

THE WILD ROSE

OF LOUGH GILL. A TALE OF THE IRISH WAR IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

"So, gentlemen, to your stations," added MacDonogh, and the group dispersed. Specially there was a blowing of horns, a beating of drums and a rustling of ranks. The insurgent soldiers formed their ranks and went through their manoeuvres with a good show of discipline. In a short time they were moving in long columns of march on the road to Manor Hamilton. After marching for some time they were joined by another division of their army, which had marched from Drogheda, and which was led by an officer who now assumed command of the entire force.

This was Colonel Luke or Lucas Taaffe, one of the remarkable Irish leaders of the day, but one who was destined to leave behind him a very poor reputation as a commander. He was the son of John, Viscount Taaffe of Coranah, the son of a military adventurer who had espoused the cause of Elizabeth against the Irish, obtaining in reward for his services a grant of the strong castle of Ballymote, and of the forfeited lands of the Mac Donoughs. Time rolled on, however, and brought those Taaffes of Ballymote—of whose lordly line the present illustrious Prime Minister of Austria is now the representative—heart and soul into the Irish cause, so that now both Lord Taaffe and his son Lucas were in the front ranks of the Confederates—the prestige of both was very low. The readers of Irish history will remember that the command of the Munster army was scarcely entrusted to Lord Taaffe when this incapable commander was defeated with great slaughter by the ruthless Inchiquin on the fatal field of Knockanure; and will remember also that when Cromwell laid siege to New Ross, the governor of that town, who capitulated at almost the first onset of the parliamentary cannon, was Major-General Luke Taaffe—the same individual who is now present before us.

As Colonel Taaffe rode he was surrounded by a number of the Irish leaders, with whom he maintained a light and jumpy conversation during the march—a conversation overheard by our hero, who in his post of ordery was constantly near the person of the commander.

"Indeed, gentlemen all," said he, "the news I bring from Galway is not the best; but since the meeting of Clontarck, our Lord President, and the chief men of that county at Loughree, matters have improved. Our effective force there in August last was, I protest unto you not above three hundred in number and we had but little rest or quietness. The forces of the county Mayo had encamped at Slarne, on the borders of the two counties, and my Lord Mayo sent us for aid—aid, indeed!—being well known to his lordship how able we are to spare any; but his lordship was pleased to write plainly that if we did not in retribution of his forces' loss then sustain parallel his courtiers, we would expect no more aid from thence—give him a fair excuse or a denial. As for the English news, the king and Parliament are still at great distance—the Lord of Heaven continue them so until I send them absolution."

"I heard you ought of the supplies, colonel?" inquired an officer.

"Ay, the powder bestowed by the Council upon Connaught is sent partly to Mayo and partly to Galway, not to be touched until our Provincial Council distribute it as they think fit. But we can await it division; for has not Sergeant-Major O'Dowda furnished us with a supply, for which he shall be promoted? Besides, the powder made at Loughlin is as good as any in Ireland, and we want no more of that commodity so we be furnished with all other necessities."

"But tell me," he exclaimed, eagerly, "how have things gone on with you here? I've heard with sorrow that poor Carberry has been oppressed by the insolent power of the Northern, and that Hamilton intended to make a hot Christmas at Ballymote and burn our town to ashes. Well, thank heaven! my mother took my advice, and had the castle ditch well secured before the bad weather overtook it. The report of the strange shipping at Sligo gave me no small occasion of fear. Tell me, in what restraint was Oliver O'Hara kept by the sheriff since my leaving here? I thought he would speedily cry mea culpa, but finding that he stood so stiffly upon his justification, I promised to desire justice against him, and against the sheriff also if he went not according to his directions," &c., &c.

"While Taaffe was thus holding forth, Mac Donogh, who rode some paces in his rear, side by side with O'Dowda, seemed plunged in a deep and gloomy reverie. Suddenly he lifted his downcast eyes and addressed the sergeant-major:

"O'Dowda, my friend,"

"What news, Brian?"

"It is curious, O'Dowda; I feel now what I have never felt before, a chilling sensation of mysterious dread—of what I know not, for I flatter myself I fear not death; it must be a presentiment of evil: how say you?"

"Pooh! an idle fancy. Come, come, leave platitudes to the hags."

"Give me your hand, Teige."

"You're welcome to it, Mac Donogh."

"Teige, my wife and little ones are lying in their old home on the green slopes of Collooney, on the banks of the peasant Unaloo, and close by the castle which our clansmen wrested two years ago from the brood of the Undertaker Cooper. In case I fall, you will take my blessing to my lonely little nest."

And he pointed in the direction in which the Puritans were marching. "He, they mean to unite their forces; we must prevent that," said Taaffe. "Ay," exclaimed MacDonogh, "and to do so we must after them with speed. Throw out a party of pursuit, O'Dowda, and press on it the double with your division. We will support you."

The Puritans, holly followed, were brought to bay on the crest of a hill, where they took a very advantageous position. Behind them, parallel with their line, ran a earthen wall, or "ditch" (so-called); their flanks were protected by inequalities of the ground, and along the base of the hill below them ran a deep and swollen stream, spanned by a narrow rustic bridge.

"Forward, forward! attack! attack!" shouted the insurgent, and forth he sprang, as soon as the hill was brought to a halt at the foot of the hill occupied by their enemies; and the Irish leaders at once set about preparing for battle.

They divided their force, which was less than two hundred men, into three columns, assigning each column a proportionate number of musketeers, the latter numbering about a hundred. MacDonogh held command of the first column, O'Dowda of the second, and Captain William Tyrrell of the third. In this order the Irish advanced against the Puritan array. They crossed the river by the bridge, across which MacDonogh was the first to pass, without any casualty, manoeuvring on the bank in order to present a full front to the enemy, and advanced steadily up the hill. MacDonogh had dismounted from his horse, several of his brother officers following his example, and sword in hand, encouraging their men to charge.

A volley burst from the Puritan line. It was now, as the half of bullets hurled through their ranks, placing many men hors de combat, that the insurgents betrayed their want of steady discipline. Irritated by the galling fire of the enemy, the Irish troops broke their ranks and charged up the hill in a loose, impetuous body, their muskets opening a scattered and irregular fusillade, and their pikemen, their weapons to the charge, rushing upwards with fierce battle-cries.

Suddenly, as the Irish came eagerly up the slope, the Puritan line broke and fled, Hamilton and his men leaping over the ditch that crossed the top of the hill; so that in a minute the Irish saw no trace of an enemy save the bodies of those who had fallen beneath their fire.

"Victory! Hurrah!"—and the insurgents gaining the crest of the hill, rushed towards the ditch stretching along in front.

But instantly along this ditch ran a line of smoke and flame, as the reports of a hundred muskets boistered forth their rag on the air. A terrific death storm swept through the Irish masses, levelling several men to the ground, and throwing the whole force into confusion. The Irish wavered, and ere they could recover from the effect of their surprise, there was a second roll of musketry on their left flank, and another deadly trumpet of lead whistled through their midst. It came from a fresh body of Hamilton's men—that which had been guarding his cattle some distance off, and which had now arrived in time to participate in the fight.

"Steady, men, steady—charge!" cried Colonel Mac Donogh, waving his sword. But in vain. For now on the watering Irish front and flank, the exulting Hamilton hurled his masses of pikemen, who charged the Irish with the utmost ferocity and ardour. For a few minutes a combat, sharp and furious, raged on the crest of the hill, when a Puritan leader, one John Cunningham, was mortally wounded; and then the insurgents, hopeless and panic-stricken, began to retreat in wild confusion, notwithstanding the valiant efforts made by their leaders to rally them.

"Fight! fight! Tyreragh to the rescue!" Edmund O'Traoy heard a hoarse, familiar voice shout the words, and at that instant he saw the herculean frame of O'Dowda towering in the midst of the terrible mael that raged on the hill-crest. The mighty sergeant-major's features were begrimed with blood and powder, and the large falchion he was wielding with deadly effect was red from hill to point. In a moment he had lost sight of him, but in the next he caught sight of another leader (Mac Donogh) closely engaged in the thick of the fray, and making a fierce and valiant struggle against overwhelming odds.

"Strike, comrades! strike for the old country!" cried the colonel, who was fighting bareheaded, sword in hand; and his voice rang high above the din of conflict.

As he spoke, he with difficulty parried the thrusts of a number of Puritan pikemen who were lunging at him furiously with their long weapons.

"Rescue the colonel!" sang out O'Traoy, and he began to force his way forward to the support of the almost overpowered officer. But that moment there was a sudden rush, and Edmund found himself engaged face to face with the enemy's pikemen. He immediately received a deep thrust in the shoulder, but repulsed the assailant with a slash across the fingers. Turning aside the bristling pikes, he looked for MacDonogh, and saw the latter, who had been wounded by a musket-shot in the leg, fighting desperately on his knees, and heard him still calling on his men to rally and charge. Again O'Traoy sought to cut his way to the colonel's rescue, but scarce had he moved a yard towards him when he saw a Puritan present his pike and shoot the brave man through the head.

With the colonel's death virtually ended the battle. The fatal shot was heard when O'Traoy felt himself borne down the hill, in spite of his struggles, in the midst of a demoralized multitude of fleeing insurgents. Almost immediately, he found himself precipitated into the river running at the foot, from which he drew himself with difficulty. The solitary little bridge had given way beneath the pressure of the flying masses, and many of the insurgents were drowned in the swollen stream, into which they showed each other in their flight. Hamilton did not pursue the retreating Irish, of whom, he alleged, upwards of sixty perished on the occasion.

CHAPTER XVII.

OWEN ROE—A DUPE INTERRUPTED. "Owen Roe, our own O'Neill, he travels once more our land; The sword in his hand is of Spanish steel, But the hand is an Irish hand!"

On a bright summer day, not many months after the Irish defeat described in the preceding chapter, an animated scene took place in the immediate neighborhood of the Castle of Drogheda. For many days previously, the rumor that the Irish army in Ulster was about to be quartered in the locality for the season's training and organization, had been widely circulated among the people of Leitrim; and now that the particular day named for the enemy's coming was at hand, a numerous crowd was assembled on the wide lawn in front of the hoary stronghold of the O'Bourkes, to bid the soldiers of the Confederation a hearty good-bye to Leitrim. West Breefy. Beside the dense crowd of ex-

alted peasantry, some hundreds of the Irish troops in North Connacht held possession of the green, on which they were drawn up, both infantry and cavalry, in two long columns, the pikes and muskets of O'Connell's men shining alongside of those of O'Bourke's stalwart Breefy.

It was necessary, as an event courier was observed approaching in hot haste on the road leading eastward through Killybeg to the county Cavan, and a loud murmur of excited comment ran through the assembled multitude at the solitary horseman rode forward to the spot where Owen O'Rourke, Teige O'Connell, Silgo, and other chieftains of the county set on horseback.

Soon afterwards a cloud of dust appeared on the same road, and the helmet and breast-plates of a troop of cavalry became visible. On they came at a rapid trot, a dashing set of brave fellows, tolerably well-armed and accoutred, and mounted on very active horses, well adapted for the perpetual scouting and guerrilla warfare then practised by the commander of the Ulster army. They were headed by an officer of herculean frame, mounted on a splendid black charger, and Edmund O'Traoy, from his post by his foster-father's side, recognised both horse and rider in an instant. The officer was no other than the redoubtable Miles the Blasher.

"My faith, but I rejoice to see you look as well, gossip," exclaimed the stalwart O'Reilly, as he responded cordially to the welcome of the lord of Drogheda; "and the sight of those stout clumps of yours reminds me of the old days. There's good material here, terms, and by the sword of the great God-lamb, well make right good advantage of your men ere long."

"Here's former acquaintance of yours," said Owen O'Rourke, smiling, as he pointed to Edmund; "perhaps you've forgotten him?"

"What my sprig of valor, is it you?" said the Blasher, as he caught sight of O'Traoy; "forget him, gossip!—no, no; we've ridden too far together for that—my trooper? Well, I'm right glad to meet you once more, Emon O'Traoy; you see I can remember names pretty well."

He wrung our hero's hand warmly. "Emon O'Traoy?" hastily muttered one of the Blasher's dragoons, a tall and powerfully built man, who eyed Edmund stealthily with a very black look indeed, continuing his scrutiny for several minutes.

"I suppose your main body is high at hand, O'Rourke?" inquired Owen O'Bourke.

"Ay," responded Miles O'Bally; "at least they're not far off; see, there come their forerunners."

And he laughed as he pointed in the direction he and his troop had come. All eyes were instantly turned to that quarter, in which a very curious spectacle now presented itself.

From a dense cloud of dust came the thunderous beat of thousands of hoofs, mingled with the lowing of kine, the bleating of sheep, the shouting of men, and the barking of dogs. Here after herd of Irish cattle—lively little kine, with long, polished horns, and dark shaggy hides—came on in a seemingly interminable succession, mingled with several large flocks of mountain sheep, all driven and guarded by a great number of rough-looking, agile, and powerful men, whose wives and families, in many picturesque groups and clusters, followed. These were the celebrated creghts of Ulster, hardy mountaineers who led a rude, primitive, and nomadic existence—something akin to that which the patriarchs of old led in the vale of the Jordan—leading their herds and flocks from one pasturage to another, according as the grass in each was consumed. The term "creight" was originally applied to the drivers in charge of a prey of cattle, but these creghts of the seventeenth century could fight as well as drive, as the Palemen, who were wont to circulate strange stories of their daring and ferocity, could well testify. They generally accompanied the forces of their valiant provincial general, Owen Roe O'Neill, who found them of vast use as a sort of fighting commissariat, and who recruited his ranks largely from the number of those stout and daring mountaineers. A curious, old-fashioned race were those redoubtable creghts, clinging to the customs of their ancestors with a tenacity which seemed only to increase with their lengthened wanderings. They adhered also to the old Irish garb. The men wore their hair in long, shaggy curls, their upper lips being covered with the crimson, or heavy, drooping moustache, while their brawny and muscular bodies were clad in the large, flowing, and many-plaited yellow garment, gathered in at the waist by a broad belt of unadorned hide in which glittered the inevitable skin, and their either covered with the tight-fitting bracco. The tall and stately forms of the women were enveloped in the graceful folds of the flowing, bright-colored cloak, and their heads surmounted with a white, spiral skein of Miltelan womanhood.

On hurried the creghts, and now here after herd broke away to the right or left face of pasture that their guards and drivers selected, leaving the road at length clear to a large force of infantry and cavalry that followed.

This force consisted of some thousand men, horse and foot, who marched along with excellent military order and precision, bearing themselves with a ready discipline and manifest esprit de corps. Over them flew the banner of O'Neill, emblazoned with the Red Hand of Ulster, side by side with the flag of the Catholic Confederation.

The latter ensign, adopted by order of the Council of Kilkenny, was of a green colour, and bore the Irish cross inscribed within a red circle. Over the cross was an imperial crown, with the letters "O. E." standing for Charles Roe, and underneath the words, "Long Live King Charles."

The commander of this little army, who now rode forward and doffed his hat in response to the salutations of the crowd, was a man in the prime of life, of erect and soldierly form, and of frank, cheerful and intelligent countenance. His eyes were wonderfully sharp and bright, his nose denoted energy and resolution, and the lower part of his face was covered with a light curling beard.

"O'Neill aboo! O'Connell fails to Owen Roe!" shouted the multitude, and peal upon peal of loud and enthusiastic applause rent the air as the beloved and popular general graciously bowed his acknowledgments.

The reasons which had induced Owen Roe to select West Breefy as a training ground for his army, were obvious ones enough. Here, in these remote plains and plateaux, unapproachable save by a few bad roads and dangerous passes, and free and free from the incursions of the great force of Monroe, the organisation, drill, and discipline of the Irish levies might be proceeded with in comparative quietness and tranquillity until the time for action came. For the military talent which, displayed on the walls of the old Burgundian city of Arras six years before, had kept at bay for many weeks the French troops of Marshal Miltelle, was now employed by the patriotic savior of the house of Tyrone in the cause of his own country—how well and anticiouly may be

inferred from the modest and orderly appearance of the army already under his command.

The career of Owen Roe had been a stirring one since, when twelve months before he had landed from Captain Anthony Fleming's ship at Doe Castle, in Donegal (after having made the long voyage from Dunkirk round the North of Scotland), bringing with him about a hundred officers and a large quantity of arms and ammunition. At a general meeting of the Ulster clans, held at Clones in Monaghan, he was appointed "General-in-Chief of the Catholic Army" of the North, his kinsman, Sir Phelim, the former commander of that army, contenting himself with the title of "President of Ulster." The new General proceeded at once to Charlemont, before whose walls he soon gave evidence of his military skill, when, being surprised while out hunting with a small body of his troops by a large force under Monroe, he repulsed the Scotch troops with great slaughter in a narrow lane near the fort, and defeated them again on the following day. A short time previous to his arrival in Leitrim his first mishap had occurred, his creghts falling into an ambuscade laid for them by the enemy at Clones. Still the occasion served but to brighten the General's prestige, for with his small division of one thousand foot and one hundred horse he skillfully covered the retreat of the creghts, bravely contending with the vastly superior forces of Colonels Stewart, Balfour and Mervyn, so that the Irish loss was but small; and soon afterwards he had ample revenge for Clones. Attacked at Portlerea in Meath, by three thousand determined Puritans under Lord Moore of Mellifont, he drew up his force for the fray with his usual admirable foresight. The battle had scarcely begun when Lord Moore was struck lifeless by a round of grape from a cannon levelled, it was said, by Owen Roe's own hands—an event recorded by a "camping chaplain" of the period in a curious dithyramb:—"Contra Romanos mores, res mira Dynastis, Morsus ab Engenio canonicatus erat!"

"Rome's ancient rights are now but lightly prized, Silgo college, by Owen Roe, was canonized."

Moore's colleague, General Monk, afterwards the celebrated restorer of the Stuart dynasty, issued the order to retreat, but the impetuous Irish tore through his waving ranks, and it was with a sadly reduced army he gained the shelter of Drogheda. Owen Roe and his soldiers were now fresh from this victory, and no wonder that the rejoicing Irish everywhere accorded him and them a glad and excited ovation.

Drawing rein in the centre of the lawn, O'Neill made a brief but characteristic speech to the surrounding multitude. The fighting general was a man of few words, but the short, pithy sentences he uttered inspired courage, faith, and hope in the breasts of those whom he addressed.

"Thanks, men of Breefy," said he, "for your warm welcome to my soldiers and myself. I am happy to tread the soil of your ohvalurous country, and to meet the brave men whom I now see before me. I was proud to hear that the clansmen of Breefy, first they valiantly resisted, and still resist, the power of the ruthless tyrant yonder—whom Heaven will soon aid us to drive like a wolf from the fair plains of your ancient territory. Courage, I say, brothers! Breefy for the Brefflinians! and away with the cold-hearted stranger—away with the bodoghy Albanach! Again I thank you for your welcome. I have come here to drill and recruit the force under my command, and when I leave Breefy a free country, I hope to leave it with a large, brave, and disciplined Irish army at my back."

A burst of rapturous applause followed, during which the general dismounted, and accompanied Owen O'Rourke and the other chieftains into the castle to enjoy the hospitality of Breefy.

Thenceforth the day was one of general rejoicing and festivity, and far into the night Drogheda was a scene of native mirth and merry-making. The night brought with it a rather singular occurrence for Edmund O'Traoy, an occurrence which shall now be related.

It was long after midnight when he quitted the castle hall, with his merry crowd of guests, his hangers, his foaming goblets, and his brilliant torches, and sauntered forth on the lawn. Here as merry and lively a scene was presented to his gaze. The lawn, brightly illuminated by several large, flaming bonfires, was occupied by a large concourse of people, who each and all seemed to be giving full vent to their national revelry for the dance. On the level spaces in the light of the fire large groups of dancers, composed mainly of O'Neill's soldiers, ably seconded by the pretty cottagers of the neighbourhood, were mirthfully gliding through the mass of some sprightly rinks.

The screaming and droning of the Irish bagpipes, mingled with the shouting, laughter, and exclamations of the Miltelan votaries of Terpsichore. Music, jest, and laughter resounded everywhere, blended with the regular tread of feet merrily beating time. The crowd seemed a chaos of gliding, whirling, and agitated forms, and ever-changing faces that glowed in the ruddy light of the huge fires, which leaped and crackled as if in harmony with the general gaiety, and the spectral outlines of the castle keep and the dark surrounding trees and sending bright pyramids of sparks leaping in myriad cascades into the moonlit overhead.

As Edmund paused to survey at his leisure this joyous and animated scene, a flood of memories, dear, tender, though oppressive, came stealing upon his heart, drawing after them a burden of sad and bitter thoughts and regrets which made the whole gladsome spectacle seem a mockery of him and his woe, causing him to turn away with a pang of sorrow. To him there was one great and serious want in the merry-making, a dull void to be filled only by an absent maiden whose place knew her no more:—

"At the dance in the village
The white foot was sweetest—
Thy voice 'mid the chorus
Of maidens was sweetest."

Oh, for one view of thy light form, one glance of thy dark eye, one sound of thy sweet voice, gentle Kathleen Ny-Cuirnlin!

What! Emon O'Traoy, and not dancing? exclaimed aloud a comrade on recognizing him.

"No dance for me to-night, Shawn," was the answer, and he sadly turned away. As he did so, a tall man brushed by him, peering curiously into his face in doing so. It was the same trooper who had taken note of his face before during the day.

With a gliding step and drooping head, Edmund strolled away from the dance, and after him like a shadow stole the tall trooper. Leaving the lawn, he wandered into the adjacent wood, rambled in pensive thought along a vista leading deeper and deeper into

it recesses, and at length halted pensively on the brink of a small stream, his attention unconsciously attracted by the romantic beauty of the spot. A bright full moon shone in the pale radiance over the scene, showing the woody wilderness of stately trees and cavernous recesses, and playing on the white cascades of the stream leaping along over its rocky bed beneath a luxuriant tangle of foliage.

Not long had he stood enjoying the tranquil beauty of nature under her summer-shoulder aspect, when a rude touch on the shoulder caused him to turn with a start. He saw confronting him a tall trooper in steel helmet, and "ack!" whose countenance, as far as the moonlight enabled him to observe, seemed somewhat familiar to him, though it was now disguised by a very wrathful and gloomy expression.

"What seek you?"

O'Traoy, startled by the malevolent glance which met his own, stepped backwards as he spoke, laying his hand instinctively on the hilt of his sword.

"Thy life," was the answer in a fierce and determined voice, hoarse with pent-up passion.

"Who said what are you that you should seek my life?" inquired Edmund, after he had surveyed the other for a few moments in silent astonishment.

"Thy bitterest enemy," was the answer; "and now put me no more questions, for, erep as thou wilt, the thought of your villainy is setting the heart in my breast on fire. Listen, O'Traoy, you demon of evil, the black wrong and ruin of one I held dearer than His life at your door, and I've sworn to wipe out the crime in your heart's blood. I might have run you through as you stood, but I am a soldier and love fair play. You shall have a chance for your base life, and that will be to fight for it, now and here—just on this smooth bit of grass that the moon lights up so brightly for our accommodation. Come—draw!"

Throwing himself into a position for combat, the soldier unheeded his long sabre, which glittered coldly in the moonlight. But Edmund stood motionless and unprepared, irresolute what course to take. The trooper, fearfully excited, again addressed him: "Ho, man! at thou a white-livered spalpeen and a rascal too? Wouldst thou shun the fight, coward? Hast thou not steel on thy breast and a sword to thy hand as well as I? Out with thy blade, mongrel, or I'll cut you down where you stand, for, as heaven is above us, but one of us quits this ground alive."

"Perhaps you have made a mistake," ventured Edmund, "in taking me for your enemy. I know not wherein I have injured you."

"Oh, that is but a shabby shift. You are O'Traoy, the dala of Owen O'Rourke yonder at the castle?"

"Yes."

"Then you are my enemy, and you or I die here to-night. As for the injury you've done me, I'll bles the story of it in your dying ear. On guard!"

There was no further use of evasion. Edmund drew his sword and threw himself into a posture of defence. His adversary rushed upon him furiously, and instantly the loud clashing of steel rang out upon the night air. The moon shed her calm holy refulgence upon the scene of combat, the stream bounded and danced by, murmuring in sleepy song, and the tall trees stood up dark, silent witnesses around; and there in the midst of the calm of nature the two men, foot to foot and blade to blade, struck and lunged at each other in deadly combat. The wild birds of the grove fluttered uneasily on their perches, alarmed at the clangour of the striking steel.

Clash!—clash!—clash!

Suddenly, ere blood was drawn, two dark figures darted forth from the wood, and a third blade struck up the weapons of the combatants, while a tall and powerful form forced itself between them.

"Very brilliant play that, gentlemen, but the business is rather inopportune," said he of the interposing form. "Story to interrupt an affair of honor, but the general will not tolerate such duello within his outpost. Please put up your swords, and if you be of us, let me tell the enemy yonder than turning them against one another's lives."

"The speaker was Miles the Blasher.

"Hallo!" continued he, as he scanned the faces of the late combatants, "young Emon O'Traoy, as I live, and—what! Niall, the best and bravest trooper that ever threw leg across a saddle, how is it I find you so engaged? By the beard of Baghalnagh, I am all amazed."

"I will explain, colonel," said the trooper, speaking in ominously calm and deliberate tones, though his voice trembled with wrath—"I will explain it all to you, though heaven knows the tale is a sad, sad, and shameful one, save that I should tell it. Hear me. It is now three years since this serpent here, this accursed O'Traoy, first came into our home on the shore of Lough Gill, and laid his evil eyes on my one darling sister, my poor Kathleen, dearer to me than my heart's blood. She listened to his smooth, flattering tongue, and his vile grew more frequent—withered his hand that did not plant a skin in his black heart at the first, and end his life and his love-making together! When the war began I took my sister for safety to a friend at Glen Nephin, and then, after a time, I brought her back to Sligo, where the last I saw of my poor girl was in July last, just before the raid of the bloody Albanach. Since then, during my soldier life in Ulster and Leitrim, I have often heard whispers that made my heart and brain burn and my hand tremble for vengeance on this infernal bodoghy. Colonel, spare me the pain of saying more on this subject—a hundred thousand curses!—is it not on the lips and tongue of every rough soldier in Breefy? Stand by then, in the name of justice, and let us proceed."

As the speaker finished, O'Reilly and his companion exchanged exclamations of surprise.

"This is strange," muttered the Blasher. "Very strange, indeed; the wrong demands atonement, but there are better orders than that of battle; would that some funds were of the past," said his companion, a man of ordinary stature, whose form was enveloped in the folds of a large cloak, and whose features were undistinguishable beneath the broad leaf of his hat.

"You wrong me, Niall O'Cuinn, cried Edmund, vehemently, after listening in angry amazement to the accusation of Kathleen's brother, whom he now recognized; "you wrong me foully, and bitterly—I will swear it on the holy cross. I know not who has thus poisoned your mind against me, but I swear your words are vile and hideous as hell, and do not think you, my brother, utter them. I'd own the base calumny down his black throat with my sword."

"To the proof, then," quoth the soldier, grimly, again advancing his blade, and assuming a gliding posture.

"Speak then, young man," said the fourth party, addressing Edmund. "We await your explanation of this unpleasant affair."

Then clearly and satisfactorily our hero related all he had heard of the evening's doings of the war—which, as the reader knows, was very little—adducing the evidence of O'Dowda and others to vouch for the truth of his narration. When he concluded, Miles O'Reilly seized his hand and wrung it heartily.

"There is truth in your honest face, Emon, and I believe your every word."

"The explanation is both good and true," said O'Reilly's companion; "no sheath your swords—and there was a peculiar ring of authority in his voice as he spoke. The ex-combatants did as desired.

"Now," continued he, taking and joining the hands of the late adversaries, "although my vocation is rather the opposite, let me perform the office of peacemaker for the nonce. Happily there is no further cause of feud between you, but rather for close and united action, both in your country's cause and in seeking out and saving the maiden so dear to you both—heaven preserve the poor child wherever she be! And if he can cement your souls in amity and brotherly love, no nobler action could satisfy the hopes of Owen Roe O'Neill."

The speaker raised his Spanish beaver as he uttered the last words, and the moonlight showed the manly features of the general.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF MANOR-HAMILTON. 'Twas echoed wildly from within,
Oh shout and scream the mingled din,
And weapon-clash and maddening cry,
Of those who kill, and those who die!
As filled the hall with sulphurous smoke,
More red, more dark, the death-flash broke,
And forms were on the lattice cast,
That struck, or struggled, as they passed."

Well, it is a sharp and sore thorn in our sides, and apparently it must remain so for a while longer. The want of artillery presses hard on us here. Had we a few pieces of good Spanish ordnance, such as spoke defiance to the French from the battlements of Arras, we should soon bring our friend Hamilton to terms; nevertheless, we shall do our best."

The speaker was Owen Roe O'Neill. Surrounded by a small group, including Owen O'Rourke, O'Dowda and O'Traoy, the General stood beneath the shade of a wood on the banks of the Owenmore, intently surveying the stronghold of Manor-Hamilton.

"Ay, we'll do our best," echoed the sergeant-major;—"but to what purpose? Experience has told us that a blockade is but of little use."

The terms of Drogheda shook his head. "Until we get proper ordnance," said he, "I fear we shall never be able to take yonder castle or root out the Albanach."

"Bare ye that, son of my murdered father and mother!" exclaimed a deep, hoarse voice near at hand; "not able to take the castle or drive away the bloodthirsty Albanach! Oh, wirra, wirra, the blood! Hegeul!"

The party turned in surprise. A gaunt figure, clad in scanty, flitting rags, was leaning against the trunk of a tree. A wan, haggard-faced man, whose eyes were brilliant with a strange, weird light, and whose white, fang-like teeth gleamed through his unshapely cranium. O'Traoy started as he viewed him, for, though years had passed since his last encounter with the fierce maniac on the shore of Lough Gill, he instantly recognized the insane Murtoogh Mac Sharry.

"I'll take the castle for ye, Murtoogh! 'Shade of Dathill, you will!"

"Heed him not!" remarked Edmund, pulling O'Dowda's sleeve; "he is insane."

"Yes, by the rock of St. Leman, 'tis Murry will take the castle for ye; 'tis Murry will lead the wolf-bounds into the bloody wolf's den; 'tis he will show ye the hole in the wall that the good fathers took him through; 'tis he will show ye the skiff dhas be grasped from the tall soidiers and thrust into his black heart. Hal! look ye at it."

So saying, the maniac drew from the folds of his tattered garments a large dagger, and threw the dangerous weapon on the sword. Teige O'Dowda picked it up and examined it.

"This certainly belonged to some of his men," he remarked, passing the weapon to O'Neill; "observe the crest."

The shining hilt of the weapon was highly chased, and was artistically adorned with Hamilton's arms, crest, and even motto—the arms, three pierced ermine clasquels on a ruby ground; the crest, an oak tree penetrated with a saw; and the motto, "Nec timo, nec sperno."

The crest (which had attracted O'Dowda's notice) was a remarkable one, and the legend attached to it more remarkable still. Sir Walter Hamilton of Leostrethine, speaking with praise of Robert Bruce in the Court of Edward II., was struck by the big's favorite, John de la Spenser, whom he fought next day and killed. Flying to the king's fire, he made for Scotland, and his servant were passing through a wood, they changed clothes with some woodcutters and began to saw an oak, in order to evade the royal guards, by whom they were hotly pursued. On the approach of the soldiers, the servant grew fearful and timid, but his master hastily shouted to him, "Through," as the oak tottered and fell, thus enabling him to regain his self