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THE HOUSE OF LISBLOOM.

A LEGEND OF SANSFIELD.

From Legends of the Wars in Ireland, by Robert Dwyer Joyce, M.D.

CHAPTER I.—SHOWING HOW ELLIE CONNELL SENDS NEWS OF HERSELF TO HER LOVER.—CONTAINING ALSO THE FIGHT BETWEEN GALLOPING O'HOGAN AND THE CAPTAIN OF BLUE DRAGOONS IN THE SWAMP OF MONA.

Between two of the abrupt hills which shoot out upon the Limerick plain from the wild range of Sliav Bloom, there is a deep pass communicating with level country on each side, and sending down a noisy stream to swell the waters of the Mulkern, that winds far beyond into the Shannon. To the careless or ignorant observer, this pass presents little to distinguish it from the many in its neighborhood, save its somewhat greater depth and barrenness; but it will at once strike a person having even a slight knowledge of the art military as a spot of much importance in time of war. In the latter point of view, indeed, it seems to have been looked upon by the contending parties in the various struggles that desolated this island in former times; and well they might so regard it; for, besides leading directly to an ancient ford across the Shannon, it formed the safest outlet from the fruitful plains that lay, with all their towns and strong military positions, to the eastward.

As you proceed up the pass, about midway between its two extremities, a huge mound rises before you, with the small stream half encircling its base. On the summit lie a heap of grass-covered ruins, surrounded by half-obliterated outworks, and a deep, dry ditch, that, with its bristling palisades, must have once formed a formidable barrier against the entrance of a foe. These ruins are the remains of what, about a century and a half ago, was a fortified and very strong mansion, called the House of Lisbloom.

This house, during the various wars, often changed masters; and at the period to which our story relates was in the possession of a man whom, of all others, and for very plain reasons, the surrounding peasantry least relished as its lord. His name was Gideon Grimes. The father of the worthy Gideon was an undertaker; that is, an English settler, who had made his home in that part of the country after the termination of the Cromwellian wars, and there, amidst the conquests of his bow and spear, had amused himself by occasionally hunting Rapparees, and, when successful in the chase, hanging the poor fugitives without trial to the next handy tree. The bold Gideon himself followed for a time with a high hand in the footsteps of his departed redoubtable sire; but with this difference, that, whereas the defunct Roundhead was consistent, and sternly held to his principle of exterminating the poor Irishry by the sword alone, the more sagacious son adopted, in the lapse of time, a safer and more peaceful method of venting his hatred upon his war-broken neighbors. Making use of the terrible laws, which, of course, were all on his side, he succeeded in driving several of the poor farmers around to beggary and death, and seizing their holdings, thus enriched himself and gratified his inborn hatred of the unfortunate peasantry at the same time.

One instance will suffice to show the methods used by Black Gideon, — for so he was called by the people, — one, too, that had an important bearing upon his after fate. It happened that his next neighbor was a farmer, named Murrough Connell, whose ancestors had been gentlemen of large property, but who having been broken "horse and foot," as they say, during the great rebellion and the previous troubles, had left Murrough the possessor of only a farm, — a rich and large one, however, at the entrance of the pass of Lisbloom. On this farm Black Gideon had long cast his rapacious eye, concocting various plans for obtaining possession of it, all of which, in one way or another, failed. At last one of his spies came to him with the valuable information that a number of old pikes and matchlocks lay concealed in a ruinous barn belonging to poor Murrough Connell's farmstead. This was enough. Gideon brought the law down like a sledge-hammer upon his unfortunate neighbor, ruined him, and was just on the point of turning him out of his farm, when the Williamite revolution commenced, the battle of the Boyne was fought, and the retreating Irish armies took possession of the south of Ireland. This gave a short respite to Murrough Connell. But the second siege of Limerick commenced; and the Williamites, in their turn, occupied all the country to the south and east. So, feeling himself once more in power, Black Gideon drove out Murrough, who, with his herds of cattle, betook himself to the wild mountains of Sliav Bloom, and commenced the life of a kerrying, or wandering grazier of cattle.

About a week after Murrough's flight to the mountains, his only daughter, Ellie, a beautiful young girl, walked down one evening to fetch water from a spring near their camping-place, but never returned. Search was made for her far and near, but never a trace of her could be

found; and, with bleeding hearts, her father, her two brothers, and Tibbot Burke, a young gentleman to whom she was betrothed a year previously, at length returned and told the sad tale to her mother. Suspicion indeed fell upon Gideon Grimes who, it was remarked, had cast his eyes upon her as well as upon her father's lands; but nothing certain regarding him and his proceedings could be gathered by her friends, notwithstanding that they watched him closely.

One bright autumn noon the sun glittered from the spades, shovels, and hammers of a number of men whom Black Gideon had employed to build up the breaches in the outworks of his mansion in the pass, in order to secure himself from the bands of Rapparees who hung around the Williamite army, then commencing its operations upon the gallant city of Limerick. One of these laborers was a diminutive, brown-skinned, wiry-looking young fellow, who, by the way he handled his spade, seemed no very diligent workman in the cause of Gideon. Under a remote gable-end of the house, he was employed clearing away some rubbish and weeds; and, as he worked lazily under the blaze of the hot burning sun, he so laced himself occasionally with a little conversation addressed to himself, interspersed with some fragments of ballad poetry, the legends of which he ornamented with various delectable choruses that seemed, from the way he doubled and trebled and again dwelt upon them, to soothe his spirit mightily under his distressing labor.

"Wisha, may the blessed fingers fall off o' me," exclaimed he at length, as he struck his spade against some loose stones at the base of the wall, "if I haven't found the very thing I wanted!" He looked cautiously round him. The laborers were all so busy at the outward wall that they could not observe him. "Dhar Dhia!" continued he, as he bent the tall nettles that concealed the spot aside with his spade, and examined the spot with his black, glittering eyes. "Lord have mercy on us, if it isn't the very hole that my grandfather entered wid his men when he killed every living sowl o' the bloody Parliamenters that held Lisbloom long ago in the time o' Crummill! Aisy a bit, Cus Russid! P'raps the time will come when you'll do as well as your bowld grandfather, — rest his sowl in glory this blessed day, amin! — an burn the house over Black Gideon and his murderin' villains. There is a doore for the brave Rapparees, an' ists myself that'll soon take the new to them fresh and fastin'." And with that he carefully arranged the long nettles again, and recommenced his work and his song.

While Cus Russid — we will give him the cognomen used by himself, which means Brown Foot — was hanging on one of the most Elysian bars of a certain chorus, he heard his name pronounced in a low, sweet voice from the single window above him in the gable, and on looking up beheld the prettiest face imaginable, shaded with rich masses of yellow hair, bent upon him with an eager and frightened gaze from between the strong iron bars.

"Fandher alive, if it isn't Ellie Connell herself!" exclaimed he, wheeling round, and resting on his spade, "Oh, wirra, wirra! is id here I find you?"

"Hush!" said Ellie, for it was she: "I have but a moment. If you love my father's house, Cus Russid, away with you, not to my father or brothers, for they can do nothing, I fear, but to my uncle O'Hogan and Tibbot Burke, and tell them that I am here!" And the casement was shut instantly, and Ellie's face withdrawn.

"May the four bones wither in my brown carkiss," said Cus Russid, "if I don't find them soon and suddint for you!" And with that he cast his spade from him; and slinking over, like a fox, to a half-filled gap in the outworks, he crossed the ditch, unobserved by his companions, and soon gained the wood that clothed the opposite side of the pass.

On reaching the summit of the ridgy hill that formed the western flank of the pass, Cus Russid walked deliberately to a thicket beneath a rock, and took therefrom an ash staff, like a pike-handle, with a small iron ring at one end, to which was attached a piece of strong twine with a loop at its extremity. — Again he dived his hand into the ferns, and pulled out a thick frieze cothamore, in which he instantly arrayed himself. He then put his hand into an inside pocket of the cotha, and drew forth a long, bright spear-head; and, after gazing upon it with great comfort for a moment, replaced it in its hiding-place, turned, and shook his fist at the house of Lisbloom, and then, gradually sliding from a walk into a trot, went at a formidable pace across the country to the westward.

After travelling thus for about a dozen miles, he at length sat down upon a height, and looked over a winding road that led directly towards him through the woody country from the north-west. Advancing along this road he soon perceived a troop of Williamite cavalry, with a large glittering cannon in their midst. It would have been the most natural thing in the world for Cus Russid to run away at such a sight. He did no such thing, however; but, on the contrary, using his spear-handle for a

walking-staff, he descended the height, and advanced boldly along the road to meet them.

"What's your name, my man?" said the commander of the troop, as they came up. — "Come, out with it and your business too, for no man passes here unquestioned."

"Wisha!" answered Cuss, with a look of wonderful sheepishness and simplicity: "they calls me Cus Russid, sir, by reason o' these misfortunate brown feet I have upon me. — Bud maybe your honor didn't see any cattle about here, for my maaster sint me every morthal step from the House o' Lisbloom to look for them. Bad luck to them, 'tis a sore and a sorrowful journey they're givin' me!"

"It is strange that we happen to be going to the very place he speaks of," said the commander to the young officer who rode beside him. "Tell me, boy," continued he, turning to Cus, "is it far to Lisbloom?"

"'Tis a sore journey, sir," answered the latter. "But maybe you're the General that's goin' to defend id for Misher Gideon Grimes against the Rapparees; for if you are — there! I see the cattle beyant there in the wood, an' I'll just go an' dhrive them up; and then if I don't lade you in pace and quietness up to the very gate o' Lisbloom."

"Pass on then, and be soon back," said the captain, as he turned and followed his troop.

"Yes, pass on," muttered Cus, after meeting two dragoons who rode at a good distance behind; "but wait till I come to the rere-guard, an', be the sowl o' my father! I'll give you a different story to tell, you murderin' robber."

The dragoon who formed the extreme rear-guard seemed to have, from some cause or other, lagged behind. Cus Russid therefore had full time for preparation. He took out his spear-head, stuck it carefully on his ash staff, and then fastened it by means of a small screw. Then, like a wolf awaiting his prey, he darted down into a hollow, and there crouching amid the copse, with blazing eyes and clenched teeth, glared out upon the lonely road. The unsuspecting dragoon at length rode merrily up; but, as he passed the deadly spear whizzed out from the bush, and struck him beneath the helmet on the neck. Almost before he reached the ground in his fall, Cus Russid had plucked the spear from his bleeding neck, with one bound was on his horse, and tearing away like a demon at a furious gallop across the country.

Finding that he was not pursued, after nearly half a dozen miles' mad riding, Cus Russid slackened the pace of the strong trooper, and rode along with a light and contented heart over the level plain, with every rood of which he seemed to be intimately acquainted. It was sunset when he gained the verge of a thick and extensive wood, that stretched along the base and up the sides of a rugged mountain. Once more putting his horse to a brisk gallop, he dashed along a tangled pathway, and at last emerged into a little sylvan valley with a beautiful stream gurgling down through its bosom. At the foot of a steep, limestone rock, that jutted out to within a few yards of the rivulet, he beheld three men sitting under a spreading oak-tree, two of whom he instantly recognized. The one nearest to him, as he rode up, was a young man of very handsome presence, tall, lithe, and brown-haired, and armed with carbine, sword, and pistol. His corselet and morion, in the latter of which was stuck a spray of green fern by way of a plume, glittered in the red beams of the sun, as he sat with a drinking flask in his hand upon the bank over the water. The other was a man nearly forty-years of age, of somewhat low stature, but herculean build of frame, and with an oval face rendered almost black by exposure to the suns of many climates. He was armed like his younger comrade, with the exception of his sword; which, from the size of its scabbard, seemed of unusual length and weight. The third, whom Cus did not recognize, was a man of far taller stature than the young man above mentioned, of a nobler and more commanding aspect, and with an eye that seemed to pierce to the very marrow of the brown-footed messenger, as the latter now sprang from his horse, and walked forward towards the tree.

"Captain," said Cus Russid, as he approached the dark-visaged man, "I have bad news for you."

O'Hogan, or Galloping O'Hogan, as he was called, — for it was that gallant captain, — started to his feet, and bent his keen, black eyes upon Cus.

"What is it?" asked he. "There seems to be nothing but bad news for us now-a-days, poor Brown Foot."

"Your niece, Ellie Connell, is in the hands of Black Gideon o' Lisbloom, — bad luck to him, seed, breed, an' generation, I say, amen! — an' she towld me to tell you, for your life, to release her soon an' suddint."

"This is pleasant news for you, Tibbot Burke," said O'Hogan to his younger companion. "But no matter. We will set Ellie free, and put Black Gideon's house in order sooner, I dare swear, than he reckons. The place this boy mentions, my lord," continued he, turning to the other, — "Lisbloom, is the

house that commands the important pass I mentioned to you. We will see to it to-morrow or next day. In the meantime, we had better arrange our bivouac and go to sleep, after our hard day's ride; for we have much before us on the morrow. Cus, my boy, attend to your horse, which seems in a sad state. — see, ours are picketed in the wood, — and then come hitler; for you must keep the first watch."

In half an hour after, they were asleep. Cus Russid standing sentinel beneath the tree.

The sun of the next morning found them far away from their camping-place, riding on at a brisk trot towards the east, and all laughing heartily at Cus Russid's account of his capture of the troop horse. They were now approaching on their right the verge of a great marsh, called the Swamp of Mona, many miles in extent, and with a sluggish river oozing down lazily through its centre. The track on which they rode wound along the bosky skirt of a wood, which, at some distance in advance, sent out its thickets and scattered trees to within about a mile of the low verge of the swamp. O'Hogan, who was somewhat in advance, suddenly reined up the stoutly-built but rather small nag he rode, and pointed to this projection of the wood. As he did so, they beheld the vanguard of an army slowly emerging into the sunlight, their arms glittering and flashing, and their banners fluttering gaily in the buxom breezes of the blithe autumn morning.

"My lord," exclaimed O'Hogan, riding back to him whom he addressed, "you see we have raised the men of Kerry in good time against the invasion of General Tettau. There he is with a vengeance! There are his savage Danish infantry and his blue Dutch dragoons!"

"For a verity, I believe it is so," answered the other. "But we must be now quick to act, or we stand a good chance of having an audience of the Dutchman. My brave captain, as you claim to be general on this side of the Shannon, you must direct me what to do on the moment; for you know it would not serve the cause of the king to have me taken prisoner in an hour or so."

"Away with you, then my lord, — you and my lieutenant, Tibbot, and Brown Foot, round the marsh to the other side; and there wait till I rejoin you."

"And you," answered the other: "surely you are not thinking of one of your mad but gallant exploits this morning; surely you are not rash enough to go forward?"

"Leave that to me," answered O'Hogan laughing. "As you yourself say, I am general here, my lord; so take my word of command for the present. Right about wheel, and away!" And, with that, he gave the spur to his nag and dashed forward; while his companions, after watching him for a moment galloped off in the opposite direction, so as to get round the swamp, and put themselves at a safe distance from General Tettau and his army.

Meanwhile the bold Rapparee captain tore over the moorland, not, however, directly forward, but obliquely down to the verge of the swamp; and, as he came opposite the flank of the column, halted, and coolly commenced to count the number of their cannon, and to estimate the strength of the enemy. It seemed to tickle their fancy mightily that a single man should thus put himself in such dangerous proximity to them, with a broad marsh behind him; for in a few moments, with a shout of laughter, an officer and about a dozen men dashed out from the regiment of blue dragoons, and came at a thundering pace across the moor towards O'Hogan. But they little knew the man they had to deal with. The Rapparee, after finishing his observations, turned his nag to the marsh, — both horse and rider knew it well, — and began to fit over it with the lightness of a plover. The pursuers at length came down; and, plashing heavily into the marsh, there soon stuck and floundered up to their saddle-girths, all except their captain, who seemed to be more accustomed to the thing, and who now led his horse warily after O'Hogan. The latter at length gained a broad, dry spot towards the centre of the swamp, and there, turning round his broad-chested nag, coolly waited the coming of his foe, who, after a few mishaps and several volleys of outlandish oaths, also gained the verge of the dry space. They were now within pistol-shot, the Dutch captain advancing cautiously on his heavy steed.

"Surrender, base hund!" shouted the latter, as he drew his long pistols from the holsters, and presented them at O'Hogan.

"Ha, ha!" answered the Rapparee: "you'll have to take me first, mynheer. Come on, then, for the honor of Vaterland, old beer-swiller, and try yourself against the four bones of an Irishman."

For answer, the bullets from the two pistols went whistling, one after the other, by O'Hogan's ear.

"Now, on the good faith of a man," exclaimed O'Hogan, "I would rather, where there are only two of us, that you had stuck to the sword alone to decide between us, like a gentleman!" And, with that he drew his long weapon from its sheath, and with his dark

brows knit, and eyes flashing, sat prepared for the onset of the Dutchman.

"May de deevil seize thee for a damned Rapparee schelm!" roared the latter, as he thundered down upon O'Hogan, intending to ride over him, horse and man, with his heavy charger.

But O'Hogan expected this, and was prepared for it. Swerving his nag nimbly to one side, he allowed the Dutchman to rush by; and as he passed, after parrying his cut, struck him on the corselet, between the shoulders, with a force that bent him forward on the flying mane of his steed. The Dutchman, however, recovered himself, and came on gallantly once more.

"I could shoot you like a dog," said O'Hogan, tapping his holster sternly with his left hand; "but no, I believe you to be a brave man after all. Come on, then, closer, closer, and let the good sword settle it between us."

In a moment the bright weapons crossed, and clashed against each other, striking sparks of fire by their deadly contact; the horses swerved round and round; again the swords clashed, till at length the long blade of the Rapparee went sheer through the side of the ill-fated Dutchman, who dropped from his charger with a heavy thud upon the boggy sward beneath. Tettau had watched the combat keenly; for, in a few moments after his officer fell, the heavy boom of a cannon tore through the clear morning air, and the shot, intended for O'Hogan, struck, instead, the poor Dutchman's charger upon the spine, and hurled it a shattered mass beside the body of its dying master.

O'Hogan, with a grim smile, shook his gory sword at the hostile army, then turned his steed, and flitted once more across the swamp, beyond the range of their cannon-shot.

CHAPTER II.—IN WHICH SANSFIELD ARRIVES NEAR THE GATE OF TIR-NAN-OG, AND HEARS A ROMANCE FROM BROWN FOOT.—CONTAINING ALSO THE ADVENTURE OF THE GRAY KNIGHT'S CHAMBER.

There was a little book called "The History of the Irish Rogues and Rapparees," which the author happened to read in his boyhood, but on which, happily for himself, he was not left dependent for information concerning the individuals whose lives were misrepresented therein. The book had a very extensive circulation among the peasantry; and it is astonishing the number of opinions it influenced regarding the history of the times immediately following the Williamite conquest of this land, and the actions of the gallant men who fought for their homes and their religion against the psalm-twanging, snivelling, and murderous undertakers, and against the penal laws then in the flush and first swing of their gory vigor and brutality. The sorry-spirited sinner who wrote the book represents the Rapparees as a pack of ferocious big-trotters, pickpockets, highwaymen, and murderers; whereas, on the contrary, if the truth were known, they were a stout peasantry, led on by their hereditary captains, gallant and noble gentlemen, who, when dispossessed of their lands by the conqueror, took to the sword and gun as their only chance of existence, and on many a hill-side, and in the depths of many a forest and pass, poured out their life-blood trying to regain their ancient patriotics, or, at least, endeavoring to wreak honorable vengeance upon the robbers who held them in their iron grasp. In England, the free-born Saxons thanes, are celebrated in many a stirring lay, and the actions of the brave Spanish hidalgos, who fought against the Moors, sung in innumerable melodious ballads; but the poor Irish gentlemen, who shed their blood in the Williamite wars, are only vilified and misrepresented, though they were not a whit less gallant, hardy, or chivalrous than the *Cids* of Spain or the Robin Hoods of the sister island. With this preamble, which we hope the reader will excuse, we will now resume our story.

O'Hogan, whose nag seemed to know by instinct the firm parts of the swamp, was not long in gaining the dry and rising country to the south, where, on a green knoll beneath a clump of trees, he rejoined his companions, who had thence watched with anxious hearts the issue of the combat.

"Ha! you are back at last," said the elder horseman, as O'Hogan rode up. "You had a narrow escape, captain; but, on the good faith of a soldier, it was a brave exploit, though a little hair-brained for a man of my temperament."

"You are not always in the same mood, then, my lord," answered O'Hogan, laughing; "for it was only last year I saw you perform an exploit equal in daring to a thousand of mine just now. I did it, however, to show you the manner in which Tettau will be welcomed by the bold Rapparees of Kerry. It was not my first meeting with the Dutch blue-jackets; and I hope to make them know me better before the war is over."

"I remember your first meeting with them well," remarked Tibbot Burke. "My lord, if I don't mistake, you must recollect it too. It was at the woful field of Aughrim, and on the shoulder of Killoonmodan Hill," continued he, as they rode forward again. "O'Hogan and I