

## The Geraldine's Fate.

## AN EPISODE OF IRISH HISTORY

## CHAPTER I.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, went the muffled steps of horses through the ancient High street of Kilmallock. The snow had been falling heavily all day; and, now that the hour of midnight had arrived, it ceased, leaving a thick carpet on the streets, the fields and neighbouring hills.

Although the festive seasons of Christmas had just set in, very few of the local neighbors appeared to do its customary honors, and merry songs and tipsy shouts were any thing but common. Mine host of the "Golden Rose" was at that time lamenting to a few cronies, in the common room, in the wide fire place in which roared a lagre fire of logs, the disastrous change in the times. It was scarce a decade when its tapsters and pot boys would, on the blessed Eve of Christmas, know no rest till morning. He never remembered a year when the "Rose" was cleared before the "joy bells" from SS. Peter and Paul's. These parlous times truly—nothing but war, famine, and sudden death.

The tramp of the horses interrupted his discourse, and he, perhaps, anticipating the advent of travellers from Cork or Limerick—Kilmallock being on the high road between these cities—gave the fire a hearty poke, and moved towards the door. But he was doomed to disappointment. The horsemen, who were evidently soldiers of the garrison, had already passed the inn, and had arrived at the town-cross. He could see their steel morions gleam in the faint light that shone from the attic of his rival, the "White Cat." For a moment they stood there as if their commander were meditating the choice of roads. Then they turned down the street that led to the Water Gate, and the landlord went back to his customers and recommenced his jeremiad.

When the soldiers arrived at the Water Gate they experienced some difficulty in waking the Warden. They were about a score in number, and from their quiet demeanor, and strict silence it was evident that their mission was an important one. When the gate was opened they rode through in double file, and crossing the Water bridge turned to the right, and got upon the road which led to the celebrated valley of Aherlow, in Tipperary, then called Harlow.

The leader rode at the head of the files, and regulated the pace, and, while it was evident that he wished to make rapid progress, the depth of the snow compelled him to move rather slowly. Except in the immediate neighborhood of the town, owing to the recent Desmond war the population was very scanty, so there was very little difficulty in preserving a secrecy of movement.

For upwards of a mile the soldiers moved laboriously through the snow, keeping a good look-out for the road before them, as, owing to the want of fences in many places, it could scarcely be distinguished from the surrounding fields. When they approached the castle of Fantstown the leader commanded a halt, and in language as forcible as trooper ever used in Flanders, cautioned them to preserve silence, and to move noiselessly. The Castle was passed safely, and the troop got into the lee-lands beyond. But here the road was so deeply burdened with snow that the horses found it hard work to make any considerable progress, and to add to their difficulties the snow began to fall heavily again, so that they found it almost impossible to keep the road. Indeed, on a few occasions a horse stepped into one of the deep ditches that boarded it, and he and his rider were only drawn forth after much delay and infinite

swearing. The silence then began to gall the spirits of the men, and from time to time a low murmur could be heard. As the leader knew that this portion of the country was almost uninhabited, and that there was no habitation of any kind on their road, he did not repress these muttered conversations; indeed, after a short period, he himself commenced to hum Kit Marlow's song: "Come dwell with me, and be my Love."

"Prythee, friend Phil," said one who rode in the last file to his neighbor, "at what game doth our noble Captain Zouch fly this night?"

"I care not," said Phil, drawing his cloak tightly about him; "but I wish to heaven he had chosen a more opportune time for his pleasure."

"Thou hast too keen a love for Master Meade's tap to love wholly any other kind of sport. I warrant me," rejoined his companion.

"Ay, lad; a warm bed and a warm pot are not to be despised, a night like this."

"Methinks," said one who rode before, "we are this night to be employed on an affair of State. It is said the Governor had intelligence this morning concerning some of the rebels. I would not be surprised if the old fox of Desmond has returned to his former lair. But he is known to be hiding near the Islands of Kerry."

"I thought he and the Countess were lately heard of in the woods of Connelloe," said the first speaker, "but thou knowest best, Master Michael."

"Wherever the poor beggar be, whether Connelloe, or Kerry, or Harlow (Aberlow) Wood, I warrant he hath a better time than we poor soldiers of her Grace," put in the lover of Master Meade's liquor.

"Ay," growled another, "they have robbed him of everything that makes life worth living. Why doth not the fool come forward and get comfortably killed?"

At this moment the horse of a soldier a little to the front floundered into a ditch, bringing the whole party to a pause. They proceeded at once to extricate man and mount, which was a work of some difficulty, as the snow was deep.

"I have served her Grace in many parts," growled the unfortunate one as he shook off the snow which clung to his garments, and mounted his horse again, and "neither in the Low Countries nor in the Indies have I met such a damnable place."

"Always excepting that canal at Zutphen," said Philip. "I picture thee floundering like a porpoise therein. And there was no usquebaugh to cheer thee when thou wert out of it!"

A repressed laugh passed through the company; all had heard of the adventure.

Here the Captain turned and warned all to keep silence. They had arrived at a cross road about four miles from Kilmallock, and some small cabins were to be seen in the distance. They rode past as silently as they could, but no stir of life appeared in the miserable dwellings. For two miles further they toiled before the leader paused. Then he began to scan the fields narrowly, as if he had looked for something, but it ended in disappointment apparently, and he commenced to swear to himself. Commanding the men to halt, he rode backwards for the space of near a hundred yards. On returning he called to one of the men:

"Gilbertson, you know this country passably. Where doth the field passage to Inch Castle break from the road?"

"I know not exactly, Captain, but I think a cabin stands near by, and we have not yet passed that."

The Captain rode forward with a keen watch for the cabin. A quarter of a mile's ride brought them to it. Here they halted, and when the leader began again to look for the passage, the snow had fallen so thickly that

none could be discerned. He rode to the cabin door and knocked vigorously.

"*Cia h-e tuca a dh-uail co duna*" cried a voice from the inside.

"Stay thy jargon," cried the Captain roughly, "and come forth! I would speak with thee."

"If it please you, worthy sir, I'd prefer to stay where I be. These be hard times. Who trusteth to prowlers of the night?"

"Thou misbegotten fool, I have no time for parley! If you come not forth, at once, I'll have the house burned with thyself in it."

"If that be so, I must even come forth," said the occupant of the cabin, opening the door and coming forward.

"Sirrah! we wish to know the short way through the fields to Inch Castle, or Castle Inch."

"May it please your worship," answered the man, limping out into the road, and pointing towards the mountains to south, "it passeth to the right of yonder clump of firs, then by the ruin of a farm house which you can notice by the bushes near. When you get so far, the Castle may be plainly seen, now that the snow has again ceased."

"Is the passage a good one," demanded the Captain.

"At the best of times," answered the cottager, "it is a bad passage; and now it is quite dangerous, being full of open water-courses which are, mayhap, covered with snow. I would strongly advise you to keep on the road to the cross-roads near Elton, when you can take the one to the left and so on to Castle Inch."

"I suppose I must needs take your advice. But, sirrah, how comes it that you, who are plainly an Englishman, live in these outlandish parts without molestation from Irish enemy?"

"I have never harmed them, and they do me no hurt," answered the man as he limped back to his cabin: "Give your worship good night."

The troop continued its journey towards Elton, and the man watched them from his door till they were out of sight. Then he returned into the hut, closing the door. By means of the embers on the hearth he lighted a splinter of bog-wood, and fixed it in the wall. He then went to a corner of the cabin, where a man was lying on a heap of straw apparently in deep sleep.

"Edmond, Edmond," he cried to the sleeper in Gaelic, "arise, arise!"

The man clutched a dagger which lay by his side, and sat upright.

"Arise at once!" cried the Englishman, "Dids't thou not hear the knocking?"

"I have not slept for four days," answered the other apologetically.

"Well, well! thy master is in danger. A troop of horse from Kilmallock has gone through Elton to Inch Castle. Go through the fields and thou wilt forestall them."

These last words were called after Edmond, for he had already dashed from the cabin.

## CHAPTER II.

Gerald, sixteenth Earl of Desmond, and County Palatine of Kerry, had succeeded to the family honors on the death of his father, in 1558. He had an elder brother, commonly called Thomas Rua, or Red Thomas; but the father, following the example of Henry the Eighth of England, had poor Thomas declared illegitimate, on some question of consanguinity. The new Earl, for a couple of decades, had led a rather chequered career. Some time after his accession to the earldom he had the misfortune to be worsted in battle at Affane by the hereditary enemy of his house, the Earl of Ormonde. On this occasion he manifested a very pretty wit. Being borne from the field wounded, on the shoulders of the Ormondites, he was tauntingly asked:

"Where now is the proud Earl of Desmond?"

"Where, but where he should be—on the necks of the Butlers!" was the instant reply.

It is a matter for regret that his resolution was not as ready as his wit. It would have afterwards stood him in better stead.

At this time it was the cue of the Lord Deputy to act as general peace-maker; so with much pains he reconciled Desmond and his enemy. Not long afterwards he himself came to grief in a little incursion into the territory of Muskerry, and unmindful of old experiences, this little affair was succeeded by another little affair with Ormonde. The Deputy seeing, as he himself states, "that Desmond would neither rule or be ruled," determined to have him kept in peace and quietness; so he had him seized at Kilmallock, and forwarded for safe keeping to the Tower of London.

This and other matters were instrumental in causing the insurrection of the Earl's cousin, James FitzMaurice—one of the greatest Irishmen of that, or, indeed, of any other time. FitzMaurice laid siege to Kilmallock which, truth to tell, was always an English garrison in the middle of the enemy's country. He took it, banged the Provost and some of the commonalty, burned the town, and razed the town wall to the ground. The Deputy marched at once with a large array into Desmond, and after a spirited resistance FitzMaurice was forced to fly to France.

Matters becoming settled, Desmond was liberated from the Tower, and sent to Dublin where he was treated as a prisoner on parole. But he soon escaped, and fled to his own kin in the mountain fastnesses of Limerick and Kerry. The Government was forced to make the best of a bad matter, and took him into favor again.

FitzMaurice in the meantime had arrived in Rome to solicit aid from the Pope. The Pope gave him supplies of men and money, the former being placed under command of an English free-lance named Stukely. FitzMaurice proceeded through Spain to Ireland and landed at Dingle in the summer of 1579. He fortified himself at the Golden Fort to await the arrival of Stukely, and to gather in help from the friendly Irish Chiefs. Stukely never turned up, and very little help came from the Chiefs. Earl Gerald, too, showed himself decidedly hostile; but his brothers John and James of Desmond came in with a small force. They were soon obliged to abandon the Golden Fort, and make for the fastnesses of Kilenore (the Great Wood), near Charleville. A small portion of the little force marched towards Clave, but were opposed by the Bourkes of Castlewell at Bohreen Ford, on the Mulkearne (now Barrington's Bridge), where their leader was fatally wounded, and died soon after, appointing John Desmond to the leadership.

John proceeded to make it very hot for the English immediately. The President of Munster, Sir William Drury, determined to beat up the Irish quarters in the Great Woods; but, instead, was very badly beaten for his pains. The Irish leader soon became such a nightmare that Drury's health broke down under the stress, and he proceeded to Waterford to find rest, and found death instead. Sir William Pelham was appointed his successor; but John's hand being in, he beat him at Drumcolliher, and again at Manister, near Croom. Having, as it were, performed his work satisfactorily, he retired to Aberlow, his winter quarters. Some time later, the English, under Captain Zouch, entrapped him near Castleyons; and being desperately wounded by a varlet named Fleming he died in their hands.

During all these proceedings the Earl sided more or less with the English. On more than one occasion, indeed, he harassed the Irish terribly,