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THE IRISH WIDOW'S SON;

OR,

THE PIKEMEN OF NINETY-EIGHT.

BY CON. O'LEARY.

CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

After speaking with the brothers, in the presence of McCracken, Neilson, and Milliken, the latter and his party started at once for the office of the stage-coach, from which they proceeded to their appointed place. Milliken was well acquainted with the driver, and hired outside seats for himself and companions.

When fairly started on the road, Israel, who had secured a seat beside the driver, entered into a long conversation with Cormac, as to the necessity of his prudent management of affairs, enrolment of soldiers for the army of United Irishmen, and the cultivation of a feeling of brotherly love among those of different religious persuasions. A few hours brought the stage-coach to a place called Hillsborough, at which horses were changed. About a mile before reaching the "Head Inns," where fresh horses were in readiness, all the travellers dismounted from their seats to walk up the hill, through the town. The demesne of the Downshire family are situated here, the entrance to which was guarded by a body of yeomanry. To this day the same practice exists, and a more ludicrous sight is not easily seen, than five or six of the Downshire yeas, dressed like parish beadle sauntering about the entrance to the Castle. They are old men, mostly the sons of '98 yeas. They are dressed with cocked hats, large white rollers of cotton cloth round their necks, plush breeches, swallow-tailed coats, profusely embroidered vests, that bespeak capacious stomachs, white stockings, that from their thinness betray the padded calves, and shoes with large antique buckles.

It was a common practice for the guards of this noble mansion to get into conversation with passengers on their route to Dublin, and other towns on that line.

Milliken instructed his companions on this matter. Cormac and himself were peddlers. John and Peter were farm servants. All were to appear to be good and loyal people, and no matter what sentiments were heard uttered in their presence, they were to remain quiet; or, if they did speak, to join in with all that was said. People who "knew the road," were sensible of the necessity of this line of conduct, for Hillsborough was remarkable for many a scene of bloodshed in those days.

After the tiresome walk up the steep hill, and the appetite generated by the drive through the fresh country air, the passengers betook themselves at once to the large room, where the comfort of a good fire awaited them. Refreshments were loudly called for, and shortly a spirit of hilarity became prevalent among the fellow-travellers. The bar-room was thronged by the yeomanry, who were anxious to learn if anything stirring was taking place in Belfast.

"Any news from your quarter?" asked one of the yeas, addressing Milliken.

"Which quarter do you mean?" inquired our friend.

"Belfast," said the yeoman.

"I don't belong to that place," said Milliken.

"Do you, young man?" inquired the same speaker, addressing Cormac.

"No, sir," said Rogan, rather emphatically.

"There is some news," said one of the passengers, joining the company. "Some bad news, too, as far as I can learn."

"Let's hear," said the yeoman.

"Col. Barber has been applied to for forces from Belfast, to be stationed at Antrim, Randalstown, and districts."

Cormac and Israel became attentive listeners but neither gave the slightest indication of any particular interest in the conversation. A slight tinge of red was visible on Cormac's cheek. Milliken's keen eye observed this; the others were not so attentive.

"Regular forces?" said the yeoman.

"Regulars and yeomanry both," said the stranger.

"Any report of disturbances about those places?" was the next inquiry.

"Nothing but the burning and laying in ruins of every honest man's property," replied Israel Milliken's fellow-traveller.

"Do you mean the property of those who are trying to save the country from the horrors of civil war?" asked the yeoman, who evidently appeared to be above the ordinary grade of those of his class.

"I mean the property of men who won't be dared into the acknowledgment of any treason against the crown and sovereign of these realms," replied the stranger.

"Quite so; that's what I mean, also."

"The report to-day is, that a gentleman named Duncan Cameron, had his house, barn, and haggard completely destroyed."

"Cameron, did you say?" asked John Milliken.

"Yes; that's the name, I believe."

Milliken gave a glance at Mullan, and drawled out: "Bad, very bad, indeed."

"Darned bad!" said the yeoman, excitedly.

"I tell you what it is, my friends," he said, addressing the party, "our government thinks itself very wise, and very cute; but the fact is this: it is only allowing matters to go to a certain head, thinking to crush them whenever it appears necessary; but the same government will very likely find itself mistaken, before long, and then they'll wish that they had taken active steps before this."

"Quite right; quite right," said Israel.

"If I only had the chance," said the other.

"I'd very soon—"

"Take your places, take your places," roared out the guard of the mail-coach.

There was a general rush of travellers.—The strange gentleman was an inside passenger. He nodded in a friendly manner to Israel.

The latter was no sooner seated beside the driver, with Cormac on the opposite side, and Peter and John behind, than instantly he inquired: "Who is that fellow with the drab vest, Darby? There are two ladies with him. I think."

"Whisht," said the driver; "that's the devil!" and he made the whip give forth a loud crack as he spoke.

"And his name?" inquired Israel.

"Beelzebub," said Darby.

Milliken could not help laughing at the appearance of Darby, as he used the word.

"Mister Beelzebub, I call him," said Darby.

"When I am speaking to myself, or to a friend and when nobody else hears me."

"I saw him before, somewhere," said Milliken, "and for the life of me I cannot call to recollection, this moment, where I did see him."

"You saw him in the Star Inn, in Belfast," said Darby, "the night you were nearly nailed."

"What, Murdoch!" asked Israel, evidently alarmed.

"The same," replied Darby. "Mister Murdoch, the friend and companion of Mister Newell. God bless the purty pair o' them, over the left," said the driver.

"Pull up suddenly whenever you pass Mac-Shane's, about five or six miles beyond Loughbrickland," said Milliken.

"All right; I know your ground," answered Darby.

Cormac's mind was evidently "ill at ease" since he heard the news about Cameron.—Peter and John, the latter especially, felt rejoiced, but neither of them divined the right cause of the burning of Cameron's premises.—Peter ascribed it to Pat Dolan. John said, "that was all stuff." He would lay his life that some of the O'Haras had a hand in the work.

As the darkness increased, the conversation began to lag, and but little transpired among our party until the journey's end was reached.

The driver pulled up quickly, and Israel Milliken and his party dismounted, without any notice being taken of them.

CHAPTER XI.—A CONVERSATION BETWEEN FATHER JOHN AND KATE—KATE VISITS WIDOW ROGAN'S—MEETS BRIGID O'HARA—WHAT THEY DID AND WHAT THEY SAID.

"Still do your happy souls attune
The notes they learned on earth to move;
Still breaking o'er the chords, commune
In sympathies of angel love."

It was a bitter cold night, as Father John McAuley drew his arm-chair closer to the fire, and desired Kate to come and sit beside him.

Kate obeyed; and having provided herself with some needle-work, for Kate was master of that humble but essential little article, the needle, took her place beside her uncle, in a cheery and light-hearted manner. She had made her uncle acquainted with the details of her interview with Cormac, omitting the little episode of the ratification of what transpired at said interview.

"Kate, my good girl," said Father John, "you were anxious to know if I were pleased with your conversation with Cormac Rogan, and with his conduct in addressing you as he did. I am quite pleased; or, rather, I am partly indifferent. I must tell you, however, that you did well to mention to me all about it. I never fail in telling others, when I consider they have done right. I look upon it, my child, as much of a duty to point out what pleases me, and to show my appreciation of good conduct, as to warn against errors, and condemn in proprieties, and graver faults. It is a mistake, Kate, to withhold praise when really due. It is an incentive to do better still; and the father, mother, or friend, who feels pleased, and inwardly rejoices at some good or brave act of a child, companion, or friend, and who fails to notice that which pleases them, commit a great mistake."

"Many years ago," replied Kate, "I observed you, dear uncle, endeavor to establish that fact in the minds of your people. I did not properly understand your meaning, for I was just returned from Miss O'Hara's school. But the lesson seemed to grow on me, as it were, and since I came to properly understand the goodness of your motives, I have felt it as necessary to open my mind to you on matters

wherein I was to blame, as on things the reverse."

"That was the point I aimed at, and therein lies the true germ of education. I was proud to see it so beautifully exemplified in the conduct of Cormac's mother. That woman, dear Kate, knows more of real education than many of those who take upon themselves the performance of such a duty."

"That, perhaps, is the secret of my regard for her."

"Might you not just as easily have said your love for her, and been nearer the truth?"

This was a sharp, practical hit on the subject both were talking on. Kate acknowledged that her uncle was right.

"And, therefore," he said, "comes the great necessity of speaking out boldly what we think, under such circumstances as these."

"But would it be wise to use such freedom with those whom we actually do love?" said Kate.

"Why ask such a question, after the plain matter-of-fact interview with Cormac?" said Father John. "You know," he continued, "if you were in presence of Widow Rogan, and spoke of the regard you had for her, she would probably speak of her regard for you, and you would not feel at your ease. But if you spoke of the love you bear to her, her own instincts would rightly lead her to know that your love for her arose from your love for her son."

Kate acknowledged the full force and truth of what her uncle said; but expressed her unwillingness to treat every one alike, and openly proclaim her likes and dislikes in their presence.

"That is not at all necessary, my dear girl. You are quite right in what you have said.—Your own good sense, and the merrings instincts of your nature, will always prompt you, when necessary, as to the sort of person to whom you should speak the honest truthfulness of your mind. For instance, I don't think you would speak to a person of the regard you have for me."

"No, dear uncle, I could only speak of the warm-hearted love I bear to you," said Kate, with an animation that beamed from her eyes, and lighted up her face with a radiant beauty.

"I know that," said the priest, and his face shone with pleasure, "while on the other hand you would never dream of telling everyone who mentioned Cormac Rogan's name in your presence, and perhaps inquired what you thought of him, to say instantly that you loved him."

"Then we are as one on such matters?" said Kate.

"I should think so, my child."

"But you did not tell me yet, uncle, if I have your sanction for what I have done?"

"You did nothing wrong; and some other time I shall speak to you on this subject again. I suppose you understood me in the proper way when I mentioned Cormac's name to you on Christmas day?"

Kate replied that she knew the spirit and meaning of her uncle's words on that occasion.

"I am in great doubt but that the burning of Cameron's place will be laid to the charge of Cormac, in consequence of all that has happened," said Kate, with a tremor in her voice.

"I am of the same opinion," said her uncle.

"Circumstances all point to him; and thus we learn how easy it is to fall into errors and mistakes in our judgment."

"And do you not think the government will use every exertion to trace his whereabouts, and arrest him?" inquired Kate, quite nervously.

"I have not the slightest doubt but they will, neither have I the slightest belief that they will succeed."

Kate thanked her uncle warmly for this assurance. She had great, almost implicit faith in his judgment, so true it is that we desire to believe what others say in whatever concerns us most.

Next morning, Kate paid a visit to Widow Rogan's, and was a little, just a little non-plussed, to find charming Brigid O'Hara there before her. There was nothing wrong in Brigid's presence, but then—aye, but then, Kate, speak out, and don't forget last night's conversation with uncle!

Well—yes; go on. Brigid is John's sweetheart, and Kate is Cormac's, and Mrs Rogan is Cormac's mother, and knows something about Jack Mullan, and Brigid often laughed at the mistake between Peter Mullan and herself.—Peter had disclosed the whole affair one night, and nearly killed Widow Rogan and Cormac with his droll recital of it—and Kate would rather not have met Brigid just then. There was something queer about it. However, there they were, both met under the one roof, and who knows but Cormac and John Mullan were under one roof, too, and perhaps just talking about these girls at that very moment; aye, who knows? And what matter if any one knew?

Widow Rogan was heartily glad to see both the girls, both of whom began at once looking about them to see if there was any work to be done.

"There is no more excellent trait in the character of our Irish maidens than the one here alluded to. They make a visit to a friend's house, and before they are five minutes in the place, they look around to see what is going on, in order "to lend a hand," and this is done with such freedom and hearty good will, and so well performed, besides, that it would appear as if the work was indeed a labor of love. Should the "woman of the house" be ailing, should there be a sick child to occupy the mother's time and attention, some neighbor is sure to "drop in," just in the nick of time to milk the cows, to make supper for the "boys," or do anything else that won't permit of delay.

I have witnessed these things with the extreme satisfaction; and at a time when there is "trouble" in a house, perhaps a death, such acts of kindness, quietly performed in the most unobtrusive manner, win upon us and dignify our nature by the effect of their innate loveliness. Often, too, may be observed the maiden blush on the face of a young girl, if she thinks she is looked upon by some one with favor, in the performance of those valuable acts of kindness.

It was natural, therefore, for both Kate and Brigid to look around the kitchen to observe if anything required to be done. But all was orderly, neat, and clean. The widow rightly interpreted their looks, and knowing that idleness was a negative point in their character, said—"If you have your needles, girls, we'll take a spell at a new quilt I making."

Out came the pincushion, and the needles withdrawn.

They were soon seated at their work, and talked on everything but that which lay nearest the hearts of each. Cormac engrossed two-thirds of their thoughts, and John Mullan the other third. Whoever likes may analyze the problem for themselves, and find out the cause of the unequal division.

The widow changed the conversation by alluding to the disturbed state of the country.

The transition from that subject to those who were devoting their lives to their country's cause was easy and natural.

"Sometimes I fancy that I will never see my son again," said the widow, who had scarcely spoken the words when she regretted having done so, for the blood came and went on Kate's cheeks in a manner which at once showed the effect they had on her.

"The same thought crosses my mind about Jack," said Brigid, quite artlessly; "but my father says, 'there's no fear of him,' and then I begin to think to myself he's just able enough to take his own part, no matter where he is," and Brigid gave her pretty head something like a jerk; in fact, a saucy jerk, for the curls all shook responsive. Kate could not help smiling at this act of faith, so boldly pronounced by Brigid in regard to John Mullan.

"Let us hope," she said, "that nothing will happen to any of them. It is a sad duty that calls them forth, and forces them to take the step they have taken. There was no resource left," she continued, "and they would have been less of men to simply wait until their doom was on them."

"Ah! that's true, my dear Kate," said the widow. "That thought reconciled me to Cormac's absence. His poor father—God rest his soul!"—Amen," said both girls in the one breath—"would just have acted in like manner. I even question if he would have taken so long to deliberate."

Cormac was nothing the worse for deliberating," urged Kate. "When anything is deserving of being well done, it is also deserving of being well considered before being undertaken."

Brigid laughed heartily at the remarks of Kate, for which she gave a different interpretation to them than that which actuated the mind of the speaker. Kate looked up at her with some surprise, but Brigid only laughed again.

"Let me explain," she said to Kate, "and mind you mustn't be angry. I was just thinking that Kate was nothing the worse for wisely deliberating within herself whether she would love Cormac Rogan, when her good little heart had given its consent before the deliberation commenced—"

"There, that will do now, Brigid—"

"And then, when the heart had done its work well, Kate thought it was deserving of being better considered before the mutual contract would be undertaken"—and all three laughed, as much at the roguery beaming out of Brigid's eyes, as at the strange metamorphosis of Kate's words and meaning.

After spending a considerable part of the day with the widow, Kate returned. It was arranged before leaving, that Brigid was to obtain leave to remain for a few days in Widow Rogan's house, and Kate promised to make her visits as often as she could spare time for that purpose.

CHAPTER XII.—PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION OF UNITED IRISHMEN—MIDNIGHT EXCURSION IN SHANE'S CASTLE PARK—FLEMING WOUNDED AND CARED FOR.

"That rake up near the rafters, why leave it there so long?"

"The handle, of the best of ash, is smooth, and straight, and strong."

The magistrates of the county of Antrim...

scrambled in meeting a week after the burning of Cameron's house and offices, and issued a proclamation in which £500 were offered as a reward for the conviction and prosecution of these, or any of them, who were accessory to the incendiarism. Several additional districts were proclaimed; but that proceeding was totally uncalled for, inasmuch as the soldiers and yeomanry had license to enter any dwelling, so long as the pretext of searching for arms was acted upon.

The enrolment of members in the society of United Irishmen proceeded at a vigorous rate.

Sometimes this was openly performed in broad daylight, and within a very short distance of the headquarters of both yeomanry and soldiers. The members were getting bolder and more defiant in their work every day. For many districts around Belfast, Carrickfergus, Larne, Saintfield, Ballinacorney, Antrim, Randalstown, Toomebridge, and on toward Magherafelt and Cookstown, several influential gentlemen were fast joining the organization, and, by aid of their large fortunes, supplying those who were too poor to provide themselves with arms and ammunition.

Assistance from France was looked for day after day; and many members of the Dublin Directory, depending too much on this aid, thwarted the designs of the more energetic, who held to the belief that they should rely upon their own exertions to further the cause that one and all had most at heart.

The manufacture of pikes continued steadily on the increase, and large foraging parties were appointed throughout the country districts to lay the demesnes of the large landed-proprietors under tribute, for the provision of pike-handles.

No small danger attended this description of work, as the shafts or handles were usually chosen from plantations where young ash trees most abounded.

Pat Dolan, according to previous instruction, held a meeting of one of those parties, consisting of about twenty men. Lord O'Neill's estate being the largest in the county, and being provided with the sort of splines required, was selected as the rendezvous for Dolan's party. A dozen of saws and hatchets were provided for the business, and, at the appointed hour, the men were on the ground, ready to proceed to work. About three hundred were required, and arrangements were made to proceed to a pretty little wood that sloped down toward the edge of Lough Neagh.

Patrols were placed almost nightly in those woods, and it was necessary that the utmost caution should be observed.

Fleming, the undertrapper, was often appointed to this work. He was provided with a guard, and all were heavily armed.

It was a bright, moonlight night; the air was as still as in the cool delicious evenings of July; the tall trees cast their shadows on the water, while the moonbeams sported on the tiny waves. Nature was asleep.

"A pleasant night for work, boys," said Pat, addressing his followers, "if there was just a good breeze to disturb the branches."

"The sound of the hatchet travels far, a night like this," said his son Phil.

"Let us use the saws, and cut clean through, without any breaking," said the father.

Scouts were posted at proper distances, who were to give the signal at the approach of danger. They were also to travel from those who were engaged at the work, and learn at what distance the sounds ceased.

One of these men returned hastily, and informed Pat that he saw four or five men, with muskets slung across their shoulders, moving in a direction to the left, where the men were at work. He could distinctly hear the sound of the branches cracking, and advised a cessation of the business.

"We must continue the work this night, at every hazard," said Dolan. "I am bound to have the pikes in readiness for the Magheralin men, and some are to go down to Belfast and Lisburn in the hay and turfcarts, to-morrow."

The words were scarcely out of Pat's mouth, when another scout came hastily forward, with word that men were coming that way.

Instructions were given for the party to cease work, to divide, and lie down.

That instant there was a flash of light, then the report of a gun, and five or six men were seen approaching in the direction of Dolan.—Pat crept slowly backward. The report of the gun had set the wood astir with rooks, flying from tree to tree. This aided Pat's party, who, taking advantage of the noise, kept retreating into the thicker and denser part of the wood.

Fleming, for it was he who led the party, saw where several young trees were recently cut down, and knowing that he had passed the same spot during the day, came at once to the conclusion that the depredators were then secreted in the wood. He did not see clearly what was best for him to do. There might be few, or many; and the result might be unpleasant to himself. Dolan kept his eye on the party, and watched every movement of Fleming. So far, all was going on well enough to Pat's satisfaction. He believed that Fleming had examined the place, and had robly thought