

SHEMUS DHU, THE BLACK PEDLAR OF GALWAY.

A TALE OF THE PENAL TIMES.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The loud voice of the town clock announced the hour of midnight just as Fergus and O'Reilly came up to the guide. There was a sudden change in Murrough's position. He stood erect, raised his cap of felt a little off his head, and with eyes fixed in an earnest gaze towards heaven, he muttered the "Angelus Domini," that formula of prayer used by his Church in reverence for the mystery of Christ's incarnation. The young men, as good Catholics, stood silent, in respect for his devotion. When he again drew his cap over his brow, and noticed them, he said:

"Young men, we do well, to commence the holy Sabbath with prayer. Let us pray that its sun may rise, as it has set, upon our good will, with regard to our present undertaking."

Before either of the young men could reply, their attention was called to the approach of steps from the upper part of Cross-street. Two figures, completely disguised, approached them:

"Good night, friends!" said Murrough, meeting them. "God's blessing be with you!"

"God's blessing, and the Virgin's!" was the only answer.

A sudden rush was made, and O'Reilly, before he could think what had happened, was blindfolded, and in the hold of powerful men.

"Villains! what is this? On your lives, desist! Fergus, strike one blow! Murrough—ah, traitor!" were the exclamations of O'Reilly, whilst he strove but uselessly, to free himself.

A kerchief was bound over his mouth, his arms were pinioned, and he was held on each side by a strong hand. Fergus' surprise was as quick as his companion's; he was withheld by Murrough from giving any assistance, and in the suddenness of the seizure, he lost the power to struggle against the guide.

"Young men, fear not; no evil is intended you," said this mysterious man. "Be silent and you are safe."

Frank would have answered, if he could. The voice of his captor fell upon his ear with a change, bringing a thought that its owner was one whom he knew for years, yet he could not say whose it was. He was hurried along, whither he knew not, without hearing another word; but he had the satisfaction of knowing that Fergus and Murrough followed him. Frank's whole attention was directed to the turns of the streets; he hoped, from his knowledge of the town, to be able to guess the way by which he was led. At first, it seemed to him that he had passed the whole length of Back-street; then, that he turned to the left, and continued, during some of the time, in a direct line, which must have brought him to the neighbourhood of the North Gate. Here his conductors halted, and, by the only sense which was allowed him to judge—now doubly acute from his situation—he could detect an addition to his captors. It was a moment of hope to him. Fear, from the beginning, had not entered his heart, for he was satisfied from the attention of the men to his ease, in untightening the cords, which, in his struggle with them, gave him pain, that he was seized, more with the intention of securing him for some ulterior purpose, connected with others, than of doing him any personal injury. Moreover, though it may appear strange, he had now a greater confidence in the faith and protection of Murrough; he could not say why, unless it was caused by the recent change of voice which he had noticed. Still he was detained against his will, and he hoped that now there would be a termination of an adventure, which, under other circumstances, would have given pleasure instead of pain to such a disposition as his for uncommon situations. A few words in a low key, that he could not catch, passed between the newcomers and Murrough, and then he thought he was brought back upon the same track; that he entered another street, whose situation he could not guess, and passed into a flagged entry, whose heavy gates were closed quickly, when the last of his companions followed.

"These precautions were necessary, Mr. Frank. We feared some evil consequence from your spirit, had we acted in an ordinary way. You did not know that you were among your friends. I will not ask you to promise to keep secret what you shall see and hear: I know you well, though you know not me. You are now at liberty," whispered Murrough.

The gag was immediately taken from his mouth, and the bandage and the cords were unloosed. O'Reilly's first impulse, after his release, was to speak to the guide. He had disappeared through a folding-door, which opened on the entry. He then sought Fergus among a dozen of dark figures, variously disguised. Fergus was not there. He had not time to inquire for him, when the figure nearest to him said in a voice differing from the common:

"We follow your companion, sir, through this door."

Frank, with his director, entered the folding-door through which Murrough had passed. A light from the first lobby showed them up a double flight of broad marble steps; thence they were directed, by another disguised person, to a long narrow corridor, at the end of which a faint light was seen, as coming through a half-opened door, from a solitary candle, or lamp, in a large room. They approached the light, and were met by Murrough, at the entrance of the room, who cautioned them to step lightly across the floor.

"Thank God!" he said, with solemn feeling, "we are in time. She slumbers now; but her hand is run; her death-agony will come on before the next sun."

They entered the chamber of the dying. It was a large room, without furniture, except the pallet of the sick, a few old oak chairs, and one table. A venerable-looking person, whose hair was white as snow, sat near the bed of the sufferer. He raised a mild blue eye from a small thick volume at the entrance of the strangers. O'Reilly recognized an acquaintance, and bowed to him. He returned the salute of Frank, and was again engaged with his book. The other persons in the room were Fergus, who leaned upon the broken mantlepiece, and an elderly female, who was preparing some drink for the patient. One tallow candle threw a dim light, suited to its desolation, through the apartment. Murrough went to the bed, examined the features of the sick woman, and then said to the white-haired man:

"I fear, father, she will pass away without awaking."

The priest shook his head mournfully, as he replied:

"Her sufferings are not yet over. It is a grace that is given to her. May the Almighty Father of mercy receive them as a substitute for those of the next world!"

"Did she speak, father for the last few hours?" asked Murrough, earnestly.

"She spoke, my son, but as usual, in delirium," said the priest. "Shade the light—she awakes."

The sick woman stirred in her bed. She opened her glazed eyes, on which death had fixed its mark; her bosom heaved with the struggle of giving forth a deep, heavy moan; again she slumbered, with a thick breathing. Her sleep was the mockery of

health, with which disease often treats its victims before it hurries them to their last eternal sleep.

"Father, I fear she will pass away without speech," said Murrough, bringing the light again upon the ghastly features of the dying.

"No, no," said the priest; "I have watched her during the day; she has had these fits often. She will speak just now."

It happened as the old man told. The sufferer groaned again, and opened her unmeaning eyes upon the muffled form of Murrough, which hung over her. Her gaze was near fifty; and it was disease, not time, which had the greater share in her wreck of beauty. A clammy moisture covered her wrinkled forehead; her cheeks were livid and sunken; and her discoloured lips were parted far asunder. Her eyes, fixed without speculation upon Murrough, by degrees received animation; then a wilder expression lighted them up. She looked from the sick figure to his companions, and from them back again to him. Her eyes started; her lips were quickly compressed. It was the intancy of memory. Recollections, dark and terrible, seemed to flit across her brain. Her whole frame shook; a cold sweat flowed from every pore. The faculties of the immortal spirit within rallied in their last struggle for supremacy over disease. They succeeded. She spoke with reason.

"It is to mock me with the hopes of another world that you are here?" she said, in a hollow voice, which became sharper as it uttered the passion of her thoughts; "or is it to exult over the misery of my fall?"

"In the name of the Redeemer, who died for all, woman, listen to words of consolation," said the priest. "We come in the name of the Man-God crucified, who calleth not the just, but sinners to repentance, to give you hope—a strong hope of pardon through His merits."

"Man, mention not His name!—speak not of pardon to me!" she cried. "Pardon!—hope! I have long ceased to hope. O heavens! if his blood were of my soul! It is burning into my heart! It is boiling with the fire of hell in my brain! God! God! there is no God for my hope!" She swooned in the excess of her despair.

After some attention from the nurse, the patient recovered from her fit. She looked around her with more meaning, though still her eyes and her whole countenance betrayed the wildness of her thoughts. It seemed as if the first storm of passion had passed, but that there remained symptoms enough to fear its return. During the recovery of the sick woman, Murrough was engaged in deep conversation with the cloaked stranger who had introduced O'Reilly.

"You know my motives, Burke. What counsel do you give me?" said Murrough, in a tone scarcely audible to him whom he addressed.

"Speak boldly to her," said the cloaked person. "If you hear but a word, it is better than nothing."

"But, then, the soul—the immortal soul!" said Murrough, feelingly, and looking towards the bed. "It is awful to disturb her in her last moments. Let her give what remains of sense to her priest and to her God!"

"Pooh!" said Burke, in a tone of indifference. "Her priest can do her little good now. My time wears. I must be hence immediately—you know the danger of delay."

"Be it so," said Murrough, turning, with suppressed feelings of disgust, from the selfish person. He spoke some words to the priest; the old man nodded his consent. He approached the bed, holding the candle in his hand; and throwing back the moulting from his head, looked fixedly upon the features of the dying woman. Their eyes met—the expression of the guide kindled a corresponding sense in the orbs of the sick woman. She returned the same riveted look, steady and long; and then made one effort to shade her eyes with her hands. She looked from him to his companions, who were crowded around him; again she looked to the guide. There was the same calm, but penetrating gaze. She wanted but the words which followed to unloose the thoughts which heaved her breast.

"Do you know me, Winifred?" said Murrough, with a thrilling emphasis, which caused not only the sick woman to start, but even Fergus and O'Reilly, who were leaning at the time upon the railing that united the lower posts of the bedstead. They both looked to the guide, but could not see his features; and then, with breathless anxiety awaited the answer. The first effort of the sick woman was to raise her hand to her forehead, and then her features relaxed. This was not the effect of satisfaction; the rigidity of her countenance sank into apathy.

"It is he!" she said, in a low, sullen voice, turning from the guide. "He is come to witness these last moments of his cousin's shame! He!" she continued, with more vehemence, "are you come with witnesses to rob God of His vengeance? You shall not! I am His! He will be avenged! Leave me, James—leave me!"

"Winifred!" said the guide, with the tenderness of a child's entreaty. His voice was weakened by sorrow; it was stifled by the sobs of his grief. "Winifred! hear me say but this word—I loved you once, I love you still. I forgive you, Winifred; I wish not to torture you with recollections of the past. God is merciful! I trust, I pray, that He too will forgive you. But, Winifred, leave not the world with a secret on your soul, the disclosure of which can give peace and happiness to many, and may merit God's forgiveness for yourself."

O'Reilly started again he fancied it was the voice of a man whom he knew.

The guide then lowered his mouth to the ear of the sick woman, and asked: "Dear Winifred, who was O'Grady's murderer?"

"Just heavens!" exclaimed the unfortunate woman, clasping her hands in agony. "It knows it! they all know it! they are come to torture me before I die!" She paused for a moment; then she arose to a sitting posture, and pointing with a maniac look to Fergus and his companions, she cried: "Send them out, James—send them out! I will tell you all—I feel it ease my heart; but send them out; my shame must not go before the world."

"Father," she exclaimed, turning to the priest, who she perceived had arisen from his seat, and was going, at a nod from the guide, with Fergus and O'Reilly, to a distant part of the room, where they could not hear the sequel, unless when a voice was raised—"Father, leave me not, I beseech you! You have given me the only little hope of pardon that has come to me—leave me not now. The terrible vision will come again, if you depart. I want your help, to tell my guilt and shame. O God! if anything could wash away the blood that is on my soul! If shame, if misery in this world; if suffering—the greatest—in the next, could do it, I would bear it! But not now! It cannot be washed out! I am a wretch devoted to eternal misery without hope!"

Again she was silent: it was not the silence of exhaustion of mind or of body, it was the settled silence of despair.

"Daughter," said the aged priest, in a calm and solemnly deep voice, "your last sin will be the worst, if you despair. Whatever your crimes be, be they numberless as the grains of sand upon the vast shore, or in guilt as red as scarlet, one drop of our Saviour's blood is of value to blot them out, and make you white as snow. Despair not, then, my child; God is merciful to forgive. He has pledged his word in the Holy Scriptures to receive the sinner to peace, even in his last moments, if he sincerely repents." "I know what you say is true, father," she replied, with at first a weak and calm voice; "but I cannot feel it. There is a fiend within me which whispers to me that I shall not be forgiven. When your words sometimes make

me think of mercy with some feeling of hope, all the unrepented guilt of my past life comes suddenly before my view, red and glaring, and with a dark fiery hand blots out every form of hope; and blood comes creeping, drop by drop, towards me, and it swells about me, and it swells about me, and it enters into my very mouth to choke me! And I feel—O heavens!—the torments of the damned! Father, speak not of hope to me! I must despair!"

"Child, say not the terrifying word!" said the priest, with moistened eyes, and in a voice of deep entreaty. "Unburden your soul of the secrets which hang heavy upon it. You shall still have peace."

"Peace for me? Aye, I know to well that the sinner can have no peace. The Lord has said it. But I will tell my guilt—I will tell it, though the words blister my tongue as it says them. It is some relief to me to proclaim to the world—though a passing one—that I was the cause—the sole cause of the disgrace, the exile, and the death—I have heard he died in want, in a foreign country—of the kindest of masters—aye, of our benefactor, Godfrey O'Halloran. You start not, James! Why do you not call upon the earth to swallow me alive? Why do you not invoke Heaven to blast me? Oh, you would give me hope—it is a vain hope! I am doomed to destruction! Well, I will tell you, father, the crimes I have committed. My time is short—I feel the cold hand of death upon my heart. I speak the truth. I was once beautiful. James had loved me, I once loved him. He was my first love. O God! if I kept to that love! But no! I was taught the notion of a higher conquest. For two years I was the associate of the high and of the rich—I was ruined!"

At this period of her history the unfortunate woman uttered a wild scream, and sank back upon the bed. In a few moments she resumed, with a weaker voice—

"I know I have but a few moments to live. I feel the coldness of my limbs creeping towards my heart. Listen, then, whilst I am able to tell you. There was one among my acquaintances for whom I had a deep affection. He was not of rank or of fortune. I loved him better and more sincerely on this account; because I thought he would not be prevented by notions of birth or false honor, from loving me tenderly and truly. I was deceived. He loved another. I was slighted by him. As woman's feelings are more sensitive of injury than man's, so woman's perceptions are quicker in finding out the means of redressing her wrongs. I resolved to be revenged; and to the full I tasted of the damning draught. James gave me some water—my heart is burning! I need not tell you—you know what followed. You know that our best benefactor and master was condemned for the murder of O'Grady! He was innocent! It was I! oh, it was I! maddened by fury and drink, on that fatal night, and attended by his son, though the reputed son of D'Arcy—it was I who struck the blow that deprived him of life! I am the guilty one, from whose soul his blood shall never be washed! I am the wretch!" she continued, with dilated eyes and raised hand, and in a voice of fierceness, which caused her hearers to tremble—"I am the wicked one, who first murdered my lover, and then solemnly swore that he was my best of masters—O'Halloran! It was I who brought ruin upon his house—destroyed the hopes of his family—sent him disgraced into a foreign land, to die the death of a heartbroken wanderer! To the first crime my own wicked passion urged me; to the second, and the worse crime, I was instigated by two of the most wicked of men—one, the brother of O'Halloran; the other, his own unnatural son, called Reginald D'Arcy. Can I be forgiven, father? I have no hopes! I am the murderer of O'Halloran, too! I cannot be forgiven that crime!"

"Daughter, you are well-instructed. You told me that you believed Christ to be the Son of God, and that his death was of value to save a thousand sinful souls," said the priest; "why, then, should you despair? It was for you, and such as you, He expired in torments upon a gibbet of infamy. Hope, then, in Him, your saviour; ask Him, through his merits, and by His sacred blood, to pardon you. He will hear you, and you will be forgiven."

"I cannot presume to ask Him," she replied, in a low, sullen tone. "I will not pray—I dare not! The grace is not given me! I cannot expect pardon!"

It was now evident to the priest, who became experienced, during his attendance upon her, in the signs of the many and sudden changes of her mind, that the sick woman was again relapsing into a state of unreason. She remained for some minutes in a sitting posture, her eyes fixed rigidly upon a raised figure of worsted work on the cover of her bed; no person, at a sign from the priest, venturing to disturb her. She then raised, slowly and unmeaningly, her clammy eyes, and looked vacantly around her. She drew up the covering from her bosom, fleshless arms, and viewing them without sense, began to rub one over the other, at the same time muttering some low, melancholy murmurings. The witnesses of this scene were too much affected even to speak in whispers. Frank O'Reilly was the only one who gave notice of his presence, by the sobs which now and then he uttered. The man, called Burke, who was concealed near the bed from the observation of the dying, and who was busily employed during the time in writing down all that she said, when he perceived the change which had come on her, quietly left the room, without speaking. A few moments after his departure, Winifred Haughton became fainter and fainter. She fell back through weakness upon the bed. Before assistance reached her, she made an exertion to arise. She cried aloud:

"See! he is coming in his blood to be revenged! I go—I go with you!—but wash the blood from your face! I go with you, O'Grady!—oh, choke me not!"

And with a wild scream, which struck terror to the hearts of all present, she clapped her hands, and fell a corpse upon the couch.

"It is over with her!" said the priest. "Let us hope that she repented of her crimes before she lost her reason. It is our duty now to pray that God have mercy on her soul."

He knelt by the bed, and said a short prayer. He left the corpse to the care of the old woman, and desired Fergus and his companions to follow him.

CHAPTER XIX.

The room to which Father Thomas led them, was a ground-floor or vault at the farthest angle of the yard. Fergus and O'Reilly followed the priest and the guide through a crowd of forms—Some—the fewer number—entirely muffled, stood apart from each other, and the rest spoke in low voices, in groups of three or four. It seemed to Fergus that there were some females among the groups; for, as he passed, a soft voice more than once caught his ear; but, when he looked, he could see nothing, in the appearance of the speaker to strengthen his suspicion, unless a slighter and lower form, disguised with cloak and cap, like the other forms around. There was a sudden though respectful rush towards the priest. Fergus was separated from his companions by the strong yet gentle pressure of the crowd. He wondered how so many people were concealed in this small enclosure; for, now, every corner and door gave some addition to their number. He was borne easily onward, and he descended into the vault. Just as he rested upon the lower step, a sweet voice from behind whispered to him: "Young stranger! there is treachery in this night! Beware! you are marked!" He strove to turn, but

he was borne onward, and when he did turn, the persons nearest to him were muffled forms of the sterner sex, to whom he could neither refer the warning or the voice. Had Fergus not other subjects more painfully interesting to engage his thoughts, he would be struck with wonder at the scene which presented itself in the vaulted chapel, for such it was. Entering among the foremost, he was hurried forward to the slight railing of timber which divided the sanctuary, or place of the officiating priest, from the outer worshippers. The chapel was formed by three wine vaults, divided from each other by round arches of heavy stone, forming as near an approach to ecclesiastical architecture as circumstances admitted. These vaults had been the necessary appurtenances of a wine merchant, in the first rank of business; but he being a Catholic, gratuitously bestowed his vaults and houses upon the priests of his religion, and for the purpose of their worship. This was the report of some, and they were Catholics; but other said that Father Thomas possessed these tenements in his own right of inheritance, or else as agent for some proprietor whose right was undoubted. However, Father Thomas was allowed peaceful possession by the powers then being; and as he neither appeared in public, or interfered with the severe laws against his creed, he was allowed by the city council to be "a peaceful citizen," and a "passive"—the word was thus qualified—"well-wisher of the corporation," though on more occasion than one he was accused before the honorable corporation as disaffected, and for holding nightly meetings, whose purpose was unknown. These accusations, made by evil-minded persons; went, however, for nothing; for there was no evidence of outrage committed, or of evil purpose, either against the priest, or against those who attended his meetings. The fact was, Father Thomas was the only one of his brotherhood thus far tolerated in the city, he being connected by relationship with some of the corporators, and with other citizens of influence.

At the farther end from the door, a temporary altar of wood was raised upon a platform of planed boards. This was separated from the benches, which ran crosswise through the aisles or vaults, by the railing above-mentioned. The altar was unadorned, except by a large gilded crucifix, arising from a plain oak tabernacle; six heavy silver candlesticks, the offering of some rich and devout Catholic; a few white linen cloths, that covered the altar; and the illuminated charts, or cards, which helped the priest's memory in the office of the Mass. The chalice was on the altar, covered with the veil, the silken or golden cloth which shrouds the chalice and the bread from the sight of the profane or curious, before they become an oblation; the amice, the alb, the maniple, stole, and chasuble—those vestments, whose use and name tradition or ecclesiastical command have appropriated to the Roman clergy—were placed upon the left corner of the altar. All things were prepared for the celebration of that rite, the most solemn in the liturgy of Catholics. The six large wax candles threw out a full and clear light around the altar, and half way through the vaults. Where the glare was dimmed in the distance by some wooden or stone abutment, sconces, hanging from the walls and arches, gave light enough to distinguish the forms and the features of the congregation, if they were not purposely concealed. Fergus did not remark all the little details that we have told, though the scene should be new and surprising in every circumstance to him. Neither did he remark that O'Reilly and himself, both whose forms and features were unobscured, were objects of observation to those around them. It is not to be wondered at; for Fergus was young in suppressing other thoughts, to be free for observation. Any one of the circumstances which followed his visit to Galway, was enough to cause an exclusive anxiety of thought to a young mind, for the first time brought into difficulties that required an experience of the world in order to be avoided; and, if not thrown upon his own exertions, to escape them. How much perplexed and surprised he must then have been, by the many wonderful occurrences which followed each other so quickly! However, Fergus had no anxiety for himself; in the ardour of his youthful mind, his spirit arose with danger and difficulty. He was even glad that they existed; he was glad, because their endurance, and the victory over them, which he had no doubt, would prove his love for Eveleen, for his father, and for his father's friend. But still he was thoughtful, and without observance of the things around. There was one feeling which he could not suppress, and which unnerved him more effectually than fear for himself, than desire of success, than anxiety for home. He was sick at heart after the scene in the dying woman's chamber. I doubt not that Fergus would have stood unmoved at the death of thousands in the battle-field—that he would have felt his courage and his pleasure increase in proportion to the number of foes he had killed; yet, here, one old woman's death created a melancholy and awe which he could not overcome. But, then, it was such a death, attended with curses of despair, that it will not be wondered at if, lost in deep reflection, he stood in the low chapel, regardless of the interest which he excited. He was only aroused from his thoughts when the psalm, with which the ceremonies of the Mass begin, was recited by the priest at the foot of the altar. He looked around for O'Reilly and Murrough, but could not discover them. On entering, he had been separated from them; and he saw that the persons nearest to him were strangers. He recollected the warning he received; he hoped to hear again the sweet voice which uttered it. He was disappointed. He heard nothing during the Mass but the sobs of some, and the muttered prayers of others of the muffled forms bent in worship around him. The Mass advanced. There was no interruption or noise to denote danger. The collects and gospel were read; the offertory was made; the canon or the most part of the Mass, was attended with a dead silence; the Agnus Dei was said, and the priest took the communion. It was only then, after the ablution or purification ceremony, when the priest began to speak, that Fergus feared the warning given to him was true. The congregation had now arisen, and moved with a gentle force towards the railings of the sanctuary. Fergus was not surprised at this, for he knew it was the time of the mass appointed for giving spiritual instruction or worldly advice to the people. But as he arose from his kneeling posture no gentle hand seized his arm; and when he turned round, a countenance of a fierce and malignant character, upon which the light from the altar fell full, scowled at him from out a high collar of frieze. The place was not fitted for any remark or question much less for a scene, which Fergus' feelings would have urged him, in other circumstances, to act. He therefore moved towards the railing, placing, by his exertion, two or more persons between him and the scowler. However, he felt for his pistols; and his attention was unequally divided between expectation of noise or motion from behind, and the exhortation of the priest.

"My beloved children in Christ!" It was thus the old priest began to speak; and as he stood upon the altar of the poor and lowly chapel, at that solemn time of night, at that moment of devotion, most solemn to his hearers; and as his mild eye brightened, and his countenance beamed good will, but with enthusiasm; and as he held forth his hand, and this light fell upon his silvered head, and upon his snow-white hair, and his gold-spangled crimson vestments—it would not be much exaggerated to fancy him an embodied spirit of a better world, come on earth to teach peace and happiness to unhappy man. "My beloved children in Christ! I had intended to instruct you on the gospel read for this day; but I must change my subject; for she, who an hour back was one of your

congregation, is now no more on earth; she has appeared, with her virtues and with her faults, before her great Judge, and her sentence stands unchangeable, for misery or for happiness, throughout eternity—eternity!"

A low murmur of feeling arose throughout the crowd, as the old man dwelt with a falling, lengthened cadence upon the last word. But the solemn feeling which the words, or rather the manner, of the priest excited, was not long to last; for a stern voice, not far from Fergus, arose over the low sounds, and said aloud:

"Villain priest! thou liest! She is not dead? You dare not do it whilst I was away! Show me proofs of it? What said she? Bring me to her? The curses of hell be upon you and her, if it be the case!"

The old man stood as unmoved upon the altar as if he expected the interruption. He raised his hands in entreaty to the congregation, when he perceived that all threw back the covering from their faces, and threateningly looked to the place whence the voice came. He knew that, if he bade them, they would destroy upon the very spot the wretch who dared to offer insult to their minister, and in such a sacred place.

"Peace, my children!" he said, aloud; and the passions of the crowd were suspended in the anxiety to hear the opinion of the priest.

"Who are you, wretched man," said the priest, "who dares to interrupt the service of religion, and to offer insult, not only to your fellow-man, but to your God? If you believe not with us, go from us in peace. But do not blaspheme God in cursing our belief; for our belief is the firm dictate of the conscience He gave us."

The effect of Father Thomas' words was evident. At first there was a dead silence, and then there was a sound of satisfaction, or of triumph, for their priest's dignified firmness, running through the congregation. It was not loud—the sacredness of the place forbade it—but it was sufficiently loud to evidence the disposition of the people to interfere if further interruption was offered. It might be that the intruder felt suddenly the danger of his situation, and did not wish to incur the roused anger of so many men by a continued outrage of their dearest feelings. But it is certain from what followed, that he had no serious apprehension, if any, for his own safety. His silence was more from the shame than the fear of a man incautiously moved to express a feeling which it was his greatest wish to conceal. He held his head down for some time, and allowed the priest to resume his instruction. It was but for a minute. He stepped upon the bench or form near him; and in a loud and firm voice, but with less of warmth than at first, he said:

"I proclaim this meeting unlawful. It is against the laws of our corporation. It is opposed to the laws of the English constitution. Under the cloak of religion, it is held for traitorous purposes. There are at this moment proved traitors and rebels among you."

Law was then, more than now, a powerful cabalistic word to allay the spirit evoked by any passion. The people shrunk from the neighbourhood of the speaker, for they recognized, as he threw off all disguise, a person having authority, and an avowed enemy to their religion. There were none between Fergus and the speaker. Fergus did not move, except to confront his enemy; for he thought that he himself was the person to whom the speaker referred in his last words. He prepared to speak boldly, yet cautiously, when his cause was taken up by Frank O'Reilly, who, followed by the guide, still closely muffled, forced his way from an opposite part of the chapel, and stood between Fergus and the stranger.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed out Frank, with whose brain the effects of the port of the good landlady of the "Salmon" were still working, notwithstanding that he had taken a draught of strong ale from the nurse—a long one, to be sure, proportionate to his grief, to steady his nerves, shaken (as he said) by the death-scene he had witnessed. "By Jove! it is a good one. Who would have expected it? Saul among the prophets! Well, at any other time I would have forgiven you all you owe me, for this laugh against you. Ha! ha! ha! But come, my lad; I have you now! Follow me, if you be a gentleman; and I shall soon prove that you, yourself, are the architect!"

"Peace, fool!" said D'Arcy—it was he. "I will answer you again. You will bring yourself into danger, against my will. It is not of my speak."

"Well, of whom speak you, my once good comrade? Ah! villain, I know your turns well. You shall not escape me now."

It cannot be doubted that O'Reilly, in his passion, would have used force, and thus have implicated himself and his friends, if Father Thomas had not raised his voice to a tone of stern command.

"Hold, gentlemen! this is not the place to meet for your private quarrels. If you respect our religion as Christians, you must respect our rights as citizens. We will suffer no annoyance in our own houses. If you suspect any here of treason, on to-morrow accuse them publicly before proper judges. I promise that each of us will stand the accusation."

"I suppose I must obey," said D'Arcy casting a haughty look at the priest, and descending from the form. "You know that you and your meetings are merely connived at; but you exceed all licence when you league yourself with traitors. To-morrow you must answer the consequence. As for you, young man," he said, with his hand raised towards Fergus, "by—! you shall not escape my vengeance, if you persist in your present purpose."

"False villain!" arose on Fergus' lips; but before he could utter the words, D'Arcy rushed out, the crowd suddenly giving way. He would have been followed by O'Reilly, if Murrough, who foresaw Frank's intention, did not hold him with a strong arm. O'Reilly would have been nearly in any other place; but, as he saw there was no possibility of escaping from Murrough threw the crowd, without much confusion, he remained comparatively quiet, though avowing to be avenged both of Murrough and D'Arcy. The priest did not resume his discourse. He told the congregation not to fear for his safety, or for that of others; he exhorted them to go peacefully and cautiously to their homes; and he desired Murrough and his companions to remain for him. The communion and last prayers were read without interruption; the benediction was given to the people, and they were sprinkled with the consecrated water. One by one they left the chapel in silence; and in a few minutes, Fergus found that O'Reilly, the guide, the priest, engaged in his thanksgiving prayer after Mass, on a few devotees, bent in devotion upon the damp pavement, were the only persons who remained.

(TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.)

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