

LEGEND OF THE O'BYRNES.

"A sad tale's best for winter;
I have one of sprites and goblins."
—Winter's Tale, Act II, Scene 8.

It was a fine morning in January, in the year one thousand five hundred and —, that the governor of an inconsiderable castle, on the marches of O'Byrne's country, was awakened by his son, a young child, to tell him that he saw from the window a number of strange-looking people approaching from the direction of the Wicklow mountains.

"What kind of people, boy?" demanded the governor, starting up; "are they cased in armor?"

"No, papa," replied the boy; "they have no armor, but, as well as I can discern, they have bright yellow garments."

"By St. George," exclaimed the governor, rushing out, "the O'Byrnes are upon us. To arms! to arms! the foe is here!"

But it was too late, an advance party of the O'Byrnes had already surprised the castle; having first contrived to transfix the careless sentinel—who slept in his cups—with as many arrows as sufficed to prevent him from ever being able to tell tales, a few of them contrived to steal in through a badly secured window. With the assistance of these, their comrades outside soon forced open the gate; and their shrill war cry, as they rushed into the hall, replied to the ill-timed commands of the governor.

The inmates of the castle, however, though hastily collected, made a desperate defence; but the arrival of a reserve party of the O'Byrnes, headed by no less a personage than Phelim McHugh, the celebrated "Mountain King," turned the scale of victory in favor of the assailants; and the sun that shed its wintry beam on St. George's flag as it gaily floated in the morning breeze, beheld from his meridian tent of purple gray clouds, its place occupied by the banner of that extraordinary chief, who was thirty years ago the terror of the government of the Pale, although living in its immediate vicinity.

The assailants used their victory with great moderation. Not a drop of blood was shed, from the moment the castle surrendered; and the inmates were not only treated with lenity, but even with kindness; but for all this, the mountain warriors did not neglect to appropriate to themselves everything valuable in the castle, acting, no doubt, on the maxim of war, afterwards adopted by Hudibras, towards the vanquished astrologer; "I give you quarter; but your pillage."

The conquering warrior's crop and tilage, which, with his sword, he reaps and ploughs, that's mine, the law of arms allows."

On the following day the chief of the O'Byrnes returned to his dwelling in the mountains, with the greater part of his clan, leaving the rest to protect the castle. All the prisoners accompanied him, with the exception of one, who, although the poorest man in the castle, had alone, of all its defenders, as much money in his immediate possession—being the amount of his good luck at the gaming table in Dublin a few evenings before—as the victors deemed equivalent for his freedom. This man was one, Ralph Goldthorn, a Londoner by birth, and a "poor gentleman" by profession—as indeed, his well darned hose and the hue of his velvet doublet, changed by long wear from dark blue to azure, proclaimed him at first sight—who having wasted his youthful patrimony in dissipation, had entered the army, and, after mounting many and many a breach, and helping to change the color of many a "tentied field" from green to red, had returned to England as poor as he had set out—the bounties of Mars being soon lavished at the shrine of Bacchus. He had come to Ireland a few weeks before, "claimed kindred" with the governor of the castle, whose capture we have just described, and had his claim allowed, for, in the days of Queen Bess, it was not so difficult a matter for a man like Goldthorn, to "live on his friends" as in the present age of refinement when most men choose their friends by the length of their purses.

Goldthorn was about to depart from the castle, on the morning after it surrendered to the O'Byrnes, when he received a pressing invitation from Rory Oge O'Byrne, the commander of the new garrison, and a near kinsman of Phelim McHugh, to remain as long as he pleased; which he had the more readily accepted as he had few such friends in Ireland. Moreover, he loved the good cheer and deep relations of the new master of the castle. Rory Oge was a being of much light and shade; he was young—as his name implied—handsome, generous and brave; but on the other hand he was

a hard drinker, and extremely capricious and quarrelsome. He, however, agreed remarkably well with Goldthorn, who possessed a very even temper, was able to drink his host under the table, and could entertain him with stories innumerable of foreign lands, battles and sieges; in relating which, he was an admirable adept in selecting his materials from the world of fiction, when the world of reality ceased to afford them.

In the meantime the foray of the O'Byrnes having reached the ears of the government of the Pale, a considerable force was sent to dispossess the mountain warriors of their stronghold; but being foiled in several attempts to surprise the castle, through the address and vigilance of Rory Oge, the English commander deemed it more advisable to encamp his army at some distance—yet not too far for observation—with a view to obliging the Irish either to surrender for want of provisions or to come out and fight on more equal ground.

It happened, one night, as Goldthorn sat drinking with Rory Oge, and a few others of his sept who could understand English, that, having exhausted his entire stock of real ad-ventures, he had recourse to imaginary ones for the entertainment of his audience; and accordingly he commenced relating such a series of improbabilities, as had Baron Munchausen been then in existence would have thrown that Utopian traveller completely in the shade.

"I have been," said he, "in Araby, where the sun is so near the earth that I have often lit a candle with its rays; and in Egypt, a country governed by a queen called Sphinx, who is half a woman, half beast, with the wings of a bird. Not to speak of my encounter with a fiery dragon, in the land of the Aethiops—my escape from snupwreck in the Baltic sea, on the back of a kraken, or sea serpent—or my ascent of Mount Etna, one of the entrances to hell, through a chink in which I could see Beelzebub and his whole convale of devils, red, black and blue. But all this is nothing to what I saw outside this castle a few nights ago."

The simple mountaineers, accustomed from their infancy to stories of fairies and magicians, heard all these lies with the most implicit credulity; and now that the narrator was about to mention something that occurred so near, they bent forward with breathless attention to hear the sequel.

"Wot ye not," said Goldthorne, "of the fellow who once possessed the rath on the site of which this castle is now built?"

"Aye, do we," replied Rory Oge; "he was called, in Irish, Donnau as Goun Laun, which signifies Donald of the blue steel; and a brave fellow he was. It gave the Saxon churls some work to dispossess him; they cut off his head for spite, because he attempted to set the fort on fire over their heads, after having surrendered; but no matter, we shall have many a head for his ere long. My curse on the race of the stranger, root and branch!" Goldthorn, who well knew that Rory's rising petulance was a sure symptom that the "thief" which he had "put into his mouth," was rapidly ascending "to steal away his brain" took no notice of his offensive manner and language, but proceeded with his story:

"By my word," continued he, "it must be this very Daniel, the long worm, or whatever you call him, that I saw. On the night to which I have alluded, having indulged too freely in strong waters, I thought to walk in the cool night air would be of service. After taking a turn or two before the castle, I was astonished mightily to see a tall figure suddenly start up before me; but what was my horror when I perceived that it wanted a head, from the neck. You all may be sure that I instantly took to my heels, nor have I ever since ventured outside the castle after sunset."

As Goldthorn concluded, "the pallid mantle of fear"—to use the elegant language of the ladies of the Genes—descended on every face present, except Rory's, who had now too much spirits within to have any fear of spirits without; but there was one person present on whom the Englishman's story made a particular impression. This was a Gallowglass named Angus Dubh, or dark Aeneas O'Carroll, than whom a handsomer youth never danced of a bright summer's eve among the blue eyed daughters of Glendalough, or a more daring spirit never went to the wars of Phelim McHugh. I may safely say that he feared no man living; but that he feared no man dead is an assertion which the melancholy sequel of my narrative would not bear out. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at, if the sound

of the castle bell were peculiarly unwelcome to Angus Dubh, as, striking twelve, just as Goldthorn had finished, it announced the hour when it fell to his turn to relieve the sentinel outside. His pride, however, prevailed against his fears, and he went forth without uttering a word of remonstrance.

It was a dark and tempestuous night; the wind was rocking the surrounding trees and moaning among their leafless boughs. Large masses of watery clouds were drifted athwart the face of a starless sky; and a drizzling rain blown right in his face was alone sufficient to prevent Angus from discerning objects very distinctly, even if Chimmerian darkness did not envelop all things. This last circumstance tended to give him some courage, for he very philosophically concluded that it would be very hard for him to see a ghost when he could not see his hand; and he accordingly determined to put all his ideas of the supernatural out of his head, and to turn his thoughts to what was very natural,—his approaching nuptials with Katherine O'Dempsey, one of the prettiest lasses of the valley of the Seven Churches. He had already entered into many a gay dream of future happiness, and constructed many an airy tower of hope—"when the bell in the castle tolled!" Away flitted all his pleasing visions, as this hour of spectres brought Goldthorn's appalling narrative more vividly than ever to his mind.

But we must leave him for awhile and return to the party inside, who had all this time continued in high wassail, until they—that is to say, Rory Oge and Goldthorn—for all the other inmates of the castle, with the exception of a few below stairs, who sat "like sacrifices by their fires of watch" were buried in sleep—made the unpleasant discovery that their bottle of aquavite was out; but they should have more. Goldthorn declared that if he took another cup sleep would never visit his eyes that night; and Rory swore that if he did not get more drink he would set the castle on fire.

The sagacity of the former soon hit upon an expedient which supplied their lack. From the time the castle was invested by the English forces Goldthorn had observed a strict neutrality, and unlike many who adopt a similar line of conduct, he preserved the friendship of both parties. He had continued from time to time to hold conferences with reconnoitering parties from the British camp unknown to the Irish sentinels. Among one of these parties he recognized an old fellow-soldier well supplied with aquavite; being indifferently well-supplied himself, a bottle should be at his service whenever he could procure a trusted messenger. He now availed himself of his friend's offer. A messenger was procured, and in less than half an hour the bottle of aquavite sparkled on the table, and the first cup set Rory Oge completely free from the long-relied reins of sobriety.

It was Rory's misfortune that he never got drunk without getting into a quarrel. Heretofore he had, even in his cups, preserved his national courtesy to strangers as not to quarrel with his guest, but contented himself with attacking one of his own people, who, knowing the humor of his leader, indulged him with a show of resistance; but all the Irish in the room being asleep, the temptation presented by Goldthorn, a national enemy, and one who had fought hard on the day the castle was taken, was too powerful for Rory to resist. Accordingly the little wits which the aquavite had left him were instantly set at work in order to find a proper cause of quarrel; but when a man is once determined to fight he will never be at a loss for an occasion. Rory Oge instantly commenced giving the lie direct to all of his guest's marvelous relations.

"Harkee, Master Saxon," said he, "do you imagine me such a fool as to believe all your lying tales? Egad, you were no more in Araby than I was. You fight a dragon—egad! a good cat would make you run like the wind—not to say a dragon, that if he smothered would blow you into atoms. Pah! I suppose you think me drunk, to think such lies can go down with me; and as to hell—why, sure, any one knows—that if such a scant of grace as you were allowed to go so near the devil as you say—why, he would never let you back to vend lies in Ireland."

"Why, an' may I never eat mutton," replied Goldthorn, "an' I have not told you verily."

"You shall never eat mutton here again, nor beef either," replied Rory, "for, by the hand of my father, you shall quit to-night, and I'll set every dog in the castle after you. I faith you shall be in sadder plight than when on Mount—Mount—oh, curse on it—where the fire is. I'll set beat you this moment that you shall be a greater wonder to look at than the Spinnet, on Spinix, or whatever you call the fellow in Egypt, of the—the—pah, the fellow in the red sea, or what ever he is, he could not give you such

a blow as this." So saying he made a hundred pieces of the aquavite bottle on the head of Ralph Goldthorn. I have already remarked that Goldthorn possessed a good temper; but, like many well-tempered men, he was of a nature which once aroused was not easy to be subdued. Springing up—for the blow had prostrated him—his face wet with aquavite and blood, he drew his sword, and exclaimed;

"Rory O'Byrne, I call you a coward and a braggart if you possess a spark of courage, I demand instant satisfaction for the insult which you have given me."

"Satisfaction you shall have, false Saxon, and so will I!" replied Rory, unsheathing his sword, overturning the table and staggering forward. "Depend upon it," continued he, "you will find me a worse antagonist than the dragon. If you can ever come from where I'll send you presently, you will be able to say with truth that you saw Beelzebub."

In the next instant the steel of the Gael and the Saxon clashed together in combat; but poor Rory was not so good as his threats. Before a dozen blows were exchanged he dropped lifeless on the floor—not, however, beneath the sword from his adversary, but from a shot that was fired into the room. The report of the shot awoke the mountaineers. They quickly started up, but ere they could their arms the room was filled with English soldiers, and they were made prisoners. Goldthorn being well-known among the soldiers had no difficulty in getting downstairs, where he found the English force in complete possession of the castle. All the Irish were prisoners except a few, who being awake on the entrance of the English, lost their lives in making a brave but fruitless resistance. But how the English could have surprised the castle was still a mystery to Goldthorn, and he was about to make inquiry when two harquebusiers entered, bearing between them the seemingly lifeless body of Angus Dubh. On examination no wound could be discovered on the body of Angus; and after a short time his senses slowly returned, but his intellect appeared disordered and he gazed intently on one spot, as if viewing some object visible to others.

I shall now proceed to acquaint the reader with what befell O'Carroll. The castle bell, tolling I, as has been already mentioned, put all matrimonial visions to flight; the vague fears which succeeded were soon increased, as he beheld a distant light advance towards him. As it came, however, from the direction of the English quarters, his fears for a while struggled against his apprehensions, and thinking it might be a spy, he laid down his battle-axe, and stringing an arrow to his bow, prepared to take aim, but he soon dropped bow and arrow, and dropped himself after them on his knees, as on the nearer approach of the light he perceived it to be a column of bright, red fire. Trembling and breathless, yet unable to avert his face, he waited the coming of the phantasm; but as it drew nearer his senses completely forsook him when he made the horrible discovery that it was a walking headless body, enveloped in flame and blood.

A reconnoitering party of the English soon discovered that the Irish sentinel was not at his post. Encouraged by this circumstance, they ventured to approach the castle, when one of them stumbled over the senseless Gallowglass. Believing him to be dead, they immediately carried the intelligence to their commander, who instantly led his men toward the castle, which they surprised in precisely the same manner as the sept of the O'Byrnes had done a few weeks before. The account of the apparition was obtained with great difficulty from the unfortunate Gallowglass on the transient return of his senses. He shortly after became delirious, and ere the sun rose poor Angus O'Carroll was no more. The Red Spirit had deprived him of reason and of life.

Many years after the period of this tale there died at the residence of the celebrated Bishop Bedell an old man, who had been for some time before a pensioner of the prelate's louny. This man was much esteemed in the household of the bishop for his upright conduct and entertaining conversation, and many an evening did he entertain the domestics with stories of his earlier years, for he had been a soldier in his youth, but he ever referred to that period with a sigh, as time mis-spent in vanity and vice. He often spoke on the evil of lying, and as an example of which he would relate the story of the Red Spirit.

"It was not until long after," said he, "that I came to know how I had, by idle and perilous tales, been acceptable to the poor, simple Irish man's death. The messenger whom I sent to the English encampment for the aquavite was an old woman who had followed the O'Byrnes to the castle. In consequence of the darkness she carried a light, which, in her return, the high wind obliged to keep beneath her crimson mantle, the hood of which she drew over her face, in order to avoid the rain—as long wear had giv-

en it a degree of transparency that, with the assistance of the light, enabled her to see perfectly well through it, and the superstitious sentinel, his mind being filled with phantasies wild and terrifying, took this old wife for a spectre such as I have described; the consequence whereof was that he was so affrighted as to lose his life." It is almost unnecessary to add that this old man's name was Ralph Goldthorn.

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BRITISH AMERICA ASSURANCE CO.

The Sixty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Shareholders of this Company was held at its offices, Toronto, on Thursday, 28th February, 1901.

The President, Hon. Geo. A. Cox, occupied the chair; and Mr. P. H. Sims, who was appointed to act as secretary at the annual report, of which the following is a summary:—
Your Directors have the honor to present the Annual Report and Financial Statement of the Company's sixty-seventh year, duly vouched for by its auditors.

It will be noted that there has been a considerable increase in the Premium Income for the year, this being mainly due to the business derived from the new fields in which the Company has established business connections, and also to the improved conditions that have prevailed in the Marine business.

Two half-yearly dividends have been declared at the rate of seven per cent. per annum, amounting to \$60,393.26, and the Reserve Fund has been increased by \$581,457.22.

In view of the abnormal fire losses on this continent during the year 1900, including the disastrous conflagration in April last in the cities of Hull and Ottawa, which involved a loss of property to the value of about ten million dollars, your Directors feel that the statements herewith submitted must be regarded as satisfactory by the Shareholders.

The Capital Stock of the company has been increased to one million dollars, in accordance with the by-law passed at the last annual meeting, the \$250,000 new stock authorized to be issued at a premium of fifteen per cent., having been all taken up.

Summary of Financial Statement.
Total Cash Income \$1,951,233.34
Total expenditure, including appropriation for losses under adjustment 1,890,347.57

Dividends declared 60,393.26
Total assets \$1,776,606.45

Cash capital 1,000,000.00
Reserve Fund 581,457.22

Security to Policyholders \$1,581,457.22
The President, who moved the adoption of his report, which was seconded by the Vice-President, referred to the exceptionally heavy losses by fire on this continent during the year under review, and said that although the report just read did not present so favorable a showing, as far as the balance between income and expenditure for the year was concerned, as the preceding annual statements which he had had the honor during the past eight years of submitting to the shareholders, he felt that there was perhaps as much matter for congratulation in the figures embraced in the accounts for the year 1900 as in those of some preceding statements which have shown a more favorable balance sheet. It was gratifying to observe the continued increase in the volume of the business transacted. While there has been a satisfactory growth of income from fields in which the company had for years past been carrying on operations, he was glad to be able to say, that from the agencies recently established beyond the limits of this continent, very encouraging returns have been received. The prediction that the Directors ventured to make a year ago as to a probable improvement in conditions of marine business had, he was pleased to say, been realized, and, as a result of the better rates which, speaking generally, had prevailed, both upon inland lake and ocean risks, there had been a fair margin of profit upon the business written in that branch during the year. But what in his estimation was more a matter for congratulation than any of the figures to which he had referred was the fact that, at the close of a year in which the fire losses in Canada and the United States have been very largely in excess of those of average years, they were able to present a balance sheet which showed a loss of less than one per cent. upon the premium income as the result of the year's underwriting transactions—that is, ignoring the income derived from interest and rent.

The report was on motion adopted, and the following gentlemen were re-elected to serve as Directors during the ensuing year:—Hon. Geo. A. Cox, J. J. Kenny, Hon. S. C. Wood, Thos. Long, John Hoskin, K.C., L.L.D., H. M. Fellatt, R. Jaffray, A. Myers, and E. W. Cox.

A meeting of the Board held subsequently, the Hon. Geo. A. Cox was re-elected President, and Mr. J. J. Kenny, Vice-President.

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