

# MARGARET OF DESMOND

## OR, THE RAVEN'S NEST.

A Romance of Kildare.

By GERALD GRIFFIN.

### CHAPTER I.

"Her sire an earl—her dame of prince's blood  
In his her hue, and Geraldine she  
—sonnet on the Countess of Lincoln

The Fabii make not a more distinguished figure in the history of the ancient Roman, or the Medici in that of the modern Tuscan State, than do the family of the Geraldines in the troubled tale of Ireland's miseries. Whenever the annals of the island shall be treated by a competent pen, they will not fail to be classed, by all impartial judges, among the most remarkable families in history. Their errors, and, perhaps, in many instances their crimes, were great; but their undaunted courage—their natural eloquence—their vigorous genius—and their hereditary open-heartedness, are qualities which will be as certain of awakening admiration, as their misfortunes of exciting pity. The story of the Earls of Kildare commands such a piece of history as almost no other noble family could boast. It is a story of a noble and a king, and the genius of Plutarch would have delighted in the plucky sayings, heroic actions, and touches of character, in which the annals of the family abound.

During the reign of the Tudors, a deadly feud had raged for many years between one of the Earls of Kildare and a Chieftain—a branch of the Geraldines, residing in a distant part of Munster. The Geraldine coveted his rights, as well as those of his country, invaded by the excessive rigor, and even injustice, with which Kildare (who was Lord Deputy) administered the government; and the Earl was so highly incensed by what he called the turbulence and malice of his kinsman, that he protested his determination not to lay down his arms until he had compelled him to make submission, "albeit he should have him, as a common borderer, cut off by the knee." In this resolution he received the entire sanction of the English Government, who seldom were hard upon their deputies for an excess of zeal.

Outworn by continued defeats, and feeling deeply for the sufferings which his fruitless resistance had brought on his dependents, the gallant Geraldine testified at length his willingness to make terms, and offered to come in person to the metropolis, in order to make a formal submission to the Viceroy. He was not so despicable an enemy that even the haughty Earl was not reconciled at his proposal. He was received in Dublin with the highest testimonies of respect and joy. The Earl gave splendid entertainments, to which many, not only of the substantial citizens of the Pale, but of the native Irish Chieftains, were invited; and the public places of the city, for several days, were thronged with a motley company of revellers, mingling with a confidence as enthusiastic as if they had not been for centuries as bitter enemies, as oppression on the one side, and hate and outrage on the other, could make them.

On the second night after the arrival of the Geraldine in Dublin, a party of horse, bearing the marks of long travel in the jaded carriage both of the animals and their riders, appeared on the borders of the Pale, which they had entered by one of the northern roads. They were commanded by a young man of an appearance not once delicate and martial. The peasants and humble artisans doffed their bonnets as they passed him on the road, and the gentlemen saluted, and sufficed him to go unquestioned. As they approached the city, the sounds of rejoicing, which were distinctly heard in the calm air, awakened the attention and curiosity of the group.

"Ride on before, Thomas," said the young officer, addressing the page who bore his shield and helmet, "and ask what feasting is toward in the city."

The page spurred in his horse, and was making inquiries at the booth of a new-looking vendor of woollen

stuffs, returned to say that the Geraldine was in the city.

"The Geraldine! What—bath he taken it, then?"

"Nay," cried the page, "if it were so, I question whether the Pale would be so orderly. He has come to make submission to the King."

"To make submission!" repeated the young man. "This seems a tale no less improbable than the other. Alas! such wisdom is rare in a Geraldine. The poor Pale has suffered deeply for the pride of the Fitzgeralds. Poor, miserable land! Give me the helmet. We must not pass the Geraldine unarmed. How long is it now since this quarrel was begun?"

"Near sixteen years, my lord."

"Thou sayest aright. I remember to have heard it on my mother's knee. I well remember how Kildare returned to the castle on an autumn evening, all black with dust and sweat, and how she flew to meet him, while I marked his rusty javelin, and puzzled my brains to comprehend its use. I am not so ignorant now. Ill-fated country! How many lives, dost thou compute, have already fallen in this feud!"

"It is thought, my lord, some seventy or eighty soldiers of the Pale, with about seventeen thousand of the Irish in various encounters; besides castles sacked, about fifty; towns and villages demolished to the number of fifteen; and private dwellings of the common sort, to the amount of some thousand roofs. The Pale, too, suffered loss of property; a woollen draper's booth destroyed, besides some twenty cabins in the suburbs laid in ashes."

"Pray you, Thomas, who might be your accompant?"

"My cousin Simmons, my lord, the city ballist—your lordship may remember him."

"Ay, I thought the computation had been made within the Pale. And what was the beginning of the strife?"

"The insolent Geraldine, my lord, had the audacity to turn a troop of the Lord Deputy's horse—"

"Out of a widow's house upon his holding, where they would have taken up their quarters for a fortnight in the scarce season. This insolent Geraldine! I long to see the disloyal knave. Know you if the Lady Margaret, his daughter, be with him in the city?"

"My lord, the woollen draper spoke not of her."

"I long to know them both. Report speaks loudly of her, no less than of the Geraldine himself. But here's the city. Good-morrow, masters! Thank you heartily, than you all! O'Neill is quiet in the North, my masters! Long live the King! Hurra!"

The last sentences were spoken as the young warrior passed the city gate, where he was recognized and hailed, by a holiday crowd of the loyal citizens, with shouts of welcome that made the houses tremble around them. Kildare forever! Long live the King, hurra!" was echoed from the city gate to the very drawbridge of the Castle. The young nobleman, who had, amid all this gallantry and gaudy, a certain air that showed him to be above the reach of party spirit, received their congratulations with spirit and cheerfulness, but without losing a moment's time either to speak or hear. The streets, as he passed, presented an appearance singular and altogether new to his eye. The Irish green bonnet (or barret) seemed as common as the cap of the Pale; kernes who spoke not a syllable of English were gazing at the splendor of the city; and citizens, standing in their booths, stared with no less amazement at the unshorn locks, wild looks and woodland attire of their new allies. Passing on to St Thomas' Court, where the Lord Deputy at that time transacted the business of the Government, Sir Ulick Fitzgerald, the young knight whose course we have been following, alighted from his horse, and sent one of the officers to inform the Lord Deputy of his arrival. He was received by Kildare in the King's

chamber, and gave an account of the state of affairs in the North, where he had, for some months past, occupied the place of the Lord Deputy himself.

"Thou art welcome, Ulick, from the North," said Kildare, reaching his hand to his son, who kissed it with reverence and affection. "And now, how hast thou done thy work, my lad?"

"Like a true soldier of the Pale, my lord," replied Sir Ulick. "I taught the rascals what it was to have to do with a friend of England. Thou and our royal master, I am sure, will love me for it."

"What said O'Neill at the conference?"

"O my good father, bid me not repeat his insolence. He said his lands and castles were in the keeping of his ancestors before the very name of Ireland had sounded in the ear of a Plantagenet;—that we used our power cruelly—(we, my lord, cruelly—and I could ever upon mine honor as a knight, we have not piked about twelve score of the rascal's Irishry, except on holidays, when we wanted exercise for the hobblers. We cruel!); he complained also of trespass on the property of his dependents (what!—had we touched their lives, my lord!); he said all men were naturally free; that he derived his possessions from his progenitors, not from the royal gift, and many things beside, for which I would have set his head upon his castle gate; but as your lordship recommended clemency, I only hanged a cousin of his, whom we caught in the camp after dark."

"Ulick," said the Earl, "thou art a bantering villain; and I warn thee, as the Geraldines stand not over well with Tudor, how thou sufferest such humors to appear, and before whom. It has been remarked, and by those who might not pierce thine irony, that thou art rather a favorer of these turbulent insurgents. Thou art over mild with the rebels."

"It is a mending fault, my lord," said Sir Ulick; "in the service of Tudor it will soon wear off."

"I tell thee," said the Earl, "it is thought by many that thine heart is less with the people of the Pale than might become the descendant of those who have grown old in the royal confidence and favor, and transmitted both as a legacy to their posterity. Thou hast learned the language of these rascally Irishry."

"I confess my crime, my lord," replied the Knight; "I know my country's tongue."

"Thou lovest their braggart poetry and villainous antiquities; and art known to keep in thy train a scoundrel harper, who sings thee to sleep at night with tales of burnings and rapines, done by their outlaw chiefs upon the honest subjects of the Crown."

"I confess my fault, my lord. I love sweet music."

"Thou hast even been heard at times," continued the Earl, "to sing a verse of their howling ditties in the very precincts of the castle."

"Nay, nay, good father," cried the Knight, "if you will impute my tuneful voice as treasonous, blame nature and not me, for I had it of her. I confess myself guilty in that point also. There is a rebel melody in my voice that I cannot well be rid of."

"Ay, bantel, banter, villain," said the Lord Deputy. "I tell thee in a word, to treasure up what I have said, nor presume so far upon thy loyal deeds to excuse disloyal words. Princec are jealous of a smile, Thou must bear in mind that it is with a conquered race, thou hast to deal withal, and add a fiddle to the rod of government."

"I shall learn, my lord, I hope, as aptly as my predecessors Eric I am twice Lord Deputy I shall amend."

"And now," said the Earl, "to thy chamber, and prepare to meet the Geraldine at evening. In a few days, he makes formal submission to the King before the Lords of Council at Kilmainsham Castle; and to-night he must be entertained as becomes a Geraldine of his birth and breeding. Farewell!"

### CHAPTER II.

Spirited, lively, and yet filled with generous affection, the young Knight was not less calculated to attract admiration in the hall than in the field. He was early at the festival, and met the Geraldine in his father's presence. The latter was a swart stout-built man, with a brow that spoke of many dangers braved and difficulties withstood. If not overcome. Unaccustomed to the polished raffery of a court, the stubborn Chief was somewhat dis-

posed, at first, to be offended with Sir Ulick, who addressed him in a tone of ironical reproof, and upbraided him in eloquent terms with the unreasonableness and schism of his withholding from the conquerors possessions and immunities which he and his ancestors had so long enjoyed, and which it was but fair that they should yield at last to those poor adventurers whose services the Tudors had no other means of rewarding. "Did the Geraldine, or his confederates, consider what the Tudors owed those men to whom they were indebted for the subjugation of so large a province—and would they be so ungenerous as to withhold from the Sovereign the means of recompensing so pliable a public service," etc.

The Geraldine, who did not understand irony, was observed two or three times to bend his brows upon the youth, but had his ire removed by some gracious turn in the language, introduced with timely promptitude. The hall of the festival was now thrown open, and Sir Ulick, standing at the farther end, summoned to his side his favorite attendant, Thomas Butler, from whom he inquired the names of such guests as, in entering, had attracted his attention.

"I pray thee, gentle Thomas," said Sir Ulick, "what man is that with a cast in his right eye, with a coolan as thick and as bushy as a fox's tail, and as carrot-red withal, and a sword that seems at deadly feud with its owner's calves?"

"Who is he, my lord? That is O'Carroll, who thrashed MacMurrough at the Boyne, for burning his cousin's castle and piking his children in the bog."

"And who is she that hangs upon his arm?"

"His daughter, Nell, my lord, who ate the tip of MacMurrough's liver, with a flagon of wine, for dinner, on the day after the battle."

"Sweet creature! And that round, short, fleshy, merry little man with the chain?"

"That is the Mayor, my lord."

"And that lofty lady who comes after him like a grenadier behind a drummer?"

"The Lady-Maivress, my lord, who took her husband upon her shoulders and ran off with him to the city, when he would fain have fought, single-handed, with an enormous O'Toole who set upon them as they were taking a morning walk to Cullenswood."

"Her stature stood him in good stead. And who are they who follow close behind?"

"Burke, of Carricarde, and O'Moore, who hanged and quartered the four widows, in O'Hally, for speaking against the cosherings on the poor."

"And the ladies?"

"Their wives and daughters, who were by at the quartering."

"A goodly company. But, hush!"

"What is it, my lord, that you would ask?"

"Hush! Hush! Canst thou tell me, Thomas, what lady is that in yellow, as far beyond the rest in beauty of person as in the graceful simplicity of her attire?"

"That, my lord," said the attendant, "is your cousin, Margaret Fitzgerald, and the only daughter of the Geraldine."

"Fame, that exaggerates all portraitures, fell short in hers. My cousin Margaret. Away, good Thomas, I care not to learn more."

Approaching the circle of which the fair Geraldine formed a chief attraction, Sir Ulick was introduced to his young relative. The evening passed off happily away in her society; and before many days they were better friends than, perhaps, themselves suspected, or the parents of either would have readily approved. Both freely communicated their thoughts and wishes on the condition of their families and country. Both mourned the divided interests that distracted the latter, and the wretched jealousies which seemed destined to keep the well wishers of the island for ever disinclined in themselves, and therefore utterly incapable of promoting her advantage. Such themes as these formed the subject of conversation, one evening, while the dance went gaily forward, and the hall of the banquet seemed more than usually thronged with brilliant dresses.

"Now, at least, cousin Margaret," said Sir Ulick, in a gentle voice, "we may promise ourselves brighter times. Our fathers seem better agreed on every interview; and so nearly do their tempers harmonize, that I am sure it needed but an earlier intimacy to render them as fervent friends

as they have been strenuous enemies. Hark! What is that noise?"

While he spoke, the sounds of mirth were interrupted in a startling manner by loud and angry voices at the end of the hall, which was occupied by the Lord Deputy and other chieftains of every party. Before the time was given for question or reply, the wordy clatter was exchanged for the clash of weapons, and in an instant the scene of merriment was changed to a spectacle of horror and affright. The music ceased, and the dance was broken up, the women shrieked, while of the men, some joined the combatants, whom others sought to separate by flinging cloaks, scarfs, caps and various articles of dress across the glancing weapons. A truce was thus enforced, and then Sir Ulick learned with indignation that the hot-blooded Geraldine had struck his father. The news soon spread into the streets, where a strife began that was not so easily to be appeased. The followers of the Geraldine, whose hearts were never with the treaty of submission, seemed glad of the occasion given to break it off. They fell upon the citizens, who were not slow in flying to their weapons; and a scene of tumult ensued which made the streets re-echo from the river-side to the hills. The Geraldines were driven from the city, not without loss, and their Chieftain found himself on horseback, without the walls, and further from the royal countenance than ever. He was with difficulty able to rescue his daughter, who, on the first sound of strife, had immediately placed herself by his side.

### CHAPTER III.

The war now recommenced with double fury. The Lord Deputy received orders from London to have the Geraldine taken, dead or alive, and set his head, according to the fashion of those times, upon the Castle gate. In obedience to these instructions, which needed not the concurrence of his own hearty good will, Kildare marched an army to the South, and after several engagements, laid siege to the Geraldine in one of his strongest castles. The ruins still occupy a solitary crag, surrounded by a rushy march, at a little distance from New Auburn. The place was naturally strong; and the desperation of the besieged made it altogether impregnable. After several fruitless efforts, attended by severe loss to the assailants, to possess themselves of the castle by storm, it was placed in a state of blockade, and the Lord Deputy, encamping in the neighborhood, left famine to complete the work which his arms had failed to accomplish.

With different feelings, Sir Ulick, who held a subordinate command in the army of his father, beheld the days run by, which were to end in surrender, or (as was more probable from the well-known character of the Geraldine) in the destruction and death of the besieged. Two months rolled on, and there appeared no symptom on the part of the latter that indicated a desire to come to terms. Such, likewise, was the fidelity with which those feudal chiefs were served by their followers, that not a single deserter escaped from the castle to reveal the real state of its defenders. They appeared upon the battlements as hearty and as well accoutred as on the first day of the blockade.

Meantime, there was no lack of spirit in the castle. The storehouse was well supplied for a blockade of many months; and the Geraldine depended much on a letter he had sent, beneath the wings of a carrier pigeon, to a distant part of Desmond. The days passed merrily between watching and amusement, and the frequent sounds of mirth and dancing from within showed that the besieged were thinking of something else besides giving up the fortress.

One evening Margaret, retiring to her chamber, gave orders to her woman to attend her. The latter obeyed, and was employed in assisting her lady to undress when the following conversation passed between them:

"You have not discovered by whom the letter was left in the eastern bolt-hole?"

The woman answered in the negative.

"Take this," said Margaret, handing the maid a small wooden tablet, as white as snow, except where it was marked by her own neat characters. "Take this, and lay it exactly where the former was deposited. Yet stay! Let me compare the notes again, to be sure that I have worded

mine answer aright. Sweet Margaret. Be persuaded by one who loves thy welfare. Let thy sweet voice urge the Geraldine to give up the fortress which he must yield perforce ere long, and with sorer loss perchance than that of life and property. Thy friendly enemy unknown." Well said, my friendly enemy—not quite perhaps so unknown as thou esteemest,—now for mine answer.—"Kind, friendly enemy—Thine eloquence will be much better spent on Kildare, in urging him to raise the siege, than my poor accents on the stubborn Geraldine. Wherefore, I commend thee to thy task, and warn thee to beware of my kinsmen's bills, which, how shrewdly they can bite, none ought to know better than the Lord Deputy and his followers. Thy thankful foe."

The tablet was laid on the window, and disappeared in the course of the night. On that which followed, while Margaret and her maid were occupied, as before, in preparing for rest, a noise at the window aroused the attention of the mistress, and struck the woman mute with terror. Dismissing the latter into the sleeping chamber, which lay adjacent, and carefully shutting the door, the daughter of the Geraldine advanced to the window, and unbarred the curtained lattice. A brilliant moon revealed the lake, in the midst of which the castle rose upon the summit of a rock, the guarded causeway by which it was connected with the shore, the distant camp of Kildare and too tranquil woods and hills extending far around. Beneath her, on the rock appeared a figure, the identity of which she could not for an instant mistake, but how it came thither, to what intent, and wherefore undetected, was more than she had the skill to penetrate. Perhaps, like a second Leander, he had braved the waves with no other oar than his own vigorous limbs! But the stern of a little curragh, peeping from beneath the overhanging rock, gave intimation that Sir Ulick (for he, indeed, it was) knew a trick worth two of Leander's. Waving his hand to Margaret, he ascended the formidable crag which still separated him from the window of her apartment, and came even within whispering distance. He did but come to be sure that she, at least, was not in want of food. It so happened that this side of the rock alone was unguarded, being supposed impregnable from the steepness of its ascent, as well as that of the opposite shore. Sir Ulick, however, gliding under the shadow of the distant cliff, and only venturing to dart for the isle when the sky was darkest, had already visited it for three successive nights, and seemed, at every new venture, more secure in his secret. The alarm of Margaret, however, was excessive. The discovery of an intercourse would be certain death to one of them—for the Geraldine, in a case of treason, whether real or apparent, would not spare his nearest blood. The same, as Sir Ulick was himself aware, was true of the Lord Deputy. Made bold, however, by impunity, he quieted the lady's fears, and without much difficulty, communicated to her mind the security of his own. His visits were continued for a week without interruption, after which period the fair Geraldine observed, with perplexity and uneasiness, that they terminated abruptly, nor did she, for an equal space of time, see or hear anything that could account for this sudden disappearance of her accomplished friend.

One night, as she sat in her window, looking out with the keenest anxiety for the little wicker skiff, she observed, with a thrill of eagerness and delight, some dark object gliding close beneath the cliffs upon the opposite shore. At length a friendly cloud extended its veil beneath the face of the "welcome satellite; and in a few minutes the plash of oars, scarce louder than the ripple of the wavelets against the rock, gave token to the watchful ear of Margaret, of the arrival of the long-expected knight. A figure ascends the rock, the lattice is unbarred, there is sufficient light to peruse the form and features of the stranger. It is not Sir Ulick, but Thomas Butler, the fidus Achates, and only confidant of the youthful knight.

"What, Thomas, is it thou? Where is thy lord?"

"Ah, lady, it is all over with Sir Ulick!"

"How sayest thou?"

"He is taken, lady, by the Lord Deputy's servants, and stands condemned in the article of treason."

"These dreadful tidings, acting on spirits already depressed, by a sul-

den disappointment, proved too much for Margaret's strength, and she fainted away in the window. On recovering, she obtained from Thomas a full detail of the circumstances which had occurred to Sir Ulick, since his last appearance at the island, and the cause in which they had their origin.

About a week before, the Lord Deputy was sitting, at evening, in his tent, when a scout arrived to solicit a private audience. It was granted; and the man avowed that he had discovered a treasonable communication between the inhabitants of the island and the shore. In his indignation at this announcement, Kildare made a vow that the wretch, whoever he was, should be cast alive into the Raven's Nest, and appointed a party to watch on the following night on the shore beside the cliffs for the return of the traitor from the rock. Having given the men strict injunctions to bring the villain bound before him the instant he should be apprehended, he ordered a torch to be lighted in his tent, and remained up, to await the issue.

Towards morning, footsteps were heard approaching the entrance of the tent. The sentry challenged, and admitted the party. The astonishment of Kildare may be conceived, when, in the fettered and detected traitor, against whom he had been fostering his liveliest wrath, he beheld his gallant son, the gay and heroic Ulick! The latter did not deny that he had made several nightly visits to the island; but denied, with scorn, the imputation of treasonable designs, although he refused to give an account of what his real motives were. After long endeavors, no less by menace than entreaty, to induce him to reveal the truth, the Lord Deputy addressed him, with a kindness which affected him more than his severity.

"I believe thee, Ulick," he said. "I am sure thou art no traitor. Nevertheless, thy father must not be thy judge. Go, plead thy cause before the Lords of Council, and see if they will yield thee as ready a credit. I fear thou wilt find it otherwise, but thou hast thyself to blame."

A court was formed, in the course of a few days, consisting of Kildare himself, as President, and a few of the Council who were summoned for



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