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REDMOND O'CONNOR; OR, THE SECRET PASSAGE. A PAGE OF IRISH HISTORY.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE SECRET PASSAGE.

A few moments before the time appointed, O'Connor and Tyrrell, accompanied by a trumpeter, advanced and took their stations on the plain, opposite the principal gate.

Wingfield, from a loop-hole in the battlements, watched with agonizing anxiety the preparations for the onset. "Death!" he muttered, "Clifford has met his match. The fellow sits his horse like a very pillar of iron!

It was long ere Clifford recovered from the stunning effects of the fall he had received. His helmet was removed and laid beside him, while the victor stood over him, his frame heaving with rage and disappointment.

"Art too proud to ask your life, fellow?" demanded O'Connor in a tone of thunder. "I am in your power," answered Clifford, rising, "and fear I do not deserve it."

"Then take it for the present; but how, in the fiend's name, did you come to play me false? Speak! did the assassin refuse to abide the issue of the challenge he accepted?"

"It is even so," answered the discomfited Clifford. "He chose rather to hide within his stone armor, and I only sought to sustain the honor of my country."

"You have lent yourself to a base piece of treachery; but I forgive you, considering the alleged motives. But by heaven, he shall not escape me thus. I will hang him, were England's army within view!"

The party returned, disappointed, to O'Connor's quarters, a hut of green boughs which the peasants had erected for his accommodation. Clifford, having given up his arms, was placed under a guard, with strict orders to use him properly and to supply his wants.

At last he felt asleep, and had scarcely done when he imagined his father came and beckoned him to follow. With an undefined feeling of awe which prevented him from speaking, he arose and followed the apparition, which led him to the bank of the stream below the castle.

freak of his fancy, he again settled himself for repose. Again was the dream repeated, and again did he awake to find all as before. He had scarcely fallen asleep the third time when the vision was repeated more distinctly than ever.

This time O'Connor sprang to his feet, and after assuring himself that he was awake, determined to search the mystery to the bottom. He was not one to yield to superstition, but the strange dream had gained such a hold on his imagination that he could not shake it off, and seizing his sword he started from the hut.

Fergus was immediately dispatched for Tyrrell, who was not long in making his appearance. "Tyrrell," said O'Connor, with more animation than he had shown for some time, "we must change our plan of attack. I have but now returned from a survey of the castle, and have concluded to attack it in the rear at the same time that you will take it in front."

"That is a simple impossibility," answered Tyrrell. "There is not a nook about the castle I have not examined, and the rear is far beyond the reach of our ladders and smooth as glass. Our only chance lies in a bold assault upon the front."

"Nevertheless, I am determined to try, and only ask you to make a show of attack in front and leave the rest to me. When O'Connor's cry is heard within, push boldly forward and you will find us before you."

"Then your Spanish sojourn has made you acquainted with Satan!" exclaimed Tyrrell. "I defy mortal man to enter from the rear, unless he mounted on the wings of witchcraft. However, if you are determined to try the hazard, I will not balk you."

"Then be sure you keep our people at a respectful distance till the cut-throats are cleared from the battlements, which will not be long, with God's help."

In a few moments O'Connor had placed himself at the head of his most tried veterans, and under cover of the woods gained the river by a circuitous course. At the same time, Tyrrell drew up the remainder on the plain, the display of their force being accompanied by music and the waving of banners, which, while it raised the enthusiasm of his own troops, served to keep the attention of the garrison fixed, and afforded O'Connor an opportunity of advancing unperceived.

the fury of a madman; oaths and groans rent the air, and no quarter was asked or given. Each fought as if the success of the strife depended on his single arm. All fell back before the sweeping blows dealt by O'Connor, for every stroke left a foeman lifeless. At this juncture the besiegers came pouring over the wall from without, and attacked the garrison on all sides. Nerved by despair, the English forced their way to the hall, their enemies entering with them.

Here was the last and final struggle. The hall was soon crammed with men, and the fight was carried on foot to foot, and man for man, those without being obliged to remain idle spectators of the combat. Gradually the number of the English diminished, their death groans nerving the arms of their foes to greater deeds.

Fergus and Tyrrell advanced slowly and steadily, side by side, and at last reached Wingfield, who, since entering the hall, had been compelled to remain nearly inactive, owing to the crowd of his followers. He now stood alone with two companions, and the young Knight shouting "murder!" advanced to attack him.

"I ask my life," he muttered as he rose, his armor covered with blood. "That were a boon too precious for such a villain," answered the victor. "Bind him, men, and bear him to the dungeon."

While this was being done, O'Connor stooped over the body of Fergus and drew the dagger from the wound from whence his life-blood had ebbed. "May God receive your noble spirit, my brother," he sighed, looking upon the rigid features of his foster-brother. "You have fallen by the hand of the dark traitor, but your memory shall not perish."

Throwing his own cloak over the body, he rushed from the hall, and was met by MacCostello, who waved the keys of the castle triumphantly over his head and was hurrying in search of Alice. They met old Nan and her particular charge at the foot of the stairs, and while Eileen threw herself into her husband's arms, the old woman fell on her knees and begged hard for mercy.

"Kiss good mother," said the Knight kindly. "We war not against defenceless women, and you will better show your thanks by leading us to the other prisoner."

The old woman, happy to escape with her life, led the way up stairs and unlocked the door of the prison in which Alice was confined. The noise of the strife below had alarmed the fair captive, and they found her on her knees in an agony of terror. Her lover whispered her name, an exclamation of joy escaped her, and the next moment she was in his arms.

"Hast no word for me, sweet cousin?" said Tyrrell, entering and taking off his bloody helmet. "Nay, I will have no excuse," he continued, as she tried to utter something. "I know your secret and wish you all the happiness you deserve."

"But are my father, my mother, my uncle safe?" she inquired. "All, sweet one, as we could wish," answered her lover.

"Then, thank God, I am indeed happy." The old woman who had been a spectator of this tender scene, now came forward, and going up to O'Connor, timidly inquired—

"My lord, are you the son of Shane O'Connor?" "I am, good dame; but I pray keep your titles for those who value them. Hast any reason for asking this?"

"Follow me," said the old woman, "and I will show you what you would give your casque full of gold to see." Leaving Alice with her cousin, O'Connor followed the old woman through a labyrinth of passages, till she stood before a strong oaken door, and permitted O'Connor to look in. The young girl whom we have noticed before, sat with her back toward him. The noise of the assault had not reached her secluded chamber, and she seemed lost in contemplation of the objects seen from

her narrow window. So intent was her gaze, that she did not notice the entrance of the Knight, who stood silently behind her. Her long raven hair hung like a thick veil over her slender shoulders. He could not be mistaken in the beautiful profile of her face, for it was that of his own sister whom he thought long dead. An involuntary movement alarmed her, and turning, she fixed a long look of recognition on the intruder, and exclaiming, "my brother!" fell fainting to the floor. Her brother knelt beside her, and called her by the most endearing names. The old woman nudged the faces of her bodice and bathed her face and hands with water. She recovered slowly, and looking up into her brother's face, inquired, half doctingly—

"Is this a blessed reality? or is it one of those deceitful dreams?" "It is no dream, my sweet sister, but your own brother who embraces you."

"O how I thank heaven for this! What happiness, my brother, to behold you after such dreary captivity! But have you indeed mastered the usurper?" "We have indeed mastered him, Eva, but but little did I expect the happiness of meeting you on earth. Let us leave this prison room, which henceforth shall be dear to me since it preserved you to your lonely brother."

O'Connor, with the lady Eva leaning on his arm, was conducted back to the room where he had left Alice. He introduced his sister to his affianced bride; the future sisters embraced, and joy and mutual congratulations for a time banished all other thoughts.

It was a busy day with the survivors of that bloody struggle; with the same alacrity with which they pressed upon their foes, they dug their graves, and before sunset not a vestige of the strife was visible.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE USURPER'S PATH.

That night there was feasting and revelry in Castle Dearg. The little hamlet was deserted by its inhabitants old and young, and all joined in the festivity of the evening. The court-yard wall was lined on the inner side with bonfires, and in the centre were two tables extending almost across the yard, around which the rough troops were seated, and making merry with the usurper's most precious wines. Within the hall, the women and elder portion of the villagers were collected to honor their young master and mistress and to share their hospitality. In the place of honor, at the right of the host, sat Father John, the faithful curate. On his left were Henry Tyrrell and the ladies, and a little farther down, but still above the salt, sat the liberated Clifford. He seemed embarrassed in relation to the part he had acted toward Alice, who tried to convince him by looks and words that on her part it was forgotten. O'Connor had learned from some of the villagers that Clifford had restrained his superior from totally exterminating them, and this, in the eyes of the Knight, more than counterbalanced all his misdeeds. Seeing the jealous glances of some of the people, who could not bring themselves to look upon Clifford as a friend, he rose and addressed the Englishman—

Master Robert Clifford, in consideration of the friendly part you have acted toward these, my poor people, when deprived of their lawful protector, I here release you from all further duration and give you leave to depart this Castle at any hour that may seem good to you, with horse, and other effects as becometh a gentleman. Or, if you are otherwise disposed, I bid you welcome to remain as my guest as long as you will honor us with your presence."

"I am most deeply grateful," answered Clifford, "for this chivalrous intention toward one who does not deserve it from you or yours, and would beg leave to ask one or two questions of the worshipful company."

"Speak on, and welcome," said the Knight. "Will those good people forgive any harshness I may have used in executing the commands of my superior?" "We do, we do forgive," was answered from a hundred tongues.

"Dare I ask if the lady Alice will forgive an act which the renown of her own loveliness alone urged me to commit?" "You have my fullest pardon, Master Clifford; and I will add a wish for your success under more honorable circumstances," replied Alice with a smile.

"As for the lady Eva," continued Clifford, "I never had the pleasure of seeing her till this evening, and only heard of her being in the castle from the old woman who waited on her. If I have not contributed to her comfort, I hope she will believe me incapable of adding to her suffering."

"The lady Eva believes you more generous than to heap misery upon the unfortunate," answered her brother. "Then do I accept your hospitality, and remain. The cause cannot be otherwise than good which is defended by such generosity, and from this moment I renounce all fealty to Eng-

land's Queen and devote myself to the cause of the confederate chiefs."

"Hear ye that resolve, my friends?" cried the Knight, when the uproar had somewhat subsided. "Let every cup be emptied to the health of this noble stranger who has given himself to our holy cause!"

The Knight himself set the example. Loud was the applause, and many a cool mille failthe was drunk to Clifford. Alice looked admiringly at her chivalrous lover, and the bright, flashing eye of the lady Eva grew brighter. The youthful Tyrrell was not slow in his attentions, and before the banquet concluded, many a hint was passed between the guests that the castle would soon see a double bride.

At an early hour in the morning all about the castle were up and stirring. A temporary altar was erected at the end of the great hall, and thither every one repaired and knelt devoutly, as Father John proceeded to offer the holy sacrifice in thanksgiving for the victory. When Mass was concluded and all were leaving the hall, the priest beckoned O'Connor to stay.

"My son," he said, when they were left alone, "thou wilt not commit this cruel deed that thou hast sworn. Think of the conquest thou hast made, in the case of this Clifford, by one poor act of clemency, and wilt thou lose the reward of all thy good deeds by the commission of this crime?"

"In this, Father, I must disobey your precepts. Before the holy altar, ere I left Spain, I swore retribution. No, Father, I will not spare him, else he will return as he did before, and murder my people in my absence. If I could trust his word, I might indeed forgive him; but when did a Saxon keep faith with one of us, since Hugh de Lacy first trod the plain of Tara? Justice and our own safety alike call for his blood, and it must be spilled."

"Thou art deterred, I see," said the priest, mournfully shaking his head, "and I can only pray that God may forgive thy rashness."

O'Connor hurried to the yard and gave orders to have Wingfield brought forth. The fallen usurper was led from the dungeon beneath the castle, pale and haggard. As he approached O'Connor, he exclaimed with a boldness which he was far from feeling—

"Fine usage this for an English baron in his own castle! But I will yet be avenged if there be law in England!"

"Your time is too short for vengeance in this world," answered O'Connor, "and as for the next, you will hardly trouble us."

"What am I to understand from that, sirrah?" demanded Wingfield.

"Simply that, ere many minutes are past, you will be hanging from your yew leafy branches, beside the bones of your victim."

"But you dare not hang me without the due course of law?" gasped Wingfield, seeing nothing but cool determination in the other's face.

"We will give you the benefit of the same law you observed in hanging an Irish noble from his own shade tree, and confining his unoffending daughter, to coerce her to become your wife; as if the blood of the lowest maiden of our land were not too noble to mingle with your polluted stream! Lead him on, men," he cried, turning to the guards.

It was in vain that the wretch struggled with his sturdy captors, who dragged him to the fatal tree. It was with difficulty the exasperated crowd could be kept from tearing him to pieces, so vividly did they remember his former atrocities. The priest begged him, with tears in his eyes, to prepare for death.

"Hold your peace, prating hypocrite!" hissed the culprit, between his teeth. "I will have none of your nummeries to answer for in the other world."

"May God forgive you!" sighed the priest, as he retired among the crowd.

"Was I not a true prophet, when I told you the eagle should die with the fox?" coolly asked MacCostelloe, as he adjusted the rope about the neck of Wingfield.

There was no answer to this inquiry, and a dead silence reigned around, as O'Connor gave orders to hang him up. In a second he was high up among the green branches, while a long, loud shout of execration and satisfaction rent the air.

A ladder was quickly brought, and the bones of John O'Connor were taken down amid the tears of his clansmen, and interred with solemn pomp in the burying place of the family, behind the ruined chapel. About four weeks from the eventful day above-mentioned, a gay procession streamed from the gates of Castle Dearg, and crossing a new wooden bridge over the stream, entered the door of the chapel, now in good repair, and the bell sending forth its merriest peals. A spectator of this interesting scene, could observe many a plumed noble, and dainty dame, besides those who have figured in our history. It was the powerful sept of the O'Connors' Faly, who had, for a time,