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THE LAST IRISHMAN.

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CHAPTER III.

To explain the visit of the priest to the house of the nobleman, it is necessary to observe that Father O'Byrne was a man of talent. When the British aristocracy cannot seduce or enlist talent in their service, they endeavor to neutralize its power; they present it in the enchanted halls of their magnificent palaces with a Circean cup, and lull it to sleep by their graces, favor, and smiles. The longevity of their order arises from this craft.

The O'Byrnes, at one time, were paramount in Leinster. After the invasion of the English under Strongbow, the gallant clan retired from the plains into the bosky dells and beautiful vales of Wicklow, where they reigned for four centuries, in conjunction with the O'Kavanaghs and O'Tooles, to the terror of the foreigners. Under the leadership of their terrible chieftain, Feagh MacHugh, the O'Byrnes, in the reign of Elizabeth, made the English queen tremble for the safety of her colony in Ireland.

During Elizabeth's reign, MacHugh repeatedly defeated the soldiers of England in the valleys of Wicklow. Spencer mentions as the cause of the greatness of MacHugh, "the strength and great fastness of Glenmalur, which adjoineth to his house of Ballincore." In this stronghold he long defied all the powers of England, and made *razzias* into the plain, which filled the city, country, and castle of Dublin with consternation. On one occasion, a large body of English troops, commanded by Lord Wilton de Gray, was utterly routed with great slaughter, in the valley of Glendallough, by the heroic O'Byrnes. On another occasion, after a victory gained by the O'Byrnes over Harrington, whom Essex had appointed his commander-in-chief, the viceroy, to punish the cowardice of the English soldiers, had every tenth man of them put to death. In 1597, however, a descent was made on Wicklow by the then Lord Deputy, at the head of an overwhelming force, and MacHugh was surprised and killed. But he left two sons, Philem and Raymond, who inherited all their father's valor, as well as his zeal for the Catholic faith. The year 1603 is the epoch of the entire destruction and subjugation of the Irish nation, under the English yoke, when, of course, the O'Byrnes submitted, along with the rest.

Among the English adventurers at that time in Ireland, the ancestor of the present Lord Powerscourt was by no means the least cruel, and grasping and successful. Holding a situation in the Castle of Dublin, he managed to force or inveigle the two sons of MacHugh into that redoubtable fortress. Buried in the deep dungeons of the castle, the young chiefs were subjected to the rack, and compelled by the most cruel torments, to sign documents, resigning a large portion of their lands into the hands of the English adventurer who founded the house of Powerscourt. From that time forth the fortunes of the O'Byrnes gradually declined, while that of the Powerscourts swelled, and mantled into a still prouder tide of prosperity. During the wars of Cromwell and William III., every acre was torn from their grasp. William III., gave forty-nine thousand five hundred and seventeen acres to the Earl of Rossmore; one hundred and eight thousand six hundred and thirty-three acres to Lord Albemarle; one hundred and thirty-five thousand eight hundred and twenty acres to Lord Portland; twenty-six thousand four hundred acres to Ginkell, Lord Athlone, whose father was general of his forces, twenty-six thousand five hundred acres to Lord Galway; and ninety-five thousand acres to Lady E. Villiers, a concubine, or favorite of the King. Thus, the estates of the O'Byrnes were divided among the aristocracy, who are everywhere, as a necessary consequence of this confiscation, the deadliest enemies of the Irish race. The rightful owners of the confiscated lands were banished from Ireland, and obliged to take refuge in foreign countries. One of the O'Byrnes settled in Spain, entered into commerce, and became an opulent merchant. Though living under a sunny sky, and surrounded by the splendors of wealth, O'Byrne did not forget Ireland. He taught his children, born in Spain, to consider themselves as strangers in that opulent country, and destined to return sometime to their ancestral land. He even taught them to speak the Gaelic, and although externally Spaniards, in their hearts they were Irishmen.

The O'Byrnes of Spain visited the vales of Wicklow, generation after generation, just as pious Christians make pilgrimages to Rome.—Finally, Fergus O'Byrne, towards the close of the last century, returned to Ireland, and settled in Dublin. He possessed a large fortune, but the fatal issue of the insurrection of 1798, into which he plunged with more ardor than prudence, reduced him to poverty. During the rebellion he was taken prisoner and flung into jail; by the interposition of some powerful friends he was

finally liberated. He spent the remainder of his life quietly in Dublin, married a beautiful lady by whom he had three children, the principal persons in the following narrative.

Richard, the eldest of these children, entered the French army, from which he passed into that of a native Indian prince. Angus, the second son, entered Maynooth, and became a priest, uniting, as he did, the sacred authority of an ecclesiastic with the hereditary respect due to a chieftain, his power among his parishioners was almost unbounded. Julia, the sister, was a good, beautiful, and timid creature, full of modesty and resignation, simplicity and sweetness. She felt no rancor towards the oppressors of her country, yet she was devotedly attached to the cause of the oppressed.

Leaving the house of O'Byrne, we shall pass for a moment into that of their rival, Lord Powerscourt.

The present inheritor of the title was seventy years of age, destitute alike of great virtues and great vices. Lord Powerscourt was the terror of his tenantry—"a village tyrant," passionately fond of dogs, horses, field sports, and "the lancy." He might be said, like most other lords when young, to live in his stables. He was a black-leg. But in exact proportion to his warm attachment to horses, he was cold, not to say indifferent, to his lady—a perfect beauty in her youth—whose days were shortened by his pride, licentiousness, neglect, and malignity. In politics, as in morals, he seemed to have no principles. He slept during a debate, and at its termination, voted with the minister. He was the first to fly from London when the session closed. He hastened to recruit his constitution, and waste his gold in France and Germany, or in Italy—to run his horses on English race courses, or hunt the fox on his Irish estates. Now, however, he was old, tortured, overwhelmed, and crippled by rheumatism and gout; and instead of flying through Europe in a carriage, he found it difficult to traverse his chamber with a crutch.—He had parted with the greater part of his stud, reserving only a few magnificent horses for domestic purposes. Nailed to his chair, and swathed in flannels, he occupied his time in checking his agent's accounts, and fleecing, and grinding, and thwarting his tenantry. His temper, which was in his youth not very sweet, became intolerably and vexatiously sour in advanced life, while, in old age, his lordship was an animated vinegar cruet. To do him justice, the uniform acerbity of his revolting disposition was chequered occasionally by terrible explosions of anger. The quiet but external snarl was displaced by a paroxysm of passion that resembled a tornado, and burst on his family with a loud fury and violence that made every soul in the house shake and tremble, and even the house itself. It was whispered that these diabolical transports had their origin in domestic disappointments. In consequence of the murderous atrocities which the father of the present lord had perpetrated on the people in 1798, God had cursed the Powerscourt family, it was believed, with barrenness. The extinction of the race was to be the penalty of its crimes—it was never to see another male heir.—His sons, blighted by the malediction, which clung to them, like a secret malady, perished in the cradle, while his daughter, Miss Ellen, blooming like a rose, was fated, her father feared, to wither like a flower. This young lady sometimes succeeded in soothing the savage anger or settled morosity of this triangular old lord, when every one else fled in terror from the exasperated roar of the human tiger. He loved his daughter as warmly as he could possibly love any human being—it was something less than his self-love. At his death, in compliance with the aristocratic law of substitution, his estates, his title, his seat in the Upper House, must all pass to a distant kinsman, to the exclusion of Miss Ellen, who received by way of recompense a large annuity. The want of a male heir embittered the existence of my lord, as it had shortened the days of the Viscountess. Not that his kinsman, Sir George, was unworthy of a coronet; the reverse was the fact; for Sir George was a capital shot, could cross a country or bring down his bird as well as any man in the kingdom, and his father, who was likewise a sportsman, had broken his neck in a steep chase. Thus all the qualities which the newspapers adore in a legislator were found in Sir George. Nature, in giving him these propensities, had evidently intended him for a peer. But though Lord Powerscourt naturally admired Sir George, it grieved him that the children of his daughter should not be heirs of his estate. The remedy which Lord Powerscourt proposed for this inconvenience was to marry his daughter Ellen to his kinsman Sir George. This young officer—for he had purchased a commission—was invited accordingly to visit Powerscourt House. Sir George, who was not rich, gladly accepted the invitation. Those flowery and cultivated retreats yielded him a refuge from his creditors, and excellent angling, fowling, and field-sports.

His horses, his bets, his gaming, and his mistresses, had exhausted his resources; but Lord Powerscourt's purse was inexhaustible. When Lord Powerscourt, however, advanced money to Sir George, the noble lender stipulated that the needy borrower should continue to reside on the property. Sir George not only complied with this condition, but even assumed the arrogance and authority of master of Powerscourt. He revolutionized the kennel, reconstructed the stables, altered the equipages, and modified the liveries. Nor was he by any means a stranger to the pretty girls—the handsome vassals on Lord Powerscourt's demesne. He gradually became reconciled to this mode of life. His lordship's palace was more cheerful than the dreary cavalry barracks at Portobello. The pursuit of wild fowl in Wicklow, he began to think, was more desirable than to be himself pursued by his angry creditors in Dublin; and the tranquil beauty of cultivated landscapes, though less exciting, was at least safer than drunken quarrels in a noisy tavern.

Lord Powerscourt was doomed to disappointment. The longer Lady Ellen knew Sir George the more she disliked him. While, on the other hand, the style of her beauty, and the character of her mind were equally distasteful to the military libertine. She felt, instinctively, as a woman only feels, that this future heir of Powerscourt was a shallow, vicious, worthless fellow,—that the imbecility of his character, not the determination of his mind, set limits to the depravity of his nature. The Irish aristocracy resemble some pagan hierarchy. They carefully avoid scandal, and make no noise. Hidden in the parks, gardens, and palaces, they are as vigilant as Argus. The spies of the tyrant Tiberus were not more numerous than those of the Irish lord. He knows everything: he resembles the spider whose threads of intelligence radiate all directions. No one can come into his parish—no one can go out of it without his recognition. He appoints, or—what is the same thing—recommends the magistrates. Every Irish magistrate may be regarded as the pimp, spy, and panderer of the nobleman who appoints him: he is ever ready to run and tell his lordship where a covey of partridges, an ardent patriot, or a pretty girl happen to conceal themselves. The Irish aristocracy being worthless and depraved, appoint men to the bench who are likewise depraved and worthless. The magnificent jails of Ireland are crowded with fine men, and the decaying streets swarm with unhappy women, owing to the officious sycophancy of the pliant knaves who call themselves Irish magistrates—ever eager to fly and gratify the cruel hate or sensual passion of the adjacent aristocrat. All this is done without noise, without suspicion, without scandal! The moment Father O'Byrne came to the parish, Lord Powerscourt, who knew his character perfectly well, determined to cultivate his acquaintance, while Sir George determined to ruin the beautiful Miss O'Byrne.

Father O'Byrne and his young relative had left the village, and were fast approaching the prodigious wall that sweeps round Lord Powerscourt demesne, at a point where a postern door had been practised in the masonry. "O, Julia," he exclaimed, "I think you have got a key, you said, which enables you to enter these grounds whenever you please—perhaps it will open this door—let us try."

The young lady took from her reticule a small key, which had been presented to her by lady Ellen. The door opened without difficulty, and admitted them into a narrow alley of young trees, which, doubtless, furnished a refreshing shade in the sultry heat of the dog-days, but which was now sparkling with dew, and garnished with the tender foliage of May. Farther on noble and lofty elms decorated the cultivated landscape; and the ground was mantled with the thick, rich, velvety grass, blended with shamrock and distitute of weeds, whose tint has obtained for Ireland the merited appellation of "Emerald Isle." The intruders had only advanced a few steps into the park when they heard, or fancied they heard, the slapping of the door behind them, which they also fancied they had themselves securely fastened. They both turned round, and the extremity of a mantle swept away among the shrubbery, as if some person were hurriedly plunging under the foliage. It occurred to them that this might be some inmate of his lordship's household—some game-keeper or member of the family. They went back and examined the entrance to find it perfectly secured; and then, without further reflection of the incident, proceeded in the direction of his lordship's house.

On obtaining admission to the presence of Lord Powerscourt, they found him in a state of perturbation; he was hobbling through a large and magnificent room, leaning one arm on that of Sir George, while he struck the floor with a large gold-headed cane, firmly grasped in the opposite hand, somewhat like a pavior. His lordship was a small man shaped like a hogshead, with a short neck like that of a bull, and a large

paunch like that of a cook, a red face, which resembled raw beef, and a stoop in his shoulders, as if the weight of his paunch had over-taxed the strength of his narrow back. His fiery visage would have suited a Bardolph, and had you met it behind the bar of a tavern you had respected it. It would be in its place. He trod the luxurious carpet—which sank under his pressure)—as if it were red-hot iron,—and pained him at every pace. Anger on this occasion had mantled a face with crimson, which was indebted to alcohol for its usual dull red. His eyes were glaring with rage, and his lips teemed and trembled with maledictions. The face of Sir George offered a perfect contrast to that of his lordship; he was cool, pale, careless, impudent, and satirical. In person, Sir George was lank and slim, as if nature had benevolently moulded him, to accomplish the difficult task of going down a pump. On his long ungainly body was perched a small head; but his countenance, which was not remarkable for comeliness, had a gentlemanly expression. Occasionally, however, the insolence of the puppy—a mixture of scorn and self-conceit—breathing from his face, rendered his features absolutely hideous. The moment the calm eye of the priest met the inflamed face of the lord, despair took possession of him; his heart sank in his breast; he grew pale—trembled, and wished himself a hundred miles away.

"God give me strength and courage," he murmured, almost perspiring with anxiety, "we are too late—he knows all." The pious aspiration of the anxious priest was by no means uncalculated for the nature of the circumstances. When his lordship's blazing eye fell on the priest and his sister, he recoiled as if to bound on them. His motion resembled that of certain noxious reptiles which love to surprise their prey, but yet disconcerted when themselves are surprised. The next instant, he advanced upon the strangers; his glittering eyes, like those of the rattlesnake, fixed on the discomposed visage of the ecclesiastic.

"Ho! is this you?" he rudely and bitterly exclaimed, without noticing the salutation of the priest.

"I knew you would come—I always reckon upon the honor of receiving a visit from Mr. O'Byrne, when his rebellious rascals perpetrate an outrage. Well, sir, what have you to say now—have they not committed a dastardly and ferocious assault upon a man who wears my livery—have they not barbarously murdered my servant, McDonough?—eh—perhaps I am mistaken—perhaps they are innocent lambs—eh?" "I trust, my lord," answered the priest, mildly, "it is not so bad as murder. The man has been certainly wounded in a casual affray. But when he was borne into my house a minute ago, his consciousness returned, and I have reason to believe he is now in a fair way of recovery."

"Ha! ha!" laughed his lordship, (an iron laugh that made you shudder), "he is not injured at all, I suppose? Eh?"

"He is grievously injured, but certainly not killed," replied the priest.

"Sir, I am an honest Protestant, and not a Jesuitical quibbler," roared his lordship. "He is dead or dying—killed, brained, or knocked lifeless! What is the difference? I'd be glad to know? Did they not intend to kill him? Is the conduct of the villains less savage, dastardly, and ferocious? Have they not despised my authority, Mr. O'Byrne? But I am in the commission of the peace," he shouted, "and the moment my magisterial colleague, the Rev. Mr. Bruce, arrives, I shall myself go down to investigate this brutal affair. Then you'll see what you'll see."

His lordship dashed his stick against the ground from time to time, while pronouncing these harsh words, and elicited a sound which blended with the roar of his own voice, made no slight impression on the hearts and the hearing of his pale auditors.

"My object, my lord, in waiting on your lordship," said the priest, "is not to defend the culpable, but to hinder the innocent from sharing their punishment. Let me implore your lordship not to drive them to despair, which, like famine, is a dangerous counsellor."

"If you hope to frighten me, Mr. O'Byrne," replied his lordship, changing countenance, for he was really afraid, "you are destined to bitter disappointment. The sordid rabble who burrow in your squalid hovels will never deter me from doing my duty—alike as a loyal subject and a peer of the realm. They would willingly dip their hands in my blood if they could summon the courage that murder requires. But I know them and know too the good fruits which the Romish religion bears in this country."

"I have not come, my lord, to discuss religious questions with your lordship," answered Father O'Byrne, with dignity; "I bow to your anger when you denounce your guilty tenantry, but refuse to listen when you inveigh against my faith. Come away, sister."

"Nay, nay," exclaimed Sir George, "old

friends must not quarrel about such paltry squabbles. What is it all about? A rascal in very good livery has been trounced by rascals who are much worse dressed. Why, it is very natural. Besides McDonough is very skilful (to give him his due) in curing wounded hounds, and has now a deuced good opportunity of exercising his skill by curing himself. As to those riotous bog-trotters allow me to dispose of them. I'll settle their hash! I'll put one half into the prison for the assault, and the other to the road for non-payment of rent. We must not trouble ourselves about the vermin—nor above all distress the beautiful Miss O'Byrne by our shindy who stands here trembling like a bird!"

"Ha! Miss O'Byrne!" exclaimed his lordship, with an unnatural smile curling his lips, and an air of surprise elevating his eyebrows, as if he had only that moment seen her. "Forgive me if I have not accorded you all the attention which you unquestionably merit: ha! ha!"—laughed the old fox, sneaking the bitterness of his heart with a soothing sweetness of tone—entirely at variance with his language. "His reverence modestly doubted the influence of his eloquence, and wisely reinforced the magic of his tongue with the bright eyes of his sister.—Very good! very good. But Miss O'Byrne considers me as too old and callous, ha! ha! too old and callous, ha! ha! She attacks my kinsman who is young and inflammable, ha! ha! 'Tis a wise selection which argues a great deal of experience."

Miss O'Byrne had looked imploringly at Sir George, hence those last words, which being atrociously insulting, were of course accompanied with his lordship's very sweetest smile. The common custom of wrapping the sourest gall of sarcasm in mellow tones of honey, is, perhaps, the strongest proof of thorough scoundrelism. The poor girl felt the poison of the gaily feathered arrow rankling in her susceptible heart. Her fine eyes swam in tears—she filled up and seemed about to cry.

But as he was, Sir George deemed this too brutal—not indeed that his sympathies were tender—but he was a younger man.

"Oh! my lord, this is not gallant, Miss O'Byrne is blushing for your lordship's violence," said Sir George, in an expostulatory tone. "If a victim be positively necessary, pray spare the lady, and direct your just indignation against your humble servant, myself."

The crusty old lord looked for some moments from Sir George to Julia, and from Julia to Sir George. "Very good—very good," he cried elevating his voice on the adverb, with a great air of latent meaning. Then as if remembering himself, he added, "Will my charming neighbor pardon me! I acknowledge myself inexcusable!" "But we are losing valuable time," said Sir George, let us depart; perhaps Mr. O'Byrne and his sister will favor us with their presence—they will see that we can be just."

"Since your lordship permits it we shall be happy to accompany you," said Father O'Byrne—seeing there was a lull in the storm:—"in the confidence that your lordship will show mercy as well as justice to those misguided and miserable people."

His lordship shook his head, and was proceeding to his carriage, drawn up at the door, when suddenly a lady mounted on a magnificent steed came sweeping up to the lawn—her long blue habit floating on the air as she moved. When she had swept up to the door, she managed to slide down without assistance, and with the extremity of her habit in one hand, and her whip in the other, and her cheeks glowing with health, she advanced towards the visitors.

The admiring Sir George, at this display of equitation, could not control his enthusiasm.

"Well done, Nelly! well done!" he exclaimed. "By Jove, I could not handle her better myself. I could not. You're a first-rate horse-woman, by Jove, and no mistake. But who the deuce buckled that martingale?" he cried, in a tone of astonishment, blended with anger—(the accents of admiration were dismissed at once from his voice to make way for those of alarmed reproof)—"I'll lay my life it was Tom Stafford. Never suffer that blunderer to touch your mare, Lady Ellen. Had Queen Mab got angry she might have broken your neck. And by Jove, she had every reason to be irritated with such a martingale as that. Poor Mab!" he continued, rubbing down the mare, and quite forgetting the lady in his congenial admiration of the quadruped.

"The affair had been better done had you been in the stable," said the lady, "for you are unquestionably the best groom in Ireland. But owing to your absence I was obliged to be content with Stafford. *Bonjour mon pere.* Oh! Mr. O'Byrne and my dear Julia—*bonjour*—how do you do?"

Lady Ellen was apparently twenty years of age. In brilliancy of complexion and fairness of skin, she was perfectly English; but her finely arched eyebrows, dark hair, and brown eyes,