



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 1864.

No. 23.

THE "HIBERNIAN" NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS.

THE CAPTIVE OF KILLESKIN.

(Continued.)

The Irish forces had been defeated in Kildare and driven into the heart of Catherlogh. O'Nolan had made a stand in the castle commanding Leighlin Bridge, where he every day expected to be besieged by the Earl of March, at the head of his victorious army; while Mac-Murrough, falling back on the Leinster mountains, was only protected by the swamps and forests between Raduff and Clonegall. In the midst of her distress the lady Una was sought by a brother from the priory.

'Trouble never comes single, Bantierna,' (lady) said he; 'Lysagh Moyle, the hermit of Tubberbawn, hath been found on his knees, in the oratory, stone dead, and here is none to interpret the letter which O'Nolan hath sent to this youth. We know not what to do, as the commands of the chief are, to communicate his message without delay, unless thou, lady, will act as thy noble father's interpreter. We have tried the Saxon both with Latin and Hebrew, but he understands these no more than our own Gaelic. Shall I bring him before thee, Bantierna?'

Una's color came and went as she consented; but as her agitation might have arisen from her father's danger, or from the death of an aged adherent, no one attributed it to the expected interview with Fitz Thomas. He was introduced. The abbess and the brother of the order were present. The confusion of Fitz Thomas and O'Nolan's daughter was extreme.

'Noble Sir,' said Una, when he was seated, but without raising her eyes from the ground, 'in the absence of any other understanding thy language—for thy aged friend, alas! is no more—I must be the interpreter of a letter addressed to thee by my father. It has pleased God to prosper the arms of thy friends. They are now about to lay siege to the only stronghold remaining to us on the other bank of the Barrow. O'Nolan thus writes you from that castle.' She then read from the Irish of her father's letter the following:—

'O'Nolan, chief of Slieumargie, to the Saxon gentleman captured in the skirmish near Tubberbawn, health. Be it known to thee, valiant Sir, that success has attended the arms of thy countrymen and their allies. Thou wilt rejoice at this; but it is to me a cause of grief. My house of Killeskin lies in the way of an early attack by their conquering forces. I am pent up here, so that I cannot stir out to defend my own hearth or the graves of my people. If thou wouldst do me a service, remain, I pray thee, and moderate the violence of thy great kinsman's soldiers, so that my children's tombs may remain undisturbed. I rejoice to know of thy returning health, which if thou wouldst rather enjoy among thine own people, I require not thy stay. Do as thy will prompts thee in this regard; I shall not the less abide by my first purpose towards thee; therefore, if thou wouldst depart at any time, let these presents be thy warrant. Given from the castle at Leighlin Bridge, this ———, 1398, by me.

Nothing but the reflection, that when she had last addressed Fitz Thomas, it was in words and accents that would make any appeal to his compassion incompatible with the dignity she ought to sustain, could have prevented Una Ni Nolan from giving way to tears as she read this touching letter. As it was, her voice was tremulous with emotion, and her beautiful face alternately crimson red and the color of the lily. Fitz Thomas sat at first uncertain and abashed before the grave severity of the ecclesiastics, and the offended feelings, as he fondly imagined, of the fair interpreter; but when at length he perceived the object of O'Nolan's letter, his diffidence vanished before the conscious sincerity of his good-will, as he leaped to his feet and ardently cried that he would shed the last drop of his blood in the defence of her father's house against whatever adversaries might come against it.

'Nay, noble Sir,' Una replied recovering her self-possession as she found herself in the less difficult position of one deprecating instead of beseeching aid, 'we would not have thee perish either thy life or thy allegiance in our quarrel.—If our own people cannot hold this tower against the Saxon, we but ask thy humane interest with the victor, that the conquest shall be as bloodless as the generosity of thy people shall permit.'

'Lady,' cried Fitz Thomas, 'do not afflict me by a scorn which I no longer deserve. I have no friends—I have no country; suffer me only to be thy friend, and thy country shall be mine. My heart has reproached me ever since I uttered that unworthy, but inconsiderate calumny of thy nation. Thy words have wrung my soul with shame and remorse. I stand here to offer thee the

service of my arm, if thou wilt but receive me as thy servant. Use me—command me; fighting in the cause of justice, in the defence of innocence and beauty, I fear no difficulty—I shrink from no danger! I am no longer but half an Irishman, one look from thee, and I cast away this badge of thy and my oppressors for ever.' So saying, he tore away the red cross embroidered on his surcoat, and kneeling with the enthusiasm of a worshipper, laid the symbol of his sacrificed allegiance at her feet.

'Ever, my brother, thou art not dead!' cried Una, looking up, whilst her eyes streamed with tears no longer suppressed; but the abbess advancing, prevented further acknowledgment of her approbation, by demanding why she saw a man kneeling at the feet of her niece with all the fervor of a lover before his mistress?

'Rise, rise, noble Fitz Thomas,' said Una; 'my kinswoman considers this indecorous. Dear mother,' she continued, turning and addressing the scandalised abbess in her native tongue;—'dear lady, the noble gentleman is but swearing his allegiance to his mother's country; he loves the liberty of Ireland too well to suffer any other object to share his devotion.'

'If the liberties of Ireland reside in forward maidens' eyes be will, doubtless, prove an ardent patriot,' replied the abbess with considerable severity of tone. 'Meantime, inform him that he may retire.'

'Noble Sir,' said Una, blushing deeply, 'we have offended the lady abbess; leave us now;—but go not without the thanks and approbation of—all who love the cause thou hast so generously espoused.'

'Have I, then, thy forgiveness, lady Una?' said Fitz Thomas.

'Yes, yes,' she replied; 'I ought never to have blamed thee; I ought rather to ask forgiveness from thee for my unjust reproaches.'

'Dear lady,' cried the delighted youth, 'for such a moment as this I would barter the best year of my life, and deem myself happy in the exchange.'

'What says he now?' demanded the abbess.

'That he would rather serve us than the English,' replied Una, somewhat confused.

'He uses many words for so simple a phrase,' observed the abbess.

'The Saxon language is less expressive than ours,' replied Una.

'True, true,' assented the propitiated lady;—'the Irish is, indeed, the most perfect, as well as the most ancient language in the world. The dialect of these strangers seems truly a most harsh and incondite jargon. I pray thee, soil not thy lips with further use of it, but let the youth depart.'

Fitz Thomas accordingly retired, but with a step so exulting that one who had seen him enter so short a while before, could hardly have believed him the same man. The Irish he had acquired was put in immediate requisition, and the monk who had so anxiously sought an interpreter for O'Nolan's letter, was amazed to hear the unsuspected progress of the ignorant Saxon. The clansmen were summoned—the defences inspected—and his assumption of the mantle and barrad won the hearts of all whose admiration had already been captivated by the fame of his valor. 'Tha mo Gael,' was his passport to the confidence of young and old. He says he is an Irishman! we will fight for him to the last gasp! 'Gerralt aboo!' he is a kinsman of Desmond; 'he is the image of Sir Ever. Farrah, farah,' gather down to the bawn, one and all, till we repair the barricade and clear the foss and barbican.

Such were the cries with which Fitz Thomas's tumultuous allies thronged about Rory Buy's little band of gaitgloss, the only disciplined body left in Killeskin, and at whose head he had, by general consent, placed himself. Young as he was, he had already served a campaign in the French wars, and he knew enough of military affairs to direct the operations of those employed in fortifying the place, by example at least, if not always by intelligible precept. The enthusiasm of the people was boundless; the ecclesiastics themselves prepared to barricade their sacred buildings. The valuables of the priory were transferred to the round-tower, which, being fire-proof, made the safest treasury.—Every day brought fresh auxiliaries from the country, and at the end of the first week, from the time of his declaring himself an Irishman, Fitz Thomas found himself with Rory Buy, at the head of a sufficient force to hold the castle against any ordinary assault. The effects of his fever were gone; its traces were hardly to be observed. Every day brought an accession of bodily vigor, of influence over the people with whose language he had become hourly more familiar, and of enthusiastic devotion to the fair

† I am a Gael.  
† Gerald for ever.  
† An exclamation, said to be the war-cry of Ireland. See O'Mahony's notes to Keating's Ireland.

being whose smiles animated all his projects and rewarded all his toils. In the hurry of war-like preparation, among the tramp of marching men, the clang of the armorers' hammers, the strokes of the barricaders' axes, and the ceaseless clamor of kerns and horse-boys, there was little time or opportunity to talk of love. Approving glances and kind words of encouragement were not, however, wanting. Even the lady abbess was won to occasional smiles.

Time flew by, and the daily intelligence was, that the Leighlin-bridge was closer and closer invested. Fitz Thomas now meditated throwing succor into the besieged town, and a chosen band was even selected for the contemplated service.

On the evening before their intended march, on his return from collecting supplies for the relief of the besieged garrison our hero found the courtyard of Killeskin a scene of such confusion and lamentation as it had not exhibited since the day of Sir Ever Oge's death. News had arrived of the fall of Leighlin Castle—the garrison had been put to the sword: O'Nolan was reported to be slain. The army of the Earl of March was in Kilkenny, ravaging the west bank of the river, and in full march upon Kavanagh's country by the fords at Graignamanah. No one had yet ventured to communicate the dreadful tidings to their chieftain's child. Far from being infected with the general consternation, Fitz Thomas's spirit rose with his danger. He ordered the clamoring soldiers to their posts, sent out the scouts, placed the guards, and committing the charge of the watch to Rory Buy, entered the great hall of the keep with the air of a man conscious of his own resources, and determined to use them to the utmost. He met Una in the middle of the apartment, hurrying from her chamber to inquire the cause of the unusual tumult.

'Lady,' said he, 'canst thou confide in me?'

'I were ungrateful and senseless not to do so,' she replied; 'but tell me, I beseech thee, what means this alarm?'

'If I have merited thy confidence or regard, come with me,' said Fitz Thomas. He opened a side door and led her out on a secluded spot of the platform. 'Una,' he began, 'success attends the arms of my uncle.'

'Leighlin is fallen, and my father slain!—(thus is what thou wouldst tell me,' she said; 'I know this; my heart told it to me when I heard thy voice.'

She clasped her hands, and pressed them to her bosom, while a cold shudder ran through her whole frame, but no tears came to her relief.

'Una,' again said Fitz Thomas, 'when I tore the English ensign from my breast, it was for love of thee I did it.'

'Oh, if thou dost love me, return to thy allegiance,' she cried; 'enough lost already—father, brother, all gone! oh, add not thou also thy life to the sacrifice!—for me; there is nothing left for me but to die! Mother, dearest mother, I shall soon again rest on thy bosom where sorrow shall reach me never more.—Open your arms, Grace Bawn, and little Nora, your sister will not be long away from you! Oh, my friend, how bitterly I now reproach myself for existing thee in this disastrous cause. Yet it is not too late; fly, save thyself, shun us—there is death in our alliance. Oh save thyself, and leave me to my fate, for now that all are gone before me, I would rather die than live.'

'And canst thou believe that I ever loved thee, Una, when thou wouldst have me desert thee in this extremity?' cried Fitz Thomas.

'Love me not, love me not,' she exclaimed, 'all who ever loved me are dead and gone, father, mother, brother—not one left—and I—alas, I would not survive thee also.'

'Then tell me not to leave thee, Una,' cried Fitz Thomas, 'for without thee I care not how soon I quit a world that would then be to me a desert. Thou hast neither father nor brother; but I will cherish and protect thee while life lasts. I take the heaven above me to witness that I will be constant to thee and to thy father's people, come what may. Nay, dearest, thou didst but try my constancy. Oh, then, reward the truth thou proved—let father Raymond join our hands to-night, and then, bring the morrow what it may, we shall live or die together.'

Una shrunk with natural horror from such a proposal on the first day of her mourning for a parent; but ere Fitz Thomas left her side she had pledged him her troth, and the triumphant lover returned to his warlike labors with a light heart and cheerful countenance. Una was now his own. They might be forced to fly from Killeskin, but the life of a hunter in the woods of O'faly seemed sweeter with her for a companion, than that of a baron of England in his castle with another. Una's situation could not be made worse by marrying him; it might be bettered. He could not sleep for thoughts of his

approaching happiness; or, if a light slumber did weigh down his eyelids for a moment, it was but to exhibit visions of delight and beauty.

He started from a dream of bliss, and seized his sword. There was a knocking at the gates. Except the sentinels, he was the first upon the spot. It was a letter—for the Saxon gentleman,—borne by a panting and spent kern. By the light of a torch Fitz Thomas tore open the paper, and recognised the writing of the Earl of March, his hated guardian, and now his enemy. The letter ran thus—

'Dear Kinsman—By a strange chance it hath been made known to me that thou art still alive; whereat I rejoice heartily. Among the rebels captured by the King's Majesty's troops, at the pass of Leighlin-bridge, is the arch-traitor O'Nolan. It was observed of him that he rode that grey charger I had bestowed on thee the morning of the passage of arms, wherein thou wert lost sight of. Being questioned touching the same, he maketh answer that thou art in the hands of his kern at Killeskin. Moved with an earnest desire to release thee out of the hands of these savage people, I have consented to delay the execution of the aforesaid traitor until Friday at noon, when, if his rebellious adherents shall not have delivered thee up to my lieutenant Sir John De Ryddel, at the church of Ullard, (where the said traitor lies ready to be exchanged on thy behalf,) he shall hang from their belfry as a warning to all presumptuous scorners of the Royal Majesty. Herein I send thee a letter of safe-conduct for those who may accompany thee; but I will not permit a greater number than ten to pass my out-posts under that warrant. God speed thee shortly, dear kinsman to thy loving friends. I commend me heartily to thee, and so bid thee for a short while, I trust, adieu.'

MARCH AND ULSTER.

'Given from our camp, at the abbey of Graig-managh, this evening of Wednesday, ——— 1398. Postscriptum. I have signed the beads of the pestilent Cistercian friars, who sheltered the traitor Mac Marragh last spring.'

Those who stood near Fitz Thomas as he read, might have observed, in his fitting color and flashing eye, the signs of those contending emotions, which may well be supposed to have agitated his breast; but they were busied in hearing from the messenger, who was one of the prisoners taken at Graig, and spared in order to convey the letter, such vague rumours as he had collected on his way, of the defeat of their friends at Leighlin; among which, however, he had heard nothing of the escape or capture of O'Nolan.

It was already the grey dawn of Friday.—Not a moment was to be lost. Fitz Thomas took his resolution with the promptitude he had exhibited throughout. There was nothing in the Earl's letter to lead him to suppose that his voluntary desertion was yet known in the English camp. In that case thousand opportunities of escape would offer themselves; he might be back in Killeskin almost as soon as his released benefactor. To summon Rory Buy, to announce to the astonished and delighted clansman that his chieftain lived, and how he purposed to redeem him, to inscribe his letter with the words, 'I go—but to return,' and leave it to be delivered to the lady Una, after sunrise, was the work of but a few minutes; and, long before the indistinct dawn had changed its grey haze for the streaks of the true day-break, Fitz Thomas and Rory Buy were riding at the head of eight chosen gaitgloss, through the steep defiles and close passes of Cloghreenan.—The delight of the clansmen knew no bounds.—They already beheld their chief returning to lead them to his old accustomed victories. They swore eternal gratitude to Fitz Thomas, and made the woods ring with songs and shouts of exultation.

The road they took to avoid the English out-posts was circuitous, and it was not till the day was fast verging on the meridian, that they, at length, beheld the grey gables of Ullard between them and the forests of Idrome. The sky had changed, and a continued storm of wind and rain had added to the toil of their journey. The sun could no longer be distinguished, but many an anxious glance was turned towards the dull light that still marked his position among the driving rack, as they spurred up to the English out posts. Rory Buy, with his letter of safe conduct, rode forward—the token was acknowledged—the bearer returned, and the captive chieftain was brought forth. Sir John De Ryddel himself, armed cap-a-pie, led him forward and demanded the body of the king's liege, Sir Robert Fitz Thomas. Fitz Thomas wrung the hand of Rory, as he separated from his little band, and met the knight halfway. De Ryddel extended one hand to grasp that of his recovered companion in arms, severed with the other the cords that bound the wrists of O'Nolan, and the liberated chief sprang forward to his men with a wild cry of joy that was lost in such a shout of con-

gratulation, as made the echoes ring from the church walls to the wooded banks of the Barrow. Fitz Thomas would have embraced his preserver—soon, he hoped, to be doubly dear to him in a still more tender relationship—but the welcomes of his clansmen so covered the chief with caresses, that he could not even see the adieu which his young friend waited to him, as he went. When the first burst of their joy was over, the Irish drew up, for a moment, on the skirt of the wood. O'Nolan seized a dart from one of his attendants, shook it aloft with a gesture of defiance, and then the whole party broke asunder, and, plunged into the thickets, disappeared.

'Thou takest thy liberation in but sorry part, Sir Robert,' said De Ryddel; 'methinks, unless thy looks belie thee, thou wouldst rather be riding with yonder kern than with me. Sir Robert thou art my prisoner!'

Fitz Thomas struck his horse with his spurs, and laid his hand upon his sword; but his reins were seized on either side, and De Ryddel himself, grasping his arm at the wrist, prevented him from drawing his weapon.

'Yield thee, Sir Robert!' he cried sternly. 'I arrest by the commands of the Earl, thy uncle. He has heard of thy degeneracy—thy very dress proves all that his informant reported; and, unless thy wouldst be tried for rebellion against the king, I would have thee submit to whatever he may think most meet for thee.'

'Never! never!' cried Fitz Thomas; the whole misery of his situation rushing on his heart with insupportable anguish, and he madly strove to shake himself free of the guards, who now, in spite of his most frantic exertions, disarmed and bound him.

'Sir Robert,' said De Ryddel, 'I have not done this without sorrow. I pray thee to have patience, and urge not my men to reluctant severity. Marmaduke Cuthbert, take thou this knight, thy prisoner, to abbey at Graig. Canst thou in the upper apartment of the great tower, and place two guards upon his person.—If the knight consent to forego violence give him the freedom of his limbs and honorable attendance, till the return of the Earl out of Kavanagh's country. Immediately on his arrival bring the prisoner before him. Sir Robert, I bid you adieu.' So saying the knight left the unhappy youth in the hands of his keepers, who proceeded without delay into execute what they had been commanded.

Fitz Thomas again found himself riding through the woods, but, alas, with prospects and feelings how wonderfully different! The treachery of the Earl stung him to the soul; the thought of Una was utter distraction—he could have dashed out his brains against the stones!—He no longer marked the scenes around him with an eager and observant eye. He was conscious, but no more, of a broad river flowing in the valley—he knew not whence, and cared not whither, and of ruins smoking over his head, as he was borne through the courts of a great building, and lodged at the top of a tower that that seemed to have escaped a fire. His guards undid his bonds but he sat motionless and gazing on vacancy. He would not eat. The day passed on, and there was the wretched gentleman with his head reclining upon his arms, leaning over the solitary oaken table as motionless as a stone.

To any but one overcome with such excessive grief, the scene, visible from the window before which he sat, would have been well worth his journey to have looked on. The storm had abated. The clouds were clearing off before a western breeze. The sun now hanging on the steep verge of the horizon, shed a red flood of light upon mountain, wood, and river. Under the eye, the Barrow, fordable at that spot, still flowed undiscolorated, save where its more rapidly swollen tributaries were already streaking its clear expanse with their muddy and turbulent waters; but these angry uruads gave fearful presage of what might be expected, when the great river itself should have gathered its slower but more certain increase from the plains of Carlow and Kildare. On the opposite bank, a brown wilderness of oak forests stretched away to the bases of the hills, that rise about the grey steep of Stack Dhu, the star of Leinster. That gaunt wall of stone closed up the eastern prospect, under a curtain of half-drawn thunder clouds, heavy and eminent. Far as the eye could reach, every object had caught an ominous tinge, reflected from the deep canopy that still overhung the landscape, broken only in that rent through which the sunset so fearfully illuminated its lurid concave. Suddenly, Fitz Thomas raised his head and listened; then dashed away the moisture from his eyes, and starting up took his stand at the open window. His ear had caught the familiar sound of war shouts and battle-mumal, faint, it is true, and indistinct, but not to be mistaken. The noise came from the opposite forests. He bent his eye eagerly on the