

THE WILD GEESE;

OR,

THE RAPPAREES OF BARNESMORE.

BY WILLIAM COLLINS,

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The wild geese, the wild geese! 'tis long since they flew
O'er the billowy ocean's dark bosom of blue."

CHAPTER I.

O! weep those days, those penal days—
Their memory still on Ireland weighs.—*Davis.*

If this be true, indeed,
Some Christians have a comfortable creed.—*Byron.*

It was a lovely evening in the month of August, 1705. The sun was just setting behind the tall peaks of Croghan Mountain, and his last beams lingered upon its heathy slopes and on the placid waters of the River Finn, as if loth to depart from so fair and lovely a scene. The woods that fringed the shore and rose in stately grandeur half way up the mountain side were bathed in a flood of golden light and the last beams of the bright orb of day kissed the smiling waters as he sunk to his ruby couch of clouds in the West. As the twilight descended and the gathering shadows of night cast their sombre hues upon wood, mountain and water, a deep and impressive silence reigned around, undisturbed and unbroken, save by the chirrup of some tiny insect, or the glad-some hum of the river as it rushed merrily to the embrace of the sea.

The tall oaks that lined the river's bank and spread for many a mile on either side looked in the deepening twilight like huge giants asleep, with their rugged and brawny limbs outspread; for not a breeze disturbed a leaf or sighed among their foliage. It was a scene in which an anchorite might seek repose from the cares and sorrows of the world, and, wrapped in the magnificent solitude which he enjoyed, dream of that brighter Heaven beyond the grave. And yet, amid all this grandeur and loveliness which nature, with a prodigal hand, had given, were hearts whose every throb of existence was marked with misery and despair. There was not in all the world, perhaps, at the time of which we write, a more wretched and poverty-stricken people than the peasantry of Ireland, particularly those of

the province of Ulster. Every part of the island was enduring its share of rapine and plunder and groaned under the merciless sway of the victors of the Boyne and Aughrim; but their inhuman acts in the South and East seemed merciful to those perpetrated in the land of O'Neil and O'Donnell. There the pent-up vengeance of centuries, which had been hoarded in the hearts of the "Stranger" against "the mere Irish" was let loose upon the few and defenseless "Papists" and "rebels," as they were ignominiously termed, who remained after five hundred years of blood and carnage.

But fifteen years had elapsed since the fatal and decisive battle of Aughrim; but during that short period thousands of the youth and manhood of Ireland had fled to France and other continental nations and joined the military service there. It was the policy of the British Government to root out and exterminate the Irish population, and plant in their stead English and Scotch Puritans. For this purpose the atrocious "Penal Laws" were instituted. They failed, however, in their object, for, though the hand of man was heavy on poor Ireland, the hand of God was guiding her through the darkness, and she was fated to emerge, after years of persecution, into the light, radiant with the sun-light of faith, and pure as when taught from the inspired heart of the blessed Patrick.

During this fierce and cruel time a pall of darkness cast its gloomy shadows over the fair face of our island. The holy priest of God, with a price on his head, was hunted from covert to covert, to the loud "haloo" of the savage huntsman and the deep bay of the pack of blood-hounds, and he who was first in at the death boasted of his exploit and was envied and admired by his associates. The "priest hunter" and the "informer" were taught their duty by the Government, and well they obeyed the behests of their foreign masters.

"They bribed the flock, they bribed the son
To sell the priest and rob the sire;
Their dogs were taught alike to run
Upon the scent of wolf and friar.
Among the poor or on the moor
Were bid the pious and the true.
While traitor knave and recreant slave
Had riches, rank and retinue.
Yet, exiled in those penal days
Our banner's over Europe blaze."