

REDMOND O'HANLON.

An Historical story of the Cromwellian Settlement.

CHAPTER XX.—CONTINUED.

Whether it was that her senses were rendered more acute by her anxiety, or that the thoughts that were whirling through her brain made her mistake internal sensations for the action of exterior things, she found it difficult to determine; but it appeared to her as if there was an ominous sound in the slightest motion of the air. There was, she fancied, a sigh in the slightest breeze that fanned her cheek, and a groan given forth as she heard the shutting or opening of a distant door, whilst the fierce howls of the dogs seemed to her the raging of a storm as it burst on a rocky shore, and with it was occasionally mixed the unnatural, hideous, new-noted yell of "the tiger," which seemed to come up to her from the court-yard as the agonized shriek of a dying wretch, whose last gasping cry is smothered by the foam of the relentless billow that is about to bury him down in the sea for ever.

Judith struggled with these feelings for a long time, bringing to her aid her resolute will, and native courage, and so occasionally conquering them—even though, after a few moments, they rose again in their strength to unnerve her. At length she believed she had overcome them completely, when a new species of terror assailed her—it was the dead, the awful, and the sudden stillness that she felt surrounding her. There was not a breath, not a motion, not a sound! It was as if nature or art had conspired or contrived that there should be such a complete absence of all motion, that the slightest noise made by her in attempting her escape could not fail to betray her.

Poor Judith! her long, sad, solitary confinement had made a deep inroad upon her constitution in weakening her body, and numbing her mind, blunting her brave spirit, and undermining her powers of endurance. Ah, me! how many sad, sad hours are there in this dreary, weary world! How many a noble spirit it quells, and how many a generous being it destroys, whilst selfishness reigns supreme, and with a cold but sure hand crushes to death many a loving heart! Who can tell the effects on an ardent spirit and an impulsive nature of coerced inactivity and compulsory lassitude? Its results may be calculated by gravestones; its sufferings can never be known but on that Day when shall be unfolded to an appalled universe a record of all that each of us has said, and done, and thought.

Poor Judith!—she was young, unaided, unadvised, and she was about to accompany, she knew not where nor for how long a period, a half-witted boy, whose imbecile mind, like his dwarfed body, appeared to place him beyond the pale of humanity. Who can be surprised to hear, under such circumstances, that the once valiant Judith was, for the moment, exposed to vain fears and baseless apprehensions, or that when she detected the slight noise made by opening the casement in the tower opposite to that in which she sat, an unaccountable feeling of deception fell upon her? Her spirit was abated, but her will was firm; and therefore it was with a steady hand she fastened the rope by which "the imp" could pass over to her.

The noise made by flinging across the rope around the vigilance of the dogs beneath, and their loud barks and yells were renewed with the same clamor when they observed Judith looking at them in the day time. Judith's lips trembled as she heard this outbreak of canine ferocity. She looked down into the court-yard, but could discern nothing beneath. She only knew the raging brutes were below by their untiring howls.

This clamor continued for some minutes, when she observed a lighted lantern moving beneath in the darkness, and heard words spoken in soothing tones to the dogs. She was sure she could remark "the imp" carrying some food along with his lamp, and the dogs following him; then there was again darkness for a minute or two, and at last the lamp reappeared, and was borne about to different parts of the yard, as if he who carried it was in search of something. It appeared to Judith as if one of the dogs was missing, and the person with this lamp was looking for it; and tempting the animal to come to him: for she was sure she heard the words, "Come, Sir,—hi, hi! here, good dog, come here!" This continued for a minute or two, and then again there was a deep, solemn, and profound stillness; and in the midst of it, and whilst still looking down into the dark court-yard beneath, Judith perceived "the imp" was beside her. Pulling her dress, he whispered in a low voice:—"Ready?"

"Yes—what have you done with the dogs?"

"Locked up."

"Go on, I'll follow you," said Judith. The imp cast the rope ladder into the yard, and then, getting outside the window, he said: "Follow me; I'll guide your feet; hold your whip in your mouth; you'll want both hands to hold fast."

Judith did as she was directed. She scarcely ventured to breathe as she felt herself in the air; her feet guided from step to step by the imp until she was sure she was near the earth, when her foot was let go, at the same instant that her conductor cried out:—"Oh, God!—jump, jump to the ground at once; one of the dogs I thought I had put up is out; he has a fast hold of me. Strike him on the head with your whip, or he will crush the bone of my legs to pieces."

"Where is the brute?" cried Judith, as she bounded to the earth, forgetting all her fears, the moment that a struggle was impending, and that a human creature appealed to her for assistance. "Where is the brute? and where are you?"

"Here! here! oh! I'm destroyed."

does not bleed much—but I don't care—I won't feel it when grand-daddy gives me my bottle."

"Bottle! of what medicine does your grand-daddy give you a bottle?" asked Judith.

"Ugusbaugh, nice usquebaugh," said the imp, smacking his lips, though his leg was ringing with pain. "Come haste, you make haste."

"Will you not stop to bind up your leg?" "No! no! no! not time—haste, haste haste. This way, give me your hand. He has bit you—I see—more sorry for you than myself! Brave girl! tried to save me! Come, come, come! haste! Pity you haven't usquebaugh. Come, come, come. I want my bottle to stop this pain."

Judith gave her hand to the boy, and he led her through what was to her impenetrable darkness. All she could ascertain was, as she wound her whip about, that for some time they were going through narrow passages; and then that they were at last in the open air, and as the darkness seemed to recede from her view, that they had passed beyond the walls of the fortress, and were walking upon grass; at last she heard the pawing of a horse, and then felt that such an animal was at her side.

"Mount," said the imp, "I'll ride before you."

Judith felt that a pillion had been provided for her, and in front of it was a small saddle for the imp.

"This is," observed Judith, as her practised hand ran along the horse's head, neck, and shoulders, "a very powerful horse. Have you the strength to manage him?"

"You'll see," answered the imp. Judith at once mounted. The imp clambered into the saddle before her, and then uttering the ejaculation "Hi, Sir!" away dashed the animal as if it had started for a race.

"The horse cannot long keep to that pace," remarked Judith.

"I was not disposed to eat, but I have slept almost ever since."

"Sleep! I'll never sleep again."

"Why?" "Oh! this leg!—this leg!"

"What is it paining you?" "The imp pointed from his hip to his toe, and cried as if in intense agony—"Pain—pain all pain!"

"Which of the dogs was it that attacked us?" "The white dog."

"Ah! the tiger," thought Judith to herself. "Why did you not shut him up at the same time with the other dogs last night?"

"I thought I did—but he hid himself. For some days back he did not come for food, and when I thought I had been tempting them all out of the yard, he must have stayed behind—hid his eyes from the light—and then, not knowing me in the dark, he bit me; and you he bit, because he did not know you."

"I have noticed," said Judith, "that same dog going on in a very strange manner for the last few days. Have you heard what is the matter with him?"

"Oh! yes."

"Mad!" exclaimed Judith; "the dog mad! Good heavens! Then you and I are both lost."

"Not at all!" answered the imp, with seeming indifference. "Not at all! What do you mean?" asked Judith, hoping she had misapprehended the meaning of the imperfectly informed being before her.

"No harm can overtake him who has plenty of usquebaugh. I'll soon have plenty. What do I care for mad dogs?—mad dogs cannot do me any harm. Oh! this leg! this leg!" cried the imp, as he hopped about. "But come, no more time to lose. We must be off to meet daddy."

"Come! come! come speedily. If what you say of the dog be true, there is indeed no time on this earth for me to spare. First to see my father—that one last, sole happiness the world can give me; and then to meet that other Father, who seated in Heaven, looks down with the unceasing vigilance of ever watchful love upon His erring, poor, weak, mortal children."

"Come! come for the grand cure," cried the imp, as he mounted the saddled horse in front of Judith. "For the cave, and then for such an everlasting drink of usquebaugh!"

"WHAT a strange! what an awful! and what a gloomy-looking place is this!" said Judith, as, having crept upon her hands and knees through a long passage, she at length stood erect in a cavern, which looked like a natural hollow in a mountain side, dimly illuminated through a few crevices of the rocks of which it was composed.

"In what a strange place I am to meet my father! How unlike our last parting to our next greeting! Then I knew no sorrow—then health was rioting in every vein; and now—death is upon me! Yes! yes! that poor semi-idiot has told the truth. The dog was mad; and the poison that was in his foul body has infused its mine, and burns and chills by turns this poor wretched limb. Be it so! be it so! It was well received. It has fallen upon me in a good cause. It was injured in the effort to save another from injury; and better—far better—that life should be so taken from me, than that I should lose it when sinning, or thinking of sin. Yes; God is very merciful, and I must prepare myself to meet Him; but then, my father—my poor, poor, dear father. What tidings are these I have to tell him! Oh! death! death! there is thy bitter pang. Leave me, boy, leave me, said Judith, turning to the imp, who had followed her into the cave, and who stood watching her, whilst she was thus soliloquizing with herself.

There was a new and a strange expression in the face of the imp."

So new and so strange was this expression that, despite of the sad and absorbing thoughts that filled the mind of Judith, she could not refrain from taking notice of the youth. Instead of the malignant grin, which at all times and upon all other occasions distorted the countenance of the imp, it now marked with profound sorrow, an anxious care and a deep gloom; whilst sighs issued incessantly from his lips, and he moved, not as he had been wont, with the agility of a baboon, but with the slow, hesitating, and halting step of a wounded animal. It was as if suffering and affliction, for the first time acutely felt were awaking in the intellect of this poor young creature faculties and sentiments that had previously lain dormant.

"Alas! alas!" cried Judith, as she looked upon him.

"I see in your face a confirmation of my fears. What can I do for my poor boy? In what manner can I assist you?"

"No ways," replied the imp.

"Then leave me here," said Judith.

"I do not wish to leave you."

"Then remain."

"I do not wish to remain—and you do not wish to leave me here. What do you mean? Is it that I should not remain here?"

"Yes."

"But it is not here that my father is to meet me?"

"It is."

"Ah! then, be the consequences what they may, here I must—and here I will remain, until I see my father."

The imp's eyes filled with tears, and falling on his knees, and clasping her hands, he said to her, "I cannot, dare not tell all I suspect and fear; but you were bitten by the dog in trying to save me. You tried to save me. I—I—I want to save you; there's but one way of doing it; leave this place before your daddy comes."

My poor boy, cried Judith, deeply moved by this manifestation of feeling on the part of the imp. Not at all the world the wealth of the world—or the medical skill of this world could save you or myself from impending fate a horrible death! We are sad companions in misery.

I understand you. There is danger, I suppose, hanging over my father by his coming here; there is danger to my life in my remaining where I am. Much better for me then, to stay where I am, because, by so doing, I may in time give warning to my father of the peril that threatens him, and so prolong a existence that is dearer to me than my own."

"Come, come," cried the imp, catching Judith by her robe. "Come, come, or you'll be too late. Come, I say," he added, tugging impatiently, like a fretted and spoiled child, when one of its wishes has been unexpectedly thwarted. "Come! Oh! do come, or you'll be too late."

"Never—never," answered Judith. "Here my father is coming to meet me; and here, therefore, will I remain."

The imp started away from her, threw himself on his hands, and placing one of his horn-like ears to the ground, stayed in that listening position for a moment, then jumped up again, let fall his hands by his side, and howled rather than cried out, "Woe! woe! too late! too late! they are coming! they are here!"

And so speaking, he dashed into the narrow dark entrance, and disappeared.

"My father! my beloved father!" cried Judith, as she flung herself upon her knees. Judith listened for the approaching footsteps; and, as she did so, she tried to pray, whilst her sense of hearing and her devotional aspirations were disturbed by alternate chills and flushes, which made her tremble now with cold, and then burn as if with a fever. A strange stiffness fell upon her neck, and there was the sensation as of a strong hand grasping her round the throat, and endeavoring to choke her.

Poor Judith!

Lawson and Ludlow were punctual in keeping the appointment made with Gerald Geraghty. At the hour fixed upon they were to the very moment in front of the old ruined square tower; and at the self-same moment Geraghty came from out of the tower, and greeted them from the mound surrounding it.

"You are welcome," said Geraghty; "not a moment too soon—not a minute too late, you, Mr. Lawson, to see your daughter, and you, Mr. Ludlow, to witness revenge for old wrongs fully satisfied."

lips trembled, as he said, with terror: "Unhappy boy! Hapless girl! bitten in trying to save the life of my grandson. Why is this miserable woman the daughter of such a villain? But there's no saving her now. She's already doomed. I could not save her if I would. But are you sure it was the white dog?"

"Sure!—right sure—I cut his throat."

"The white dog! Why he seemed for the last few days to be going—"

"Mad," answered the imp. "Sullivan, the keeper told me so on Tuesday. But I don't care. Usquebaugh, you know, cures everything. Have you got it for me?"

"Here it is," said the old man, producing a large bottle from one of the wide pockets of a large outside coat.

The imp made a clutch at it, but the old man was too quick for him. He drew it out of the reach of the boy, and thrusting it into his pocket, said:—"Not yet, not yet. Here is the fire-box. I have shown you what to do with it. Now mind what I say to you. You are to keep your eye fixed on the place I showed you; you can there see everything that is going on in the cavern. The people there, when they find me alone, may want to take your bottle from me, but I won't give it to them. In saving it I may be knocked down. If I am, your only chance to get your bottle is to take out the things from the fire-box, and to do what I told you. If they do not molest me, then I will leave them, and bring your bottle usquebaugh, and then—"

The old man smiled at the thought of being able, in safety, to complete the diabolical plan he had projected.

"Now, boy, away! Observe, if you see me struck or knocked down, then, not before then, use the fire-box."

The boy nodded assent, made a motion as if he was striking a spark from a flint, and ran off towards the hills.

As the boy disappeared, the old man turned to his fellow-travellers, and said: "All right! Your daughter, Sir, is in the cave, and you may be sure, anxious to hear your footsteps, because certain you will save her from her persecutor."

"That I will," replied Lawson, "or die in the attempt."

"So I expect," replied Geraghty. "Great caution, however, will be required. Let us dismount here. You can follow me on foot from this place to the entrance of the cavern. When there, you can easily find your way in, as the boy tells me there are a couple of lamps lighted. Their brightness in the midst of darkness will be a sure guide to you."

CHAPTER XXII.

There was a grand ball at the Castle of Dublin. His Excellency the Duke of Ormonde had resolved upon having in that ancient fortress one of the most magnificent entertainments ever displayed within its walls. He was desirous, when such a festival as that of "The Restoration" was to be celebrated, that the seat of government in the Irish metropolis should, by the munificence of the Chief Governor, the number of his guests, and the fervor of their loyalty, constitute a marked contrast to "The Green Club" of England, its ex-monarchical leader, Shaftesbury, and all anti-monarchical sympathizers in "the sister country."

The throne room of the Castle was crowded. There were glittering uniforms and magnificent dresses, and noble looking personages, and fat corporators in red, gaudy robes, intermingled with ladies remarkable, some for their great display of jewellery, and not a few attractive for their sparkling beauty. Amongst the latter there was not one more gorgeously attired than Lady Diana Harvey, the newly married wife of Major Harvey; and none more distinguished for her juvenile charms than the young lady who had been at the moment presented to His Excellency as the bride of Mr. Vincent Fitzpatrick.

It was with piny cheeks, deeply flushed with pleasure at the compliments which had been paid to her by the Lord Lieutenant, that Kathleen returned, leaning on the arm of her husband, to take her place by the side of Lady Diana.

"Bless me, my love!" said Lady Diana; "I hope there is nothing the matter with you. You look greatly flushed. Your cheeks are entirely too red. I hope you are well."

"Will!" answered Kathleen; "I never was so happy before in all my life. That charming old gentleman, the Duke, has been saying such very kind things of my husband."

"Your husband! indeed!" chimed in Lord Arran, as he appeared in a rich, full dress suit, with a diamond star on his breast. "Your husband, indeed! My worthy old father was thinking of you, and not of your husband, or perhaps he was like his son, wishing he was himself your husband. You know Lady Diana, how little of a poet my father is; and yet, I assure you, such an impression did this young bride produce upon him, that as she turned away, I heard the worthy, but somewhat antiquated, beau, quoting Shakespeare, and saying as he looked upon her—"

"For where thou art, there is the world itself. With every overland pleasure in the world; And where thou art not, desolation."

"I do not know, my Lord," observed Kathleen, "for which quality you are most to be admired—the readiness of your fancy, or the