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TURLOUGH O'BRIEN;

THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER. CHAPTER I.—THE OUTPOST.

Turlough O'Brien was now a welcome guest at the savage feast, of which, however, he was faint enough to jar himself; and sooth to say, to a hungry and exhausted man worse might possibly have been welcome.

Turlough learned that the party was a kind of rear-guard to another, who being now in safety, had proceeded, leading with them fourteen dragoon horses, the fruit of a cleverly contrived surprise, as executed by the rapparees on the night preceding.

From Ryan he learned further that William's forces were now in possession of Athlone, and that St. Ruth, had withdrawn his army to Aughrim; where it was rumored he had resolved to give the enemy battle. He also learned that the little town of Aughrim, where they were now in position, was distant some five-and-twenty miles; and that considerable supplies, arms, ammunition, clothing, and money, but no men, except a handful of troopers who accompanied the general, as a body-guard, had reached the country along with St. Ruth. Of him the rapparees could say but little; he had arrived but a few weeks since, and Sarsfield and he had already had several angry and bitter altercations.

Having thus gleaned all the information he could, Turlough O'Brien stretched himself upon the hearth, near the fire, and was soon fast asleep.

With the first gleam of the opening dawn, the bivouac was all astir again; another meal of savage plenty ushered in the day—after which Ryan undertook to conduct his guest a mile or so upon his journey.

As side by side they walked onward, each felt the cheering influences of the early days. The slanting sunbeams shot ruddily athwart the brown sweeping undulations of the hills they were descending—the dew-drops sparkled in the heath, from among whose purple tufts ever and anon the merry lark soared upward and upward into the sky, until all but his thrilling matins melted into air; the fresh bracing breath of morning, and the lowing of distant kine from the fields beneath them, and the thousand pleasant scents and sounds, and influences that hail the opening day, inspired with feelings akin to joy and confidence the breasts of both, as they trod the downward path, and looked abroad over the ruddy and expansive prospect.

Having bid his companion farewell, Turlough O'Brien soon struck into a narrow road, designing to cross the Shannon by the fords, a little below the point now known as Shannon Bridge.—Turlough O'Brien was well aware of the risk he incurred of falling in, accidentally, with some straggling party of William's army, from whom (were his real character discovered) he might very possibly receive the roughest usage. He was not sorry, therefore, to meet at a sudden turning of the road, a pedlar marching leisurely along toward him, with his pack strapped upon his shoulders, and his measuring staff, studded with brass nails, glittering like a spectre in his grasp. He therefore accosted this 'travelling merchant,' and learned from him that the road, as far as he had travelled it, was free from all obstruction.

'Which army have you seen?' asked Turlough.

'Paix, then, I seen both iv them,' he replied; 'the likes iv me have no business takin' part with this side or that side, but just to mind my business, and take the world aisy.'

'Have you been delayed or annoyed by either?' said O'Brien; 'have you been allowed to drive your trade without hindrance or molestation?'

'An' why would not I?' he rejoined; 'it's only too glad they'd be to see the likes iv me coming near them. Hindrance, indeed; is that all you know about it?'

Turlough O'Brien mused for a moment, and then said—

'If you be willing to sell your pack and measure, as they are, for a lump sun, you shall have it on the spot. What say you—will you sell them?'

The offer was promptly acceded to, and after a brief negotiation, the purchase was completed—the embarrassed pedlar pursued his way with the gold pieces, which might have fairly bought his possessions three over, stored safely within his waistband; and Turlough O'Brien, with the staff in his hand, and the burthen slung across his stalwart shoulders, strode onward toward his destination, with renewed confidence—and, indeed, comparatively careless as to whom he might encounter, under his assumed character.

Drening was drawing on apace, when from a gradual eminence he beheld, some three miles before him, the broad Shannon, glowing like burnished gold under the fiery summer sun.

'A few miles more,' he thought—'a few miles beyond that glorious barrier, and I am again at the head of my brave Irish soldiers.'

He listened for the distant sound of cannon, in the instinctive anxiety of the brave man who fears lest his part in a grand impending struggle should be denied him.

'The breeze favors,' he resumed; 'the guns would be audible from hence; thank God, all is still—I am in time.'

With renewed energy, and something of the deep and stirring excitement of coming battle already upon him, Turlough O'Brien strode onward upon the narrow and unfrequented road, toward the ford which lay before him.

The train of busy thought which had followed the reflections we have just mentioned, was interrupted on a sudden by the jingle of a horse's hoof, and in less than a minute, a tall, raw-boned, military chaplain, in a somewhat rusty cassock, a plain, broad-leaved hat, and military boots, and, a good deal to Turlough's uneasiness, attended by two mounted dragoons, rode at a leisurely walk, from a converging road, right into that which he himself was pursuing.

To have attempted to avoid this unexpected cavalcade, in which his practised eye instantly detected the adherents of the Prince of Orange, could have no other effect than that of exciting suspicion.

'Holla! halt there, sirrah!' cried the chaplain, for he was a little in the rear; 'halt, I say, and right about.'

As Turlough saw nothing for it but to sustain his assumed character as best he might, he unhesitatingly obeyed this unceremonious order, and the same grave functionary fixing a small eye, which owed its overpowering effect entirely to the fiery purple of the massive face in which it was set, full upon the pedestrian, said, singing to him at the same time to march by his side.

'What may be your calling, friend—and that upon your back—what's that, eh? Speak up, man—speak out, I charge you.'

'As for my calling, sir, I'm a pedlar, answered Turlough, with difficulty assuming the outward deference of respect, 'and that I carry is my pack.'

Turlough paused abruptly, for in his momentary confusion he had failed to perceive what he now observed for the first time: the horse which his interrogator rode, was no other than Roland—his own brave charger, lost at the action of the Boyne, and now encountered again under circumstances so altered.

Well was it for Turlough that the grave cavalier mistook the nature of the good steed's demonstrations—the cocking of his ears—his snortings, and champings.

'Tush, Captain—go to—go to, I say,' ejaculated his rider, checking him once or twice;—'quiet, I say, we must not bite the poor for being poor—God forbid; nay, nay, honest man, fear him not,' he continued, addressing Turlough, 'he is used to dragoons, and loves not any else; but fear him not, he knows his rider. A pedlar and a pack—so—so—and I dare aver, not sorry to find a market for some of his wares; now, what may you have to sell—eh?'

The question was somewhat disconcerting, as Turlough knew just as little as the questioner what might be the contents of the pack; he answered therefore, promptly and deferentially—

'If your honor be likely to buy—I can't do less than unpack and show you my wares.'

'Time enough—time enough,' rejoined the chaplain; 'be not too hot after mammon, friend. There's a time to buy, and a time to sell; and I'll do neither the one nor the other, I promise you until I get out of the saddle. But come along—come along, we'll soon see what may be done.'

Accordingly, very little obliged to his ungainly patron, Turlough O'Brien continued to walk by his stirrup, answering as briefly as he might the questions which he showered upon him, until, on a sudden, they came upon a large dilapidated farm house, with a stone enclosure, and a cluster of offices about it, peeping out among the tufted timbers of an old overgrown orchard. It was quite evident that this place was occupied by a troop of dragoons; for two dismounted troopers, with their pieces shouldered, kept guard before the gateway upon the road; and some dozen of horses, still saddled, but with the girths loose, were visible in the open shed in the yard.

'Now, then,' ejaculated the cavalier in the cassock, as he dismounted: 'now, then, we can see what you have got to sell. No want of customers here, I warrant you; so come along. In with you, pack and all,—in, in, I say.'

Thus encouraged, Turlough O'Brien had no choice in prudence but to comply; and accordingly, preceded by the chaplain, and followed by the soldiers, he entered the enclosure, where the dragoons were loitering in groups, and thence into the house, whose door stood open; and the little party proceeded directly into a large chamber, dilapidated and damp-stained, and which had

once been a cozy kitchen, and was now little better than a wreck. They found here a group of officers, who stood listlessly chatting and looking out of the shattered windows, dusty, and with their hats on, just as they had dismounted. Scarce a moment had elapsed ere the supposed pedlar was established at the head of the only table the room possessed, and his goods displayed before the little group, who clustered about him. While thus engaged, he observed a countenance pass the outside of the window, the sight of which filled him, reasonably enough, with dismay. It was that of Miles Garrett.

He fortunately had not removed his hat, and he pressed it deeper upon his brows as that personage entered the chamber. Miles Garrett, who was, as it seemed, in command of the detachment, took his place among the rest at the table, and joined in their careless comments upon the wares displayed before them. The trying scene was now, as Turlough hoped, drawing rapidly to a close; when, greatly to his uneasiness, he observed Garrett look sharply once or twice at his features, as if desiring to see more than the broad flap of his hat rendered easily visible.

'Friend Pedlar,' he said, at last, abruptly interrupting a bargain, 'methinks it were scarce more than courtesy to doff your hat in presence gentlemen, who are honored, moreover, with the king's commission—take it off, sir; take it off, I say.'

These words—their peremptory tone—the suspicious glance that accompanied them—all showed Turlough that concealment or evasion was no longer possible. He drew himself up to his full height, returning Garrett's glance of exulting malignity and recognition with one of proud and reckless defiance, and for a moment they both stood face to face, in breathless silence, amid the wondering soldiers.

'Ha! he's nettled at last,' said Garrett, under his breath, and as it seemed unconsciously;—while he continued to regard him with the same fixed and triumphant smile of malignity.

'Well, Mr. Pedlar,' he exclaimed, with chuckling triumph, 'so it seems you won't uncover, eh?'

'Not to you,' retorted Turlough, with the intense sternness of hatred and despair. 'Cold-blooded, murderous intriguer—betrayer of your friends, of your faith, of your king—wretch and renegade—uncover to you!—steeled as you are in effrontery and crime, and with all your soldiers round you—how dare you, abominable wretch—how dare you ask an honest man to do you reverence?'

As Turlough, with flashing eyes, and a voice hoarse with passion, concluded this furious address, his hand mechanically sought the place where his sword-hilt might have been.

'Ho, corporal! hola, guards!' shouted Garrett, stamping on the floor, and raising a pistol to the level of Turlough's breast, 'move—attempt to escape—move—and I fire. Guards, there, hola!'

A single spring brought Turlough up to his opponent, but ere he could grapple with him, he was effectually overpowered by numbers, and dragged to the floor.

'A spy! a rapparee! a deserter! pistol him—brain him—pink him!' such were the ejaculations, accompanied by many an oath and imprecation, which rose and rang in ferocious confusion around the overmatched Jacobite, in this desperate but short-lived struggle. Turlough O'Brien now lay gasping and overpowered upon the floor, a literal pile of men above him, hailing, throttling, tearing, and tugging at their now overmastered and breathless victim.

'Hughes—Berry,' said Garrett, hastily, 'order patrols down the road, both ways, this moment. Let the trumpet sound—call in the men—tighten girths—and have all ready. There's something in this, by—more than we wot of. Secure the prisoner—bind him,' he continued, addressing himself again to those who were engaged about Turlough—'bind him, and never spare—bind him as you would a mad beast.'

With such directions, Garrett stimulated his men, sooth to say, nothing loath themselves to extreme severity, in pinioning the prisoner's arms, and drawing cords to their utmost tension; and thus, in a few seconds more, Turlough O'Brien, bare-headed, his long hair matted and tangled in the struggle, his hands and his face smeared with blood—pale and faint from exhaustion—stood once more, pinioned and securely guarded by two soldiers, before his now entirely triumphant enemy.

CHAPTER II.—THE RIDE MOONLIGHT.

'Well, sir, methinks you have at last got yourself into pound; and egad you will scarce get out scot free!' exclaimed Garrett, as he seated himself opposite to his prisoner, and eyed him with a smile and a scowl grim enough to behold. 'You don't care, I presume, to give any information—dogged, of course; corporal, search him.'

Doatempt resistance under the circumstances would have been as undignified as futile. Turlough,

therefore, submitted in sullen silence.

'Ha! his commission,' said Garrett, glancing at the parchment document, as he placed it in his pocket. 'And what's this?—a letter,' he continued, roughly opening the next paper handed to him.

'Do not read that; I charge you as would be held a gentleman; read it not,' interrupted Turlough, indignantly.

With provoking coolness, Garrett proceeded to read, it nevertheless; and, as he did so, bit his lip, and turned deadly pale; then, tearing it slowly into strips and across and across, he flung it back into the grate, with a sneer, observing—

'You're not like to read such amorous memorials long. I promise you, master pedlar, though sooth to say, it were a pity to spoil so promising a romance; but spies are spies, though never so deep in love, and must to the gallows as often as they are caught. Corporal,' he continued, 'look out a stout piece of rope in the stables there. We'll swing the traitor from one of the old orchard boughs—would every branch bore fruit as good. Meanwhile, march him into one of the buildings, where he may say his prayers, and commend himself to his mistress, before all's over. Away with him—march.'

The concluding order was spoken in a loud and peremptory tone, for he obviously did not care to hear his victim speak; and saw, or thought he saw, a disposition on his part to do so. Avoiding his very glance, Garrett turned abruptly on his heel, and strode to the window, through which he continued to look, whistling in affected carelessness, until the prisoner and his guard had passed forth.

He then became silent, glanced quickly through the room in dark abstraction, and again looked forth in gloomy silence.

'Cangley,' said he, addressing an officer, 'I and Mr. Strong (here he glanced at the chaplain) will return this evening to head-quarters; you take the command of the detachment in my absence—have your men at Ballinasloe by noon to-morrow; there, at least, you will bear of position, and join the regiment forthwith; keep a sharp look out all night—do you mind; and hang or shoot any of the rapparees you may chance to light upon; don't let the dogs escape. Parson, come hither,' he added, addressing the chaplain, and leading that perplexed official forth. They walked, arm in arm, in the little enclosure, to and fro, in earnest conference.

'Promise him, then,' said Garrett, in conclusion, 'that you will contrive his escape, or procure his pardon; say, anything, in short, so that you lead him to tell you all about the old woman's papers and jewels; first, is Lady Willoughby actually dead; and then what has become of her valuable jewels and all the rest! I have a claim for some six or eight years' maintenance upon them; I can't afford to be swindled out of this.'

'I'll see what may be honestly done,' he replied. 'I'll do all I fairly may.'

'Here, you, sir,' said Garrett, staking one of the soldiers with the cane he carried, as he might an ill-favored dog; 'here, you, sir—you, Martley—go in yonder to the prisoner; tell him from me, to collect his wits, and prepare for an interview, and see that the cord is well secured around his arms. Be quick, sirrah,' he added, menacing him with a repetition of the blow; 'and make no blunders, or, by the mass, you shall walk the gauntlet, as you did before.'

In surlly silence the fellow obeyed; and it was not till he had reached the door of the stable where the prisoner was confined, that he muttered bitterly—

'Walk the gauntlet again! I believe you would flay me alive, if you dare. Well, I put a spoke in your wheel for all that; I will—and now's the time.'

The dusk had now closed; and the rude chamber which he entered was so dark, that for a moment he could not discern its inmate. In gloomy despair, exhausted by vehement but fruitless efforts to free his hands, he was now sitting sullenly by the wall. The soldier came close up to him without speaking. He then said in a low but distinct tone—

'See, comrade—whatever you be—Captain Garrett means to pay you a visit; he'll be in this minute, to wheedle something out of you; but never mind; will you fight him and finish him, if you can, provided I loose your arms and give you this knife?'

'I'll fight for my life: I'll fight while I have a drop of blood; give me this chance,' said Turlough, fiercely.

'You must wait here for him; and never say, if it fails, how you came by the knife,' he pursued; 'do you swear this?'

'I swear—as a soldier and gentleman, I pledge my honor,' said Turlough, earnestly.

'Then, here goes,' said the fellow, sullenly, as he ripped open the strained cordage; 'now use your hands, when he comes, and use this to a purpose,' he added, in a whisper, and placed the sharp knife, whose blade was full six inches long, in his grasp.

This done and said, he vanished. The door was secured outside: and all passed so rapidly that but for the evidences, in which he could not be deceived, O'Brien would have almost thought it a dream.

Nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed, which, to the prisoner seemed to embrace whole hours of suspense, without the appearance of the expectant visitant. At length, however, the chaplain entered. Turlough O'Brien had placed himself in the shadow of the door, and recognized the intruder at a glance. Cautiously the lank gentleman in the mantle and cassock advanced, and our hero's first impulse was to avail himself of the open door, and relying upon his own strength and activity, to venture all upon one bold effort; the hazard of attempting to brave his way, single-handed, through an enclosure filled with troopers, was well nigh desperate; and, in the momentary hesitation, another, and as it seemed, a more hopeful scheme, flashed upon his mind. Upon this latter he resolved to stake all, and with caution and rapidity he proceeded thus to its execution:—

With tread as noiseless as that of a cat, he lightly followed the stooping figure, which was moving before him towards the dark extremity of the chamber. Had his own urgent and awful danger admitted an emotion of mirth, he might well have smiled at the ludicrous attitudes of the long-legged pastor—who, sweeping his lank arms slowly before him, groped and stumbled cautiously onward, in a stooping posture, ejaculating, as he proceeded—

'Prisoner, I say, prisoner, bestir thyself; prisoner, where's they tongue, man?—[I] not barm thee.'

If his ungainly attitudes and strange intonations were calculated to make our hero smile, what followed, had not his own life hung upon the issue, might well have made him laugh outright.

Collecting his whole strength, and watching his opportunity well—for the formidable proportions of his antagonist were not to be despised—Turlough O'Brien waited until the cowering figure turned, in its bewildered search, towards himself; and then, with a single spring, clutched him by the throat, he hurled him backward, and with his whole weight, pinned him to the pavement. The violence of his fall, the utter unexpectedness of the assault, and a thousand confused apprehensions prevented his attempting, for some seconds, to move, or even to speak; of these moments, Turlough promptly availed:—

'I am armed—speak not—make no sound—and I swear you shall have no hurt; but if you attempt to stir, or give the alarm, by— you shall die; I am armed—once more, beware. Listen to my proposal,' he continued, his hand still gripped upon the throat of the prostrate man, with a pressure which just allowed him space to breathe; 'listen—and submit with prudence.'

Meanwhile a sentinel with loaded musket paced and ant replaced the space before the stable door—dragoons smoked and loitered in the yard—two guards kept the outer gate, and Miles Garrett sat mounted upon his steed, while the brave Roland, never more, as it seemed, to bear his true master to the field, stood saddled beside him; an escort of four dragoons, moreover, stood by their horses, awaiting the order to mount, and close by the cavalcade a rope was swinging from a strong bough, and underneath a cart was placed. Upon these ominous preparations, Garrett looked from time to time with a kind of fascination—it was not pleasure nor yet fear—a strange and horrible attraction, from which he seemed himself impatient to escape, for he looked often at his watch, and then through the gateway into the yard; at length muttering something which might have been either a curse, or a congratulation, between his teeth, he beheld the chaplain walk slowly and gloomily forth; the impatient steed neighed shrilly, as his rider approached. The stalwart chaplain gloomily mounted; he seemed, in truth, sorely crest-fallen and depressed. The escort also mounted, and this little military cavalcade began to move at a brisk pace along the narrow and shaded road. They had ridden some way ere Garrett spoke.

'Well,' he said, abruptly, 'what did the scoundrel tell you?'

The dragoons were riding at a sharp trot, the pace which they had all kept hitherto, in advance of them, and the chaplain drew bridle as if about to make a disclosure more at his ease; he pointed, however, silently down a narrow lane, at the foot of which, under a long perspective of sloping bushes, the waters of the glorious Shannon were glittering in the moonbeams.

'Well—what of it?' demanded Garrett, surlily; 'you don't want to ford the water—do you?'

'Ay, but I do though,' answered he of the cassock, sternly; 'look at me, and know me.'

Miles Garrett looked, and, aghast, beheld Turlough O'Brien himself; he had dropped the