



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1863.

No. 4.

THE RETURN OF CLANEBOY.

(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

On an afternoon in midsummer, 1633, a party of native Irish, issuing from the northern forests of Tyrone, crossed the river Bann into Antrim. They were of the clan Aodh-Buidh, or followers of Yellow Hugh O'Neill, a prince expelled some years before from his kingdom of Dalradian, on the western confines of which they were now arrived.

'Prince,' says he, 'the life of an O'Neill was not given to be cast away upon the running waters. Here are pools and currents that have swept down man and horse, and one step to either side might have carried thee amongst them.'

'Pardon me, pardon me, for giving thee alarm, good Laughlin,' said young O'Neill; 'but trust me there are rivers as deep, and fords as dangerous to Tyrconnell, yet has white Fingall borne me from Ballyshannon to the Black Valley, and never put hoof to bridge. And this is Dalradian,' he cried, striking the butt of his hunting spur against the green sward, and gazing at bank and tree, and at the river at his feet, and the sky overhead—'Dalradian! my father's right, my brothers' and my own inheritance, and I am here at last—I would I had a fairer view of the country, ho, Laughlin, let us on to the open hills, and they gave their horses' head, and are the dull beat of the hoof upon the grass had died away, were hidden behind the thick green veil of the foliage. Presently appeared a smaller party on foot, shaggy and nimble kerns, with mats of their own plaited hair for head-pieces, and long mantles, fantastically fringed and braided, hung over their yellow linen doublets and close trousers of deer-skin. These led greyhounds and wolf-dogs in leashes, and bore tent-poles and hatchets, which, with the panniers borne by three sumpter-horses, showed that the strangers purposed pitching their camp for some time wherever they might stop. They followed in the track of the horsemen at a pace that took them almost as quickly out of sight, and the river had hardly smoothed itself after them, till the salmon shot again, and the wild swan came down from his island, the ruffling of his feathers the only sound between the forests, save when a sudden plunge told that the otter had slid out again from his hiding-place, or when the wood-pigeon, that had wheeled aloft from the strange aspect of men, cooed murmuring from her reclaimed nest upon the overhanging ash once more.

When the strangers next emerged from the forest, it was upon the hills to the north of Connor. As they rose into view of the open country beneath, O'Neill's eye glanced with restless admiration over the scene. 'And is it,' he exclaimed, pointing down the rich valley of the Mayne—is it from such an inheritance as this that we have been driven to the bleak ravines of Slieve-Gallen, and the thickets of Killeightra? Oh, Laughlin, had I known what a fair country was ours by right, I had never staid so long contented in Tyrconnell. I thought it a desolate tract of moorlands and morasses, fit only to be dwelt in by those hungry strangers who are glad of any spot of ground, however miserable.'

'Alas, Prince,' said his companion, 'thou hast never seen an English army, nor an English'

stone castle. One of the walled shellings of Tyrconnell could be fired and consumed over the heads of its inmates in shorter time than thou couldst pick a single corner-stone from the keep of Cragfergus; and, for an armed knight of their nation, thou mightest as well shower thy blows upon the armorer's anvil.'

'Bones of Saint Murus' cried the youth;—'and if he were as impenetrable as a pillar of flint, strength of men and horses could overturn him! and for their redoubted castles, when did they ever build such a cromlech as I see on yonder knoll, where the altar top is as broad as the shield of Fin MacColl, and every standard stone would sink a ship.'

'Think not that I magnify our enemies to excuse ourselves,' replied his companion; 'but their tower battlements have even such stones heaved higher than the rath of Ughlogael, upright from the ground; and one of their ships would hold a hundred such leathern baskets as thou hast seen on Lough Erne and the Blackwater—floating castles they are, with tall trees for masts, and armies of men and horses in their holds.'

'I have seen ships,' said O'Neill, 'I have seen ships on Lough Swilly, and Tanists of the great Clan Donnell sailing in them over the waves of the open sea; but though these strangers had ships like our castles of oak, and castles like our mountains of rock, I have learned, Laughlin, among the shellings of Tyrconnell, to trust to myself, my kinsmen, and our noble allies, for the maintenance of our ancient state and freedom against both.'

'Think not, I again pray thee,' replied the other, 'that I would make enemies terrible in thine eyes, either to excuse ourselves, or to daunt thee; but trust me, thou art overconfident in the strength of unaided arms. The English are as wise and powerful as they are covetous, and while united to oppose inroads of their robberies, will ever be triumphant as they have been; and this thy royal father well knoweth, when he holds council all year round in his mountain castle, leaving the year within their pale to shrewd clerks, Brehons, and Erenachs like myself, who have wrought their government more mischief in one day than centuries of unequal war could have accomplished. Have we not already in times past stirred up both Lucys to rebellion;—won over the MacMurrough and O'More to our alliance of late in Leitster, Fitz Thomas in Desmond, and in Ormand and Kikenny, the stout Lord Tipperary? And have not I here within a year drawn Bermingham and Mandevill, nay, the very cousins of William De Burgh himself, to abandon their allegiance, and turn as Irish as ourselves?'

'For which,' replied O'Neill, 'if I have heard aright, Walter hath already perished miserably in his imprisonment at Cragfergus, while Richard and Huert still lie in the deepest dungeon of Norburgh, awaiting the Earl's mandate for life or death. Their sister Lady Gyle, the widow of Sir Richard Mandevill, is stirring all Ireland in their behalf; and all, as I have heard, in vain.'

'All this I know,' rejoined the Erenach, or lay abbot, for such his words and habit had shown him to be; 'I know that in Dublin and London, the defection of these nobles has struck such a terror into the councils of the English, that letters commanding the cruelties exercised upon these unhappy gentlemen, have been sent to all the Lords of the Pale; and that whether he will it or no, William must execute the law, without regard to blood or kindred; but it is from this same cruelty and its ungrateful compulsion to its exercise, that we hope the best.—'Thickest thou Earl William will sign the death warrant of any gentleman for living as a noble spirit prompts him, and not reflect that when he perchance may increase his own retinue by a butler more, or raise his own wall by a foot of battlement higher than may seem good to some timorous tyrant of the council, he also may be proclaimed a rebellious traitor, and a *Morus Hebernicus*? But that I fear thine open fierceness I could disclose such a plan as would make thee well content with our peaceful policy.'

'Let me be no party,' said O'Neill, 'in any concealed designs. I will defy the traitor to his face, if you list to trust your quarrel to my hands; if not I am privy to nothing, save the accommodation of the coheries.'

'Be it so,' said the Erenach, gravely; 'thou shalt have store of pleasures at the English Court, without tilting at the Earl.'

'Ho, Laughlin,' cried the impatient youth, while he struck his spurs into his horse's flank, and making him spring high in the air, threw out his right hand expanded, as if to grasp the long line of highlands that lay before them—'Ho, Laughlin, these are brave mountains; they look not like other hills; they are broad, swelling, and rolled together like a wave of the sea, or an army of good warriors. How name you that great one that rises over all like the ship among the waves, or the king's presence on the ridge of battle?'

'That,' answered the Erenach, 'is the great Mount Stemsb. We shall be on its summit ere sunset, and I will then show thee the whole land of Dalradian from Mourne to Rathlin.'

They pursued their way along the vale of Broughshane, through thick woods that for a time hid everything else from their view, and were almost under the western precipices of Sleinish before they beheld its huge wedge-like bulk piercing the blue sky overhead. Sleinish is one great joint of that spine of mountains that runs between the vale of Glenwhirry on one side, and that of Broughshane on the other, heaved over its fellows so high, and so abruptly, that to the eye of one standing on the highest point, the platform of its summit is alone visible, like a green island under foot, floating a thousand feet above the middle of the county Antrim, for from that point neither base nor side can be seen, but all around, from Louth upon the south, to the hills of the Causeway upon the north, and from the mountains of Argyleshire and Gallo-way upon the east, to the western highlands of Derry and Tyrone, everything lies under the view as on a map. The rock of which it mainly consists, rests upon a green sloping and smooth base, rising suddenly out of the hollow of the hills on either side, and in itself a mountain.

Rounding the southern shoulder of this, our travellers came upon a fountain, springing out of the green sward, beside a great stone which seemed to have come down at one bound from the brow of the precipice above, for it was sunk half way in the earth, and overhanging, as if arrested by the depth of the first diat it had made in the soil. Under this they halted; the horsemen dismounted, and till the arrival of the kerns, who, although on foot, were not far behind, occupied themselves in cleaning their horses and accoutrements. Presently the kerns came up, bearing willow withes and rushes, which they had cut in the holms by the way, and all were soon busily engaged in pitching their camp.—Two circles were marked out on either side of the great stone, round each of which they sunk certain of the tent poles alluded to, at equal distances, and having brought the ends of these together under cups prepared to receive them, speedily wattled the spaces between, and thatched them all over with rushes, so that to one coming suddenly in sight of their dark green pyramids, it might have seemed as if two trimmed yew trees had all at once sprung up beside the fountain. So soon as these works had been put in progress, O'Neill and his preceptor ascended the mountain. Erenach often stopped and breathed himself upon the steep and dizzy ascent, but O'Neill betrayed no further symptom of fatigue than a deeper glow upon his cheek, and a fuller expansion of the plaited tissue on his breast. He had thrown of his mantle and high cap, and now stood on the middle and highest peak of the summit, the rays of the declining sun deepening the yellow of his garments into flaming orange, and graining the auburn bands of his hair with a waving radiance like gold, as the wind blew it round his deep flushed and animated features. The Erenach ascended to the foot of the little pinnacle on which he stood, and gazing, blessed the glorious boy in his heart. 'The very sun crowns him with a brighter light,' he exclaimed mentally, 'there is a glory on him from heaven.'

O'Neill stood wrapped also in a trance of admiration, but it was of the noble prospect spread everywhere at his feet.

'Stand by my side, good Laughlin, I pray thee,' he said at length, 'and tell me how all these lakes and mountains around us are named; for I here see loughs and countries I never dreamed of till now.'

'Let us look northward first,' said the Erenach, 'before the cloud falls between us and the Knock-Laide, for a storm is rising from that old country of the giants'—and pointing out successively the various objects on the northern horizon—the Causeway mountains, the watchhills of Fairhead and Lurgedin, and the Isle of Isla;—and eastwardly, the Mull of Cantire, the Isle of Arran, the Craig of Ailsa, and the Carrick mountains; he told him the names of their possessors, and the wars of wonders for which each was celebrated; then turning more southwardly, directed his eyes to the lough of Carrickfergus, distinguishable at intervals, down past the steep shoulders of the mountains between. 'The strangers have their castles,' said he, 'all along its nearer shore, close under this broken line of hills. First stands the great stone keep of Cragfergus, with the lesser castles of Machneocole and Kilroute; next, under yonder precipices—they are scooped into caverns, in which I have seen the kings of three nations assembled—have they their town of Coole and Castle by the fords at Belfast; beyond, the forests of the Lagan stretch far into the territory of Kiltulnah; then come the low countries of the Macgennis and O'Hanlon, but these we cannot see for the intervening heights of Deris, although their southern boundary of Mourne rises over all, mountain

on mountain, cutting the horizon as with the teeth of a saw. To the west Lough Neagh flames like a sheet of gold, and the hills of Tyrone and Coleraine are hardly visible through the bright veil of the sunlight. But come, now, and let us look down upon the spot we have left.' He led O'Neill to the southern verge of the precipice, whence all that side of the mountain was visible. 'Is not this a strange and solemn scene, Prince?' said he, 'this lonely hollow at our feet, this black rock on which we stand, these wooded wilderness all around, and that solitary well spring in the midst, rising unwearied and silent, and sliding down the same smooth path from century to century? Knowest thou who wandered these woods and mountains, climbed those rocks, and drank of these blessed waters eight centuries ago?'

'I know not,' said O'Neill, 'unless perhaps a herd of wild boors, or a troop of wolves.'

'Oh, holy and blessed Patrick!' exclaimed the Erenach, 'was it for this that the visions came to thee by night, and the voices of the male infants crying out of the forest for redemption? that the scene of thy prayer and fasting should be deserted and forgotten, that the people of thy choice should be made vagabond like Cain?'

'Nay,' said O'Neill, 'I knew not that the good saint had been a mountaineer of Dalradian.'

'Knowest thou the song of Feich of Sleibtha?' said the Erenach.

'From beginning to end,' answered O'Neill; 'I learned it of Callough Moyle, my grandfather's bard.'

'What says he in his 16th and 17th stanzas?' said his preceptor.

O'Neill repeated the Irish of the following: 'By the fountain that never knows draught or decrease,

He nightly sang a hundred psalms, In service of the King of Angels. They went he to sleep on the bare rock, His covering round about, a dark mantle, His pillow of rest, the bark of the forest tree.'

'And what saith his own epistle, when he tells how the love of God increased within him day by day in his captivity?' questioned the Erenach.

O'Neill paused for an instant to recollect, then repeated the passage—'etiam in sylvis et monte manebam, et ante lucem excitabar ad orationem, per rivum; neque gulum, per pluviam; et nihil mali sentiebam, neque ulla pigritia erat in me.'

'These are those woods,' cried the Erenach, 'this is that mountain, and yonder well-spring is that fount. Here me, Prince, we stand on the most blessed ground in Europe—in the cradle of the church—in the nursery of kingdoms, in the very womb of western Christendom! for here it was, even in this wild and lonely rook of Sleinish, that God raised up the reclainer of the Pagan; and here I made a vow—and I call these hills and waters and these eternal rocks to be a perpetual witness against me—that through good and evil, through honor and dishonor, thro' life and death, I will devote myself to the sacred cause of this thy thrice blessed land's recovery.'

O'Neill stood apart, astonished and in silence, while the other knelt and prayed; and neither spoke, till at length the Erenach having arisen, the Prince turned himself again to the wonders at his feet. But he had not long looked till he cried suddenly, 'Cast thine eyes over this hill beneath, good Laughlin; what takest thou that glittering and glancing among the hazel copses to be? Ha! there goes a stranger horseman; and by the lamp of Kildare, two gallant mounted ladies by his side! and see now where their train draw out from the wood, and take to the open country—Bones of Murus, 'tis a rare sight on these deserted hills.' So saying, he flung himself down the nearer pathway, hurrying to join his men below, while the graver Erenach followed by a more circuitous but safer road.

When O'Neill came again in sight of his men, they were clustering round the tents like bees before the hive; for a bugle note from the party just descried from above, had reached them before the strangers were yet risen into their view. Many were the enthusiastic exclamations that the appearance of their Prince swinging from rock to rock down the face of the precipice, called forth.

'Behold the young eagle of Claneboy,' cried his bard Turloch Gorme—'he stoops from his eyrie of Sleinish like the young golden eagle.'

'Like a sun beam from the cloud!' exclaimed Brian Roe, his standard bearer.

'Like the bright sword from its sheath,' responded Roije Duff, his armorer.

'Ring round him, sons of Hy Nial!' shouted another kern, with hair like light flame, and eyes like coats of fire, as he put a long twisted horn to his mouth, and made the rocks re-echo in reply to a second blast sounded over the hill, as the Prince stood before them. 'Speathe your knees, my loving friends,' he said; 'I have seen the strangers from above, and they rather crave our

shelter from the storm that already is fast rising out of the north, than violence or discourtesy.' At that moment the party alluded to rose over the hill—two ladies and one knight, with an attendant train of half a dozen troopers. They came down at a hard gallop, till the clump of dark figures round the green tents caught the elder lady's eye.

'Draw up, brother,' she exclaimed, 'these are no friends of ours; I know the red cloak of their leader—they are the Irishry from Coleraine.—Draw up, Sir Robert; and do thou, Aylmer Warde, ride out and ask the knaves if they be for peace or war.'

'Stay,' cried the knight, 'their leaders are advancing let—me meet them half-way. Noble kinswomen and Lady Honora, your paltreys are fleet, and it we should come to blows with these rascal kerns, I pray you hold back out of arrow-range, and keep us ever between you and their battle.' So saying, he spurred forward, attended by the tall man-at-arms, and met O'Neill with his preceptor in the middle of the intervening hollow.

'What greeting have you, sirs, for the noble lady Gyle de Burgh on her kinsman's hills of Antrim?' he inquired in a loud voice.

'Health and peace to that noble lady, and all good greetings to her valiant brother-in-law, Sir Robert Fitz Martin Mandevill,' answered the Erenach in good English, as he advanced, and held out his hand, which the Knight shook warmly, exclaiming with a face of glad recognition—'What! our some time chaplain of Coleraine! right welcome thou art to our Pale, thou and all thy good company. But which of the Princes of the West have we here honoring our hills?' he inquired, looking at O'Neill, who could only perceive by their faces that terms of good will had been established, for, save Latin, he spoke no other but his mother tongue. The Erenach, in the different languages, made each acquainted with the name and rank of the other, and the Knight acknowledged the courteous salute of the Prince with an obeisance almost as deep as he would have bestowed on an Englishman of the blood royal; then ordered the soldier to bring the ladies and their troop forward without fear. As they approached, he rode up to them, and addressed the Lady Gyle.

'Dear kinswoman, we have fallen among our best friends. This is that pious and trusty churchman, Father Loughlin Pechuly, thy poor Walter's tried advocate in all his perils, and this is the youngest of the Princes of Claneboy.' Before Sir Robert had done speaking, the lady had dismounted and given both her hands to the Erenach, while tears burst from her eyes, and she was hardly able to articulate her thanks and greeting for emotion.

'Forgive my weakness, my good father,' she said, 'but I have to-day ridden from Muckmore to Connor, and from Connor to Galgaco, soliciting abbot and bishop in my hapless brother's and I have not looked on the face of one true friend till now, now, and I cannot but weep to think of it.'

'Take comfort, noble lady,' said the Erenach; 'while there is life there is hope. Earl William cannot have so lost the nature of humanity as to put an unjust law in execution thus rigorous on his own blood relation; but alas! why do I measure dead Richard's successor by the simple and kindly rule of our own nature? When did the cold tyrant ever show any touch of generous spirit, any spark of frank nobility? But let me pray you, does your fair daughter still show her love for us, by gracing our tongue with the sweet voice I so well remember since when she was a child in Omagh; although, by my troth, her form and face have astonished me with a beauty never imagined before.'

'Honora still loves the Irish,' said the lady; 'but God wot, she must forget the language of her grandmother within our cousin's Pale; else would thy rebellious tongue be clapt out child,' and she drew her daughter forward, 'and thy doud services bestowed upon some lackey of the Earl, as I am assured happened to a gentleman of good birth in Connaught. Nevertheless, let us venture for once—tell the good father in his own tongue how much thou art bounden to his friendship.'

Honora, in Irish, reiterated the thanks that her mother had already given. O'Neill, who, all the while, had been gazing at the fair stranger, no sooner heard her pronounce the well-known accents, than he accosted her, delighted to find one with whom to converse without an interpreter. Just as he was expressing his hope that they would rest within his rude camp before proceeding farther on their journey, heavy drops of rain began to fall, and the whole party made a simultaneous movement towards the shelter; but before they could reach the little encampment, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from which the conference had taken place, the darkness had shut in on every side, and the sun was set. As they drew up before the green-arched doorway, the mountain above seemed