY MRS. J. SADLER.

CHAPTER IV.—BRYAN'S STATIONS.

(Continued from the True Witness of the 27th March)

It was not to scrape the moss from the tombs and head-stones, or to replace the precious fragments...

The calls of nature were seldom pressing on old Bryan, whose attenuated frame required but little sustenance...

The hours of that holy day passed away all unnoticed by Bryan. According to his custom on such days he made what he called his 'Stations,' beginning at the image of St. Patrick...

Long time the old man paused and prayed in the beautiful choir of Cormac's Chapel, where the altar stood of old—again at the tomb of the holy founder, close by the Chapel-wall—then on the Chapel of the Apostles, roofless and bare...

Last of all was the Cathedral with its long line of buried archbishops, many of whom are still known by name to the people and their memory fondly cherished.

time he suffered the point of Patrick's iron-shod staff to penetrate his foot without a murmur or a groan, deeming it part of the baptismal rite.

There was Cormac MacCullenan, the holy prince-bishop, who rebuilt St. Patrick's old Church and erected that Chapel which still bears his name, a miracle of ancient art.

There was Archbishop O'Hene, of whom chronicles tell that he was 'the fountain of religion in the western parts of Europe; and there was Archbishop O'Dunan, known to his own and after ages as 'the most pious man in the western world;'

There was Archbishop Maurice, to whose learning and wisdom even the Welchman, Cambrensis, bears witness, albeit that he spoke his mind rather freely to that worthy on one memorable occasion, when Giraldus having taunted the Irish with having no martyrs, the prelate replied:

'Though our country be looked upon as barbarous, uncultivated, and cruel, yet they always have paid reverence and honor to ecclesiastics, and never could stretch out their hands against the saints of God. But now there is come a people who know how, and are accustomed to make martyrs. Henceforth Ireland, like all other countries, shall have hers.'

(Well you said it, Maurice of Cashel, many a martyr Ireland has had since.) There was Archbishop O'Hene, Legate-Apostolic in Ireland, and author of the 'Life of St. Cuthbert, of Lindisfarne,' whom he proves to have been an Irish saint; there was Richard O'Hedian, one of the greatest prelates that ever swayed the crozier of Cashel—the restorer and renovator of all the buildings on the Rock, the founder of the hall for the Vicars-Choral—the St. Laurence O'Toole of Cashel—the prelate who was impeached by John Gese, the Protestant Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, in thirty articles, the principal of which were, 'That he gave no benefice to any Englishman, and advised other bishops to the like practice.'

Bryan Cullenan could not have enumerated the great Archbishop's claims to the admiration of posterity, but he knew him, by tradition, as one who stood up manfully for the old race; with all Munster, he loved and revered his name, and the place of his sepulture in the old Cathedral was one of the hermit's favorite shrines. The tomb of Myler McGrath, though from its position in the deep choir it often sheltered the old man's rest in the warm nights of summer, was yet not one of his 'Stations,' for even if the apostate prelate did recant his errors on his bed of death, he was still 'Queen Bess' bishop' to all the county round, and no man or woman in Ormond wide ever breathed a blessing on his name. The stain of apostasy was not to be effaced from the memory of an 'archbishop' by the private recantation of public errors persisted in for years. No—no—prayers might be said for the repose of that late repentant soul, and many a one Bryan did say with that intention, but no prayers were offered up by him or others at the tomb where 'the first Protestant Archbishop of Cashel' had mouldered into dust.

These tombs, with the old altar sites, were Bryan Cullenan's 'Stations,' but these were not all the Christian heroes whose memory gilds the ruined fane of Cashel. Some of the greatest and holiest of the archbishops gave up their souls to God far away from the Sacred Rock, and ever as Bryan knelt before the forsaken spot where of old they ministered at the altar, he would murmur to himself, 'An' sure they're not all here, the more's the pity. Isn't there Archbishop O'Hurley, the holy martyr, that suffered death and torture for the faith, that was buried in sayret somewheres near Dublin? Ay! and many another holy bishop that died in France and Spain, in the time of the troubles. Well! it's a folly to talk, England has a deal to answer for, and it's the black reckoning she'll have to pay when her day of reckoning comes.'

'But ochone! Bryan would sigh, as he sat himself down on the projecting base of a noble column in the aisle, after finishing his stations, and fixed his sorrowful gaze on the shattered walls of the choir, where the winter-wind was making sad music, as it swept in eddies through the breaches time had made: 'ochone! it's a hard thing to think that England wasn't the worst after all—wasn't Murrough of the Burnings worse than any Sassenach of them all!—and him of the rare ould stock, too, with Brian's own blood in his veins! Och, wirra! wirra! to think of him havin' twenty priests dragged from behind the holy altar, where they were hidin', and butchered like sheep there right in front of it—not to speak of the three thousand people he burned up in the town below! Well! well!'

The martyrdom of Dermott O'Hurley, Archbishop of Cashel, in the reign of Elizabeth, was accompanied by circumstances of the most revolting cruelty. He was bound to a stake, his arms and legs covered over with pitch, salt, oil and sulphur; fire was then applied so slowly that the holy prelate was kept several hours in torture. He was then placed on a rack, and still persisting in his refusal to acknowledge the supremacy of Elizabeth in spiritual matters, was taken to Stephen's Green and there strangled.

if there's justice in heaven, Murrough O'Brien, you have a low place in the pit of hell! still, recollecting himself, 'they say he was sorry for it before he died—and turned Catholic, too—well, maybe he did—God's grace can soften the hardest heart, we all know—but if Murrough of the Burnings died a good Christian, it was a miracle and nothing else. I declare to my heart if he's in heaven I'd as lieve not see him—I'd sooner have somebody else conveyin' to me there—God forgive me!'

Then Bryan would endeavor to bring himself to more Christian sentiments with regard to Murrough, but do as he would he never could school his lips or his rebellious heart to pray for his soul's repose. 'If it be true that he died a Catholic,' said Bryan to himself, 'then he gets his share of the Church's prayers, and can do without mine—well for him, for I'm afraid if he had no others, he wouldn't get many from me—barrin' I just was certain sure that he had no one else to pray for him. A body couldn't be too hard that way to any poor soul that stood in need of their prayers. Oh masha! the Lord have mercy on all that's puttin' their punishment over them, either in the other world or this! And sure that reminds me—the morrow is All-Souls' Day, and I must make the Stations for them. I'll warrant there'll be plenty o' them about me here the night. The poor sorrowful creatures! Please God, I must be down for first Mass in the mornin', and to make my little offerings with the rest.'

'So passed the day—the evening fell,' the early evening of dull November, yet Bryan was still at his dreary post, though the drizzling rain coming chill on the blast had driven him hours before to the safe shelter of Cormac's Chapel, the stone roof of which was proof alike to wind and rain. As the shadows deepened around him, where he sat under the deep arch of the portal, and the stony faces on the corbels looked grimmer and quainter through the mist, and the pillars of the blind arches within the building, but dimly seen from the entrance even in broad day, receded, as it were, from Bryan's view, into the darkness that enveloped the nave and choir, the old man felt an awe creeping over him that still was not fear. It was the vigil of the dead, and with the shadows came the spirits, as Bryan firmly believed. But they were not spirits that Bryan feared—they were only 'poor wandering creatures lookin' for help,' and what help Bryan could give them he cheerfully gave, in accordance with the spirit of the Church whose solemn commemoration of All Souls in the Propitiatory Sacrifice was next day to gladden the suffering spirits of the middle state—be their place of punishment where it might. To any other than Bryan Cullenan the sense of solitude, and of supernatural presence would have been overwhelming, but to Bryan it was far otherwise—silence and solitude were his dream of life, and his intimate communion with the dead, and entire devotion to their memory raised him far beyond the vulgar fear of the supernatural which superstition loves to cherish.

Ha! ha! ha! laughed Bryan low to himself, 'to think of that foolish Cauth tellin' me not on any account to stay on the Rock this evening after nightfall—as if I'd be afraid of them, anywhere, or, as if they'd do me any mischief—aren't they about us everywhere as thick as the grass in the fields, and still nobody sees them, the creatures, or hears them, either—it's little they trouble us, after all!—why, then, now, what can that be?—there's no livin' bein' barrin' myself that 'd be on the Rock at this hour. It must be something else.'

Rising from his seat, Bryan stepped out, regardless of the rain, and strained his ear to listen. The sound was, at first, a low moaning, and Bryan whispered softly to himself—'That's some poor wanderin' spirit, anyhow! There's heavy trouble on it, I'll go bail.'

All at once a soft plaintive voice was heard sung in Irish a ditty well known in Munster, and these were the words in English:

'I could wander through the streets hand-in-hand with my true love, I would sail the salt sea with no fortune but you love; My nearest and my dearest I'd leave them for ever, And you'd raise me from death if you said 'we'll ne'er sever.'

'Well, that's a queer ghost!' said Bryan, moving a little farther in the direction of the voice.—'I believe it's in the Tower it is.' He moved cautiously along by the end of the great church—the Round Tower standing at the angle of one arm of the transept as Cormac's Chapel nestles in the shade of the other—but had not gone many steps, when he again stood still, for the mournful croon was rising fitfully on the breeze, and the clapping of hands was heard, and sighs and moans that seemed to come from a breaking heart.

'Christ save us!' ejaculated Bryan, and he crossed himself devoutly, 'it must be the Banshee—maybe it's a warain' for myself—sure enough the Banshee follows the Cullenans: O!

vo, vo! isn't that a sorrowful cry? He was yet speaking, when the invisible singer broke again into a wild strain of music, and sang, still in Irish:

'Gladly, O my blighted flower, Sweep apple of my bosom's tree, Would I now Stretch me in your dark death bower, Beside your corpse, and lovingly Kiss your brow.'

'But we'll meet ere many a-day, Never more to part, For even now I feel the clay Gatherin' round my heart.'

'Ah,' said Bryan to himself, 'I know now who it is—it's neither ghost nor Banshee, but mad Mabel—poor thing, poor thing—where is she, at all?'

It must be owned that Bryan's step was somewhat quicker after making this discovery than it was when he expected to see the Banshee; he speedily turned the angle of the transept-wall, and there, crouching at the foot of the old pillar-tower, was a female figure, only to be distinguished from the dark objects around by the light color of her garments. Neither the darkness nor the rain appeared to disturb the unhappy being who had chosen a place so lone and drear for her wild and mournful minstrelsy.

'Wisha, Mabel, my poor girl,' said Bryan tenderly raising her from the wet ground, 'what on earth brought you here such a night as this?'

'Hush! hush!' she replied in a cautious whisper, putting her mouth close to Bryan's ear, 'they told me he was here—hidin', you know—hidin'—isn't this Holy Cross?'

'No, no, Mabel; this is Cashel—the Rock of Cashel, you know; and encircling her frail form with his arm, he hurried towards the gate, anxious to get her housed with Cauth in his own cottage.'

'Cashel' she repeated in a whisper; then, as if the name awoke an echo in her darkened mind, she sang a snatch of an old song, to the air of 'The Girl I Left Behind Me.'

'No more—no more in Cashel town I'll sell my health a-rakin', Nor on days of fair rose up and down, Nor join the merry-making.'

'Whisht, there's the Peellers—they'll hear you—and listen hither, honest man—if they do, they'll hang you—they hang everybody.'

Then all at once she broke out again with 'The Banshee Peellers were out one night, On duty ea patrolin', O! They met a goat upon the road, And took her to be a stroller, O!'

'Good man, why don't you sing?—he used to sing, you know. But did you hear that he was dead? She peered into Bryan's face through the darkness, then pushing him away with a force that made him stagger, she cried with a dastardly laugh:

'Get away with you, now! you're codd, and he's young—will you not be botherin' me with your palaver? O wisha, I never hear his voice now, at all—where is he?—ay, that's it—he's at Holy Cross—all alone by himself they tell me, and that's why I want to go. And I must go, too, and be there afore the clock strikes twelve the night—let me go now—you see I can't stay, at all, at all—'

'Och! among the green bushes he's waiting for me!' Bryan had purposely kept silence, fearing lest the sound of an unfamiliar voice might frighten her so that his feeble arm could no longer hold her. But still he kept on his way, whilst the rain fell faster and heavier each passing moment. They had now reached the cottage, at the door of which stood Cauth waiting anxiously, as on the previous night, for Bryan's appearance. She was just commencing with—'Why, then, Bryan—' when the old man brushed past her with Mabel into the house.

'Wisha, Bryan, wh: that you have with you?' cried Cauth, following them in, but no sooner did her eye fall on the pale face of the maniac, looking ghostly through the long, damp tresses that hung over it in wild disorder, than a livid palor overspread her own visage, and she shook like an aspen leaf. Meanwhile Bryan had seated the miserable creature in the chimney-corner, and, although the fire was blazing brightly, he threw on some additional turf, which latter act not being agreeable to Cauth, served to arouse her from her momentary stupor.

'Now, then, what did you do that for?' she said sharply enough, considering that the turf was unquestionably Bryan's own, 'wasn't the fire good enough; one'd think you had a turf-stack back o' the house?'

'Never mind, Cauth, never mind—God is a rich provider—come and see to poor Mabel—can't you put some clothes on her till you dry these duds she has on?—She's most dead with the cold and wet, you see.'

'Cold—cold!' muttered the girl, crouching over the fire, and shivering all over as the kindly warmth reached her emaciated frame through the wet garments that clung around her.

'Why, then, to be sure, I'll put dry clothes on her,' said Cauth with a strange mixture of compassion and peevishness in her tone, and in her face; 'do you think I'm a Turk or a hay-then that I wouldn't?—but where did you come across her?'

'On the Rock above, an' sure it was the blessing o' the world that I happened to be there at the time. She might have been out all night under the rain, and maybe it's dead I'd find her in the mornin'. See how God takes care of them that can't take care of themselves! Praise and glory to His name—Hee does!'

It was no easy matter for Cauth to get the necessary change made in Mabel's apparel. She could not persuade her to leave the fire, and although Bryan went out of sight behind the jamb wall, so as to leave the place to themselves, the difficulty still existed. 'The girl had taken it into her head that some sinister motive prompted the disrobing, and she resisted with all the strength that madness gives—'

'It's going to hang me you are,' said she, freeing herself with a sudden jerk from the restraint of Cauth's arm, 'there's no need for you to strip me, sure—can't you hang me with my clothes on?'

Cauth tried to expostulate, but her voice failed her, and a convulsive shudder passed through her frame. The senseless prattle of the maniac was either striking some chord in her own heart, or exciting her compassion to an intolerable degree. She silently renewed her efforts, however, to take off the wet clothes, and finally succeeded, owing mainly to their tattered condition. But still, to the last, Mabel kept grumbling and protesting.

'Hut, hut! you would jade, isn't it ashamed you ought to be to strip a decent girl that way?—Be off with you, now—not a tack more you'll get off—not a tack—O murder! isn't she the robber, all out?'

When the warm dry clothes were once on, however, Mabel's tone changed. She began to feel the comfort, and a smile overspread her wan features, as, looking down at the red drugg-petticoat which Cauth had put on, she said to Bryan, who had just resumed his place at the fire:

'There now, you see, I'm Petticoat Loose.—I could you so, but you wouldn't believe me—don't be afraid, ould man, I'll not hurt you!—But don't stop me—don't and God bless you, for I'm on my way to Holy Cross to see him you know, and I must be back at the hill before cock crow! There, look at her!' pointing with a giggling laugh to Cauth who had dropped almost fainting on a seat—she's afraid of the ghost, you see—she thinks Petticoat Loose'll hang her—ha! ha! ha! maybe she will—she hung me onst—that I mayn't sm, but she did!—and I'm walkin', walkin' ever sence, an' will till the day o' judgment.'

'The Lord save us!' muttered Cauth; 'she'll be the death o' me this night, if I stay in the one house with her! Any way, I must get the supper for them.'

The supper was got accordingly—tea and oaten bread for Mabel, porridge and milk for Bryan, in which Cauth made a show of joining him, but it was plain that the appetite was wanting to her—Mabel, on the contrary, swallowed her supper greedily, and with evident relish of the tea, then a luxury little common amongst country people in any part of Ireland.

'Tay!' said Mabel very softly, looking at the liquid in her cup, 'I like tay—I get it up at the Hall!—then, as if the name brought a thought into her mind, she turned to Bryan with quite a confidential air—'Jerry Pierce is at the Hall now—you know Jerry?—he's not hung yet—but ould Mr. Esmond says he'll hang him, and Tim Murtha, and everybody—an' then 'on't they hang him—maybe they 'on't—no, no—they don't hang the quality—they shoot them they do,' and she lowered her voice to a hissing whisper that froze the blood in the veins of those who heard her. 'You needn't look at me so, honest man, for it's truth I tell you—they do shoot the gentlemen, by times—'

'Whisht! whisht! Mabel!' said Bryan in a tone of great alarm, knowing that walls have ears, sometimes. 'You said you liked tay—give her another cup, Cauth!'

But Mabel would persist in the obnoxious theme, tea or no tea: 'Did you ever hear of old Chadwick—didn't they shoot him—didn't they, now?—Mara said they did—and listen hither, pulling Bryan's head close to her—'he said it was him—you know who I mane—there, don't say a word—for your life—but there was blood spilled, now—that's God's truth—and rich laughin' you never seed as there was after it—ha, ha, ha!—they thought to hang me, too, but I hid behind King Donogh's tomb in Holy Cross Abbey abroad; an' that's how they missed of me, you see!—but they codded him—an' they hung him for all his purty red cheeks, and his yalla hair?'

'Och! what color was your true-love's hair,