

HIS LAST DUEL.

Some fifty years ago there lived in the west of Ireland a certain Capt. Fenton. This man had gained an unenviable notoriety in his own and the neighboring counties as a successful duellist. Not only was he known to make the most trivial dispute a pretext for a challenge, but it was even reported that on more than one occasion he purposely provoked a quarrel. The meeting, in nearly every instance, ended disastrously for his opponent.

At that time there happened to be a line regiment stationed in the neighboring town of Galway. Capt. Fenton was on terms of intimacy with some of the officers, and, though far from being a general favorite, it was not infrequently occurred that he dined at the mess on guest nights. But whenever he was present an air of restraint pervaded the assembly. The dinner was sure to be a spiritless affair, and always lacked the tone of good-fellowship which usually characterizes such entertainments.

About six months after its arrival in Galway the regiment was joined by a junior subaltern. He was a man of high standing in his own right, and being still in his teens; yet by all accounts he was a fine, solidly young fellow. He gave every promise of making a splendid officer, and a few weeks sufficed to establish him as a favorite.

But, alas! only a short time elapsed before he had the misfortune to fall foul of Capt. Fenton. A challenge was given and accepted. The affair was kept as secret as possible, and at the appointed time the meeting took place in the corner of a meadow about half a mile from the barracks.

Not much time was lost in preparations. The combatants were placed, the pistols loaded and the seconds retired. The young officer stood with the fall front of his body to his opponent. He was a novice in such affairs, poor boy! It is even said that at the precise moment of firing he involuntarily closed his eyes. If such was the case he never opened them again in this world! His adversary's ball passed right through his heart.

A stretcher was fetched from the barracks, and the corpse was conveyed thither without delay. The affair would doubtless have caused a profound sensation, but for obvious reasons those engaged in it were careful to let as few particulars as possible leak out.

But on the third day a startling change took place in the aspect of affairs. A young man, travel stained, pale and haggard, arrived in town. He proceeded at once to the barracks and announced himself as the brother of the deceased. He was conducted to the room in which the body was laid. They say the scene which followed was of the most heartrending description. The stranger flung himself upon the corpse, and as he lay there his whole frame was shaken by convulsive sobs.

It quickly transpired that the brothers had been left orphans when mere boys. They were the only children of the family, and through boyhood had clung to each other, feeling that they were alone in the world. Their love was like that which brought David and Jonathan together. It can, therefore, be scarcely conceived with what feelings of dismay the elder heard of the death of the younger.

When the first paroxysm of grief was over, the young man raised himself from the corpse. Then, in a voice half choked by emotion, he uttered a solemn vow to take speedy vengeance upon his brother's slayer. With this object in view he retired from the apartment, and instantly despatched a challenge to Capt. Fenton. The officers endeavored to dissuade him from such a rash step, pointing out that instead of avenging the slain he was himself sure to fall a victim to his opponent's skill. But remonstrance was in vain. To one who had lost a brother, the words "My brother is dead; I do not care to live!"

Under these circumstances it seemed hopeless to prevent this second duel. Some, indeed, thought of appealing to Capt. Fenton in order to persuade him if possible into refusing the challenge. But none were very eager to undertake such an unpleasant duty, especially as there appeared little likelihood of their efforts being crowned with success.

Nevertheless, there was one who ventured upon the disagreeable task. This was an elderly gentleman, a Mr. Martin, who resided in the neighborhood. He was generally looked upon as a quiet, unassuming old gentleman, who never interfered in any other person's business. In fact, his one aim and object in life seemed to be the welfare of his flock and herds. But in the present instance, having learned of some particulars regarding the late tragedy, he determined if possible, to prevent a repetition of the sad event. With this object in view he called upon Capt. Fenton.

"Though he had turned three-score years," Mr. Martin was still hale and hearty. Like the patriarch of old, "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." A beard of snowy whiteness descended from his weather-beaten countenance. His venerable appearance would in all probability have given considerable weight to his arguments had he to deal with one who respected gray hairs. But, as it was, Capt. Fenton listened to him with unconcealed contempt. In answer to the old man's remonstrances regarding the result of the recent duel, his reply invariably was that "it served the young cub right."

Mr. Martin entreated him to relinquish his intention of fighting the surviving brother. The intercession was so persistent that, as might have been anticipated, the Captain lost his temper. Turning upon his visitor he abruptly ordered him to leave the house—adding that "he would not allow an old bullock driver to interfere in his affairs of honor."

"Sir," returned Mr. Martin, quietly, "you have insulted me!"

"And," continued the old man, in the same calm tones, "I demand immediate satisfaction."

"With all my heart!" responded Capt. Fenton, laughing at the absurdity of the idea.

"Moreover, as you have been guilty of such ungentlemanly conduct," said Mr. Martin, "I insist that my claim shall have precedence over all other engagements."

"Oh, certainly," replied the Captain, with mock gravity. "To-morrow morning, if you wish it, I am engaged to meet the young fellow in whom you take such a vast amount of interest in the corner of the big meadow at 8 o'clock. Be there a little before that hour, but don't be late, for I want to dispose of both affairs and return here in time for breakfast."

"I shall be punctual," returned the old gentleman; and without saying more he left the house.

He was as good as his word. At 7.30 a. m. he was on the ground, attended by his second. Capt. Fenton soon arrived, and later on the party was joined by the brother of the deceased subaltern, with whom was one of the officers from the barracks. It was fearful to behold the wild look which the young man fixed upon Capt. Fenton. Not once during the preparations did his eye wander from his brother's slayer. While the pistols were being loaded, Mr. Martin's second whispered to him: "Don't lose a moment when the signal is given. Aim low, it is your only chance."

"No," replied the old man loudly; "I shall strike him full in the head!"

It is not known whether this speech reached his opponent's ears and in some measure disconcerted him. It is believed that the steady gaze of the young man, who thirsted to avenge his brother's death, was as without effect. Certainly it is that Capt. Fenton did not take his place with his customary assurance.

The men were posted. The rest retired to a suitable distance, leaving the combatants steadily gazing at each other. A

minute or two of terrible suspense followed, during which brief space the silence of death reigned over the spot. Then the signal was given, and, almost instantaneously, the two reports were heard. For a few seconds the smoke prevented the spectators from ascertaining the result, but as it slowly rose they saw old Mr. Martin standing erect and firm, while Capt. Fenton was stretched full length upon the ground.

Both the seconds hastened towards their principals. The two men from the barracks also ran to Mr. Martin's side, and eagerly inquired if he was hurt. They found the old gentleman bleeding slightly at the neck, but he carelessly brushed the blood away with the back of his hand. Then turning with a kindly manner toward the youth whom he had risked his life to save, he said, simply:

"I don't think I had any other way of preventing this young boy from sharing the fate of his brother."

Capt. Fenton's second now advanced, and announced that his man was dead. The bullet had penetrated the left temple. He requested their assistance in removing the body. This they readily granted, but Mr. Martin and his young friend held aloof. As the others raised the dead man they noticed a peculiar hardness and stiffness about the body. On tearing open the garments of the deceased a cry of horror and rage broke from them. They found concealed beneath his clothing a tight-fitting coat of mail.

The cause of his having escaped uninjured in so many duels was now fully explained. He had evidently provided himself with this defense from the old army which his master contained. The coat doubtless not perfectly bullet proof, yet in nine cases out of ten a ball was almost sure to glance off the network of steel. As to Mr. Martin's fame as a marksman soon spread far and wide. People were exceedingly cautious in what they said and how they acted towards the old gentleman. None ventured to trifle with one who was known to be "a dead shot."

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