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THE PROPHET OF THE RUINED ABBEY.

By the Author of 'The Cross and Shamrock.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

Our hero was again alone in his cave. His early friend, the supporter of his feeble footsteps, the comfort of his declining days, was gone. Ay, and gone for ever, and at the very time when his services were most needed, yet commanded and compelled to go by him who most needed them.

Some time after the departure of Brefni, and during his frequent and protracted vigils in the subterranean chapel, the devotions of the venerable priest were interrupted by most melancholy groans and plaints of a wounded man above him, in the ruins of the 'haunted abbey.'

The wounded man, in the meantime, as far as could be conjectured, from his active movements overhead, and from the infrequency of groans, seemed to be convalescing rapidly, if he was not completely cured, but he did not quit his tenement in the ruin.

There can be no doubt that, whoever he was, he more than once caught the sound of our hermit's voice in prayer, as well as his own was heard by the latter; for very often did the exclamation burst from the lodger above:—'My God! what's this I hear? Are all the fabulous stories I heard about this ruin true?—Do the dead underground move and speak?'

Our hero would have at once removed his neighbor's fears and doubts by addressing him, but did not wish to disturb the poor fellow, who, he concluded, was some honest outlawed Catholic escaped from his persecutors, who chose this 'haunted ruin' as the safest retreat from the hands of his merciless persecutors.

bor's fears or interruption of his repose from this cause.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The ruined Abbey of 'Glanduff' bore always 'a bad name,' that is, was looked upon as haunted; but, during the last twenty years, since the excitement created by the solemn depositions of Benson, and his fellow-shepherd, the precincts of this venerable relic of Christian architecture were shunned as if all the 'fairies' of the enchanted land of elves, or all the ghosts of Elysium, were domiciled within her walls.

The conjectures and disputations among the peasantry regarding the cause of these frequent preternatural sounds and apparitions at the abbey were various and contradictory. Some accounted for these phenomena one way, and some in another and a different way; but the chief impression was, that there was an immense treasure hidden there, and that all the strange pranks that were heard and seen there were so many cunning tactics of the ghost in whose custody the treasure was, in order to guard against the possibility of discovery.

There were in that neighborhood two bold spirits, named 'Tighe O'Torpy,' and 'Considine Brack'—Anglice, Spotted Considine—who were great hunters, and not only set ghost, goblins, and fairies at defiance, but, what was far more serious, the authority of the parish priest, Father Twomy, himself. These two worthies lived in the habitual violation of the laws of the land and the laws of the Church.

O'Torpy, who was a first-rate crack shot, provided himself with a silver bullet, formed of a hammered shilling, with which he threatened to lay the ghost, if he appeared; while the others, equipped with pick-axe, crowbar, spade, and lantern, set out on their treasure-finding journey. While avarice was the principal inducement to Hassett to go on this gold-hunting excursion, Torpy and Considine declared they did not care whether or not they found the treasure, if it were to do some damage to the gentleman, O'Loughlin, on whose estate the ruin stood—that they would be satisfied their labors would not be lost.

In approaching the abbey, the ruined gables and arches of which stood out before them like so many spectres against the bright starry sky; although afraid and in awe, they affected great courage, and spoke loudly and swore bold oaths, in order, as it would appear, to let any ghosts that might be within hearing know what sort of fellows they had now to deal with, and who would not be so easily scared as were Benson and O'Halloran, the shepherd, on a former occasion. They commenced their work at about one o'clock at night, and had not labored much, when, sure enough, they came to a stone or flag.

'By all that's bad,' exclaimed Hassett, as he beat over the limestone slab to which his companion applied his crowbar, 'We'll soon be rich men, my friends.'

'I had better have my place ready to let fly at the ghost, should he appear,' exclaimed Torpy. 'How gladly I will put an ounce of lead, or rather a bit of silver in his brain, if he should show his nose.'

'Ah, silence, Mr. O'Torpy,' said Hassett, who thought they were in a sufficiently dangerous position, without having it aggravated by this unnecessary provocation of the spirits of the dead. 'There is no use in being too bold, and I think this is no time to crack a joke,' he added, as he leaned on his crowbar, with all his might.

A few moments' silence ensued, and in the interval the stone gave way, with several square feet of the footing around, and suddenly two of

the party, Hassett and Considine, were precipitated into the cavern beneath. The latter, however, recovered himself by holding on to the spade-tree or handle, which he held firmly grasped by both hands, and which crossed the aperture, and he scampered away after O'Torpy, whom he vainly called to assist him; while unhappy Hassett, after a fall of some twenty feet, fell flat on the stone floor of the mortuary chapel, over which they were at work. Their cries and alarms brought one to the spot who, lying concealed himself, had an opportunity of both seeing and hearing the gold-seekers. He advanced slowly and cautiously, not for fear of ghosts, however; and, when he came to the aperture, he was astonished to find the space illuminated.

At first he thought the light proceeded from the unextinguished lamp of the gold-seekers; but on a nearer approach, he looked into the space beneath, and there, to his utter amazement, saw a venerable old man with a wax candle in one hand, and the other elevated, as if in the act of blessing the miserable man who had just fallen in.—His hair stood erect on his head, his flesh shrunk on his limbs, and his first movement was to fly; but, when his ear caught the solemn words of the venerable old man, crying 'Come back, friend; fear not; I am no ghost, but a man like yourself.' The man returned, and, viewing his accoster closer, he exclaimed, 'Father O'Donnell! is it you or your ghost I see?'

'It is myself, my friend, and no ghost. Who may you be who recognize me?'

'O father! do you recollect your old parishioner, Terry O'Mara, called 'the enchanted warrior?'

'The Lord be praised. Is it you, O'Mara, who have been so long my neighbor, without my having the courtesy to speak to you? See, my friend, if you can aid me to lift this poor victim of his avarice out of this. I am afraid he is dead.'

'Wait, sir, till I bring a rope which I have near by, and by that means I will lift him into the fresh air.'

He was accordingly lifted up; and, after having taken a few slugs out of a convenient bottle of whiskey which Terry had by him, Hassett soon revived, and being conducted towards the highway by O'Mara, he soon made himself scarce.

XXV.

After escorting the disappointed gold-seeker outside the precincts of the 'enchanted' abbey lands, and warning him not to return at his peril, our old acquaintance Terry O'Mara returned in haste, to offer his services to the venerable father in his underground chapel.

When he had returned and descended by means of a rope, he found the hermit father already rested for Mass, it being Christmas night; and there, almost doubting his own eyes, and the reality of the objects around him, yet recognizing the voice and figure of his venerable patron, he served his three successive Masses on that blessed night.

After several hours' service, which passed as if they were only so many minutes, overwhelmed with the most extraordinary feelings of awe, surprise, grief, humility, contrition, and love, O'Mara at length, on the father having finished his last Mass, cast himself at his feet, embracing them, and bedewing them and the earth with his tears, said:

'O father, how often have I not heard your beloved voice concealed above this very altar almost; and, fool as I was, I persuaded myself that I only dreamed, or that my imagination deceived me. I could easily, however, have perceived that some spell bound me to this place during the last fifteen months; for, notwithstanding my oft-repeated resolutions, I found myself bound down almost to my hiding-place. Now I am ready to die, as I have seen again alive my father, my pastor, and my best friend. Oh, give me your best blessing, holy father, for I am in sad want of its grace-giving aid. Oh, that I could now die, while under the sacred shadow of my pastor.'

'Stand up, my son,' answered the venerable hermit, who himself had to struggle against the rebellion of human feelings. 'We should not grieve, but rejoice, on this morning, when our Lord is again newly born. 'Filius natus est nobis, et puer datus est nobis.' A son is born for us, and a child is given to us.' Come, dry up these earthly streams, and let us rejoice who sing 'Gloria in Excelsis.' 'Glory to God on high, and peace to men of good will on earth.' Follow me to my parochial house, where I will give you for breakfast a fat hare, which Providence sent me yesterday, and some good dried fish from my reserved supplies. Let us proceed in peace; it is only about two miles distant, and this is the avenue that leads to our presbytery.'

Having entered the long passage, they secured its entrance by pushing the tomb-like slab which served as its door forward to its place, and bolting it firmly. They also took the precaution of carrying off the candlesticks, vestments, and altar furniture, lest, after last night's occurrence, any

of the treasure-seekers would return, or other intruders visit the now disclosed chapel.

Having reached the part of the cave which he called his house, the father placed before his guest, on a table of native marble, carved out by his own hands, all the luxuries that the place afforded, consisting of the flesh of a hare, or rather a part of one, which the eagle supplied him with, some dried fish, a few grains of boiled wheat, some salad of the 'shamrock' sort, and a stone vessel full of pure water, caught in drops from the overhanging rocks.

Such was the frugal Christmas meal to which the saint and his guest sat down, and with their sentiments of self-denial and mortification, combined with thanksgiving and gratitude to God on the one side, and awe and admiration and unexpected gladness on the other, this simple fare tasted to them better than the feasts of royal tables.

'Now, Terry, my son, be cheerful and happy, and commence to tell me something about the affairs in the great Babylon—the world I mean. What has become of Charles, with Thomas and his family? What is the state of the country? How did you get mutilated in that form, so as to have lost part of both feet; and what has brought you to this wild region, all the way from your snug home at Knockmellown?'

'Ah, father, you impose a melancholy task on me, and one which would require almost an age adequately to discharge. I must obey you, however, though I do not know where to begin, as I will not know when or where to stop after I begin. To begin with your brother Charles, I can only inform you that he was at that abbey above, with me, a few months ago, and then departed for Spain—'

'What, Terry, was Charles so late as that in this country, and was it he who encouraged you on the night of your great pain, telling you, you would be soon well?'

'The very person, your reverence. He was the only person I spoke to within a year, or better, yourself alone excepted.'

'That was my impression at the time, too, Terry, for I heard every word he spoke to you; but I persuaded myself it was an impossibility, from having heard from a captain of a Spanish frigate that he was in Spain.'

'And so he was, and I hope is now, with your brother Thomas and family, who are in high esteem at the capital of His Most Catholic Majesty; but Charles, inspired by his love of country, came back to Ireland on the breaking out of the rebellion, and fought nobly in that defeated but noble struggle for independence.'

'What, Terry! has my beloved native land been torn by the horrors of an unsuccessful rebellion?'

'Alas! yes, father, and it was extinguished in the blood of a very large number of the people.'

'O my country, how thou hast bled, and what suffering is in store for thee yet! But go on, Terry; proceed with your tale of terrible news. Does the country suffer still?'

'Yes! and will for years. In all directions the hostile fire consumes the substance of the conquered people. Corn-fields are devastated. Houses and stored grain consumed with the bodies of their owners. Herds and flocks are wantonly destroyed—ay, and the very houses of God, even, are fired and made desolate.'

'Patience, my brother, patience. Thou hast not seen the worst yet. After the sword shall come the plague and the famine. But perhaps it has passed by. Has any great peacemaker yet appeared among the people, whose eloquence shall persuade them to allow the polished pike-blade to rust, and cause the gleaming sword to be converted into a reaping-hook, with which to cut down the corn-stalks, and gather the yellow harvest?'

'No, he has not yet appeared, except he ripen out of a young man of pure Milesian blood.'

'That may be the man who is to come and pass away ere the darkest hour of Erin's night shall arrive; but in good time the soft rays of cheering light shall fall on Erin. It shall be—Well and faithfully, Erin, hast thou adhered to thy God and thy first faith, and independence and eternal reason shall reward thy fidelity.'

After having delivered himself of the foregoing impassioned apostrophe, with the voice and gesture of a prophet, or one inspired, the good priest turned his eyes towards O'Mara, and seeing him in a flood of tears and on the ground, approached to console him and to lift him up. All the sad scenes of the insurrection, rushing like so many pent-up fountains to his mind, from the chambers of his dormant memory, completely unmanned the peasant-patriot's bosom, and he could scarcely cease sobbing and weeping like an abandoned child. And his sorrow was aggravated a thousand fold by the conviction that forced itself on his mind, from the language and manner of the hermit-prophet, that the crisis in the lamentable condition of his wounded country had not yet arrived.

The father, perceiving the effect of his words,

prudently checked himself, and the dialogue was turned towards a more familiar and less exciting topic.

'You omitted to tell, Terry,' he resumed, 'if you know anything of my old friends, Kilpatrick and Ossory. Surely Charles must have often spoken of them while you and he were together, before and after the rebellion.'

'Yes, poor gentleman, he is no more. After his return from France his lady gave birth to a son and heir; and being soon after on a visit to his brother-in-law Ossory's, with his wife and child, he lost the latter through the following extraordinary accident. The nurse having taken the child for an airing on the roof of the castle, which was flat, and on which was a small parterre of flowers, laid it down among the beds, with the flowers of which it was playing, to descend, for a moment, through the trap-door to her chamber; but lo! on her return, a huge eagle had just seized the child in its talons, and carried it off through the air. The stroke fell on Kilpatrick like a thunderbolt; he became partially insane; and, returning back to Scotland, he joined a regiment of Highlanders, who were sent by the government to dislodge Holt, Dwyer, and others, who kept up a guerilla war in the mountains of Wicklow, and was killed in his attempt to capture Holt. His lady, thus bereaved, entered a convent of Irish Ursulines in Paris, where I suppose she yet lives, if she was so fortunate as to escape the fury of the Red Republicans.'

'Have they ever since heard anything about the fate of the child,—who was christened Brefni, was he not?'

'That was his precise name; of course they never heard more of his fate, but justly concluded that he was devoured by the savage bird, which has been often known to take off and devour children in the vicinity of places in which it has its nest, in many parts of the country.'

'The joint-heir of the Scotch and Irish noble houses has not perished, but been placed in secure hands by the eagle, some of whose noble qualities he inherits, and Brefni now dwells in Spain, the land of his adoption. We have already devoted more of this thrice-hallowed festival to the discussion of the world and its affairs, let us now, my old friend, set about concluding the religious exercises of the day, and to-morrow, if God wills, we shall return to the subjects that have already so long engaged our attention to-day.'

So saying, he resumed his breviary, and approached the rude altar of the cave, followed by his old acquaintance, Terence O'Mara.

CHAPTER XXVI.

For some time, in the neighborhood of the Abbey of Glanduff, the impression was becoming general that it was by robbers or outlaws the ruin was haunted instead of ghosts. And the government authorities in the towns of Innistymon, Killeenora, and other neighboring stations, had it in contemplation for some time to order a thorough search of that lone and unfrequented neighbourhood; the yeomanry and police night-patrolling parties having frequently given information of having seen lights and moving shapes of rebels hovering about the ruin. The incidents related in the twenty-fourth chapter of this tale served to confirm these reports, and especially as a son of O'Torpy, with a view of getting a reward, gave information to a magistrate concerning the expedition and ill-luck of the gold-seekers who, he stated, were driven from the Abbey by a band of robbers who were sheltered there.—The magistrate, one Coalpoise, received the information of young O'Torpy with evident satisfaction, as, whether true or false, it coincided with his own long-conceived opinion; but, instead of rewarding the young scoundrel who gave the false and hearsay information, he kicked him rudely from his office, and threatened to hang him if he did not keep his mind to himself till after the arrest of the supposed outlaws. According to a preconcerted plan, therefore, entered into by the bench of magistrates of the above-named towns, it was determined to make an assault on the old ruin on Christmas night, when, it was thought, the outlaws or robbers would be found in their hiding-places, and easily secured. The appointed hour arrived, and the several detachments were punctually at the rendezvous, and on a given signal, in four different bodies, they approached the Abbey ruin. Having stationed sentinels at proper places and within speaking distances, around the Abbey, the commander, one Captain Blood, ordered a general search of every arch, niche, crevice, tomb, vault, or other hiding place within the ruin, so that if there was a robber, a rebel, or a rat there, he could not remain concealed, as he raucously spoke within hearing of all present. They searched and searched over again, but no robbers or sign of them appeared, except that they found the hiding place of O'Mara, which was in a broken flue of the large kitchen chimney of the Abbey, and the only sign of his having been inhabited was a litter of mixed leaves and hay that served him for a bed. They also discovered the underground chapel, which