

THE SWORD OF OWEN ROE
O'NEIL.

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH.

BY PATRICK SANSFIELD CASSIDY.

No character on the world's stage more richly deserves the undying remembrance, or so readily receives the hallowed veneration of mankind, than does he who, voluntarily and with noble impulse, steps forward to breast the advancing tide of native or alien despotism, when the black flag of oppression overclouds his country, and the appalling roar of the subjugator's cannon may be said to sound the knell of his nation's freedom. Such a character is honored and revered in all civilized countries; and even among barbarous tribes the patriotic warrior—the protector of his people—lives in the extravagant stories and sagas characteristic of primitive races, and his deeds are glorified and handed down through unwritten history and unlettered muse as examples of the noblest type of man, to be studied and emulated by each rising generation of braves. In lettered nations his memory is embalmed in song, and his name immortalized in sober history, more enduring than monuments of brass. And no country on the world's broad face has, considering its extent in square miles, produced so many sons of exalted purpose and devoted patriotism as our own green isle. The degenerate sons of Greece and Rome (or modern Italy) may boast the great and glorious deeds of their heroic forefathers; but the unde-generate sons of Ireland can boast their peers in every respect, a hundred to one. For the Roman youth, whose hand hissed in the Tuscan fire, to show the besiegers of his city the sterling stuff the youth of Rome were made of, we need go no farther back than 1803 to find his rival in the immortal young Robert Emmet. For the pass of the Thermopylae we have hundreds of parallels; but let it suffice to simply refer to how "Myles the Slasher" and a few kindred warriors held the pass of Benburb against the force of England's cavalry; and with "how well Horacius kept the bridge in the brave days of old" we can, with conscious pride compare the de-

fence of the bridge of Limerick, which is unsurpassed in the annals of history for fearless, reckless bravery and stubborn determination, that quality which shallow scribes flippantly assert the Irish character lacks.

The fame of such heroes is not confined to the land for which they fought and fell. It is the noblest aspiration of our natures to seek out, among the crowding phantoms of history, such men, and enshrine them in the temple of memory, to venerate, admire and imitate them, if fortune should ever vouchsafe the opportunity, no matter to what land they belonged. The patriot will perform pilgrimages to the graves of such heroes; the virtuous will collect with untiring zeal every relic of such noble characters, and the historian will dwell upon their deeds and with appreciative pen point the moral of their lives. And this train of thought leads to the subject of our article, the sword of Owen Roe O'Neil, than whom a purer and more devoted patriot the annals of the universe cannot produce. Every person tolerably acquainted with Irish history, and shame on the Irishman who is not thoroughly familiar with it, knows that Owen Roe, after a short but severe illness, died at Cloch Outher on the 6th of November, 1649, the feast of St. Leonard. It was popularly supposed he died from the effects of poison, but this belief has been proved erroneous by the Rev. C. P. Meehan, from reliable manuscripts; and Mr. Meehan may be taken as an authority on this or any other question connected with the history of the O'Neil or O'Donnell families.

But the sword of the dead chieftain was not destined to rest in the scabbard though the arm which so often had wielded it with gory but glorious effect on many a hard-fought field and by many a beleaguered wall, both in Ireland and on the continent, was mouldering into dust in the quiet grave beneath the altar of the Franciscan Convent of Cavan. Henry Roe O'Neil, the young and worthy son of Owen Roe, girded on the sword of his gallant father and offered his services, which were joyously accepted, to Heber MacMahon, Bishop of Clogher, who was then the leader of the northern "rebels," fighting against that merciless monster, Cromwell. I