



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

TURLOUGH O'BRIEN;

OR THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER.

CHAPTER XXV.—"BURNT BRANDY FOR TWO."

While this was passing, Sir Hugh, in his lodging, sat in anxious and gloomy conference, with a shrewd and seasoned veteran of the law, Caleb Crooke, and his sour and gloomy companion, Jeremiah Tisdal.

"Shall I be allowed the aid of counsel?" inquired Sir Hugh.

"Certainly, to sit by and advise you," replied the man of wits and notices; "but his voice must not be heard in court. It is a very hard rule; but you cannot be heard by counsel against an indictment for high treason."

"What think you of the jury?" urged the knight.

"In the heats and perils of these times, men's minds and hearts are alike unsettled and distempered," replied the attorney, "and I rely not on the impartiality of any jury. My sole trust is in the judges, and in the obvious weakness of the prosecution. At the same time I do confess, I would give a great deal that, at any sacrifice of money or property, you could make interest with some great man for a nolle prosequi. But come what may, our trust is in God and a good cause."

The attorney was collecting and arranging the notes which he had taken.

"Mr. Tisdal," he said as he proceeded, "unless I mistake, your evidence will go far to exonerate our honored friend from his present difficulties."

He paused abruptly, for a servant entered at that moment, and brought a small crumpled slip of paper, which he placed in Jeremiah Tisdal's hand.

It was now almost dark, and the Puritan approached the solitary candle which burned in the chamber, and by its light read the following words:

"Little Dick Slash to his old friend, the Captain, greeting: 'I desire to speak to you—so leave your company, and come down with me. If you keep me waiting, I shall go up to you. Choose between these courses; for see you, and speak with you, I will.'"

"Yours, as you shall treat me, 'DEVERIL.' Tisdal read this document over and over again, with such obvious and uncontrollable evidences of agitation, that even Sir Hugh observed the darkened expression which crossed his countenance, as he studied it.

"I've known him long, and seen him often tried," As they thus conferred, the subject of their discourse descended the staircase, and needed no guide to indicate the place where his visitor was to be found, inasmuch as he heard the well-known voice of Deveril, in jocular converse with the servant, at the street door.

"Ha, Mr. Tisdal," he exclaimed, assuming much to the Puritan's relief, a tone of respect, "I am glad to see you, sir."

Jeremiah nodded, and silently walked forth and pursued his way for some time in profound and obstinate taciturnity. At last he turned suddenly upon Deveril, who was smoking lazily at his side, and abruptly asked—

"Well, what is it you want?" Deveril removed his pipe, and spat upon the ground; and, shrugging his shoulders as he looked, with a half laugh, upon the Puritan, he said,

"Why, what an ill-conditioned churl he has turned out. This comes of your Munster farming, your turf and buttermilk! Why, man, you're scarce fit for civil company. What do I want? Nothing—nothing from you—nothing in the world but your company. You treated me in the country, and I'll treat you in town."

"I don't want your company—I don't want your supper," said Tisdal, gruffly.

"Come, come—you're too savage; rot me but it won't do," rejoined Deveril. "It's better be friends than foes, especially where it costs nothing. Come—I believe I'm the best off of the two, at present; and since I joined the army, and entered his Majesty's service, I've set up as a sort of sly saint, in the same line as yourself, barring that I go to Mass, and you to another sort of service; so take take courage, and remember I have a character now to look after, as well as you. Come, come—we must keep terms; it's better to have a cup of sack than to draw daggers on one another, without a cause. Come along, man; be advised."

Induced by such speeches, and more than all, by the obvious prudence of avoiding an unnecessary rupture with this man, so long as he was disposed upon reasonable terms to observe a truce, Tisdal moodily suffered his communicative companion to lead him into the King's Head, the insubstantial tavern, among whose dusky chambers we have already followed Deveril.

Behold them, therefore, seated by a blazing fire, in the old panelled chamber which tradition called the 'countess's bower.' A piece of rush matting covered a patch of the floor, beside the hearth, and upon it stood the table with their snug refection disposed in inviting confusion over its white cloth. The candles upon the table, indeed, but feebly lighted up the wide expanse of the deserted chamber; but the flickering blaze of the hearth had dispelled the damps, and sent its ruddy pulsations of fitful light into the most distant corners and recesses of the apartment.

"Sit down in your chair, old bully; choose a pipe, and help yourself out of this," cried Deveril, doing the honors, and chucking his tobacco box across the table to his comrade, while he threw himself into a seat, and glanced at the bright fire with a cozy shrug. "A snug fire," he continued, significantly, "a snug fire, captain, though not quite so warm as Drunguniool, eh?"

"The place is burned," said Tisdal, doggedly; not choosing to understand his comrade's sneer; "Burned! well, that's no great news to me," rejoined Deveril, crossing his legs, and planting one elbow carelessly upon the table, while he proceeded to chop and shred his tobacco, upon which he smiled the while, as sarcastically as if his conversation was addressed exclusively to it; "no great news, seeing I beheld the bonfire with these eyes, and should, had you but seen out your pleasant frolic, myself have lent a few pounds of grease to the blaze. Come, old Snap, be frank and friendly, and say, in confidence, did you not mean that I should broil in your old tinder-box of a house?"

"How could I help you, blockhead: I had well nigh perished myself," said Tisdal, roughly. "Aye, indeed? that would have been a blow to the religious world," said Deveril, with a look of concern.

"But how do you satisfy me for my money, comrade; the gold and silver you stole from beneath the crab-tree in the paddock; account with me for that," growled Tisdal.

"Dreams and fancies, friend; the fire has fried your brains, old boy, and these are the fumes and vapors—gold and silver, crab-trees and paddocks," cried Deveril, throwing himself back, and shaking his head slowly; "take care, saint Jeremiah—thy pious rigors, thy austerities and mortifications are fast unsettling thy wits; 'tis all pure fancy, or, if it be anything more, I at least comprehend it not; and what's more," he continued, altering his manner to one of very distinct and decisive significance; "I never shall comprehend it either; to the end of the chapter; so let us turn to something more intelligible."

"And how," continued Tisdal, "how do you defend your cruelty to poor Bligh, my trusty

servant, whom you shut into the house, and committed to the flames?" "Nay, cried Deveril, with real sincerity 'I know nothing of that; he must have fled into it from the rapparees. I was far away ere then. But was he burned, really and actually burned alive?"

"Burnt to a cinder, poor dog!" said Tisdal. "Well, he was the stupidest booby, that Bligh—just the sort of fellow to run into a house on fire, and burn himself to tinder," said Deveril.

As he reflected on the adventure, it gradually struck him in so ludicrous a light, that he first chuckled, and then laughed outright, until the tears overflowed his eyes.

"And so," resumed Deveril, as soon as this hilarious explosion had quite expended itself, "the old farm-house and the saintly youth are actually burned to smoke and ashes—dust and charcoal. It was a comfortable old place—devilish comfortable; and you got it, you know, a dead bargain."

Deveril said this in a careless sort of way, and without even glancing at his companion, who rose as if stung with a sudden pain—sate down again, and scowled once or twice quickly upon him, as if upon the point of speaking, but he held his peace.

"Come," said Deveril, "I'm your entertainer to-night; and gibbet me but I'll treat you like a gentleman; rot it, I'll have no mooping. Odd's life, man, we know one another; where's the good of striving to humbug? It's no bite—file against file—so as well let it alone. There's the backgammon board; there's the burnt brandy, and all the rest; and here am I, your old bully comrade, ready to play you a bit, or tip you a stove; or—come, to begin—ladle a glassful, and listen to me, while I tell you the ups and downs of little Dick Slash, since we parted company in merry Lincolnshire."

Tisdal complied in silence, and thus together sate these two ancient companions in iniquity, changed in aspect, and one, at least, not less so in mind, since their old days of sin and riot, and now, after their long separation, once more so strangely brought together by the whims of fortune—there they sate, quaffing 'pottle-deep potations,' from the bowl of burnt brandy—Tisdal's favorite beverage of old—and talking over, with growing interest and recklessness, their old remembrances. Under the influence of the potent bowl, all the superinduced formalities of Tisdal's puritanism gradually melted away and vanished piece by piece, revealing the natural character of the man, until, in all the indestructible vividness and strength of its old passion and daring, the dark and fiery spirit stood confessed.

The backgammon board at which they had been playing—for Tisdal had, as we have said, for the nonce forgotten his puritanism—was now shoved aside, and deeper and fiercer grew these ominous revelries. Strange and wild was Deveril's excitement, as, with flashing eye and a face flushed, but not with the glow of intoxication, he ran through his adventures, comic, tragic, and perilous, with a rapidity and a rude fascination of descriptive force which absorbed his old comrade in its interest, and fired him in turn with a corresponding excitement and reckless unreserve (fatal excitement, fatal unreserve); and thus hour after hour flew by, and found them still in deep carousal.

These mad orgies were at their highest and loudest when the inkeeper entered with a flask of brandy in his hand.

"A new flask of brandy, corporal?" said a man, fixing his eye on the soldier, as he placed the bottle on the table, and then added slowly—"and there's more below, whenever you please to want it."

He paused for a moment, looking with steady significance in Deveril's face, and then turning, left the room, without saying another word.

Deveril's hilarity subsided—the blood left his face; a dark and sinister expression gradually gathered upon his unsightly features, deeper and thicker every moment; he drew two or three long breaths, with something between a shiver and a sigh, and rose abruptly from his seat.

"What's the matter—what's gone wrong with you now, you gallow's dog?" inquired Tisdal, in a tone whose surprise, if not suspicion, was ill-qualified by a semblance of rough jollity.

"Nothing at all—a sort of a chill; the room is cold, isn't it?" replied Deveril, with an unsuccessful effort to appear at his ease. "Take some liquor, and never mind me."

Tisdal looked at him doubtfully and steadily for some time; and Deveril's uneasiness seemed rather to increase than diminish as he stooped down, and taking the poker in his hand, began to batter it heavily on the hearth.

so good-night?" "What are you afraid of—eh?" said Deveril, with a ghastly laugh, and striking again and still harder upon the hearth with the massive poker. "Curse your nonsense; what are you dreaming about?—what are you afraid of?"

Confirmed in his suspicion, undefined as they were, Tisdal rose hastily from his seat.

"Don't go—you must not go; you shan't go," cried Deveril, planting himself between Tisdal and the door, and affecting to laugh, while the hilarious cachinnation was horribly belied by the expression of his face. "Why, we've not well begun yet, rot it; you shan't turn tail at this time of night; you're my guest, you know—and I'm master here."

As he spoke he continued to affect a playful jocularly, which, however, did not prevent his companion's observing the deadly expression which lurked beneath it, and remarking also that he clutched the poker with the genuine earnestness of a man prepared to employ it as a weapon of offence.

"Let me pass," cried Tisdal, with the ferocity of thoroughly aroused suspicion.

"Nonsense, nonsense," continued Deveril, in a tone half jocular, half soothing, but which filled the mind of Tisdal with the deadliest fears.

"Let me pass, or by—," cried the Puritan, with something bordering upon desperation, for he was unarmed.

"Holla! Burke—are you asleep?—ere—murder—here," shouted Deveril, at the top of his voice, and no longer attempting to disguise the nature of his intentions.

Pressing his hat firmly down upon his brows, Tisdal grasped the ponderous brass candlestick, and hurled it at the head of his treacherous entertainer. Deveril, by quickly stooping, escaped the missile, which smote the old wainscoting at the further end of the room, with a crash which might have frightened the rats for ever and a day from the countess's bower; and in the next moment the two companions were locked together in desperate and deadly conflict.

Tugging and striving, they wheeled and shuffled along the floor; down went the table—cups, glasses, bowl, flagon, and all, rattling and rumbling over the dusty old boards; and down rolled the combatants over the prostrate table, over and over;—and as Tisdal tugged and tumbled in this deadly grapple, in the flickering fire-light, he saw two strange figures, spectre-like, peering at him from the hearth.

"Deveril, Deveril," he muttered, half breathless, "you won't murder me; don't take my life!"

"Burke, Burke!" still shouted the redoubted Dick Slash, "come—will you come, d— you, or I must brain him. Burke—holla, Burke, he's choking me!"

Tisdal heard no more; for, accidentally or otherwise, the heavy poker which they struggled for, descended stunningly upon his head, and in an instant all was dark, dreamless lethargy.

CHAPTER XXVI.—THE TUSSELE AND THE EAVES DROPPERS.

Disengaging himself as the soldiers entered, Deveril arose, torn and agitated, and smeared with the blood which flowed plentifully from Tisdal's wound.

Garrett, silent, stern and gloomy, with his strong hand still upon the old man's collar; and Deveril coolly re-adjusting his disarranged attire, and stealing from time to time, a curious look, half shrinking, half ferocious, at the Puritan; and, lastly, near the door, imperfectly lighted, with grounded muskets, stood the broad-hatted soldiers, silent and listless, while their corporal, in grim luxury, chewed a quid of tobacco.—

At last, Tisdal opened his eyes, stared wildly round, and attempted to rise, but fell again into his chair, muttering incoherently all the while.

"Thank God, thank God!" whispered Garvey, and the pious ebullition of gratitude, we are bound to admit, was spoken in the genuine sincerity of selfishness; "by the law, sir, there's nothing the matter with him; no murder after all."

"It's dark, sir; dark, sir—to be sure it is—dark—dark; curse the road, and the trees; dark—dark as pitch," muttered Tisdal, staring wildly before him.

"We'll get some more water," suggested Garvey, relapsing into alarm.

"Ay, ay, in the water, was it? A year ago found there, so it was; dangerous bit, sir," continued Tisdal, and then, on a sudden, perceiving Deveril, he said in a tone of alacrity, "Ha, Dick, Dick, little Dick for ever! Dick, Dick at it again!"

"The men may stand on the lobby, I suppose, sir?" said Deveril, hastening to drown the voice of the bewildered Puritan, and addressing Miss Garrett, at whose disposal the soldiers were placed.

"Ay; take them to the lobby," said he; and as the order was obeyed, Tisdal continued—

"Dick, Dick, he didn't hurt you, eh; no, no, no; it's nothing, is it? and, as he spoke, he raised his hand to his head. The sober black of his sleeve seemed to fix his gaze, and with a puzzled look of dismay and horror, he said—

"Dick, Dick, they're found you out; I have often told you, my God, a thousand times, I told you, you'd come to the gallows; is it, tell me, are we blown?" he cried, with a bewildered look, gazing from face to face; "Dick, Dick, stand by me, and we'll have one blaze for it; blood and lightning! man, don't knock under."

He made a frantic effort to rise, but was easily overpowered, and kept in his chair, where he continued to sit in dogged silence, while, minute after minute, one by one, his scattered recollections returned, and slowly resumed their successive connection, until at last the scene in which he had just borne so principal part, and all the occurrences of the evening, in their true bearings, stood fully reinstated and restored before his mind's eye. At length, after a silence of many minutes, he said, in a tone of stern reproach—

"Deveril, you have done for me! You are a blacker scoundrel than I took you for. You once had a notion of honor about you; you're nothing now but a stag—you are not game, what you once were; you're not game."

"Game as you are," retorted Deveril, with an ineffectual effort to appear perfectly at his ease, for spite of his effrontery, there was something so indefensibly unprofessional in his conduct to his old associate, that he felt an emotion almost akin to genuine shame, as he attempted to return his steady gaze of gloomy reproach.

"I might have served you out. I might have blown your fox's head off your shoulders; I might have taken your life as easily as drawing a trigger, when you came to Drunguniool a few weeks ago; but like a chicken-hearted fool, I spared you," continued Tisdal, bitterly.

"Thank you for nothing," replied Deveril, scornfully. "You thought the wild Irish might do it as well. My fox's head, as you call it, saved me there, and no love of yours, comrade." "Gentlemen," said Tisdal, suddenly rising after a considerable pause, "you have no right to keep me here. I'm no prisoner; I shall leave you now; I'm a free man."