



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MAY 9, 1862.

No. 39.

THE PROPHET OF THE RUINED ABBEY.

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

Father O'Donnell had already spent a novitiate of one year and a day, in his vast cell. He saw the glorious face of the summer sun change to the golden and more chaste one of autumn. He witnessed and withstood his sour and uncheering aspect during the short, but tedious hours of winter, and he observed and rejoiced at his triumphant exodus, from hyemal gloom, through the waves and tempests of equinoctial barriers, towards the more promising regions of genial spring. He saw, and went through the worst of his new life, the period of probation and inception, and he calculated to make this his nature-built tenement, his home while he lived, and his grave when he died. He was continually employed mentally in acts of devotion and adoration, and corporally in recitation of the Divine Office, in the celebration of Mass, and finally in exploring his cave, and in working at the sanctuary and altar on which he celebrated the awful mysteries of the Christian Sacrifice. True, he had no clerk to serve his Mass, but, under the circumstances, or in any case of necessity, the services of a clerk at Mass are dispensed with by the Church. This was not indeed the hardest necessity which our hermit-priest had to contend with. He had in the course of time, after his first supplies were consumed, to grind the flour from which to make his bread out of the few ears of wheat which he raised in his little garden, or from what the rooks brought him, and he had to bake his pure unleavened altar breads between two stones instead of irons. And, at a later period than that we now describe, he depended on Providence and the ocean, which once, on occasion of great scarcity, brought him a cask of wine, which, with extreme economy, proved sufficient for the necessities of his altar, during the remainder of his life.

The water which he required for the sacrifice, as well as for his own necessities, had to be caught from a single drop of distillation which fell from the roof of the cave; yet it not only afforded a sufficient reservoir after a day's accumulation, for the purpose of extinguishing thirst and for cooking the hermit's meals, but the very birds supplied their wants from its abundance. And these winged neighbors of our hero became so familiar with him, and so little feared his presence, that he seldom took his daily meal without having a crowd of them around him to pick up the crumbs that fell from his frugal table. At first, it was only a robin-redbreast or a 'blue-bird' which took these liberties, but after a short time, and especially during the winter, the wild-dove, the hawk, and the very eagle, monarch of the feathered race himself, flew into the cave in search of food, or to observe the movements of the new tenant of this, their undisputed retreat since creation.

When the devotional exercises of the forenoon were terminated, and till his hour of refreshment, which was about three in the afternoon, our hermit was employed in carving sacred images on and around his altar, except when occasionally he, by way of variety, devoted a day or two in exploring the cave, and measuring its height, width, and length. The height and extent of the cave near the mouth, on the ocean cliff, was considerable, being from sixty to a hundred feet high, and of equal breadth; but, as you advanced onwards, it assumed the form of a corridor, about four feet wide, and ten in height. The hermit made several unsuccessful attempts to reach the end of this passage, which seemed to be endless, and which from the smoothness and regularity of its sides and roofs, seemed to be hewn out by the hand of skilful art, rather than a rude formation of irregular and fantastic nature.

One day, however, after repeated unsuccessful previous attempts, the father providing himself with several of the wax candles which he had rescued from the wreck, and of which he was very sparing on account of the altar, determined to get to the end of the cave, and with this determination he set out on his exploring discovery immediately after his Mass.

On and on he moved by a long and level smooth path, apparently well beaten, till he had advanced a distance that appeared to his fancy to be several miles; but from mentally counting his paces, judged he was not far from being two miles from his starting point. He soon after his reached an irregular ascent, which, on a hurried examination, he concluded to be the remains of broken stairs descending from an upper hamlet. Fixing his candle between the fragments of a broken rock at the foot of his ascent, he crept over it, where, to his delight and astonishment, the light of heaven and the rays of the beaming sun fell on his obscured vision. He approached the crevice through which the light was admitted, and placing his eye close to it, he could distinctly see the ruin of an old church or abbey, with its creeping ivy, shattered window millions

of stone, and the slabs and tombstones of the dead which were buried within its once consecrated walls.

'Alas!' he exclaimed, 'I see now, and know too well where I am; for have I not here under my eye evidences of the civilisation of England in the ruin and desolation that exist in this once sacred edifice consecrated to the worship of the Most High?'

He was about to return, when, as if to banish every shadow of doubt from his mind, as to where he was, he spied two shepherd lads driving their flocks of sheep within the ruin, which was used as a pen as well as a cemetery, and he heard one asking the other, in the native dialect, 'Avoc abhu an fuller?' 'Did you see the eagle?'

The hermit-priest had returned from his antiquarian expedition to the end of his underground avenue, and from the day's fatigue felt rather an unusual appetite for his meal of dried fish and wild salad, when the screaming of the male eagle, which he had named Hector, attracted his attention. It was the season of incubation, and the egg was yet untenanted, save by the female eagle, and hence he thought it strange that he should hear the same repeated minute screaming and chirping and loud cackling as when the eaglets were roused to the prey. The screeching becoming louder and more alarming, our hero moved towards the mouth of the cave, where, to his utter amazement, he found the aforesaid king of birds, nick-named Hector, with his wings spread over a beautiful child, apparently asleep; and no doubt the unnatural and alarming shrill screams were so many urgent invitations to his partner, Andromache, the eagle, to come and feast on the noble captive of the day. The hermit-priest immediately grasped the child, whom he finally, not without some difficulty, rescued and secured from the merciless claws of his royal neighbors of the feathered tribes. His first impression was that the child was dead; but on pressing it to his bosom and placing his mouth over its nostrils, he found its heart beating and perceived that it breathed; and with a little care it soon revived from the swoon into which the rapid flight of its captor through the air had thrown it. It was a charming male child, apparently of some months old, and the scarlet silk frock, with the gold and silver embroidery of its head-dress and little sandals, pointed it out as belonging to wealthy if not noble parents. The venerable father was in ecstasies; he did not know what to think. Was it not plain that the hand of God had conducted him to this spot?—'What was to be done with the infant 'Mac an uller?' How could he support it by a sufficient supply of proper nourishment in the cavern? 'But the Lord,' said he, 'will provide food.'

CHAPTER XIX.

Several years of his saintly and solitary life passed by for our hero without being diversified by an incident of sufficient importance to claim a notice in this narrative. The same devotional exercises were discharged with the most scrupulous punctuality and fervor. The usual hurried and short hours devoted to repose, the protracted prayers and meditations, the accustomed single and frugal meal, the same self-denial and mortification, were unremittingly kept up in all their unrelaxed austerity; and in addition to this duty he had superadded the care and education of the child whom God had committed to his care—and the little 'Son of the Eagle,' as the Irish idiom would style him, seemed to thrive as well on his hard fare and the cheerless accommodation of the vast cave, as if he enjoyed all the luxuries and attentions of a palace. Sent hither by Providence, it was evident that he was watched and nourished by its special care. And, after a time, instead of being a burden, the father felt that his playful simplicity, so highly entertaining, and his affectionate caresses and good temper, with his company, were more than a sufficient compensation for whatever pains he took to watch over the health of the little tallow's body, and to form his soul to virtue. In a few years 'Mac an uller' became of use to our hero, and contributed not a little to the support of his father, as he called him, by the skill which he displayed in fishing and catching birds; and, on one occasion, he daringly robbed the eagle's nest, and returned to the cave with an eaglet from that same egg, to supply the wants of which himself, when an infant, was a destined prey. From his expertness in the snaring of birds, the cave was abundantly supplied with wholesome animal food and plenty of downy feathers, to revive the failing pulse and warm the decaying limbs of his beloved and venerable father.

The adventures of the youth were daring and perilous. He ventured to sail several hundred yards on the surface of the sea, in calm weather, on a raft constructed of a few pieces of boards caught by him from the flowing tide, and steered by means of a rude pole as an oar. He became an expert swimmer, and could dive like a seal or porpoise, to reach the fish, or pieces of wreck

which in calm weather became visible under the smooth waters. Finally, he thoroughly explored the cavern, and succeeded not only in reaching its terminus landward, but he effected an entrance to the old ruin to which it led; and to the delight of the hermit father, he conducted him without much difficulty into the mortuary chapel, which formed the catacomb or basement of the old abbey. The father explored this venerable house of worship with grave and reverent curiosity, and, to his surprise, he found it in a state of tolerable preservation. This happy discovery opened an additional source of gratitude to God in the soul of our hero, and he resolved, on certain solemn festivals, to visit this holy shrine, to offer the holy victim of peace within its undefiled and consecrated sanctuary. Our hero examined every foot and inch of this hidden dwelling of the Most High, with awe of a saint and the curiosity of an antiquary. There it stood in the very same position that it did about two centuries before, when its holy guardians were turned forth on the world, or butchered like so many sheep at the slaughter-house, by the rapacious minions of an apostate ruler or infidel government.— There stood the altar, with its tabernacle surmounted by its silver crucifix, unimpaired and uninjured by the decay of time. And in front stood the wooden calafalco or cenotaph covered with black drapery, and surrounded by tall silver candlesticks. The funeral cross stood planted at the head of the cenotaph, and upon lifting the pall there was the corpse of a priest interred and left unburied beneath its folds. A large number of sacred vessels were also found by him concealed behind the altar. What reflections were not these scenes calculated to excite! Here was evidently a place that the authors of the ruin overhead had not made out. The funeral obsequies of one of the community was being evidently prepared for when the spoiler came. Part of the sacred utensils were hurriedly stowed away in this secret chapel. The monk who conveyed them hither must have perished of hunger, for his skeleton was there leaning against the marble rails of the sanctuary. The whole community must have been put to death, together with the principal part of the neighboring inhabitants, or else this sacred shrine would have been visited some time or other, and its sacred treasures removed.

Alas! if the bodies of the two friars could be recalled to life, and interrogated by men as they were by God, what a sad history could they not give of the awful cruelties and terrors of that night, when the Saxon plunder came like a wolf, to desolate their peaceful home, and devour its defenceless inmates. They could tell what merciless agent of Harry, Elizabeth, or Cromwell, perpetrated the bloody deed. But all record of these acts on earth has perished, save what our hero can glean from the melancholy objects before him; and this is enough to know of these savage deeds, till that day when the earth and the sea shall give up what they have so long concealed, and justice shall be done to the humblest that sleep beneath their surface. Father O'Donnell, and his beloved guide to this solemn and sacred spot, on bended knees, repeated the *De Profundis*, and resolving to return on the morrow to celebrate a Requiem mass for the souls of the two wintered friars, they retraced their steps to the cave.

CHAPTER XX.

It was on the eve of All Souls' Day, the 2nd of November, that the discovery related in the preceding chapter was made, and the venerable father, after having finished the office of the festival of All Saints, proceeded, worthily, attentively, and devoutly, to recite that of the dead. It was a beautiful evening. The sun looked cheerfully and warmly from the western sky, chasing the misty clouds before him in his descent, lest they should intercept his benevolent rays to men. The sea-birds, in thousands, perched on rocks, were airing themselves and arranging their feathers, and the boundless ocean level lay calm and motionless as the heaven that smiled on it from above; while the father sat, stood, and knelt alternately, during the recitation of the beautiful and solemn requiem office for the souls of the faithful departed. All nature rejoiced and was glad as on the day when the Creator, drawing her forth from the abyss of chaos and nothing, first imparted to her newly-formed countenance the impress of His omnipotent hand, and the benediction of His benevolent heart; but our hero's calm brow was ruffled by an additional wrinkle, and a deep shade of manly sorrow was settled on his face. He thought of the pitiable condition of the dead who were now expiating in the regions of purifying fire those faults and sins which human frailty, human respect, or some of the other thousand seductions of the world enticed them to commit, and from the consequences of which they looked principally for mitigation and relief to the communion of saints and the suffrages of the Church. He lamented the general and increasing indifference to the sufferings of the dead that prevailed among the living, and

he shuddered and wept bitterly at the remembrances of the many frailties and imperfections of his own past youth.

This was the first time since coming into his hermitage that he had the happiness of being able to use black vestments, his only suits previously being one of green, and another of white satin, which he saved from the wreck of the unlucky Joan d'Arc. He had now, however, several sets of all the colors found in the chapel, and most of them in excellent preservation, owing to the absence of any material dampness in the chapel itself, by reason of the nature of the soil. His young assistants, whom, for reasons to be mentioned hereafter, he had christened Brefni, which we shall call him in future, was very proud of his achievement in having discovered the chapel.

'Father,' he said, 'you have blamed me for too much curiosity, and for asking singular questions, but is it not that curiosity which you censure that enabled me to find out the entrance into the beautiful chapel to which I conducted you this morning?'

'Nay, my son, it was rather the mysterious guidance of Providence that made you instrumental in making such a lucky discovery. I did not condemn rational or useful inquiry or curiosity; it was only an idle, useless, or mischievous one, that I blamed, such as your wishing to know why God had placed you here, or why He has not given man wings, like the eagle, to fly over the ocean, or mount the clouds of heaven with.'

'How gently that man slept whom we saw under the black covering to-day in the chapel, and how much like you when sacrificing, he looked with his long white hair and calm face! How came he to lie there? Is he only asleep, or is he dead, like that great eagle which I once killed?'

'His body is dead, my son, but his soul lives in a better world than this, a beautiful country beyond the clouds and the sky, where God is king. I shall soon be like him, dead, pale, and motionless, and then you will have to dig a grave and place me under the earth, as we will for him to-morrow.'

'No, father, you won't surely die and leave me here alone among the birds. I shall pray to God that you may not die.'

'Ah, my son, you ought not to do so, for by dying I shall begin to live with God in His glorious country above the stars. You, too, will have to die and lie under the earth for years and years, till you rise again at the last day, to be judged with all men.'

'But who will remain with me here in this lonely cave when you die?'

'Oh, leave that to God, who will probably take you away from this to a land beyond the ocean—ay, far, far beyond its border, where you will be among millions of men, some younger, some older, and some of your own age and size. There, also, if God wills, you will meet friends nearer and dearer to you than I, who am only your guardian and teacher, by God's appointment.'

'Oh, I may meet hundreds, thousands, millions, but never among them all one whom I shall love as I do you, father. I love God first, who made the sun, the stars, the heavens, the sea, the rocks, the birds, and the fishes, and who can light up all the sky and the ocean with the blaze of His loud thunder; but next to Him you are dearest to me.'

'That may be, for a time, child; but when you see your real father, you cannot refuse him your first love next to God and His blessed Mother.'

'But when will this be? I desire to see my real father, to tell if I can love him, and to find if he can give me a larger and better spear than this one, to pierce those eagles which went so near killing me, and that have now placed their nest far beyond my reach.'

'Yea, this you can have, and many other useful things; but you must have patience, and wait till God is pleased to send you the means of departure from this cavern. Kneel down till I bless thee, my son, ere thou retire to sleep, and rising early to-morrow, we will set out for the beautiful chapel, to say Mass for all the dead.'

Early next morning, long before the dawn of day, the mortuary chapel of the old abbey echoed, for the first time during two centuries, the solemn chant of a priest intoning the requiem Mass.

It was a 'Missa Cantata,' accompanied with incense, six lights, and all the solemnity that, under the circumstances, was possible; and though there was neither choir nor organ, the sweet and powerful chant of the officiating priest was responded to and returned back to his ear in countless charming echoes from all parts of this enchanting oratory. So delight was the father with the convenience of the place, in comparison with his own rude sanctuary in the cave, and so overpowered with ecstatic devotion, that though the requiem Mass is comparatively a short one, and though he had ascended the altar about five

o'clock in the morning, it was about nine o'clock before he finished. After the Mass he performed funeral service over the remains of the two monks, and having dug two graves of moderate depth, he consigned them to their mother earth.

Meantime a heavy tramping of feet and loud voices, mournful lamentations, and fervent prayers, are heard overhead in the old abbey ruin.— After having listened attentively for a while, the 'father' could glean from the conversation of persons just over him, that two shepherds, who were watching the flocks of a wealthy proprietor named O'Loughlin, having taken shelter under an old arch of the abbey, heard the voice of the priests distinctly, as he chanted the Mass, and after several fits of swooning, and half crazed with fear, succeeded in alarming the whole country by the recital of what they had heard. One of the men was a Protestant and the other a Catholic, and upon appearing before priest, minister, and magistrate, they testified consistently and exclusively to the strange miracle which they related. There was a hurried investigation of the affair before a full bench of magistrates and justices of the peace, who regarded it as their duty to 'take cognizance of the strange occurrence,' and make their report to the Castle of Dublin! Some laughed at the narration of the two honest men; others were for having them indicted for perjury, for swearing to what, they said, was impossible, that dead men should sing high Mass; while others, and they were the wisest in their own estimation, were of opinion that it was only the whistling of the winds through the broken arches of the ruin, that caused the voice-like sounds which they heard in half sleep. There was one incident, however, which went to show the candour at least of the narrators. The one who was a Protestant, named Benson, an Orangeman and a pensioner, there and then declared himself a Catholic, and called on Father O'Shaughnessy, who sat on the bench, to receive his recantation! 'What! Benson, are you crazy, man?' cried the Rev. Tomkins Brew, J. P., to his apostatizing parishioner, whom he could not well spare, as Benson and his family, and the sexton constituted his whole congregation! 'You must be either crazy or drunk, and to think of such a step as turning papist, and probably losing your pension, Benson!' he repeated.

'I am neither crazy nor drunk, your reverence; and as for the pension, I earned it well in His Majesty's service, who, I hope, will not deprive me of it; and if he do itself, sir, I can afford to live without it, but can't afford to lose my poor soul.'

'Benson, my man,' replied the reverend justice of peace, 'you are very silly to renounce your creed for this imagination. And supposing you did hear the chant of the Mass, which you did not, is it not most probable that it was the devil that caused this phantom to deceive you? I would not be astonished at all, if it was the devil, who was saying his Mass so early in that Popish ruin!'

'Well, your honor, or reverence—for I don't know which title is your proper one—all I have to say is, that if it was the devil I heard, he must have a very fine voice for sacred song, and I have very great doubts if he was up so early on All-Souls-Day, praying for the dead! I believe rather that, like his faithful followers on earth, he takes a good nap in the morning, and I always heard it was cursing he was given to, like all well-bred gentlemen, instead of praying. So good-bye to your reverence, and I wish you luck with the remainder of your congregation, as I and my family will, from this day forward, try to go to heaven in the way that shall be pointed out to us by Father O'Shaughnessy.'

Having delivered himself of this speech, the ex-Orangeman left the court and joined the crowd of people who moved towards the abbey of Glenduff to pray for the dead.

CHAPTER XXI.

Our young acquaintance, Brefni, or 'Mac-an-uller,' had just reached the fifteenth anniversary of his rescue from his rapacious kidnapper, and so far his life was a contented and happy one. His mind, as well as his body, seemed to improve as if by miracle, and he took not more delight in climbing the frowning precipice to reach the roosting-places of the winged tribes on which he levied his principal support, or taking his glorious plunge-bath into the bracing waters of the ocean, to invigorate his body, than he did in learning the Christian Doctrine, in serming around the altar, or in mastering the trite but pleasing truths of natural science. He had with remarkable facility mastered the elementary parts of the liberal sciences from the vocal instructions of his venerable tutor, as he had learned to serve God from his example and kind precepts.

About this time, however, a visible change appeared in his manner. He was contented and happy, to be sure, for he had learned to know and love his Creator; but the former enthusiasm of youth appeared to have fled, he became habitually silent, the bloom of ruddy health seemed to