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SHAWN NA SOGGARTH; OR, THE PRIEST-HUNTER. AN IRISH TALE OF THE PENAL TIMES.

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CHAPTER XI.

Father Bernard and Frank proceeded some distance in silence, when a peasant, who had watched and tracked their steps from the cottage, entreated the priest so earnestly to visit his dying wife...

The moon was emerging wan and ghastly from the clouds in which she had been shrouded, as Frank leant himself against a hedge on the eminence, and looked out on the waters, the nearer portion of which was softened by the clouded moonrays...

Stimulated by this thought, he strode forward a few hasty paces, towards a near gap in the hedge; and there, approaching him closely, was distinctly visible, in the brightening moonbeams, the man on whom his heart, if not his lips, had been just then vowing vengeance...

Sir Robert, who had taken this direction to the Hall through some vague idea that had sprung up in his mind, that he might, probably, meet some annoyance on the more direct path, started on first recognizing his cousin.

"So, master Frank," he said, "you did not think fit to favor the Hall with a visit since your return with your select friends. Whether was it that you doubted my hospitality, or that you had some natural fears that my duty, as a loyal magistrate, might oblige me to take some steps that might not be pleasant?"

"Pass on," said Frank, controlling, by a mighty effort, the passion with which every vein was bursting; "and be thankful that a promise, wrung by the father you have sunk into the grave before his time, restrains my hand and prevents me from forgetting, as you have done, that the same blood flows in our veins."

"Pooh, my smuggling cousin, you would have to forget, too, that I am lord of the soil here at present, and that a word from me would soon set horse and foot on your track, as I suppose it is, at this moment, my bounden duty to do."

"Can they save you now, taunting and heartless apostate?" said Frank, in a fiercely muttered tone, as he made a step, despite all promises, and consequences, to grapple with his taunter.

"No, but this shall cool you, master Frank," said Sir Robert, drawing forth a slight but finely tempered blade from the whip he carried, and making a fierce lunge at Frank. But his active opponent, well accustomed to such deadly game, bowed himself sideways almost to the ground, to avoid the thrust, and before it could be repeated, with an exclamation that all promises were now absolved, he had wrested the weapon, and, grappling instantly, by a mingled exertion of superior strength and agility, swung his cousin beneath him to the earth.

after, the voice of Father Bernard reached him, calling aloud, "Frank, Frank."

The sound dispelled at once his deadly intentions, as the notes of the sweet singer melt away our fiercest resolves; and springing to his feet he flung afar the dangerous weapon, exclaiming, "Yes, I take that voice, which has saved me from, perhaps, the shedding of blood, as an omen and a warning that my promise to the dead must be kept, whatever provocation I may receive."

It was at the nightfall of the ensuing day that the small funeral procession set out from the cottage for Ballintubber Abbey, where the mortal remains of Sir Edmund were to be assigned to his native earth in companionship with a long train of ancestors. There was at the interment, of course, none of the state, nor the misplaced grandeur and adornments usually employed in consigning to the worms the body of a person in Sir Edmund's rank.

There was, however, sincere mourning of heart among them for the loss of their beloved, though fallen, landlord; while one mourner remained behind, whose grief was not to be uttered by words or wailings. Indeed, with a self-control seldom witnessed at her years, wailing Ellen had uttered none, from the first shock of her bereavement till the coffin that contained her beloved father, from whom she had never before been separated for a day, was lifted to bear him away for ever from her sight; when, flinging her arms frantically around it, she protested vehemently they should not force it away, and, with a wild shriek, fell senseless on the floor.

When she recovered perception the procession was after having set forth; and Father Bernard, with his nephew, the friar, was by her side, while Katty, half crying and half scolding, was supporting her. The elder priest, after having bestowed some exhortations on the fair mourner to be patient and resigned, was moving after the procession when his nephew interfered, observing, "Father Bernard, it is better you should not go. The burial will be likely to be watched, and you may run some risk, as it is known you are in the neighborhood. Of me there is little or no risk, as I am almost unknown here. Leave me, then, to read the funeral service; and do you remain within, especially as I can readily go from the abbey to Christen Pat Feerack's child, that's nearly fifteen months old and dying. I think, though he hasn't yet been made a Christian of."

"Perhaps he is right, dear Father Bernard, and that you had better remain here till all is over," said Ellen, faintly, as she raised herself; "there is no use in risking yourself now—now."

"Go, my beloved child, nothing but violence shall prevent me from having the gratification of being myself the consecrator of the clay that is to receive my oldest and most valued friend.—Weep not, Ellen, for him who has preceded us but by a short stage and who was, I trust, so well prepared for his journey; but pray and hope fervently that it may be terminated in blessedness for ever; and let me hope to find you calmer when I return."

So saying, and bestowing on the bereaved one a heartsprung and careful benediction, he followed the funeral procession accompanied by the friar.

It was clouded moonlight, as the dark figures in the procession, moving along in spectral silence on their mournful errand, entered the venerable and dimly seen pile; and well did they harmonize in the gloom and desolation of that hour and scene, as they bore cautiously and noiselessly their freight of decayed mortality beneath the roofless arches, and over the broken flag-stones of the dead.

The grave of Sir Edmund's ancestors was opened for the admission of his bier, which lay by the grave side; and Father Bernard was reciting in a low tone the beautiful service for the dead, while the funeral attendants stood grouped closely around him, so as completely to shade the light of a dim lamp which the friar held for his uncle, when the noise of a shot was heard, which was instantly followed by a near shout and the tread of measured feet approaching the abbey nearly and rapidly. "We're set, we're set; that was Shawn na Soggarth's shout," exclaimed more than one voice; and instantly, as if a pestilence were in that name, the funeral attendants, stumbling over graves and overturning each other in the eagerness of their flight, had disappeared through door and window.

Shawn indeed it was. He had learned the period at which it was intended the funeral should take place, and having obtained a party from Sir John, so accurately had he timed his visit that, but for the shot, he would have surprised the priest in the act of performing the funeral service. The shot had been fired by Denis Grehan, Cornet Ffoliot's servant, accidentally by his own account; which account, however, did not obtain credence, the general belief of the period having been that, having a leaning towards the persecuted party, he had profited by the recollection of his master's shot, alluded to in our first chapter, and imitated his example by conveying a warning in that shape.

"Ye bloody thraitor," exclaimed Shawn, with one of his fearful imprecations, on hearing the shot, "ye've spilt us intirely;—hurry, boys, or every vagabone o' them 'll be off, an' thin the reward 's in the divil's exchequer." He rushed forward eagerly, and, entering the low northern doorway, shouted, triumphantly, with another imprecation that echoed fearfully amid the crumbling walls and the silent abodes of the dead, "there's the tall fellow himself!—we have him after all;" and he dashed forward, fiercely calling on the soldiers to follow him.

Father Bernard, despite the anger and upbraiding solicitations of his nephew, was the last to quit the grave. He was in the act of lowering, with his own hands, the body into its last earthly receptacle, that it, at least, might be rescued from all risk of profanation, when he was revealed to his ruffian pursuer by a burst of bright moonlight streaming wildly in through broken arches and windows—the lantern had been tumbled and its light extinguished in the first rush of the affrighted fugitives; and instantly on hearing the imprecation and recognizing its utterer he made for the extremity of the aisle, whence, clambering with an agility fear alone could lend at his years, by means of some indentations in the time-disjointed stones, he reached, through a broken doorway, a portion of the stone roof of the abbey still in preservation. Not altogether scatheless, however; for, so close were Shawn's steps on his, that as he was entering the doorway, the priest-hunter, then midway towards it, had grasped the skirt of his garment, exclaiming, "Back with you now, my ould boy, unless you choose to crack your skull on the tombstones."

But Father Bernard, swaying with the energy of desperation, bounded forward; and the skirt giving way, Shawn was precipitated forcibly amid the rugged gravestones. He remained not prostrate, however, for a second, but springing forward with renewed imprecations, he ascended again with eager and practised steps, while the loud laughter of the soldiers rang discordantly through the ruined pile, as, enjoying his discomfiture, they gazed vacantly up at the lofty arches, or flung themselves, with ribald jests, on the broken tombs and flagstones.

"Frien' Jock's ainly lik to grip ould clootie himself in these ould black walls, I've thinkin'," observed one of the party, a Scotchman.

"I have him, I have him—stand, or by the glory o' hell I'll fire," shouted Shawn above.

"I hope ould Nick himself's the ketchpoll now, and that he'll hold his houl't o' you, master Shawn," responded Denis Grehan, beneath.

A flight of those narrow stone stairs, of such immense convenience in the old romances, and still in preservation in Ballintubber Abbey, tho' now nearly choked up, led from the portion of the roof, to which pursuer and pursued first ascended, to another portion whence there was a facility of descent to the exterior of the abbey; and from nearly the summit of this the priest, having made a false step in the eager rapidity of his descent, slipped, and, powerless to stop himself, came rolling to the bottom. But just as his ruffian pursuer was stooping to grasp him, a voice was heard from the small private chapel beneath, exclaiming in deep and hollow tones, "Shawn, Shawn, remember yer uncle's awful death, an' be warned by the terrible sights ye seen since." So startling was the effect of the tone and words arising so unexpectedly from the abode of the dead, that the ruffian sank against the near wall utterly overpowered for a moment.

The moon was once more enshrouded for an instant in dense, dark clouds; and when she broke forth again and he had recovered from his stupor, there was no one to be seen on the Abbey roof but himself. Instantly darting up the narrow steps and pushing across the other portions of the roof, after a searching glance around, he slid down the exterior wall. Still was no fugitive visible; and, after proceeding a field's length beyond the abbey, he returned and entered the private chapel fiercely, to ascertain who had been the utterer of the startling words. There too, however, he was unable to discover any living occupant, and though he called loudly and vehemently, the only response he received was the echo of his own voice, ringing through the ruined wall, mingled with the laughter peals of the troopers, on their becoming aware of his dis-

appointment. So, after having spent nearly an hour in fruitless search for the fugitives, and the party having refused to remain any longer, he was fain to quit the walls contaminated by his presence, crestfallen and enraged, when some of the funeral attendants, that had lain concealed behind trees and hedges, ventured to re-enter the abbey, in fear and trembling, and fling in earth and stones on the coffin, hurriedly and imperfectly, till they should have an opportunity of completing the interment without danger or disturbance.

CHAPTER XII.

A few mornings after the burial of Sir Edmund, the rector received a visit from Mr. Dixon, one of his curates, a young man with pale, pinched features, much asperity of manner, and a fierce denoucer and persecutor of his Catholic countrymen and the law-proscribed faith—in short, who was as fiery and intolerant a bigot, as his superior was mild and tolerant.

"Mr. Gordon," he exclaimed, in an eager, sharp voice, and scarcely waiting to be seated, "you've heard, I suppose, of those audacious doings last night."

"No," said the rector, in a tone strongly contrasting with his, "what must they have been, to agitate you so strongly?"

"Why, the cabin of Jack Brennan, one of our last converts, has been fired, and himself and family nearly burned out of it. I suppose we ourselves shall be attacked one of these nights, if things go on this way."

"I never liked that man; ill-heartedness and villainy are strongly imprinted in his countenance. I said, from the first, that he was no acquisition to our church; and I should not wonder, if it were discovered that he was the incendiary himself, God forgive me, if I am wronging him in word or thought."

"O, sir, sir," rejoined Mr. Dixon, in a voice which his eagerness rendered as shrill as a cracked life, "those opinions would seem rather calculated to cover the crimes of Popery, than to express abhorrence and desire for its extermination, and I fear much, that the leniency and shelter so often extended to wilfully besotted Papists, in this part of the country, has tended materially to make those followers of Satan so daring in their crimes. How are we to root the abomination of Popery from the soil, and convert it into a God-blessed laud, if our proselytes are not to be cherished and protected?"

"I wish we had fewer converts and more Christians," said the rector, laying a strong emphasis on the latter word, "as I have had bitter experience, within the last few days, of the utter want of all Christian feeling on the part of our principal converts."

"Good God, sir, is it possible you would wish to let the country remain sunk in idolatry?"

"I yield to no one, Mr. Dixon," said Mr. Gordon, warmly, "in the ardor of my wishes to lead my poor countrymen from the error of their ways; but I have strong misgivings, whether persecuting men for a creed, or holding out a bribe to them for professing another, be the way to obtain such desirable object. Persecution has made martyrs—never a sincere convert; and for the man too ignorant for conviction, and whom worldly advantage, in any shape, tempts to assume the semblance of a creed he understands not, I had much rather see that man still cling to his own faith, whatever might be its errors, as he but adds hypocrisy to his other faults, while he still, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, continues, probably, a sincere believer than ever in the creed he has outwardly abjured."

"Are you not, then, sanctioning, by implication at least, the toleration and fostering of the papistical idolatry in the land?"

"No! with the doctrines of Rome, I have no sympathy. I but state my opinion of the inefficiency of persecution or bribery, to alter a national faith. As a clergyman and a magistrate, I shall take every step in my power to discover the perpetrators of last night's outrage, and bring them to punishment, though I must, in sorrow, admit that such outrages are the offspring of the oppression and ruthlessness of our own party, as naturally as the reptile is engendered of the slime."

"Oppression to papists and rebels! Good God, what an expression from the lips of a minister of the Established Church! Have we not them prostrate at our feet, and is it not a proof of the forbearance and mercifulness connected with our pure religion, that the faggot and the sword have not been applied to those disloyal and perverse rejecters of the word, as they would unquestionably have been used, had we been the conquerors?"

"You seem to forget in your zeal, Mr. Dixon that, so far from being at our feet, those same papists had a well considered treaty ratified to them, in the face of the world, guaranteeing to them the free exercise of their religion; but we had better not persevere in a conversation we are not likely to agree in."

"We are not, indeed, Mr. Gordon, as my de-

ecided conviction is that, if our present happy laws were but strictly and impartially enforced, the ploughshare of the true faith would soon eradicate the foul weeds and tares of popery from the land; and, were it even otherwise, I for one, would rather see it a waste, than so overgrown with the poisonous rankness of idolatry."

"E contra, my opinion has been long recorded, that we have been dealing harshly, unfairly, and mistakenly with our countrymen, however we may regret their errors; and I much fear," continued Mr. Gordon, in an impressive and a prophetic tone, "that the present persecution of the Romish church by our rulers will recoil fearfully for ages to come, on our own, which will, I dread, much, be regarded among our descendants in the light of a tyrant persecutor, instead of a beneficent mother, with arms outstretched to foster her reclaimed children."

"And here comes one to give a lift to your opinions, respecting toleration, I suppose," said Dixon, with a sneer, as a frightened looking peasant rushed rapidly towards the rectory, and doffing his hat as he approached the window, exclaimed in eager and broken accents—

"O, Mr. Gordon, jewel, they're goin' to put us out o' the cabin, an' have herself an' myself an' the gorklachs without house or home."

"Who are they, Harry, and why should they do so?" asked the rector.

"Bekase, please yer reverence, ould Isaac Ffoliot, Misher Ffoliot's brother, that took out the laises for a'most the whole village, seem' as how that—that—yer reverence knows, we could not take them out ourselves, ran away th' other day, ye'll mind—a meltation hot an' heavy on his ould bones for id, axin yer reverence's pardon; an' now Sir John's turn'a' us out to beg, by that hard-hearted villain 'Torney Baker's advice, bekase, he ses, ould Isaac (the murderin' thief) isn't to the fore, to prove his tithes, an' we have no one to stan' up for us—may God pity us."

"Well, Harry, I shall, God willing, be at the Castle to-morrow and use all my influence, which, however, I fear is but very slight in that quarter, to induce Sir John to alter his determination, and allow you to remain on the spot, which, to my own knowledge, you paid for so punctually, and have done so much to improve. In the mean time here is a trifling assist the present necessities of yourself and family. God pity you, I repeat."

The worthy rector reached over a dollar, which the unfortunate man received with tears of gratitude, as he exclaimed, "The heavens reward yer reverence: it's yer kind word an' yer help that was always to the fore when 'twas wantin'. O, if other protestan' clergy was like you, we needn't be so hard set intirely for the loss of our own priests. May heaven an' the saints, I pray again, reward you, for all your goodness, here an' hereafter."

"Now, Mr. Dixon," said the rector, in a tone partly of triumph and partly of sorrow, "have you not a key to many of the outrages of our ill-fated peasantry, in the unprincipled treachery of a man who betrays and desolates a whole district, compelled by vile laws to confide in his honor and good faith? Could any homily or treatise proclaim so eloquently, too, the almost insuperable difficulties piled up in the way of extending our creed by its professing friends—the framers of such laws and abettors of such men? Good God," he added, in a more earnest tone, "what wonder, if men treated like unfortunate Gorwan—and, alas for our nature! I fear their name is legion at present—men who, after lives of patient industry, see their little cabins and plots torn from them, by fiend-like treachery and evil statutes, and themselves and helpless families flung 'at one fell swoop' without shelter or means, on a merciless world—what wonder if such men should resort to crime and outrage!—What wonder, too, if among a sensitive, strong-passioned and imaginative race, the number of sincere converts to our faith should be so few, when acts like Ffoliot's can be pointed out as the practices of its members, and the merciless code, that tempts to such and worse, as theirs also."

"Well, I must own," said the curate, with more than his usual asperity, "than I can still entertain no sympathy for idolatry, or for the worshippers of the beast, who could, besides, escape all persecution at once, by forsaking the path of darkness, and enrolling themselves under the banners of the pure faith. Nay, I am by no means clear, as human inflictions are sometimes requisite to purge from iniquity, whether it would not be better that nine-tenths of the cabins in this benighted land were emptied—ay, razed—not a sod left of them, than that the God-forsaken occupants should continue, in their blind wilfulness, to shut their eyes against the light, and wallow in the mire of superstition."

"You are now, dear Mr. Dixon, speaking under the excitement of argument," said the rector warmly, "as I am confident that, in your