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TURLOGH O'BRIEN.

THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER.

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE PRIVY COUNCIL. Sir Hugh had not very long to wait in the ante-chamber; many groups were there assembled, some with memorials, and other matters to be officially submitted; others, and the greater number, lounging there, in the hope of having a few minutes' conference with one or other of the privy council, as they withdrew; intent on urging some private suit, for place or pension, and most of them engaged in animated conversation—some of it conducted in genuine Irish, then almost universally understood and spoken by the country gentlemen—and all, it is scarcely necessary to add, of a very decidedly one-sided character, as respected the momentous politics of the day. Sir Hugh silently, and ill at ease, awaited in suspense the summons which was to call him into the presence of King James. At last, a door in the far end of the chamber opened, and a clerk looked in and drew back again—then the same door was reopened, and the same official entered, and twice called Sir Hugh Willoughby by name. Through the now silent and staring crowd the old knight passed; the guard who accompanied him and Tisdal were stopped at the door, and he passed alone into the council chamber.

It was a spacious wainscotted chamber, lighted not very cheerfully by three narrow windows, cased in deep recesses in the sidewall, and overlooking the interior quadrangle of the castle. At a long table sat some dozen of the right honorable the privy council of those days, in rich suits, velvets, and laced cloths; and presenting (even were its effect unaided by the consciousness that the whole power, dignity and enterprise of the loyalist cause were there assembled) a coup d'œil, whose very richness, splendor and solemnity, would have made it impressive.

At the head of the table he had no difficulty in recognizing at a single glance King James himself, dressed as on the day of his entrance into Dublin, with a plainness which contrasted strikingly enough with the almost gorgeous attire of those around him. Pens, ink, and some papers lay before him; and at the moment the old knight entered the king was addressing a dark-featured, intelligent gentleman with animated eyes, gravely but richly dressed in a suit of velvet, who sat close to him. This personage was the Count D'Avaux, the ambassador, and not now for the first time, of the grand monarch. The remark had been a gracious one, and obviously intended, at least, for a pleasantry; for a formal smile was upon the face of his majesty as he concluded; and the Count D'Avaux shrugged and laughed, in which latter loyal tribute the rest of the council dutifully joined.

As the king's eye rested upon Sir Hugh, the passing smile vanished, and his rigid and heavy features recovered in an instant their usual haughty and saturnine expression. With a formal and lofty carriage, and a bold, and it must be added, a somewhat ungracious stare, the king, for some seconds, looked full upon the old knight.

'Whom have we here, Tyrconnel?' inquired James, gravely, turning to the Irish favorite, without a change in a single feature of his rigid face.

'Sir Hugh Willoughby, my liege,' answered Tyrconnel, bowing towards the king, and speaking in a low tone—'your majesty will remember—'

'Willoughby!—I remember,' said James—whose accurate memory and pains-taking habits made him at all events a good man of business—'I remember—Willoughby—let me see—I have a note of this matter by me—so, we have it—and as he thus spoke, the king turned over the leaves of a gilt red leather note-book—a prisoner under a warrant of high treason—a gentleman of Limerick, in Munster.'

'The same, my liege,' answered Tyrconnel. 'You are Sir Hugh Willoughby,' continued the king, turning again towards the prisoner, with the same fixed and somewhat forbidden aspect.

'I am, may it please your majesty, but no traitor,' replied Sir Hugh, firmly and respectfully.

'Your house of Glindarragh,' continued the king, coldly, again referring to his notes and perusing his interrogatories, for he delighted in conducting an examination in person, and sometimes indulged his taste to an extent scarcely reconcilable with the dignity of his royal station—'your house of Glindarragh is situated in the southern district of this our kingdom of Ireland, in the county, I think, of Limerick.'

'Even so, my liege,' replied the knight. 'We desire, then, to know,' continued the king, 'from your own experience, which must needs be considerable, how you believe our Protestant subjects to be affected towards our rights and person? Speak out, sir, he continued sternly, 'you will find more safety in plain dealing than in equivocation, when you come thus face to face

with the king; how do they stand affected, sir—it's a plain question?'

'May it please your majesty, they are one and all peaceably disposed,' replied Sir Hugh, after a moment's hesitation, for the peremptory tone of the king had a little disconcerted him.

'Scarcely peaceably, methinks,' rejoined the king, assuredly, 'if what is in evidence against yourself, and some three score others of your friends, be no perjury.'

Tyrconnel smiled contemptuously on old Sir Hugh, as James uttered this ominous sarcasm.

'If there be any matter sworn against me, my liege,' answered Sir Hugh, spiritedly, 'save that where your majesty's government had not the power to protect my life and interests, I feared not to defend them for myself—that evidence of which your majesty has spoken—is perjury, and nothing better.'

James could ill brook, except when it came from a favorite, even the semblance of contradiction, though he had not unfrequently provoked it; and the fearless speech of the old knight savored much too strongly of whiggish independence, not to offend an intolerance of opposition so sensitive and exacting as that of the last king of the Stuarts. A glow of irritation flushed his massive features. He sat more erect as he eyed the unceremonious prisoner with a look of extreme displeasure, and with a slight and haughty gesture adjusted the folds of his laced cravat, and the sable curls of his peruke; it manifestly required an effort of the royal dignity to swallow down the angry and peremptory rebuke which had risen to his lips; he did, however, suppress the unseemly ebullition, and after a brief pause he observed:—

'You are blunt, Sir Knight—somewhat blunt, methinks; but we except not against your plain speaking, provided you but deal as plainly in your answers as you have done in your commentary. I desire to know how far we may calculate upon the loyalty and duty of our Protestant subjects in Munster. Take the question thus—were our service to need their active assistance, do you think the Protestant gentlemen of your acquaintance would accept commissions in our army or militia?'

'For myself, my liege,' replied Sir Hugh, 'I have not been bred a soldier; and my years, moreover, unfit me for a soldier's life; had I a choice, therefore, I frankly avow I should decline a commission in either service; and as regards the gentlemen of my acquaintance, I have never spoken to them of such a matter, and cannot, therefore, presume to say how they might act in such a case.'

'Bravo, old gentleman! Well said, and guardedly,' muttered one of those who sat by, as with one hand buried to the wrist in the folds of his laced vest, and the other grasping as firmly as he might have done his holster pistol, the elbow of the great chair in which he sat—he looked with a keen bold countenance, on which flitted the faintest smile of admiration, towards the stout old prisoner. This was one among the last made, and will prove, perhaps, one of the last forgotten of King James's privy councillors—Colonel Sarsfield—not yet Lord Lucan.

'You see how it is,' said James, addressing the French ambassador in the language of that court, which was, at least, as easy to him as his own; 'heresy and disaffection go hand in hand; by my royal faith,' he added with vivacity, 'I have not a Protestant subject on whom I dare rely.'

The king paused, and the Frenchmen observed with a calm smile—'my royal master of France makes light of such difficulties.'

'My good friend,' said James peevishly, 'your master is a king; as for me, *par ma foi!* my subjects have taken to ruling me so effectually, that I am but too much obliged to them if they let me say my prayers my own way.'

'I would suggest,' began the court in reply.

'Count D'Avaux,' interposed Tyrconnel, with a jealousy which he could not suppress, but at the same time with a haughty affectation of deference, 'as one of her majesty's privy council, and with his royal permission, to remind you that you are here on sufferance, and not as an adviser.'

'By your leave, my Lord Tyrconnel,' rejoined the ambassador, with provoking coolness, 'I represent here the majesty of France—the power which has supplied your empty magazines, filled your garrisons, replenished your treasury, and under the safeguard of the *flour-de-lis*, from the deck of a French navy, and amidst the battalions of a French army, landed your royal master (and he laid a galling emphasis on the word) upon the shores of Ireland; I have the exalted honor to represent King Louis—the monarchy of France—in this assembly; and I have yet to learn that France appears in your Irish councils on sufferance.'

Your Excellency seems to have forgotten,' exclaimed Sarsfield, sarcastically, for he shared in the national and personal jealousy with which the obvious prevalence of French councils in the cabinet-interview had inspired the Irish adhe-

rents of the royal cause, 'that the flower of our Irish army is serving your master in France;—and for the supplies he is pleased to send—what are they but a loan, and a prudent one to boot? Pahaw! Count D'Avaux,' he continued more gruffly, 'we all know, as well as you do, that France serves her own ends in throwing men and money into this country. It is childish—all this rhetoric—vapor, fustian!'

'Colonel Sarsfield, you have said enough,' exclaimed D'Avaux, calmly, but with a heightened color, and at the same time preparing to rise;—'such language, scarce seemly from one gentleman to another, when offered to the Majesty of France—'

'Count D'Avaux, my good friend, for my sake,' cried James, excitedly, laying his hand upon the ambassador's arm—'Colonel Sarsfield, we have had enough, and over much of these vain altercations; let them be ended. My Lord Tyrconnel, I look to you to keep our hot Irish blood from boiling over. This is, besides,' he added more severely, and glancing at Sir Hugh, whose presence had been forgotten for the moment, 'scarce prudent, or politic, or seemly. My lords and gentlemen of the privy council, our time is scarce enough for business; it shall not be wasted in distractions. Nay, D'Avaux, I entreat—Colonel Sarsfield I command,' he continued, raising his voice as the two personages indicated, successively attempted to speak, 'Messieurs, there must be an end of this; while I preside here I will be obeyed. *Ma foi!* gentlemen, am I king here, or not? Tyrconnel, Riverston, second our endeavors, I pray you, in this matter.'

'Your majesty's command is enough for me,' said Sarsfield, with an angry glance at D'Avaux, followed, however, by a profound and graceful inclination to the king, whose extreme distress had, perhaps, wrought upon him more effectually even than his manifest displeasure.

'We are so persuaded, Colonel Sarsfield,' said James, quickly; and then he added, with a sigh, which seemed to rise from the very depths of his heart, and with a slight knitting of the brows, as if in pain, 'God knows—God knows we are troubled and perplexed over much already by the outrages and wiles of open and secret enemies; let us be at peace with one another. We are friends; I beseech you, as friends, be at peace with one another.'

The king spoke in such a tone of extreme distress and earnest entreaty, that an embarrassed silence of some seconds followed—a pause of which it were hard to say whether it partook most of the solemn or the ridiculous. Tyrconnel, however, interrupted this awkward silence.

'May it please your majesty to permit me to put a few questions to Sir Hugh Willoughby,' he asked, 'before his attendance is dispensed with.'

'Surely, surely; but be brief; we have wasted time enough, and over much, already,' rejoined the king, a little peevishly; and taking a pen, he began to jot down some notes with a careful hand in a small blank book, in which were entered the materials of those journals which he kept with such persevering amplitude and punctuality.

'It may be, my Lord Chief Justice Riverston,' said Tyrconnel, as if suddenly recollecting a circumstance which had escaped him, and with a gracious smile—'it may be that you had best, with his majesty's permission, withdraw for a few moments from the council; as you shall try this case hereafter, it were but fair play in us to guard the prisoner against prejudicing himself by too much freedom in your presence.'

'Do not withdraw on my account, my lord,' said Sir Hugh, sternly and quickly; 'I will take sufficient care not to prejudice myself. I thank you for your merciful anxiety, my Lord Tyrconnel; but it is altogether causeless.'

Tyrconnel was evidently not prepared for this, for a faint cloud of displeasure and disappointment darkened the haughty face of the practised dissembler.

'Be it as you will, then,' he said; 'only be cautious—say no more than is simply necessary.'

Sir Hugh turned impatiently away, and Tyrconnel continued: 'We have heard something against the character and credibility of this Mr. Hogan, your chief accuser. You represent his visit to your house to have been a mere pretence to gain an entrance for lawless violence. I have heard a matter which would give a coloring to this. It has been suggested to me that he presented you with a forged warrant of search, on the night of the affray. Did you read the name signed at the foot of it?'

'I care not to answer that question, my lord,' said Sir Hugh, calmly but decisively.

'You are asked,' said the king, laying down his pen, and looking upon the contemptuous prisoner with an expression of imperious surprise—'you are asked whether you read the signature at the foot of the warrant. The Earl of Tyrconnel awaits your answer.'

'May it please your majesty,' said Sir Hugh, respectfully, but perfectly firmly, 'I have already declined to answer my Lord Tyrconnel's

question.'

'You will answer the king, then,' said James, peremptorily; 'we now ask you that question, and expect an answer.'

'My liege,' said Sir Hugh, 'the question touches matters affecting my life. For this reason, it was, my liege, I refused to answer it.'

'*Ma foi!* dost thou refuse to answer me?' said the king, coloring, and with more impatience than dignity, at the same time striking his notebook upon the table.

'If your majesty commands me to answer,' said Sir Hugh.

'I asked you the question, and I expect an answer,' reiterated the king.

'I will obey your royal command, should your majesty impose it on me,' replied the old knight; 'but while your royal permission leaves me free to claim the constitutional privilege of every man under a capital accusation, I will do so; and, with submission to your majesty, I must continue to decline to answer that question.'

'My liege,' urged Tyrconnel, in an undertone, 'will you not command him to answer?'

The king hesitated; spoke a little in a low tone to D'Avaux; and only the last words he said were audible as he leaned back:—

'He is right—ay, quite right—'tis not worth pressing. Sir Hugh Willoughby,' he added aloud, addressing the old knight in a tone of high displeasure, 'as our wish hath not prevailed with you in this matter, we shall not add our command. By my troth, sir knight, there have been kings of England who would have dealt sharply with such contumacy; but let that pass—I had rather err on the side of clemency than exercise severity, however just. We have come into this our kingdom of Ireland,' he continued, with dignity, as he glanced round the members of the council, 'not to pursue and to punish, but rather to reconcile, to restore and to forgive. He who reads the hearts of kings, and under whom kings reign, and to whom alone must even kings render an account—the great God knows how gladly we would make all our subjects, even those who have wronged us deepest, happy and secure—how gladly we would assure them that we are ever more ready to grant forgiveness than they to ask it; and that, save for the necessity of warning and example, the halber and the axe might be unused for us till doomsday.'

'My liege,' said Tyrconnel, with a sullen displeasure which he was at no pains to conceal, 'the prisoner does not choose to answer the questions which I put to him; and as your majesty tolerates his recusancy, I shall press him with no further examination—I've done with him.'

'Then, God's name, let him begone, and let us to other matters,' said James, hastily; and then he added, more austere, 'you may depart Sir Hugh Willoughby, the council have no further need of your attendance.'

Much relieved at the unexpected ease of his escape from a scene which he had anticipated with so much anxiety and alarm, Sir Hugh bowed low to his majesty, and, withdrawing under charge of the same official who had conducted him into the chamber, was once more committed to the keeping of the guard who waited in the outer room.

'That old gentleman,' said Galmoy, as his sleepy eye followed Sir Hugh from the chamber, and continuing to lean indolently back in his chair; 'that old gentleman presumes strangely upon your royal clemency; there is treason in every circumstance of his case, and rebel in every word he uttered; yet he looks your majesty in the face, as confidently as if he had raised a regiment in your service. I could scarcely forbear laughing at his impudence.'

'Yet, 'tis no laughing matter, Earl of Galmoy,' said James, somewhat curtly; 'this old knight is but a sample—and we fear, too, just a one—of the general temper of our Protestant subjects. They are schooled in rebellion—one and all, with but a few most honorable exceptions; I never trusted them.'

'The history of these kingdoms, and of your royal house,' said Tyrconnel, sternly, 'affords memorable and bloody proofs of the wisdom of your majesty's distrust.'

'True,' said James, calmly; for though he always spoke of his unhappy father with decent respect, he felt no delicacy, and exacted none from others, in alluding to his fate; 'but though the bulk of them always repudiated the extremity of that sacrilegious murder; yet, in general and in all other matters, then concurred with the murderer. I remember well, when the late king, my beloved brother, and I were in France, we had often occasion to go into companies without letting ourselves be known; and there we used to hear the Protestants— invariably and without exception—speak in praise of Cromwell; a circumstance which easily impressed us both with the conviction that they were, in the mass, not to be trusted; that they were rebels in their hearts.'

'And truly can I aver,' said Tyrconnel, 'as

far as my poor experience goes in the affairs of this kingdom, that whenever and wherever the difficulties of your majesty's service were the greatest, that I have found them rebels in fact no less than in disposition.'

'The whole Island ought to be governed under martial law; it needs purging and bleeding, to a purpose,' said Lord Galmoy, with a faint sneer; 'by—, if your majesty were to give them drumhead law, with an occasional taste of the thumbscrews and the strappado, where the truth was had to come at, it would make men stare to see the order things would fall into before a month.'

'Nay, nay—'tis better as it is,' replied the king; 'as soon as we have quelled this untoward revolt in the north, we shall take order so to dispose our troops that insurrection for the future shall be all but physically impossible; and meanwhile, we have loyal juries and able judges (and the king glanced graciously at the chief justice, who bowed low in return); and thus furnished, we fear not lest the guilty should escape. But enough of this; let us look to the proclamation touching this new coinage; methinks, Duke of Tyrconnel, you have got a rough draft of it by you.'

So, with the reader's leave, we shall turn to other matters.

CHAPTER XXIV.—THE COUNTESS'S BOWER.

Hot and excited, Sir Hugh, accompanied by Jeremiah Tisdal, and attended by the guard, made their exit from the council chamber, and retracing their way through the chambers and passages still occupied by loitering groups—they descended the ill-lighted staircase, and found themselves once more in the open yard. Tisdal glanced fearfully, as he passed, at the sentinel who kept watch by the door, and to his inexpressible relief perceived that the guard had since been changed.

We mentioned before that the old building which bore the name of the Carbie had been subdivided into three houses—the centre one being a well-frequented inn—that upon one side a lodging-house, in which, as we have seen, Sir Hugh's apartments were situated, and that upon the other, a sort of dingy, ambitious ambiguous-looking tavern, which seemed to be sinking rapidly into utter decay, and carried in its dreary and dilapidated aspect, a certain air of gloom and indescribable suspicion. Its desolation was not that of honest poverty, but the wreck and squalor of vice and secret villainy; its darkness and solitude were like the shrinking, sinister seclusion of conscious guilt. There was in the sluggish undulations of its close atmosphere—in the echo of its deserted passages—in the very creak of its half-rotten stairs and rat-eaten floor, something which seemed to mutter and moan of warning and of peril—there was a certain influence which whispered danger in the ear of him who ventured alone to trust himself among its desolate chambers and equivocal company; the street door gave admission to an ill-lighted and uninviting shop, rather than tavern-room; for a counter traversed it, on which were huddled some measures for liquor, and several glasses, amid the slop of stale libations, the ashes of tobacco, and several dirty stumps of candle; a few barrels, and some dozens of wine flasks in the background, supported the convivial pretensions of this insuspicious-looking place; the wainscoting was broken, and full of rat-holes, and the furniture both meagre and crazy;—the whole air of the place, combining the character of darkness, discomfort, and debauchery, might best be conveyed in the one emphatic term—'cut-throat.'

A tall female of some five-and-fifty years—skinny and large boned—arrayed in tawdry finery, was standing behind the counter, her shoulders leaning against the wall, and her arms folded;—her hard, bony face was flushed, and the grin of pugnacity and defiance which distended her wide mouth, exhibited many a woful gap in her discolored teeth; she was redolent of brandy, and seemed in a state of considerable excitement, as she glanced from time to time, with her spiteful grey eyes upon her companion—while all the time an almost imperceptible wagging of the head betrayed the malignant resolution with which she maintained her part in the domestic debate with which the dusky chamber was now resounding.

On the counter, with his back towards the entrance, sat the other occupant of the room—a short, square-shouldered, bloated fellow, perhaps some fifteen or twenty years the lady's junior—with a talowy, sensual face, and a villainous eye. He was entertaining himself, as the discussion proceeded by deepening with his penknife a nick in the counter.

'It isn't now—nor once—but always you're at it,' said the gentleman, knocking the haft of the knife on the table by way of emphasis; 'I tell you, you've made away with five pounds of it, I know it, and I'll know how—I will.'

He added an epithet and an oath which we need not perpetuate.

'Ha! ha!' laughed the lady, malignantly,