



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. VIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 7, 1858.

No. 22.

THE ROCK OF THE CANDLE.

BY GERALD GRIFFIN.

(Concluded.)

There are some spirits which, like the myrtle, require to be bruised and broken by affliction, before their sweetness can be discovered. The young bride of Cormac might now have exhibited an instance of this moral truth. So perfectly did her manner indicate the degree of self-possession which she promised to maintain, that Cormac yielded without further argument to her entreaty, and resumed his place at the fireside.

Scarcely had he performed this movement when a loud knocking was again heard at the door; and immediately after, as if this slight ceremony were only used in mockery, the frail barrier was once more dashed inward on its hinges. A crowd of soldiers rushed into the apartment, and stopped short on seeing the bridegroom habited in the accoutrements of the White Knight, and standing in a posture of defence between his foes and the young girl, who seemed to be restrained, rather by her deference to his wishes, than by any personal apprehension, from pressing forward to his side.

"Stand back!" said Cormac, levelling his blade at the foremost of the throng. "Before you advance further, say what it is you seek.—The inmates of this house (all but one) are under the protection of the English law, and can only be molested at your great peril."

"If you be the White Knight, as your dress bespeaks you," returned an English officer, "surrender your sword and person into our hands.—It is only him we seek, and no one else shall be disturbed, further than to answer our claim of *bonaught*—rest and refreshment for our small troop until the morning breaks."

"I am not so thirsty of blood for the sake of shedding it merely," returned the pseudo knight, "that I would destroy a life of Heaven's bestowing in a vain encounter. Here is my sword, although I am well aware that in yielding it without a struggle, I do not add a single one to my chances (if any I had) of safety in the hands of my Lord President."

"It would be dishonorable in me to deceive you," said the Englishman: "your ready, though late, surrender can avail you little. I have here the warrant, which commands that the execution of the rebel captain should not be deferred longer than six hours after his arrest. I am not disposed, however, to be more rigid than my instructions compel me to be, so that you may call the whole six hours your own, if you can find use for so much time in this world."

Cormac turned pale, and thought of Minny; but he dared not look at her. The poor girl endeavored to support herself against the chair which her lover had left vacant, and retired a little, lest he should observe and participate in the agitation which this fatal announcement had occasioned.

"I thought it probable," said Cormac, with some hesitation, "that I might have had a day, at all events, to prepare for my fate; but my Lord President is a pious man, and must be better aware than I, how much time a sinner under arms might require to collect his evidence for that last and fearful court-martial, whose decision is irrevocable. A soldier's conscience, sir officer, is too often the only thing about him which he allows to gather rust. If I had been careful to preserve that as unsullied as my sword, I would not esteem your six hours so short a space as they now appear."

"The gift of grace, sir knight," said a solemn-looking sergeant, "is not like an earthly plant, which requires much time and toil to bring its blossom forth. Heard ye not of the graceless traveller, who, riding somewhat more than a Sabbath-day's journey on the seventh, was thrown from his horse and killed near a place of worship? The congregation thought his doom was sealed for both worlds, and yet,

"Between the stirrup and the ground,
Mercy he sought and mercy he found."

"Aye," said the captive; "there are some persons who look on this world as mere billeting quarters, and require no more time to prepare for the eternal route than they might to brace up a haversack; but my memory is not so slight of carriage. I remember to have heard at Mungahard, a Latin adage, which might shake the courage of any one who was inclined to rely venturously on his powers of spiritual dispatch:

Unus erat—no desperes;
Unus tantum—no presumas.

However, I shall be as far wide of the first peril as I should wish to be of the last. Come, sirs, you forget your supper; leave me to my own thoughts, and pray respect this maiden, who will attend to your wants while I rest."

"She seems as if she would more willingly omit that office," said the Englishman. "The maiden droops sorely for your misfortune, Knight."

"Poor girl!" Cormac exclaimed, venturing to look round upon her for the first time since his capture. "It is little wonder that she

should wear a troubled brow. You have disturbed her bridal feast." Then taking her hand, and pressing it significantly while he spoke, he added: "Your husband was reckoned a true man, and I know him well enough to be convinced that he would not place his heart in the keeping of an unworthy or a selfish love. I know, therefore, that you could not make him happier than by acting on this occasion with that firmness which he expects from you. Tell him, I knew better the value of life than to lament my fate, at least for my own sake; and remember, likewise, Minny (is not that your name?) if ever Cormac should, like me, be hurried off by an untimely stroke of fate—if ever—he renewed the pressure of the hand, which he still held in his—" if ever you should see him led, as I must now be, to an early death, remember, my girl, that none but the craven-hearted are short-lived on earth. A brave man, who had fulfilled all his duties, can never die untimely; but a coward would, though every hair were gray upon his brow."

He strove to withdraw his hand; but Minny, who felt as if he were tearing her heart away from her, held it fast between both hers, and pressed it with the grasp of a drowning person. Cormac felt, by the trembling and moistness of her hand, that she was on the point of placing all in danger by bursting into a passion of grief. He lowered his voice to a tone of grave reproof, and said:

"Remember, Minny, let him not find that he has been deceived in you. That would be a worse stroke than the headman's."

The forlorn girl collected all her strength, and felt the tumult that was rising in her breast subside, like the uproar of the northern tempest, at the voice of the Reimkennar. She let his hand go, and stood erect, while he passed on, followed by several of the party, into another room. Strange as sorrow had ever been to her bosom, she could not have anticipated, and was wholly incapable of supporting the dreadful desolation of spirit which came upon her after she was left alone. She remained for some time motionless, in the attitude of one who listens intently, until she heard the door of a small inner apartment, into which he had been conducted, close upon her lover; and then gathering her hands across her bosom, and walking slowly to the vacant chair, she sank down in a violent and hysterical excess of grief.

It is strange that the effusion of a few drops of a briny liquid at the eyes, should enable the soul to give more tranquil entertainment to a painful thought or feeling; but it is a fact, however, which Minny experienced in common with all who have known what painful feelings are.—She pictured to herself the probable nature of the fate which awaited her betrothed; and from the horror which she felt in the contemplation, proceeded to devise expedients for its prevention. This, however, appeared now to be a hopeless undertaking. The warrant of the Lord President must needs be executed within the time; and it was improbable that the White Knight could return before the expiration of the six hours. Would it be possible to contrive a scheme for his liberation? His guards were vigilant and numerous, and there was but one way by which he could return from the room, and that was occupied by sentinels. If Mun, or the Kerry thief, his master, were on the spot, of what a load might they relieve her heart! She would have given worlds to be mistress, for one night, of the roguery of the adept in aunt Norry's tale.

We shall leave her for the present, involved, like a bungling dramatist, in a labyrinth of ravelled plots and contrivances, while we shift the scene to the unfortunate hero of the night, who lay in his room, expecting the catastrophe with no very enviable sensations.

The soldiers had left him to make the necessary preparations for his approaching fate in darkness and solitude. He was now on the point of achieving a character, not without precedent in the history of his country—namely, that of a martyr to his own heroic fidelity—and he was determined to bear his part like a warrior to the last. Still, however, to a lover, conscious of being loved again—to a young man, with prospects so fair and present happiness so nearly perfect—to a bridegroom, snatched from the altar to the scaffold, at the very moment when he was about to become doubly bound to life by a tie so holy and so dear—to such an one, though brave as a fiery heart and youthful blood could make him, it was impossible that death should not wear a grim and most unwelcome aspect. Neither is the man to be envied, whose nature could undergo so direful a change without emotion. True bravery consists, not in ignorance of, or insensibility to danger, but in the resolution which can meet and defy it, when duty renders such collision necessary. Fear, in common with all the other passions of our nature, has been given us for the purpose of exercising our reason, and acquiring a virtue by its subjugation; and the man (if any such ever lived) who is ignorant of

the feeling, is a monster, and not a hero. The truly courageous man is he who has a heart to feel what danger is, and a soul to triumph over that feeling, when it would tempt him to the neglect of any moral or religious obligation.—Such was the temper of Cormac. He believed that he was performing his duty, and did not even entertain a thought of any other line of conduct than that which he was pursuing; but this did not prevent his being deeply and bitterly conscious of the hardness of his fortunes, in this unlooked-for and untimely separation.

Exhausted by the intensity of his sensations, he had dropped for some time into a troubled and uneasy slumber, when the pressure of a soft hand upon his brow made him lift up his eyes, and raise himself upon his elbow. He beheld Minny stooping over him, with a dim rushlight burning in one hand, while with the other she motioned him to express no surprise, and to preserve silence.

"Hush, hush!" she said, in a low whisper, "Cormac, are you willing to make an effort for liberty?"

He stared strangely upon her, and stood on his feet.

"What is the meaning of this, Minny; how came you here?"

"The soldiers have been merrier than they intended, and I drugged their drink for them.—Slip off your brogs, and steal out in your *trous* only. They are now sleeping in the next room, and I have left them in the dark. Fear not their muskets; I have drenched the matchlocks for them. There are only two waking, who are on guard outside the door; and for these, we must even place our hopes in Heaven, and take the chance of their bad marksmanship.—Ah, Cormac!—but there is no time to lose; come with me."

"My glorious heroine!" cried the astonished soldier, "I could not have thought this possible."

"Hush! your raptures will betray us."

"But whither do you intend to fly?"

"To the cavern on the western side of the hill, where Fitzgerald lay on the night of the great massacre at Adare Castle. Keep close to me, and I think it likely we shall pass the sleepers."

She extinguished the light; and both crept, with noiseless footsteps, into the adjoining room, which was the chamber of the heroic maiden herself. As they endeavored to steal between the soldiers, who lay locked in slumber on the ground, Minny set her foot on some brittle substance, which cracked beneath her weight with a noise sufficient to awaken one of the soldiers.

"It is the mirror!" said Minny to herself;—"my aunt Norry's prophecy was but too correct, and my vanity has ruined everything."

Still, however, her presence of mind did not forsake her. The soldier, turning suddenly round, laid hold of Cormac's *estaign* or mantle, and arrested his progress.

"Ho! ho!" he exclaimed, "who have we here?"

"Prithee, let go my dress, master soldier," returned the young girl; "this freedom tallies not well with your sermon on grace to the White Knight. I doubt you for a solemn hypocrite."

"I knew you not, wench," replied the sergeant, letting Cormac's mantle fall, "or I would as soon have thought of clapping palms with Beelzebub, as of fingering any part of your Irish trumpery. Whither do ye travel at this time of the night?"

"Even to kindle my rushlight at our hearthstone in the next room. Turn on your pallet, sergeant, and let me go, else you may be troubled with unholy dreams."

They passed on, and reached the outer room in safety.

"Now, Minny," said Cormac, "it is my turn to make a suggestion. Do you pass out, and await me at the stream that runs by the edge of the wood. The sentinels will suffer you to proceed, and the risk of detection will be lessened. Nay, never stop to dispute the point: its advantages are unquestionable."

Minny would not even trust herself with a farewell before she obeyed the wishes of her lover. A few passing jests were all she had to encounter from the sentinels, and Cormac had the satisfaction to see her hurry on, unmolested, in the direction of the stream. When he supposed a sufficient time had elapsed to enable her to reach the place of rendezvous, he threw aside his mantle, and prepared to take the sentinels by surprise. The door stood open, and he could plainly see the two guards pacing to and fro in the moonlight. Pausing for a moment, he uplifted his clasped hands to Heaven, and breathed a short and agitated prayer of mingled hope and resignation. Then summoning the resolution which never failed him in his need, he darted through the doorway into the open air.

Astonishment and perplexity kept the sentinels motionless for some moments, and Cormac had fled a considerable distance before they became sensible of the nature of the occurrence

which had taken place. Both instantly discharged their pieces in the direction of the fugitive, and with loud shouts summoned their comrades to assist in the pursuit. The bullets tore up the earth on either side of Cormac, who could hear, as he hurried on, the execrations and uproar of the awakened troop at finding their arms rendered incapable of service. He dashed onward toward the wood, and had the happiness, while the sounds of pursuit yet lingered far behind, to discern the white dress of his betrothed fluttering in distant relief against the dark and shadowy foliage of the elm wood. Snatching her up in his arms with as little difficulty as a mother feels in supporting her infant, he hurried across the stream, and was quickly buried in the recesses of the wood.

The morning broke before they had reached the appointed place of concealment. It was one of those ancient receptacles for the noble dead, which were hollowed out of the earth in various parts of the country, and were frequently used during the persecutions of foreign invaders, as places of refuge and concealment for the persons and properties of the people. When they found themselves safely sheltered within the bosom of this close retreat, the customary effect of long restrained anxiety and sudden joy was produced upon the lovers. They flung themselves, with broken exclamations of delight and affection, into each other's arms, and remained for a considerable time incapable of acting or speaking with any degree of self-possession. The necessity, however, of providing for their safety during the ensuing day, recalled them to a more distinct perception of the difficulties of their situation, and suggested expedients for their alleviation or removal.

They ventured not beyond the precincts of their Druidical sojourn until the approach of evening, and even then it was but to look upon the sunlight, and hurry back again to their lurking-place in greater anxiety than before. The English had discovered, and were fast approaching the mouth of their retreat.

Cormac, signifying to his bride that she should remain silent in the interior of the cave, drew his sword and stood near the entrance, just as the light became obscured by the persons of the party who were to enter. They paused for some time on hearing the voice of Cormac, who threatened to sacrifice the first person that should venture to place his foot inside the mouth of the recess. In a few moments after, the devoted pair were perplexed to hear the sound of stones and earth thrown together, as if to erect some building near the cave. Unable to form any conjecture as to the nature and object of this proceeding, they clung together, in silence and increased anxiety, awaiting the issue.

On a sudden, a strong whitish light streamed into the cavern, casting the dark and lengthened shadows of the party who stood without, in sharp distinctness of outline upon the broken rocks on the opposite.

"Look there, Minny!" exclaimed the youth, "it is the moon-rise, and we may shortly look for the return of our chief."

"It cannot be, Cormac. The shadows would fall, in that case, to the westwards, and not to the south. It is a more fatal signal, it is the death light of the Rock!"

Cormac paused for some moments. "Fatal it may be," he replied—"but do you observe, Minny, that no part of its ghastly lustre has fallen upon us? It is shining bright upon our enemies. There is a promise in that, if there be in reality any supernatural meaning in the appearance."

Minny sighed anxiously, while she hung upon his arm—but made no answer to this cheering suggestion. The party outside continued their labor, and in a little time the light was only discernible, as if penetrating through small crevices at the entrance.

"What can they intend?" said Minny, after a pause of some minutes, during which the party outside maintained profound silence. "All merciful Heaven!" she continued, starting to her feet in renewed alarm—"we are about to suffer the fate of Desmond's Kernes—they are going to suffocate us with fire!"

A dense volume of smoke, which rolled into the cavern through the crevices before-mentioned, confirmed this terrific conjecture. The practice, all barbarous as it was, had been frequently resorted to by the conquering party in the subjugation of the inland districts of the island.—Feeble as he had been rendered by fatigue, anxiety, and want of food, Cormac resolved to make a desperate effort to escape the horrible death which menaced them, and rushed, sword in hand, to the mouth of the cave. But he was met by a mass of heated vapor, which deprived him of the power of proceeding, or evening calling aloud to their destroyers. He tottered back to where he had left his bride, and sinking down on the earth beside her, felt a horrid sense of despair weigh down his energies like cowardice. Again he arose, and attempted to force his way

through the entrance, and again he was compelled to relinquish the effort. He cried aloud to them—offered to surrender—and entreated that they would at least have mercy on his companion. But no answer was returned, and the dreadful conclusion remained to be deduced, that, contented with having made the work of death secure, they had retired to a distance from the place.

With a sickening heart, eyes swollen and painful, and a reeling brain, Cormac once more resumed his place by the side of his betrothed. She had fallen into a kind of delirium, and extended her arms towards him with an expression of suffering, which made his heart ache more keenly than his own agonies.

"I want air, Cormac!—oh, Cormac, my love! take me home with you—take me into the green fields—for I am dying here. Air, Cormac! air, for the love of Heaven!"

"My own love, you shall have it—look up, and bear a good heart for two minutes, and we shall all be happy again."

"This place is horrible—it is like Hell! It is Hell! Are we living yet? I have been a sinner; and yet, I hoped, too, Cormac—I always hoped?"

"Hope yet, Minny, and you shall not hope in vain—keep your face near the earth, where the air is freest. Ha! listen to that. The White Knight is returned, and we are safe!"

A rolling of musketry, succeeded by yells, shouts, and cries of triumph and of anguish, was heard outside the cavern. Cormac and his bride stood erect once more; but poor Minny's strength failed her in the effort, and she sank lifeless into the arms of her lover. In a few moments the mouth of the cavern was cleared; and a flood of the cool sweet air rushed like a welcome to life and happiness, into the bosoms of the sufferers. Recovering new vigor with this draught, Cormac staggered toward the entrance, and passed out into the open air, with his fainting bride on his shoulder and a drawn sword in his right hand—presenting to the troop of liberators, who were gathered outside, a picture not unlike that of Theseus bearing the beautiful queen of Dis from the descent of Avernus. His pale cheeks looking paler in the moonlight, his wild staring eyes, scattered hair, and military attire, contributed to render the resemblance still more striking.

The White Knight received him with open arms; but Cormac would hold no more lengthened communication until his bride was restored to health and consciousness.

In this no great difficulty was encountered; and tradition says, that the White Knight was one of the merriest dancers at the bridal feast, which was given at the cottage in a few days after these occurrences.

I learned from a person curious in old legends, an account of the manner in which the "Candle on the Rock" was exercised,—for it has not been seen for a long lapse of time. About two years after the marriage of Cormac and Minny, they were both seated, on a calm winter evening, in the room which had been the scene of so much tumult and disaster on the occasion above-mentioned. Minny was occupied in instructing a little rosy child (whose property it was, my fair readers may perhaps conjecture) in the rudiments of locomotion; while Cormac—(young husbands will play the fool sometimes)—held out his arms to receive the daring adventurer, after his hazardous journey of no less than two yards, on foot, across the floor. The tyro-pedestrian had executed about half his undertaking without meeting without any accident worthy of commemoration, and lo! aunt Norry was bending over him, with a smile and a "*Ma gra hu!*" of overflowing affection, when an aged man presented himself at the open door, and solicited charity for the love of Heaven!

Minny placed a small cake of griddle bread in the arms of the infant, and bade him take it to the stranger. The child tottered across the floor with his burden, and deposited it in the hat of the poor pilgrim, who laid his withered hand on the glossy ringlets of the little innocent, and blessed him with much fervency. At that moment, the fatal Light of the Rock streamed through the doorway, and bathed in its lustre the persons of the wayfarer and his guileless entertainer. The poor mother shrieked aloud, and was about to rush towards the child, when the pilgrim, assuming on a sudden a lofty and majestic attitude, bade her remain where she stood, and suffer him to protect the child.

"I know," said he, "the cause of your fear, and I hope to end it. The evil spirit who possesses that fatal signal, is as much under the control of the Almighty as the feeblest mortal amongst us; and if there be on Earth a being who is exempt from the pernicious influence which the demon is permitted to exercise, surely the fiend may, with utmost security, be defied by innocence and charity."

Having thus said, he knelt down, with the child between him and the Rock, and commenced