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REDMOND O'CONNOR;
OR, THE SECRET PASSAGE.
A PAGE OF IRISH HISTORY.

(From the N. Y. Irish-American.)

CHAPTER VI.—THE OUTLAW'S COTTAGE.
It was near sunset on the evening of the fourth day when the detachment entered the confines of Fertullagh, the estate of Richard Tyrrell. The troops, weary after their long and rapid march, were glad to encamp for a few days to recruit their strength. Tents were pitched, sentinels placed, and patrols appointed to scour the glens and crags in the vicinity. Tyrrell, having made all secure, led his companions from the camp, and followed a bridle path, which wound in a serpentine course toward the top of a thickly-wooded hill which stretched its green foliage to the very back of the camp. When they had reached a small level space in the steep ascent, both halted, as if by mutual instinct, to gaze upon the scene which lay beneath them in all its vernal beauty. An exclamation of surprise escaped from O'Connor as he cast his eyes over a scene of desolation, like that presented by the classic Scio, after the visit of the Captain Pasha, with his fierce Osmanli. On a beautiful green knoll, which seemed, from its even, sloping sides, more the creation of art than of nature, arose the blackened walls of what appeared to have been once a lordly stronghold. Around the base of this, in little groups, were clustered the ruins of the cottages, which had once been filled with stout vassals, now blackened and decayed, but crumbling slowly and reluctantly, as if loth to give up the hope of a brighter future. Scattered over the valley, in every direction, could be seen the bare rafters of some little cottage, surrounded by its cluster of aged ash or sycamore trees, which seemed, as Davis has sung of a later and a similar scene, to be—

—Like mourners watching,
And crouching with the breeze.

"You wonder," said Tyrrell, sadly, "that Richard Tyrrell hath no better road than this leading to his castle. Look at those blackened walls. Yonder was the eyrie of my fathers—a home for the homeless, and a terror to our enemies for ages, till the bloody Cosby made it what it is—a heap of ruins. Look upon those crumbling cabins! Once they were filled with stout hearts, and arms that drew the *skien* but at my bidding: now, not a curl of smoke ascends from a single chimney—not a *kerne* hastens to fight the beacons—not a shrivelled grand-dame advances with a prayer and a blessing for her master! I was on a pilgrimage to Loch Derg when the maddening news reached me of the sack of my castle, the massacre of my vassals, and the flight of my wife and child. I flew on wings of despair to my beloved Fertullagh. It was the waste which now lies before us! I hastened to where my wife was concealed in this very hill, and arrived in time to receive her dying benediction, and to kiss her pale lips, ere the soul had passed between. Can the world bear our story, and blame us for seeking vengeance? Can heaven see our sufferings, and not smile upon our cause? The Tyrrell hath yet a son who is nobly sustaining the honor of his name in the army of Tyrconnell; he will be proud of your friendship, and will love you as a brother."

The Chief seemed struggling to repress his emotion, but in vain. Down that cheek, furrowed by many a rude blast, and which had never bleached amid the noise and smoke of many a hard-fought battle, a single pearly drop rolled. It was only one. The next moment the cloud had rolled away, and he was again the stern warrior.

"Come, my friend," he said, "the same faithful fellow who protected my wife yet keeps a home for his outlawed master; and if the *Sas-senach* hath not gone before us, I can promise you a friendly welcome."
So saying, he turned his horse's head, and led the way up the untravelled path which grew almost imperceptible when they had reached the crest of the hill. Diving into the wood, and brushing their way through the thick undergrowth, they at length stood before a small but neat cottage, half hidden among the overhanging branches. A young maiden was engaged tending some flowers in the little garden, unconscious of their presence. The Knight gazed upon her beautiful form and the long masses of flaxen hair which veiled her white shoulders with its graceful drapery, and was wondering within himself if the features of this fair apparition corresponded with the symmetry of her shape when she turned towards them, revealing a face of most exquisite loveliness. She appeared surprised at their sudden appearance; but, recognizing the Chief, she ran forward, exclaiming—"My uncle!" and was clasped in his mailed arms.

"Do not be so coy, sweet one!" said Tyrrell, as she was about to retire. "This is my friend,

Sir Redmond O'Connor, of Glendearg, whom I would commend to your favor and friendship."
The young lady received the Knight's greeting with a retiring modesty which, in his eyes, enhanced her charms. As she looked up into his handsome, manly face, a crimson flush overspread her own; it might be, because in this solitude she had never seen its equal. After fastening their steeds to a hoary willow, which sheltered the cottage with its green foliage, they followed their fairy-like guide into the single apartment.

A woman of middle age was engaged in preparing the evening meal; and as the heavy mailed heel of Tyrrell rung on the door stone, she sprang forward and grasped him by both hands. At the same time she cast a searching look toward the Knight, which, Tyrrell observing, whispered—

"'Tis a friend, Eileen, whom I have brought to partake of your sweet barley bread, which I, myself, used so much to admire."

"My master's friend is always welcome," said Eileen; "and what we have is at his disposal. Better would he have it if it was ours, and I hope welcome will make amends for what we have not."

So saying, she hurried to spread upon the table such fare as her larder afforded; and while she was so engaged, the Knight took a survey of the room. A bright pike, a fire-lock, a long bow, a sword, and several other implements of war, gave evidence of a masculine inmate. He could also see that the young girl was something more than a daughter, from the deference paid her by the elder female. He was resolving in his own mind to have this seeming mystery cleared up the first opportunity, when a step was heard at the door, and the master of the house entered—a gigantic man, with his dark hair hanging in matted elflocks upon his broad shoulders, and his *croimail* reaching and mixing with his whiskers, far below his chin. A cap of untanned calf-skin covered his head, and thrown carelessly on his shoulder, was a cloak of dark home-spun, which half covered a stout buff coat. In his girdle was stuck a long, two-edged dagger, and in his hand he carried a short-handled pike. Breeches of leather covered his thighs, meeting at the knees a pair of leggings of the same material, which covered, in their turn, a pair of rough shoes, with dainty silver buckles; making, altogether, a strange compound between the dress of the gentleman, the soldier and the peasant.

We have been thus anxious to bring to the reader's imagination the appearance of this outlaw chief, for such he was, as he is destined to figure prominently in this history of ours.

"Welcome, my master, and my master's friend," he said, doffing his shaggy head gear, and extending his hard, sinewy hand to each in turn. "I would have ham-strung those steeds without, but that, in crossing the hill-side, I saw the banner of Ulster flying in the valley below."

"For your clemency in this instance, we must thank you, MacCostelloe," answered Tyrrell, smiling. "And, now, what news of the country? Hath anything happened since I was last in Fertullagh?"

"Nothing, but the usual burning and massacres, which we strive, in our own way, to repay. But yesterday I heard from a strolling minstrel that the Anglo-Irish of Meath, to the number of a thousand, have gathered at Mullingar, under the Baron of Trimbleston, with the view of marching with the Deputy into Ulster."

"Then, by my faith, if they do, they will find some of their nests harried on their return," exclaimed Tyrrell. "But, no; they would not be so mad as to leave us here in their midst. There is a long score between Barnewell and me, and I care not how soon it is settled. But I see our supper is waiting for us, and we will not try the patience of our good Eileen too far."

They wanted no forcing to partake of the bread and beef which was set before them.—After doing justice to this, with a relish which gave evidence of previous hard fare, a large wooden vessel of *usquebaugh* was placed on the table, and *scalltheen* ruled the remainder of the evening.

"Now, MacCostelloe," said Tyrrell, as he was preparing to return, "should we be forced to fight this Barnewell, what help may we expect from your Majesty of the hills?"

"Faith," replied the outlaw, "tis little ye may count on me. We have no more than a dozen of men, and thrice that number of women and children."

"But how can that be?" interrupted the chief. "Were ye not three score strong when last I was in Fertullagh?"

"Aye; but it is wonderful that we should melt like April snow, when our life is nothing but warfare, and when we must put our blood in jeopardy, for the maintenance of those depending on us? It was but a week since six of our brave fellows were hung around the red castle of Wingfield."

"How—what?" exclaimed the Knight.—

"Doth he already take the law in his own hands?"

"You are a stranger in those parts," returned the outlaw, smiling, "or you would know that the Celt hath no mercy in Leinster, much less an outlaw."

"'Tis true," said the Knight, "I am but a stranger; but with the blessing of God I will not long remain so."

"It is already late," remarked the chief, "and we must to the camp, lest we be caught sleeping, when we least expect it."

On the way back, the Knight who had taken a deep interest in the "fairy cottager," as he called her, inquired of Tyrrell her former history.

"Her history, alas! is the history of thousands, in this land of ours," said the chief, with a sigh. "This 'fairy cottager,' as you have called her, is my niece. She is daughter of my only sister, Isoline, who was married to Cahir O'More, of Leix. It is hardly necessary to say that he, with one hundred and eighty of his king-men were murdered in the castle of Mullach by the false Cosby. This Brian MacCostelloe was a vassal of his house, and leaving his own three sons wailing in their blood, escaped with the tidings to his mistress. Poor thing! she was not fitted to cope with her overwhelming misfortune, and gradually she faded and died, leaving to the care of MacCostelloe the fair Alice, who was then but a child. Since then she has grown up in this wilderness in solitude; and the promises and entreaties of her uncle could not make her leave this home of her fosterage for a refuge in the strongest castle of Tyrone."

"But could we not prevail on MacCostelloe to go with us to Ulster?"

"I, faith, we might as well try to move the Rock of Cashel. He has sworn to remain in Fertullagh and be a scourge to the usurpers as long as he can wield a pike; and he is one to keep his promise, with a vengeance."

The conversation was here dropped, and separating, they took different routes around the camp to see that all was right. Nothing disturbed the stillness of the night, but the muttered song of the sentinel, as he kept his sleepless watch.

Having gone the rounds of the encampment, O'Connor returned to his tent; and, wrapping his cloak about him, he lay down on the smooth grass, and was soon lost to everything but the form of sweet Alice, which kept hovering about his bed, like a guardian angel of the night.

The next morning he was again at the cottage, and every day while the army remained at Fertullagh, his steed might be seen clamping his bits under the willow tree, while his master and his fair companion enjoyed many a lonely ramble. Were we merely writing a love tale we could give a couple of chapters of those delightful conversations; but as we are detailing history, it is enough to say that before many days had fled, O'Connor had declared his love, and was accepted. When he returned to the camp that evening, the sharp eye of Tyrrell detected a ribbon partly concealed in the Knight's breast.

"O'Connor," said his friend, "I have rare news for you. It seems Barnewell himself would not stoop to gain a victory over our twenty score of men, and hath deputed his cub to give us a drubbing in his stead. I have just now received the news of their approach, and we may expect an attack in the morning."

"I am glad of it," answered the Knight.—"This blade of mine, is rusty for lack of employment, and that mace—a present from Benito—almost forgets that it ever left its place at the saddle bow. My poor charger, too, hath lost his proud Spanish step, and now crawls beneath me like the veriest *garron*."

"Now, I would attribute that," replied the chief, jocosely, "to his standing so often at MacCostelloe's. Poo! man, do not blush so, or that scartle face will betray you. That ribbon you have hidden so carefully reveals the cause of your frequent visits to the cottage.—But of this at another time. We must gain some rest if we would do battle on the morrow."

And, kneeling down side by side, those two stern warriors poured out their souls in prayer—a strange contrast to us of the present day, who must reject this humble Christian exercise, if we would be thought men!

CHAPTER VII.—TYRRELL'S PASS.

When the Knight awoke in the morning, the hoarse roll of the drum was calling the men to arms. He donned his armor with the aid of Fergus, and mounting his horse, galloped to the road, where he found the men hurrying from all quarters, and forming in a column of march.—The brave Tyrrell was already there, forming, arranging, and addressing the men. Leading O'Connor aside, he pointed along the road, where the van of the English was seen advancing; the bright rising sun reflecting on their mailed ranks.

"Yonder they come! O'Connor, and here is my plan of action. You will take half the men and proceed to yonder wooded pass. Conceal them in the hollow on the right, next the

river. In the meantime I will retire before them with the remainder. As soon as they have passed your concealment, do you charge upon their rear, and we will give the ravens such a feast as Fertullagh hath not seen in many a day. Is my plan a good one?"

"It is good, and I will do your bidding; but would rather fight them where we stand."

"But, remember, we are but one to three—and being flesh and blood, we must take what advantage God gives us."

"So be it," replied the Knight, as he put himself at the head of the men and led them to the place appointed, which was a wooded glen between the road and a small river which flowed near. Meanwhile, the English, seeing their prey about to escape, quickened their movement, Tyrrell retiring slowly before them. All went as he had foreseen. In their enthusiasm and eagerness of pursuit, the ranks of his opponents were thrown into confusion, pell-mell and they rushed into the narrow gorge, which has since received the name of "Tyrrell's Pass," in memory of the victory. O'Connor waited impatiently until the last file had passed his ambushade, when turning to his followers, he said—

"Give them a shower of lead and let the brand do the rest."

One volley was fired, as the Irish left their hiding place and rushed upon the foe with a shout of vengeance, which the war-cry of Tyrrell echoed from the front. Placed between two fires, the English halted in bewilderment. There was no escape, and they must either cut their way through or fall where they stood.

"A Barnewell! A Barnewell!" shouted their leader, as he rode from side to side, animating them by voice and example. "Tyrrell aboo!" was heard from the Irish side as the chief and his veterans attacked them, sword in hand; while O'Connor, shouting his battle-cry, rushed upon their rear. No quarter was asked or given.—The one party fought with the fury of despair; the other with that deadly hatred which a long course of wrong and oppression had inspired.—Barnewell fought with a bravery worthy of a better cause. Where the battle raged thickest, and the clashing of steel was loudest, there did his plume wave above the crowd, and his voice encourage them to desperate daring. Putting himself at the head of a score of cavaliers, he made a desperate charge, hoping to cut his way and escape by the road he had come. The Irish, in spite of their bravery, in spite of the superhuman efforts of O'Connor, were obliged to retire; but it was only inch by inch, and bearing a trail of blood behind them. O'Connor in vain tried to crush through the dense throng and confront the mailed horsemen. As his followers fell, the survivors closed up their ranks, and formed a wall of tough muscle to oppose that of steel which strove to bear them down. At this point of the fight, a shower of heavy stones fell among the English, rolling three of them from their saddles. O'Connor, looking up to see whence this unexpected aid proceeded, beheld MacCostelloe, clambering down the face of the precipice, his sharp *skien* in his teeth, while he grasped the shrubs with both hands. He was followed by a dozen half naked outlaws, the wind carrying their tangled hair wildly about their faces. As they reached the ground they attacked the flank of the English. Those in front redoubled their fury, and Barnewell and his men were again borne back into the Pass.—They now formed, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible. But their courage was unavailing. O'Connor, at the head of his stout followers, pressed them closely. His steed, rendered wild with the noise and shouting, plunged madly forward, while every stroke of his sword laid a foeman at his feet. He at length confronted Barnewell, and shouted to him to surrender.

"Never, with weapon in my hand," was the reply, as he made the attack. The combat was of short duration. The Englishman's weapon went flying through the air, and he stood at the mercy of his antagonist.

"Yield now, Barnewell," he shouted, holding the sharp weapon to his throat. The young Baron was obliged to make a virtue of necessity and comply. The victor looked round for another enemy, but no enemy was there. The warrior who had left Mullingar but a few short hours before, full of high hope and daring courage, lay around in heaps, and one alone escaped to carry back the tidings of defeat.

O'Connor was looking upon this bloody spectacle, when Tyrrell rode up, his helmet in his hand, and a drop of blood rolling down his cheek.

"Art wounded?" asked O'Connor anxiously, seeing the blood.

"It is but a scratch, and a wash is all it wants; but, will those fellows rise, that you hold your blade in readiness? I think our fellows dealt their blows too lustily for that."

"I am not thinking of that," returned the Knight smiling; "but my hand is so swollen, that I cannot open it if I would."

"In good truth, it is so!" exclaimed Tyrrell, examining the hand, which was greatly swollen. "Send hither the armorer," he called to one of his men; "we have here a subject for his skill."

The armorer soon made his appearance, and it was only when he had cut the sword-hilt thro' with a file, that O'Connor was able to relinquish his grasp of the weapon.

While this was being done, Tyrrell pointed to the brow of the hill, and as O'Connor followed with his eye, he could perceive the flutter of a cloak disappearing among the trees. It was Alice, who, from this concealment, had watched the varying fortunes of the fight.

"Now," said Tyrrell, when the hand of the young Knight had been released, "it seems Alice will be anxious to see her Knight return in safety, and you can go to the cottage while I see to the men."

As O'Connor was making his way over the heaps of slain, he looked around in vain for Fergus. The men were already engaged in carrying off the dead, and he watched every group, but no Fergus was there. He was beginning to give up the search in despair, when just as he emerged from the crowd, he encountered his foster brother face to face; but so metamorphosed that his own mother would not have known him. He was covered with a coat of mire, at least half an inch in thickness, and round his face his hair hung dripping and matted, and so ludicrous was his whole appearance, that O'Connor could not control his laughter. In his hand he carried a cap, with a long eagle's feather, upon which he looked admiringly from time to time as he approached.

"Hast been playing hide and seek through the bog holes?" asked the Knight when he had recovered from his fit of merriment.

"'Tis just true," replied Fergus with a groan. "I was engaged with one of the cut-throats, and had some trouble in breaking his head which I at last did; and looking round for another, I espied a fellow making toward the bog. Staying nothing else to do, I gave chase, as the sailor fellows have it. As long as the ground was firm, I gained on him beautifully; but just at the edge of the bog he jumped a quagmire, and in attempting to follow him, I plunged over head and ears. When I got my head above the water, thinking to put a good face on the matter, I called to him to surrender; but by this time he was half-way across the bog. I crawled to the bank and hallooed after him, but he only ran harder, and by this time he must be in the neighborhood of Dublin. However, I found this cap, which I will wear in memory of the owner."

A roar of laughter from the bystanders greeted this story of Fergus, in which his foster brother joined with a good will, and after advising him to change his clothes, he proceeded on his way and "left him alone in his glory."

Before evening, thanks to the good offices of Dame Eileen and the smiles of his pretty Alice, he could use his hand as freely as before; and Tyrrell, with MacCostelloe and some of his followers, arriving about dark, the evening was spent in hilarity and carousing. The worthy MacCostelloe swallowed many a horn of *usquebaugh* in drinking to the success of his master's arms.

"Why will you still refuse to accompany me to a more secure asylum?" said O'Connor, as he was taking leave of Alice at the porch. "The castle of Dungannon would be safer than this poor cottage."

"Dear Redmond," she replied, looking up into his eyes, "it is here my childhood was passed, and it has become endeared to me by the presence of those who have watched over me, who have anticipated my every want, and who love me as their own. Would it not be cruel to forsake those to whom I owe so much? No, Redmond; do not urge me. Those cottage walls, and the stout arm of my good father, here, will shield me yet a little, till God send better times."

"I hope it may be so, dear Alice; but since I entered the door to-day, something whispers to me that your sweet face will not greet me on my return."

"It is only a foreboding of fancy," she replied, forcing a smile.

"I could wish it so," replied O'Connor, "and since thou art determined, I can only commend you to the care of our common mother."

So saying, he imprinted a kiss on her white forehead, and pressing her to his bosom, took his leave.

"Hath love-making driven you blind?" asked Tyrrell, as O'Connor strode across the little flower plots in his retreat. "By St. Patrick, I will look anxiously for the morrow, to have you again on the march, for this love would spoil the best Knight in Christendom. Here have I been coaxing MacCostelloe to evacuate this den, and bring his charges to Ulster; but he swears he will hold it as long as he can wield a pike in its defence."

"Aye!" answered MacCostelloe sullenly,—