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THE PROPHET OF THE RUINED ABBEY.

By the Author of "The Cross and Shamrock." CHAPTER I.

On a Sunday morning, in the month of May, in the reign of the third George, a year or two before the close of the war of American Independence, there appeared a stranger among the worshippers at the humble Catholic chapel of Dungarvan, in the county of Waterford, Ireland.

But when the glimmering twilight of dawn melted into the broad morning glory of sunrise, it was evident that the stranger was not a clergyman. He was dressed in a suit of superfine blue-black broadcloth, consisting of a long-skirted dress or body coat, embroidered long vest, reaching almost to the thighs, with deep lapelled pockets, and loose pantaloons strapped beneath a well turned and polished boot.

In a word, his beautifully arched eyebrows, his oval chin, and all the other prominent points of his figure, were in perfect keeping with the pleasing regularity of his features, and he could not fail, in any discerning society, to be complimented on being an elegant gentleman, or a fine man, according as the phraseology of different classes may term it.

The appearance of this stranger, remarkable though he was, kneeling at the rails of the sanctuary, did not create much curiosity among the worshippers at this humble temple of God, taught as they were to regard it as sinful to gaze or be distracted in the church, and wholly intent in offering their sincere homage to the Redeemer, whose real and personal mysterious presence occupied their souls, and rendered them, while sheltered under the same roof with their Creator, insensible to all created things.

Although our stranger was unobserved or unheeded by the humble occupants of the damp clay floor of St. Declan's church, he did not escape the observation of the two venerable clergymen who officiated at the three services of that Sunday.

Having received the most holy sacrament at the first Mass, he continued still unmoved in the same place during the second service, his mind apparently absorbed in his devotions. The third service at noon had now commenced; and at the Communion, when the senior pastor of the church, a man of venerable age and saintly appearance, bearded of that large congregation, in a voice trembling with emotion, that they would offer up their prayers for the temporal and eternal welfare of his friend, Rev. Dr. O'Donnell, who was under sentence—just sentence—of death, in a neighboring county, the strong frame of the stranger was observed to tremble; the color left his manly cheek, and he had to lean back to the wall for support.

A thrill of horror, at this announcement, pervaded the congregation, for the reverend victim of a British persecution was well known to them all. He had served them for a time as a curate, or vicar, and his benevolent acts were familiar to household words at every fireside in the large parochial district of Dungarvan.

Loud sobs and tears now burst from the large assemblage within and around the church. Even the aged pastor himself was carried away by the contagion of the common grief, and was obliged to go back to the vestry to recover his self-possession.

Now would be the time, thought the stranger, to raise this large body of men into action, and conduct them to the rescue of the convicted priest, or marshal them in array against the enemy of their country. Here was a chance that, in his plans for the freedom of the beloved land of his nativity, he often wished for. The influence of the officiating priest, he thought, would be of no avail to repress the manly passions that glowed within the bosoms of that great crowd.

The blood rushed back to his face; he instinctively placed his hand on his hip, as if to grasp the sword that usually rested there, for he belonged to a regiment of French Chasseurs;—when the angelic face of Father O'Healy, now appeared returning from the vestry, and the chant of the Dominus Vobiscum, responded to the choir, fell on his subdued ear.

The piercing eye of the venerable pastor now encountered that of this enthusiastic young man, who felt as if his very soul was read in that glance. His elevated feelings were brought down to that cool temperature of reason, passion was repressed, grief softened, and peace and resignation became established paramount in a breast in which religion had not lost her sway, though the dwelling of the loftiest patriotic feeling.

After the last gospel, the aged priest, putting off the chasuble, turned around to the congregation, and, in a voice of mingled authority and sweetness, exhorted the large multitude in and around the chapel (the windows of which were raised during the service) to patience and resignation under the sad afflictions which Heaven permitted this unhappy land to be visited with, for some good end. He gently chided them for these manifestations of sorrow for any temporal affliction so unseemly in the house of God.—'Your tears will do no good, my good people. Be calm. Weep not for a martyr, for it will only detract from his glory. But, pray that the will of God may be done. He, and He only, can send a deliverer.' He begged of the people not to expose themselves to punishment and imprisonment, by discussing the subject of the approaching execution in meetings or assemblages, whether in houses or out of doors; represented it as nothing but madness to attempt any thing like a resistance to the law, however unjust, or to think of rescuing his reverend friend while he was guarded by several thousand British troops.

During the priest's exhortation there was an evident feeling of disapprobation manifested among the greater portion of the people, especially those outside the open windows of the chapel, who were principally from the neighboring parishes, and now began to exclaim, 'That will never do.' 'Father O'Donnell must not be hanged like a dog.' 'No more peace preaching,' exclaimed another.

These murmurs becoming louder and more violent, the parish priest, seeing no present chance of allaying the excited feelings of the people, beckoned to the choir to play, and putting on his chasuble, and taking the chalice off the altar, he returned to the vestry.

The large assemblage slowly dispersed, and moving off in parties of from five to fifty, discussed various plans and organizations for the rescue of Father O'Donnell; but, for want of a leader, their plans were inefficient and impracticable—mere unmeaning speculations.

After having finished his thanksgiving, and after the evacuation of the church and churchyard by the people, the Rev. Dr. O'Healy sent one of the young lads, who assisted at the altar as acolyte, to request the stranger, whom we may as well now, as afterwards, call by his name, Mr. Charles O'Donnell, to speak a word with him in the vestry. It was then, after a few words of explanation, that the priest could account for the weakness manifested during the service, by one who was no other than brother to the parish priest of Cloughmore, under sentence of death.

'How happy I am to see you, my dear child,' said the kind-hearted old gentleman. 'Alas! that your visit to your spiritual father (for it was I who baptized you) should be occasioned by such a melancholy and heart-rending event as the murder (for it is nothing less) of my best living friend, your dear brother.'

'Well, it must be borne up against with fortitude, if it cannot be averted,' answered O'Donnell.

'Averted! there is not the slightest hope of that. The Government wanted a victim, to strike a salutary terror, as they call it, into the minds of the people, as well as the most influential priest, in all Ireland. You heard of the paltry charge on which he was convicted.'

'Yes; for marrying a Protestant gentleman to a Catholic heiress, was it not?'

'That was the sole accusation; but I really think your being in the service of the French monarch caused them to be more inexorable in his regard. Bless you, there were many petitions forwarded to the Lord Lieutenant, and several noblemen interested themselves on his

behalf, but all to no purpose. The whole affair, between you and me, was plotted at headquarters.'

'I shall be able to see him, at any rate I hope.'

'On my word, I doubt it. And, to speak my mind openly, my dear friend, I am greatly afraid if they find out who you are, you won't soon return back to France to your regiment. How in the world did you come here at all? If those mustachios on your lip are noticed by any of the British garrison in this town, I am afraid you are a gone man.'

'As to fear, reverend father, I have none.—And as to telling how I came into your loyal borough of Dungarvan, my oath of allegiance to my superiors forbids me to disclose the secret of my conveyance hither, till after the accomplishment of the object I have in view, with God's assistance.'

They now reached the humble presbytery of the venerable pastor and of both his younger assistants, where a substantial lunch was ready, to which they sat down, after a long fast, both by the priest and his visitor. During the conversation of the evening, nothing struck the aged pastor so much as the imperturbable gravity, and apparently unfeeling coolness of his new acquaintance. He spoke not a word for hours, nor did he join in the discourses of the pastor and his vicars, save in answer to their questions. In fact, his mind appeared absent, or rather, was so intent on the chief thought that engrossed it, that the ordinary remarks of his educated companions, as having no reference to the subject that engaged his attention, seemed to find no access to his intellect. This unusual reserve was at once perceived by the reverend gentlemen whose guest he was, and they had too much experience and knowledge of human nature not to suspect that this sudden and mysterious visit, after an absence of many years, of Charles O'Donnell, portended something more serious than a visit of condolence to his beloved brother on the eve of his death. The two senior clergymen now retired for the night, leaving the parlour to the captain and the Rev. John Murphy, between whom, because they were formerly schoolfellows, a very confidential and protracted conversation was carried on, from the two temporary cot and sofa beds in which they preferred to rest for the night. That most exact timekeeper of nature, the cock, had now proclaimed the hour of midnight, and the conference of the former schoolmates was terminated by the stealthy visitation of lazy sleep.

CHAPTER II.

Next morning, 'at the rising of the lark,' two horsemen might be observed riding out from the town above mentioned, on the Tipperary road, at a pretty smart pace. The one was our acquaintance, Mr. O'Donnell, and the other an apparently good-natured, portly-looking gentleman of middle age, the senior curate of Doctor O'Healy. He was a Mr. Fogarty by name, and was chosen as the guide of the captain in preference to the younger curate Murphy, from the well-known fact that the former's attachment to the government, and 'law and order people,' was above suspicion, and his presence would certainly save the stranger from any impertinent interference by the local authorities or spies, while the company of Father Murphy, who was looked on as half a rebel, would be sure to excite suspicion, and probably lead to his arrest. The travellers were silent, while passing through the main streets of this ducal borough; but after having passed beyond the rows of wretched huts and dunghills, which constitute the well-known *faubourgs* of Dungarvan, they entered into animated and earnest conversation.

'My dear gentleman,' said the priest in a patronizing and authoritative tone, 'you are only thrusting your own head into the halter, rushing on to your own doom prematurely and unadvisedly, while your rash course cannot be of the least service to my reverend friend, your dear brother. You will be recognized from your resemblance to the priest, and the well-known fact that you are captain of a French regiment of cavalry will render you, in the present state of the country, liable to imprisonment or death as a French spy.'

'You mistake altogether, reverend sir, and are vainly alarmed. This last circumstance, on the contrary, will be a protection to me. Do you imagine that the British Government, with the recollection of the seven years war yet before their mind, and the rumours of foreign invasion sounding in their ears, will dare to put a captain of French chasseurs to death; and that while all the American colonies are in arms against their tyranny?'

'I assure you they will do so, if you are detected as Charles O'Donnell under the assumed *nom de guerre* Chevalier St. Victor. Don't you know that if they regard you as spy, they may put you to death by the common law of nations; and your being a British subject and having transferred your allegiance to a prince at

war with England, will subject you to death by the law of the land?'

'I am aware of the iniquitous pretensions of Britain regarding allegiance, and have some idea of barbarity of her cruel laws: but I will risk all, my character in being accounted a spy, aye, and my neck, rather than suffer my poor innocent brother to die like a felon on a common gallows.'

'But, my dear sir,—' 'Pardon me, Mr. Fogarty; I have resolved to save my brother, or die in the attempt, and I feel a sort of presentiment of success. In the mean time pray for me, if you are not willing to assist me by your counsels. And if you hear of my execution, have the charity to say a mass for my soul. Good-bye. Come no farther. I know the route well. *Au revoir*.'

'*Adieu* chi,' responded Father Fogarty, with a polite bow, and they separated in opposite directions.

The road from the seaport of Dungarvan to the inland town of Cloughmore leads the traveller in a north-western direction, intersecting a fertile plain running at the base of the Comeragh Mountains, and afterwards gradually ascending the sides of these sloping hills, till you reach the summit of this bare range; and passing between the two bold peaks of Knockineldown, brings you by a rather precipitous, though a safe road, into the very bosom of Tipperary. The views that now presented themselves to the observant eye of our traveller formed a pleasing contrast with the wretched huts of the poverty-stricken suburbs of the borough of the English duke.—Hedges of fragrant and smiling hawthorn formed the road-fences for many miles. These hedges were so thick, that the smallest bird, the very wren, could hardly penetrate them, and here and there were seen little turrets, castles, pyramids, arches, and other artistic ornaments, into which the skillful pruning-hook of the nurserman had carved this beautiful plant. On either side of the road, flocks of sheep with their yearlings were resting at the feet of the wide-spread beach and ash, or on the bare limestone rocks which protruded here and there, to avoid the heavy dew which had fallen on the rich grass that grew on these splendid pastures. The skylark, after having paid her homage of song at the gates of heaven, fell dazed and wearied to the ground. Yellow-beaked blackbirds and speckled thrushes poured forth their eloquent music from the tallest branches of the ash or elm; the chorus was taken up by whole swarms of goldfinches, green-linnets, and other less remarkable warblers of the woods. Here the voice of the laughing cuckoo saluted our solitary traveller from the bosom of a smiling pear-tree; and there, from the deep grass of a meadow, the grave and warning croak of the corn-crake fell on his ear.—Here a numerous herd of cattle, browsing leisurely on the sweet grass of a clover meadow, met his view; and in another field, inclosed with high stone walls, was the warren of some titled lord, where the nimble-footed quadrupeds, vulgarly called hares and rabbits, disported and frisked.—Now a large covey of partridges would shoot over his path; and anon, the sudden starting of the woodcock would interrupt his musing. In a word, everything that the eye could light on, or the senses perceive,—the balmy air fragrant with the evaporations of a thousand honeyed blossoms, the rich verdure of the trees and the fields, and abundance of well-fed and high-bred cattle, the plentiness and variety of the game, the taste displayed in the planting of trees and pruning of hedges, as well as the absence of those miserable huts which constituted the suburbs of the ducal borough, all, all proclaimed to the traveller or stranger the unrivalled beauty of the scene, and the prodigality of nature in the bestowal of her choicest gifts on this part of God's earth.

'Great Creator of all things!' he said, in an audible exclamation; 'what a land hast thou given this people! Here all that can delight the eye, charm the ear, or gladden the heart, and all thy gifts, O great Lord of heaven and earth!—Here is a terrestrial paradise, yet the missionaries of British Parliaments and laws desecrate and desolate thy sacred soil, O holy Ireland! How long, O Lord, how long!'

It is impossible for one who visits Ireland at this season of early spring, not to be struck with the natural beauty and fertility of the country. The mildness of the winter leaves the country as green, and greener, as far as the grass is concerned, in the month of February, than many other lands in June. The labourers of the husbandman are seldom or never interrupted by frost or snow, and there is little or no need of his having to shelter his flocks under a roof. He has not to dig a well to supply him with water, every field being provided by nature with springs of purest water for the refreshment of man and beast. The numerous peat-bogs of the country supply the Irishman with a cheap, healthy, and inextinguishable species of fuel, which the ingenuity of modern science has converted into candles fit to adorn the tables of kings, by the unrivalled

brilliance of their light. The lakes and rivers of Erin swarm with countless species of rare and wholesome fish. The mountains, woods, and plantations, and, indeed, the farms in the most populous districts, are literally alive with game of feathered and quadruped species; not to speak of the mineral resources of this land, the treasures of which are profusely distributed in all the provinces and minor divisions of the country.

It is no wonder that the consideration of these things occupying the mind of the captain, caused him gradually to curb the pace of his spirited steed; and it took him a full hour to pass over this part of his journey, which, at his best speed, it would take him but a few minutes to accomplish. The glorious orb of day began now to show its cheering countenance, and the mists which enveloped the mountain summits gradually stole away, retiring to the low retreats of their origin, or melting into thin vapor before the august presence of the day-god.

The captain, after a moment's pause to look back on the fair scene he had passed over, now set spurs to his steed, which, with a speed almost equal to the rapid flight of a bird, bore him over the smooth surface of the well-gravelled road, and he was soon lost in the shadows of the dark Comeragh. As he advanced towards the mountains, his pace became necessarily slower, and here again he began to muse on the altered scene. When on the level and fertile plain, he observed that there were but few cottages or houses of the peasantry, whereas in this mountain district they were very numerous. At a distance of about a mile apart, there were a few cottages which, from their appearance, with white-washed fronts and glass windows of six or eight panes each, as well as from four or five stacks of hay and oats, one might take to be the residence of a farmer or tiller of the soil; but the chief dwellings of this district consisted of small huts of dry-built or wattle-and-daub, about 8 feet square, with a door in the centre, no windows at all, thatched with heath, and having a chimney made of wattle plastered with mud, to carry off the smoke. Here and there, as he advanced, he observed as many as a dozen or fifteen such huts, clustered together on the top of a hill, or at the foot of one of the ridges of this marshy range. As he approached one of these wretched hovels, he could see the face of a man peering out at him over the half-door; a bareheaded and barefooted boy or girl would here and there be seen running into the 'house' with an armful of turf to make the morning's fire or cook the morning meal;—but with the exception of these occasional sights, this dreary and melancholy district presented no signs of life, nor these hovels, that they were inhabited, except that were concluded from the tall and graceful spires of light-blue smoke which now began to raise themselves aloft to the clouds, with their heads drooping aside like shy peasant-girls, as if ashamed, and regarding it as unworthy that such humble emanations as they should be allowed to mingle with the gay and fantastic clouds of heaven. The appearance of a 'gentleman,' and especially one on horseback, riding at such a rapid rate, and wearing mustachios on the lips, was sufficient to alarm the poor dependant tenants-at-will of this region. If he were on foot, instead of being mounted on a splendid horse, or, if, instead of broadcloth, he were clothed in the frieze and corduroy of the peasantry, he would not have passed over a region of fifteen miles without being kindly accosted with 'God save you,' or 'Good-morrow,' of the peasant;—but he should have as many invitations as there were huts to the poor hospitality of the breakfast-table. The only living beings that seemed to take any notice of our horseman's advance were the unfriendly cur-dogs which escorted him from hut to hut, with many an angry snarl; even they seemed to recognize him as belonging to the hostile race, whose visit to these parts was likely to be of very equivocal advantage to either man or beast. He had now, after a ride of four hours, left the Comeragh in the rear, and reached the highest elevation of the road at the base of the well-known peaks of Knockineldown without meeting with a single individual, when he drew up his rein and halted, to renew his acquaintance with these old scenes of his boyhood, as well as to enjoy the splendid prospect which presented itself to his view from this wild spot. Turning to the south, all the county of Waterford and Cork, with the Blackwater and the ocean, ravished the eye with the variety and grandeur as well as the extent of the view.—Turning to the north, Tipperary, part of Clare, Kilkenny, and King's and Queen's counties, were commanded by the view. On the south, the cities of Waterford, Youghal, and Dungarvan, appeared smoking on the shore, as if they were emerging from the ocean. On the north, the fine town of Clonmel, the 'faire city' of Kilkenny, with several other towns, glittered in the sunshine which clothed them in silver hues. The 'sublime Giltmore,' the queenly 'Sleabha-na-mo,' the sedate 'Keeperhill,' and the irregular and sixty-looking range of the 'Devil's Bit,' with the 'Sa-