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THE LAST IRISHMAN.

(Translated from the French of Elie Berthet, by C. M. O'Keefe, for the Boston Pilot.)

CHAPTER XVII.

There is a district in Ireland where, at the period of our story, the English government, after the lapse of seven centuries, had scarcely succeeded in establishing its authority: I mean Connemara, or, as the Irish call it in their native language, "the Ports of Deep," that is, *Cuan na mara*. It is situated on the western side of the "Green Isle" opposite New York. There never was a country better adapted to serve as an asylum for outlaws; it is filled with lakes, impracticable bogs, and mountains that are pathless and inaccessible. The lines of communication are bridge-roads or boreens, narrow and dangerous; and form, by their multiplicity of inextricable labyrinths in which the stranger is lost. The soil is so barren that you might travel miles without meeting a farm. Few capitalists dared at this time to farm a country, the chief value of which lies in pasturage. Its principal inhabitants were ferocious herdsmen; and its only visitors were outlaws or malefactors, who took refuge in its fastnesses from the pursuits of English justice.

In Ireland, however, the word malefactor has a peculiar meaning: crimes in Ireland have generally a political cause. The hatred of race, revolting partiality, and grinding injustice of the English law usually produce those criminal actions which distinguish the Irish calendar. The stranger, who visits Ireland from curiosity or business, is quite as safe as in the most cultivated countries of Europe. He has only to enter a cabin if he be hungry or thirsty, to be immediately received as a guest and a friend. *Caed mille failthe*, and the cordial smile of welcome will greet his entrance, and cheer him to his meal. The family will offer him their milk and potatoes; the old man will tell him the legends, and the young girl sing the sweet and harmonious melodies of Ireland. But woe betide the sheriff's officer, the catch-pole, or bailiff, who ventured to execute his functions in this land of prescription. All Connemara revolted against him.

This is the country into which we must introduce the reader, about seven months subsequently to the events described in the last chapter.

A more picturesque, and, at the same time, a more savage prospect perhaps never met a traveller's eye than the Valley of the Three Sisters, (that is, *Gleann na thri Sear*.) It is a great ravine, or prodigious furrow, apparently scooped out by a deluge in pre-Adamate periods of geological convulsion: it is skirted by three mountains which give it a triangular shape. A humid obscurity broods in this valley which is never dispelled, except in one season of the year, and which disposes the mind to feelings of melancholy and terror. In the centre spreads a lake which originates in a neighboring mountain, and which is fed by a torrent that tumbles down in the foam of a cascade. The starveling vegetation is scant and stony in this sterile solitude. Nevertheless, some stunted trees, struggling into existence, have struck their roots into the crevices which the torrent had filled with particles of vegetable earth. The only sound breaking the silence of this melancholy desert is the monotonous roar of the wintry cascade. The melodious notes of the red-breast, the thrush, or blackbird never cheer the gloomy echo of these inhospitable deserts. Even in the flowery season of summer the Valley of the Three Sisters presents a lugubrious aspect; and if so, the reader may judge of its appalling appearance at the period of our story—the beginning of a rude winter. Though only in the middle of November the mountain tops were sheeted with snow, and the leafless trees dripped with icicles not destined to melt until the following May. The lake slept under a crust of bluish ice, broken here and there by withered tufts of rushes and flaggers, which grew through it. The traveller on horseback was following the half obliterated road which selved the lake, while the keen and bitter wind swept in gales over the scene. Despite an ample cloak that at once covered himself and the greater part of his horse; despite a broad-brimmed hat which he pulled down so as to leave but a narrow aperture for sight and respiration, the Unknown appeared frozen with cold. Besides, it was easy to perceive by the uncertainty painted in his face and movements that he was by no means sure of his route. He looked by turns to the right and left with an embarrassed air, but neither man nor horse was visible. It appeared, as if sheer dreariness had scared away all sentient inhabitants. Nevertheless, the traveller had reasons doubtless for refusing to retire before these forbidding appearances—he continued to gaze to the right and the left until he finally succeeded in distinguishing a few light puffs of smoke which burst from a rock a little distance from the waterfall. At the same time a smell of burned turf reached his olfactory nerves and on the principle that smoke cannot exist without fire, and fire cannot exist without some hand to trim it, he concluded that a cot-

tage lay in the vicinity, and turned his horse's head in that direction. But owing to the roughness of the way, his horse might stumble and fall into the lake: he accordingly dismounted, which he was the more willing to do as exercise was necessary to restore natural warmth to his half frozen limbs. He continued walking for about three-quarters of an hour without discovering any further trace of the expected cottage; puffs of smoke continued, nevertheless, to gush occasionally from the rocks; but he could neither discover fire nor habitation. The foxes of the mountain, the otters of the lake, or the badgers of the rocks seemed the only tenants of this scene of desolation. The traveller became convinced that what he had mistaken for smoke was one of those white gushes of vapor which sometimes issue from subterraneous waters through fissures in the earth. Finding that his eyes deceived him, he determined to use his lungs, and accordingly shouted with all his might. To his no small astonishment an answering voice issued from the earth and responded to his challenge in some unintelligible words. The horseman was a member of the educated classes, and gave little credit to the tales of *sights* and *lethprouans* with which the imagination of the peasants loves to people the caverns; he nevertheless felt a sentiment of surprise which approached to terror, and which rendered him perfectly silent. But after a moment's consideration he blushed for his weakness and repeated his cry; he heard distinctly the following words at a little distance from him: "I say, Jack, you seem to be in a great hurry this evening. I'll be with you in a moment. I only want time to put out the fire—if you have any brains you'll take a drop of the mountain dew to fasten the life in you. Every one knows that you are lord of a glass, though you hypocritically pretend to be a teetotaler."

The Unknown perceived that the speaker mistook him for a different person, and chance had led him to one of those illicit distilleries for which Connemara was so celebrated. The discovery of this secret, was often accompanied with danger; and homicide in this lonely valley must remain long unpunished. The stranger was a peaceable, and consequently an unarmed man, nevertheless his natural intrepidity, the necessity of obtaining information, and a vague remembrance of the voice, which he thought he had heard before, induced him to remain. He wanted then with no little interest the result of this adventure. He soon heard a rolling of rocks as if some one were closing the aperture of a cavern; again the bushes were suddenly put aside, and he stood in the presence of the mysterious personage whose voice had previously reached his ears; he was a middle aged man dressed in the costume of a Connemara peasant, a goat-skin cap, and gaiters likewise of untanned goat-skin, a *cota-mor* of coarse frieze which draped him to the heels, while he held in his hand a large bladder of whiskey, the manufacture of which was his favorite employment. In the other hand he held an old blunderbuss always considered a useful article in an illicit distillery. He appeared to have been a good customer to himself; a certain weakness in his limbs and a bloated, swollen countenance, seemed to prove that he had made himself acquainted with the flavor of his manufacture. He seemed perfectly thunderstruck at the appearance of a stranger. "Oh, Lord, save us! this is not Jack Gunn?" he exclaimed—"oh, Lord! is it a gauger that's it?"

Feeling certain that the stranger had discovered the existence of the laboratory, he dropped the bladder and cocked his blunderbuss, and in a tone which was meant to be firm, said:—"Well, friend, who are you?—or what brings you into a place like this where you have no business? It's what you ought to get a bullet in your brain; and if I was another —. But I must see who you are before I determine what to do with you."

The stranger was apparently unmoved by these threats, though the barrel of the blunderbuss was directed to his breast; he examined the distiller with attention for some minutes, and then observed with a smile, "I am much mistaken, if you are not Tom Kavanagh who held a farm from Lord Powerscourt."

The distiller grew pale, in spite of the rosy color the use of whiskey had imparted to his countenance. "Tom Kavanagh," he stammered, "faix yer honor was never more mistaken in yer life; my name is not Tom Kavanagh, nor never was; my name is Justin McCarthy, and I was born in those very glens—I'm livin' in Connemara since I was the size of a sod of turf.—But, *na-boc-leas*, what is it to any one whether or no? I have a great mind to know who you are yourself, or what you want in this glen of The Three Sisters. Come, speak up man, who are you; and what brings here?"

The muzzle of the firelock was aimed a second time at the stranger, who seemed indifferent to the danger. "Tom Kavanagh or Justin McCarthy," said the stranger with a smile,

"though you were in the rebellion your disposition is not sanguinary. Besides you would not wish to kill an old friend who never intended to do you any harm."

At the same time the stranger opened his mantle and exhibited the thin calm face of Angus O'Byrne.

Tom Kavanagh appeared full of astonishment and joy; he let his firelock fall, and rushing to the priest, exclaimed, "Is it your reverence that's in it—a hundred thousand welcomes!—This will be the joyful news." He suddenly became speechless, when the priest looking sharply said, "Well, Tom Kavanagh, why don't you go on? Who will consider my coming as good news? In this cursed country there is nobody who knows of my coming or wishes to see me."

"Faix, your Reverence, there's poor Biddy my wife, an' her old mother, an' all the children—we have a fine cabin at the other side of the mountain, and if you'll come wid me you'll see the joy there will be. We are not so bad off as we used to be, yer honor—the thrade is good in this country." And so saying he laughed.

"Trade!" said Angus with bitterness, "I hope your trade is not opposed to the laws of God, whatever it may be."

"Your honor appears to be terribly tired," observed Kavanagh; "if you'd take a mouthful of whiskey it would fasten the life in yer honor." Kavanagh filled an egg-shell with the contents of the bladder, and presented it to the priest.—Angus was reluctant to receive it; but the blood was freezing in his veins, and the vital warmth seemed escaping from his extremities.—He received it with a trembling hand, and swallowed a mouthful of the fiery liquid, which he so often anathematised. This action appeared to afford a triumph to Tom Kavanagh, who danced with joy to see the priest drink whiskey. "He drinks the potten," said Tom: "they'd never believe it in Wicklow. Often I've told your Reverence that the whiskey never did harm to man or mortal; an' signs on it, yer Reverence is gettin' your own color agen—it would be a sin to waste a drop of it," said Kavanagh, taking the egg-shell from the priest, who returned it nearly as full as he received it. Kavanagh emptied the egg-shell at a single gulp, "Oh, that's the right sort; it would be a sin to lose a drop of it."

In spite of himself, Angus O'Byrne felt benefited by this mouthful of whiskey. He said with a smile, "I only blame the *abuse* of it, Kavanagh. If you and others would use it with moderation. But this is no time to preach. I willingly accept the hospitality of your cottage. I am exhausted with fatigue. I have been wandering all day through this bleak country; my poor horse will be glad to get a bundle of hay or straw, for he is nearly dead. Come, Kavanagh, lead the way."

"Oh, yer Reverence, we are not far from home; and the wife remembers yer kindness to her and the childer. Your Reverence and the young lady were always good to her—may she rest in peace; but she is certainly in heaven."

The distiller with his blunderbuss in one hand, and the bladder in the other, and his goat-skin cap on his hand, led the way, while Father O'Byrne followed, leading his horse by the bridle. Conversation soon became impossible, owing to the roughness of the road; but they finally got into a path hardened by the frost, which, sweeping round the flank of the mountain, seemed to lead to more cultivated regions. Neither the priest nor his companion seemed willing to break the silence. Kavanagh was thoughtful; certain difficulties which he had not first reflected on, presented themselves to his mind, and made him dread indiscretion. The priest seemed desirous of broaching some difficult and painful subject. "Kavanagh," said he at last, in a melancholy tone, "before I go into your cabin, I have some questions to ask you, and which you will, I hope, answer without any reserve. It has occurred very strongly to my mind since I met you, that you may be able to give me some account of my unhappy brother and—of a person who accompanied him. Am I wrong?"

Tom Kavanagh looked at the priest with a melancholy air, and replied resolutely, "Ah, then, how would a poor man like me know anything about a great count like your brother? I suppose it's in France he is?"

"Now, don't tell lies," said the priest with an air of severity. "I am perfectly certain that my brother is concealed in this neighborhood; and your lies only serve to ruin your soul, without changing my conviction. Nay, Kavanagh," said he in a milder tone, "you need not be afraid of confiding in me. I have come here on a mission of mercy. You must be well aware of the danger which surrounds Richard, and the terrible penalty he has incurred." His voice failed, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, yes," resumed Kavanagh with emotion; "we got a newspaper from a deserter, and read the sentence of the Court of Queen's Bench—

If they were to transport a poor devil like me, it would be only reasonable, though no man ever seen me fire a shot in my life; but I allow the burnin' of the cottage is a black spot against me. But that the Court should dare condemn a man like the great Count O'Byrne is really infamous. But yer Reverence will say, and say truly, what can Irishmen expect from the English-made judges. Poor Daly, the blind man, is happier than any of us. He died in jail, yer Reverence, but he was true to his country to the last gasp."

Kavanagh and the priest proceeded in silence, both overwhelmed with painful reflections.

"Never mind, Kavanagh, said at last, "they may condemn him in Dublin, but they cannot hang him in Connemara; the peelers don't like to wander through the houseless wilds of Connemara; and if they did, perhaps they would not prove the strongest after all."

"Don't be sure of that," said the priest, shaking his head. "I know that Connemara has received certain privileges from nature; but I know that the English government is strong enough to violate them. Richard is no common enemy—the English Government dread his influence, his military talent, and untamable courage; they wish to get rid of so dangerous a conspirator at any cost. Besides, my brother having carried away a young lady belonging to one of the noblest families in Ireland, has become the object of implaceable hatred. I know that Lord Powerscourt has pressed the Viceroy to adopt the most energetic measures for the recovery of Lady Ellen and the punishment of her seducer. Yesterday, when I was passing through Galway, the authorities were preparing a military expedition for some unknown object. I trembled lest it should be destined to ransack these mountains.—I beseech you, Kavanagh, bring me to Richard immediately. I want to furnish him with the means of saving his life."

Tom Kavanagh was embarrassed and perplexed; he looked by turns to the earth and to the sky, and arranged his *cota mor* and adjusted his cap. "What can I say, your Reverence? a simple man like me—I don't know what to do or what to say. But, at any rate, come along with me."

"You defend yourself badly, Kavanagh," cried the priest; "you know thoroughly what I inquire about. Well, if you are impenetrable on the subject of my brother, you can tell me at least of the unfortunate young woman whom Richard carried away with him. If his vengeance was to be exercised on any one, he might have selected some other object besides the friend of our poor sister. Where did he hide her? How can he keep her prisoner in this horrible country?"

Tom Kavanagh turned his head and smiled.—He seemed strongly inclined to make some malignant remark, but he arrested the propensity—

"Sorra know meself knows," he exclaimed. "Come, come, said the priest, "speak out, man;—have you taken a freemason's oath that you will not tell me where is my brother? You know at least such a place as Fairymount?"

Tom Kavanagh stopped short.

"Fairymount?" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Who told you that? Oh, begorras, I see you know everything."

"Unfortunately I know nothing," said the priest; "but I understand if I can find Fairymount I may there get some information concerning my brother."

Tom Kavanagh made no reply. He continued to proceed, grumbling as he went, and muttering half aloud—

"Faix, I put my foot in it. At any rate we are now at the cottage, an' I'll get some instruction there, I suppose. I do not know what to say or do."

During the conversation they had emerged from the Valley of the Three Sisters, and entered a more habitable district. Grass and trees were visible; a few straggling sheep, and diminutive cows were grazing on the stony vegetation. A few poor cottages were perched upon the slope, while the path itself formed a kind of cornice where a false step would ensure destruction. None but fugitives and outlaws would establish a residence in a place so dangerous. The best of these cottages was occupied by Kavanagh and his family; Tom showed it to the priest with evident satisfaction; and entered into a detail of its advantages with no little exultation.—When he was at a certain distance from the door, he uttered a peculiar cry; immediately a considerable bustle appeared in the cottage, and women popped their heads out of the doors to examine the appearance of their new visitors.—But Tom's signal was not a signal of alarm: for the women, though inquisitive, were not afraid; and their curiosity was doubtless occasioned by the rarity of visitors. The priest experienced some alarm at first when Tom uttered his cry, but Kavanagh hastened to appease him.

"Oh, yer honor!" said he, "this is no common country—if I did not make them know that it's meself that's in it, maybe it's stone they'd

shy at us, or a shot they'd fire, or God knows what."

"And yet you boast of being very happy?" remarked the priest.

Kavanagh made no reply; and they finally reached the cottage. Kavanagh's residence was certainly better than his Wicklow habitation; it contained some chairs and tables, a few pots and saucepans, and even a couple of feather beds. Mrs. Kavanagh and the mother of her husband, and a rabble rout of children, including our tiny friend, Paddy, still dressed in his father's coat, the history of which we are already acquainted with, were all assembled in this cottage. The moment the priest was seen every face in the cottage became radiant with joy. Mrs. Kavanagh threw herself on her knees in a religious transport, and begged the blessing of her old director: The old mother of Kavanagh repeated a thousand *caed mille failthes*; and the children, one after another came forward to kiss the hand of his reverence. Subsequently little Paddy in his historic coat, hastened out to look after the horse, to which he presented a sheaf of unthrashed oats, the greatest favor that Connemara could bestow on an animal of the kind.

A prodigious turf fire was soon blazing on the hearthstone, and a prodigious pyramid of potatoes and eggs were poured smoking on the rickety table; a jar of milk and a *mesureen* of butter as well as a bottle of whiskey graced the board and flanked the potatoes. This was the most sumptuous feast that a cabin in Connemara can offer the most respectable visitor. Tom Kavanagh seemed inflated with pride and pleasure as he contemplated the groaning table; he invited his guest to be seated, and he himself opened the attack by taking a glass of whiskey. But the priest obstinately refused to participate in a beverage of which he had recently experienced the fortifying qualities; he contented himself with the milk, eggs, butter, and potatoes, which he consumed with rapidity, while Mrs. Kavanagh was relating the eventful history of her immigration into this wild country. The priest listened eagerly to her narrative in the hope that some glimpse of his brother's fate might escape from the garrulous housewife; but she had doubtless been forewarned by her husband: for she never compromised her husband by a single indiscreet expression. The young priest began to despair of obtaining any information as to the fate of his brother when he heard a well known voice exclaiming outside the cottage.

"Justin McCarthy, Justin McCarthy! you smoke-dried rascal, will you come out of that den of yours?—there's bad news this morning!—We'll have to trundle and march out of this in an hour or two!"

At the first word Tom Kavanagh started up from his meal; but the lucidity of his mind was considerably obscured by the fumes of the whiskey he had swallowed: he remained motionless, stammering: "Oh, is that you, Jack Gunn?"

"You mean Jack Bawn O'Dunn, the village piper?" exclaimed Mrs. Kavanagh, looking at her husband with an embarrassed countenance. "You ought to go and meet him—and he calling you."

"Yes, yes; you are right—that's Dunn shure enough," said Kavanagh to his wife. "What bad news is he prating about?"

Mrs. Kavanagh made a sign which he did not seem to understand. Meantime the door was thrust open, and a man entered the cottage. He wore a goat-skin cap like Kavanagh, and a *cota mor* of Connemara frieze; he seemed to be alarmed and excited. On his first entrance he did not see the strangers owing to the obscurity of the cottage. He cried in an angry tone addressing Kavanagh, "What's this for at all!—is this the time you select to get drunk, and I hoarse calling you?—What I have to tell you is no trifle.—You have better go and tell the Count to be on his guard. While you are doing that, I'll give warning to the Glen. Where is the horn?"

Without waiting for a reply he proceeded towards the part of the cottage where, amongst other articles of furniture, was suspended a prodigious cow's horn, such as swine-doctors employ in the southern parts of Ireland.

His alarming words, and the excited air with which they were uttered, affected Kavanagh and his wife to such a degree that they forgot the presence of Angus.

"What is the matter, Mr. Dunn—has anything happened?" asked Mrs. Kavanagh, in a perfect tremor of anxiety.

"Yes," said Kavanagh, echoing his wife, "tell us what is the matter."

"Oh, bedad, you'll soon know if you remain here much longer—there is a detachment of soldiers at Cong, and they're marching this way as fast as their legs can carry them. They are coming to take the Count and the young lady! But if we don't look sharp they may take you and me into the bargain! We ought to look to that, my friends; for we—" He suddenly stopped for he discerned the priest in the dusk of the cottage.