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THE "HIBERNIAN" NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS.

THE CAPTIVE OF KILLESBIN.

(Continued.)

At sunrise next morning, the woods of Castle Dermot resounded to the unaccustomed din of English drums and trumpets, as the army of the Earl of March wound their glittering way through passes that had been rarely trodden by Saxon foot since the time when the third Edward had withdrawn the barrier from Carlow Castle to the Naas.

It was with ill-suppressed reluctance that the Irish leader prepared to withdraw from the field, where a few minutes more would have gained him a victory so complete as he seemed about achieving, and the more so, that one cavalier among the English who had twice endeavored to single him out, still continued to press through the thickest of the fray with a daring which, while it challenged his admiration, provoked his pride.

Brian More, seeing him again doing such gallant service against him, rode back with the design of encountering him hand to hand, but ere he had reached the spot where his determined champion was hotly engaged with two galleasses, a blow of the battle-axe beat the helmet from his head, and exposed the fair hair and flushed features of a youth hardly past the earliest prime of manhood.

mischief at thy hands!' The bewildered youth could only reply by an appeal of piteous amazement; but, at that instant, an arrow from the pursuing archery struck O'Nolan's horse through the flank, and the tortured animal plunged forward in the agonies of death.

He had not borne his captive far when he perceived that he was severely wounded, and felt him getting weaker in his arms. The flush of defiance had now left his face, and he leaned, with the sick repose of conscious helplessness, upon the bosom of his captor. Brian More felt his breast penetrated with a strange affection for the helpless being resting on it.

A low groan from the wounded youth roused his attention. He turned and beheld him stretched motionless in the swoon which stanching blood usually brings on a wounded man. His heart, already melted, now overflowed—'Ever, my son,' he cried, 'you also are lying low! but Ever, child of my soul, yours is the swoon from which the wounded man awakens not in this life. Blame me not, my boy that other hands are about you, or that the faces you loved to see are not watching over you.

earned you.' Brian More rose and leaving his gauntlets and helmet on the margin of the fount, to indicate the short absence he contemplated, left his captive on the ground while he took a path that led into the woods, and was soon hid behind the close screen of thick foliage.

In a short time he returned, bringing with him an aged man, whose long beard and coarse garment of black serge proclaimed a recluse. The hermit, kneeling by the sick youth's side, spoke to him in broken English, telling him not to be cast down, for that his generous captor would detain him only till his wounds might heal, and then, in consideration of his youth and valor, restore him, free of ransom, to his friends.

'I have no friends,' replied the captive with a deep sigh; 'had I had friends to live for, I should not have courted death as I have done this day.'

'Who art thou?' said the hermit. 'Had I returned to the English camp to-day, I would be Sir Robert Fitz Thomas,' replied the youth, 'but the spurs that I have won I shall never wear: I am, I fear, dying.'

'Not so, my son—with God's help, not so,' cried the old man, hurrying to produce a phial of medicated waters, from which he administered to his patient with the air of one skilled in the treatment of the sick.

By this time, a score of the Sheumargie galleasses had joined their captain, and by his orders were busied in constructing a soft litter of wadded saplings. When this was finished, strewed with rushes and covered with a mantle, they placed upon it the young Geraldine—for his name associated him with the great house of Desmond—and elevating the whole to the shoulders of four men, awaited the further orders of the chief.

'Rory Buy,' said O'Nolan, 'to thee I entrust the care of the wounded gentleman and the command of these twelve galleasses. Bear him to the priory of Killesbin, with my instructions to the chief almoner that he want for no attendance or fit medicine. Lysagh Moyle, this holy hermit will accompany you; he desires a safe-conduct to Killesbin, and will aid the sick gentleman in interpreting his wants. On your life see that he comes by no harm in your hands, and charge the same strictly upon the fathers.—Good Lysagh, take thou this scarf for the lady Una; tell her I plucked it from the shoulder of a Saxon warrior in the fight this morning, and send it to her for a token that I have not forgotten her in her sorrow. But we have already wasted too much time. Farewell, Sir Robert, look to your charge, Rory MacRanall. Now, my children, mount, and ride for Ardneue.' So saying, O'Nolan departed with one body of his men, while the remainder proceeded with their charge, through the woods, in an opposite direction.

Sick and faint, Fitz Thomas could mark nothing but the shifting clouds or receding foliage overhead, as he lay supine upon his litter; but the potion he had taken soon weighed down his eyes in total unconsciousness, and all seemed a blank till he awakened alone in a strange apartment, with a lamp burning by the head of the couch on which he lay, and an illuminated breviary open on a seat beside.

He attempted to raise his head, to convince himself that it was not a dream; but the stiffness and pain of his arm reminded him of the strange events of the last day, and the throbbing of his temples, and parching heat of his body, told plainly that fever was about to be added to the pain of his wound. Sounds, too, were ringing in his ears which he at first thought voices of persons overhead. They then seemed to be the chiming in his own brain. Again they rose audibly from without; Fitz Thomas had never heard sounds so sweetly plaintive before. They grew nearer, clearer, and more wildly mournful at every note; now rising in almost painful sweetness, now sinking and floating away in murmured music, rarely to be distinguished from the sighing of a night breeze; then, again, drawing the very soul of the listener out in the ringing harmony of voices, mingling as they rose to a swell of lamentation inexpressibly touching. Fitz Thomas listened in doubt, nay, almost in terror; for his situation was such as might have admitted alarm in the most courageous. Wounded, fevered, alone, he knew not where, at the dead of night, approached by sounds of almost unearthly solemnity and mournfulness, his heart beat fearfully fast, and his eyes began to wander as he looked with momentary expectation of some equally strange appearance down the narrow vaulted passage, through which a half-drawn curtain gave the view of a heavy door at the farther end. Beyond, there seemed to be a large apartment; for the sounds were now reverberated as from an arched roof, as the chanters, he thought, entered from the distance. Shafts of light now streamed through the crevices of the door, and soon after a gentle push from some one in passing opened it far enough partially to disclose the scene without.

Fitz Thomas beheld a portion of the interior of a church, the richness and splendour of which struck him with no less admiration than surprise. He could not see the altar; but a silver censer swinging across the foreground of that part of the edifice which came within the scope of his eye, showed that it was the scene of some solemn religious ceremony. Presently a bier was borne past on the shoulders of wildly attired men. Monks followed with a multitude of tapers. Then came female mourners with dishevelled hair, singing the dirge. It died away at length, and in its place single voices were heard alternately chanting what seemed to Fitz Thomas, from the few words that he occasionally caught, to be the Latin service of the dead. This was succeeded by a voice more animated, as of one pronouncing a funeral oration; but the language was unknown to the listener. The emotions of the speaker were, however, so strongly expressed that the character of the mingled lament and panegyric, with all its passionate appeals and tender eulogiums, could not be mistaken. When this had ceased, there was a stir among those without, and a lane seemed to be opened down the nave of the church for the approach of some one of superior rank. At the same moment, the door, through which the scene had been till now but partially visible, swung back as the throng pressed to the wall, and gave to the view of Fitz Thomas the whole eastern end of the choir, with its high altar glittering over the heads of the people in the light of innumerable tapers. On a raised platform, immediately in front, lay the corpse of a young man, the rigid white features painfully distinct against the shadow of the cornice above. Ecclesiastics stood round in tissued vestments that flashed dazzlingly in the light at every motion of the wearers; the crowd beneath kept an awful silence, broken only by occasional sobs from the females. The lane now closed behind the advancing procession. The persons composing it were concealed by the intervening crowd; but when they ascended the steps leading from the base of the platform, Fitz Thomas beheld a young and lovely girl supported by two sisters of a religious order, kneel down by the side of the corpse, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, while her lips moved in silent prayer; and a hush, like that of the grave, fell over the spectators. At length she rose, kissed the cold lips of the dead man, and in a voice sweeter by far than any he had yet heard, uttered a few words so tenderly sorrowful, that none present could refrain from tears and lamentations. Fitz Thomas felt his breast thrilled with the contagion, and would also have wept, but no tears would moisten his burning eyes. In vain he tried to dispel the choking sensation that was rising about his heart and would not melt. His eyes grew hotter, his heart fuller; the scene rose and fell, flickered and whirled before him. The corpse seemed moving over the heads of the people; the lady's face came near him; frowned upon him; her words fell on his ears in altered and terrible tones—he groined in the anguish of despair and pain, and thenceforth beheld nothing but shifting scenes and monstrous phantoms through three long days of delirious fever.

The recovery of Fitz Thomas was slow and doubtful; but he wanted not for assiduous and affectionate attendance. The hermit of Tubberbawn visited him daily, ascertained his wants, instructed him in the Irish language, or read for his entertainment from the voluminous lives of saints and martyrs with which the priory abounded. From him Fitz Thomas learned that he was in the hospital of Killesbin, in O'More's county, and that the sight he had witnessed in the commencement of his fever was the funeral of Sir Ever Oge, the son of his captor, who was interred in the chancel of the adjoining chapel; that O'Nolan was still absent in the wars against the English of Kildare, but that he himself, so soon as he was able to travel, was, by the pious generosity of that chief, at liberty to return to his own people, free of ransom, if he preferred that course to remaining among his present friends. Who the lady was whose face and voice were still so fresh in his remembrance he did not ask; for from what he had incidentally heard from Lysagh Moyle, he was satisfied she could be no other than the sister of Ever Oge, and he already cherished the imagination that he might yet be as deeply indebted to her as to her father. In pondering such fancies, he had a motive which will hereafter appear.

Time at length restored his health so far that he was permitted to leave his sick chamber. On coming out he found himself, to his increased astonishment, among such marks of civilization and security as he had not supposed any part of the country, save that inhabited by the English, to contain. The arched door-way, by which he sought the open air, was a work of such elegance and art as he had never seen surpassed.—Delicate, intricate, grotesque and elaborate, its clustered columns, rich friezes, and antique inscriptions, proclaimed a long cultivated knowledge of the arts. A slender round tower rising

to twice the elevation of the loftiest buildings, shot up into the blue sky before him, like the only remaining column of some gigantic portal. On his left, among the trees, a castle stood on the green eminence, and down upon his right, between him and a hidden rivulet, the noise of which rose from a neighboring copse of dwarf oak and hazel, stretched a wilderness of grey tombs and sculptured crosses, some of them full four times the height of a man, and covered with carvings richer than he ever had seen on similar monuments before.

His first walk was to the well of the patron saint, a fair fountain flowing from the green slope of the stream's further bank. Close by, there was a romantic hollow, overhung by pendant rocks, and luxuriant wild rose bushes.—Here, the brook falling in a tiny cascade from its blue channel of slate, gushed with a pleasing murmur, through trailing festoons of briars and ground ivy, and dimpled into a shallow pool that discharged its waters by a narrow outlet, over-arched with the red laden branches of the mountain ash, and the thick cover of the sloe thorn.—Into this sweet recess Fitz Thomas penetrated on the first day of his enlargement, and bither he returned day after day, as he recovered, to enjoy the coolness of the shadows and melody of the falling water. It was the fourth day of the convalescence, and he wandered forth alone to his accustomed seat, under the secluded ledge of rock and waving bramble. To gain the fairy spot it was necessary to cross the stream above, and thence, following the course of the water, to return upon its sylvan den by the channel from beneath.

As Fitz Thomas hastened to his favorite haunt, he started to hear a voice singing in low cadence a dirge of his own country. The tears gushed to his eyes, and his heart beat with redoubled velocity as he hurried down the briery bank and along the stony channel, to see what messenger from that other world was awaiting him. He gazed the spot; there by the water side sat the lady of the chapel, weeping as she sung alone, and beautiful as a spirit.

'Ah, heaven!' cried he, as he beheld her rise pale and agitated at his approach, 'did I hear the voice of an English lady, or have my ears deceived me and driven me to intrude upon the presence of one to whom I cannot justify my rudeness?'

'The lady stood for a moment trembling as she gazed upon the intruder, but as he spoke she recovered from her alarm, and said in English, 'I am not a Saxon, although I can speak the language of my nation's enemies.'

'Lady,' said Fitz Thomas, 'blame me not that I did the duty of a subject by my own sovereign: I fought not to injure you, but to serve you.'

'Noble, Sir,' she replied, 'I blame thee not; and if I guess aright in supposing that to be the young knight whose life my father hath spared, I can well believe thou wilt not abuse that generosity by drawing thy sword again against our race.'

'Alas!' replied Fitz Thomas, 'when I last drew my sword, I never hoped to have bared it again.'

'Yet I have heard,' said the lady, 'that thou didst do battle against our people, valiantly it is true, but more unrelentingly than duty could demand of any soldier not spirited on by other motives—hatred, or revenge, or the thirst of blood.'

'Lady,' said Fitz Thomas, 'hear me, and I will justify myself. I thirst not for the blood of God's meekest creature; I would to heaven that all mankind did love one another but half so dearly as I love the humblest flower they trample on.—I fought, neither from cruelty nor from hard-heartedness—I fought from despair—I courted death because I abhorred the life I was destined to live—I smiled upon your father's steel when I thought it raised to release me from a tyranny that would make me miserable for life, and break the heart of one whom, if I cannot love, I would rather die than injure. Lady, I entreat you to hear me out, for you have stung me to the soul with your reproaches. I am the nephew and ward of the Earl of March; he would force me to wed one that I cannot bear affection to. Vast possessions in England depend upon this union; if he can force me into it the greater portion falls to himself. I am but nineteen, and for the next two years his power over me is absolute.—I have already endured such tyranny as I blush to tell; imprisonment, starvation, blows—do you wonder that I was weary of my life?'

'Was there no law to appeal to? hadst thou no means of escape?' inquired the lady.

'None,' replied Fitz Thomas; 'the eastern sultan practices not more unmitigated tyranny on the lowest of his slaves, than does the feudal baron over his ward. I have neither father nor mother nor protector to apply to. I have been watched and guarded like a felon, lest I should throw myself at the feet of the king when in England; but here I have no redress, unless I