



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 1861.

No. 15.

TURLOGH O'BRIEN;

THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—THE THUNDER STORM. About four or five days had now elapsed since the events recorded in our last chapter.

Long, winding streets and alleys, gables, chimneys, bulk-heads, and sign-boards, started into sharp light and shadow, in the intense white glare of the lightning; for one instant the flooded gutters, the quaint houses, the covering passengers, each point of prominence, every diamond window pane, every street post, every stone reflected the dazzling burst of livid fire.

It was upon this awful night of tempest and gloom, that a horseman, but just dismounted, stood dripping in his broad-leaved hat, and drenched mantle of coarse black cloth, within the chief entrance of the Carrié.

Several times, as he proceeded in the tedious task, he had been interrupted by the sound of voices in the room next to that in which he was sitting.

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easy as turn on his heel,' said Garvey, with a deprecatory tone, and look of genuine alarm—and I thought—

'You thought—did you?—you thought,' continued Garrett, in the same vein; and unable any longer to curb his fury, he thundered, 'and who the d—l gave you leave to think?' and at the same moment, with the back of his open hand, he dealt the affrighted wretch with a box across the face so furious that he fell back, stunned for a moment, in his chair, and the blood spirted from his nose and mouth, and dyed his ashy face in crimson; 'that will teach you not to meddle with what you are not wanted, you confounded oaf, you'—he added, but whether it was that upon reflection, his own convictions acquitted Garvey, or that the severity of the infliction had a little exceeded what he had contemplated—and, perhaps, had even a little shocked him, certain it is, that he added no more in the way of reproach, but turning sullenly toward the fire, left Garvey to recover at his leisure, while he whistled a quick march, and thrusting one hand into his pocket, leaned his elbow upon the chimney-piece, and wagged his head in time, until hearing his companion blowing his nose, coughing, and avincing other signs of returning vigor, he vouchsafed him a surly glance over his shoulder, and asked him with considerable asperity, 'what for he kept blowing like a grampus, and whether he meant to make a night of it.'

An ugly portrait enough did Garvey's visage present, pale and bloody, and wearing in every feature the hideous expression of malignant rage contending with fear—while his eyes, in which were usually discernible no traces of passion or significance, but the half-quenched glitter stealthy cunning, now gleamed with hate and cowardice of the poisoner, as they followed Garrett with undisguised but unconscious meaning.

Meanwhile the thunder bellowed, and the rain pattered without, in sustained and still increasing fury.

'Never mind it, man,' said Garrett, at last, in a tone of gruff conciliation, 'what a cursed fuss you make about half-nothing. Come, come, what will you have—wine or—'

'No, no, Mr. Garrett, thank you,' said Garvey, with a distracted smile, while he continued wiping his face in his hand, and at every removal looking at the blood with which it was still covered—'I'll remember it—I'll remember it when the time comes.'

'You'll remember it?' repeated Garrett, after him; in a tone of menacing inquiry.

'That is,' added Garvey, hastily; for whatever his real meaning might have been the gathering cloud of suspicion upon his patron's brow plainly indicated the prudence of qualifying the phrase; 'that is, I'll charge it in the bill of costs.'

'Umph—run rusty eh?' muttered Garrett, 'he'll remember it, will he. Look ye, Mr. Garvey—'

'You mistake me, Mr. Garrett; you mistake me,' interposed Garvey, with a sudden accession of humility.

'Well, suppose I do, Mr. Garvey, it's as well to tell you at once, you're no man for my money, if you can't bear the lash,' said Garrett, doggedly; 'with me you'll get just what you deserve—whether you're hit or made a mistake; and if you don't like my terms—why there's the door.'

Garvey sat still, and his master, turning upon his heel, lounged carelessly to the window.

A long pause ensued, during which Garrett drew the curtain at the window, so that every blinding glare of lightning shone into the chamber, eclipsing the murky glimmer of the candle in its awful brightness.

'It is a queer night,' said he, after one of those flashes so dazzling and so near, that he had involuntarily shrunk in its light, and held his breath during the stunning explosion which followed—'a queer night; one would almost think the d—l had business on hands. How is Lady Willoughby—she has been dying for the last week; I would not wonder if her ladyship made her sitting to-night; the old boy is at his tricks—egad, the whole air smells like brimstone.'

'She's near her end—near enough,' said Garvey, once more restored, at least to outward calmness; and, as he spoke, he and his companion were both dazzled again in the intense glare, followed, or rather accompanied, by a clanging report, under which the old mansion rocked and trembled in every stone and timber.

'God bless us,' he ejaculated, with a shudder, after an interval of some seconds, and making an imperfect attempt to cross himself, 'it would be an awful night to die in, and Coyle says she has not much life left to her; it's a frightful night, I thought the old place was blown about our ears that time; God Almighty guard us.'

'What are you mousing about,' muttered Garrett, who began to catch the contagion of Garvey's terrors; 'stop your praying and blessing, or I'll give you something to talk about—it makes my skin creep to hear you—a nice fellow

you are to put up prayers for people in a night like this; curse me, but it's enough to bring a thunderbolt on the place, so it is.'

Garrett turned again to the table, and taking out his purse, counted out several pieces of gold upon the board.

'That Coyle is as hungry a thief as this villainous town contains,' he muttered, through his teeth, as he reckoned the coins; 'the rogue charges his own price; this extortion can't last long—one week more, perhaps, and then a plain deal coffin, and the sexton's fee. Here, Garvey,' he continued, 'take it to the scoundrel at once—it's a cursed imposition, but we can't help it;—phsaw! what are you afraid of?—it's but a step, and you'll find me here when you return.'

Garvey knew the temper of his employer too well to hazard an expostulation or demur; and throwing now and then a stealthy glance of uneasiness and discontent through the window, upon the external storm and darkness, he proceeded to wrap his shabby cloak about his shoulders, and gathering up the money, and counting it again, he consigned it to his pocket, and, hat in hand, proceeded silently from the room.

Without one moment's hesitation, Father O'Gara, in like manner, wrapt in his mantle, drew his hat over his brow, and noiselessly hurried from the chamber, scarce daring to breathe until he had reached the open street; and, unobserved, took his station at the opposite side, with his keen eye fixed upon the door of the Carrié, into whose well lighted passage he could clearly see.

In this position his vigilance was not long unrewarded—for he beheld Garvey slowly enter the open lobby, communicating with the street, and peep, stealthily, with many a shrug and shiver, forth upon the wild and angry sky, while he drew his muffling still closer about him. At last, however, he plunged into the unsheltered street, and his pursuer kept pace with him at the other side until he saw him fairly enter Mr. Coyle's sombre and sinister-looking auberge.

Having crossed the street, through the small, lozenge-shaped window panes, he beheld, after a short delay, the swollen and sallow inn-keeper withdraw in company with Garvey; and having thus ascertained, to his entire satisfaction, what he had already suspected, the young priest hurried away through the storm and darkness; intent upon a project in whose execution he was resolved that neither storm nor darkness, nor another agency should defeat or dismay him.

Meanwhile it behoves us for one moment to glance at the gloomy cell, in the Birmingham Tower, which was occupied by Sir Hugh Willoughby, who now sat wholly alone in his dimly-lighted and desolate cell.

His ruminations, painful and gloomy as they were, were nevertheless disagreeably interrupted by the jarring prelude of bolt and bar which announced yet another visitor.

It was the official of the prison who entered—and with a hesitating and embarrassed manner, and a countenance somewhat pale, stood in uneasy silence at the door. There was something sinister in his aspect and demeanor which impressed Sir Hugh with a feeling akin to dismay.

The old knight looked inquiringly into his face for some time before the ominous messenger spoke.

'Sir Hugh Willoughby?' said the man, glancing at the open page in a soiled and heavy volume in his hands.

'The same,' said Sir Hugh, affirmatively.

'Under sentence of death for high treason,' continued the officer, still reading.

'The same—pray proceed,' urged the knight.

'And reprieved during the king's pleasure.'

'Ay, ay—the same,' pursued the old man.

'You know, sir,' he said sulkily, after a brief pause, and turning his eyes another way; 'you know, sir, I have nothing to do with it; my duty is only what you see,' he added apologetically; 'I try to make gentlemen as comfortable as I am able, while they're here; and they're all welcome to stay here as long as they like, for my part—but, sir, but—'

'Speak plainly, man, for God's sake—have you any ill news to tell me?' urged Sir Hugh, in a tone which betrayed his terrible misgivings.

The man evidently was a novice at his business—at least in its sterner department—for he appeared much disconcerted at this direct appeal; and not knowing exactly how to begin, paused and shuffled for some time, in evident embarrassment, at the door.

'You see, sir?' he resumed, after some seconds had elapsed in silence; 'I am only under orders, and have no choice in the business—and, after all, why we must all of us go sooner or later, you know—and then all is even—'

'For God's sake,' said Sir Hugh, 'speak the worst, and at once—is it—is it—to-morrow?'

'To-morrow, sir, at twelve o'clock—you just hit it,' answered he, much relieved; 'twelve o'clock, sir—and you're not to be quarrelled—that's one comfort, at any rate. The warrant is

gone to the sheriff, sir—and it's my business, you see, to let you know.'

'God's will be done,' said Sir Hugh, in a voice scarce audible, while his head sunk, and he clasped his hands together with a convulsive pressure—'God's will be done.'

'I'll be in in the morning again, sir, at six o'clock; and maybe you'd want a word with the clergy, or a scratch of the pen, by the way of a will,' pursued the man; 'and if you'd wish everything properly attended to, and moderate charges, I have a cousin, an undertaker, that does funerals for the first quality in the land, sir; and I hope your honor found everything to your liking here, sir, while you were in it. My wife is making up the little account, and it will be time enough to settle it in the morning.'

The man stood for a moment or two in the doorway; but seeing that his presence was unheeded, he forbore to say anything further; and casting an official glance round the room, to ascertain that all was right, he closed the book, and tucking it under his arm, disappeared amid the ringing of keys and the clang and creak of the iron fastenings.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—THE MURDER.

Now turn we once more to Garvey, whom we followed upon his short excursion into 'The King's Head.'

'Nobody in the house; no strangers, I suppose?' asked Garvey, stealthily, as soon as he found himself safe within the dingy precincts which acknowledged the dominion of Peter Coyle.

'No one but that,' said the host, testily pointing with his thumb towards his helpmate, who sat, as usual, dozing in her chair, and at the same time shooting at her a glance of the blackest malignity; 'no one but that—and she's one too many; for, of all the brimstone spava that I ever came across, that same she-devil flogs them. Curse her,' he continued, waxing energetic as he proceeded; 'I have no rest night or day with her; I dare not sleep in the house alone with her, without lock and bar between us—the murdering hag; it's but last night I had a tussel with her for the razor, or she'd have me in kingdom come, like the doctor, I take it. As it is, she's scarce left a finger on my hand, the she-butcher!'

As he thus spoke, with truculent emphasis, he shook the member in question, swathed about in bloody rags, in deadly menace at the slumberer.

'She's set her scheming headpiece to work now to find out who it is I have got above; but you may as well let that alone, murdering Mag, for as bold as you are; you may—for if you're determined, so am I; and have a care, for long threatening comes at last; and if you put me to it, I'll go through with it; and then who will you have to thank but yourself, my darling?'

As he thus apostrophized the tipsy sleeper, he busied himself in trimming the candle and making himself ready to accompany Garvey, by throwing on his loose coat; and this done, the two worthies began to ascend the crazy and darksome stairs; sometimes startled by the scampering of the rats down the shadowy corridors, and sometimes more awfully by the roar of the thunder.

Altogether, the expedition had in it something so strange and so ghastly, that Garvey, as he followed his villainous conductor through deserted, damp-stained lobbies, and up half-rotten stairs, to the chamber where the helpless victim of violence and villainy was lying, felt himself growing indescribably nervous and uncomfortable.

'Didn't you hear a step on the stairs?' asked Coyle, pausing with a look of something between wrath and horror, at the door, when their dreary ramble terminated; 'hish!—listen!'

'No, no, God bless us all; no, nothing of the sort,' said Garvey, hurriedly; 'come here quick; don't keep us standing in this cursed place all night; turn the key, will you, and let us in; see, let me in first,' he added, glancing nervously back into the darkness; 'though, egad no—go on yourself; the lady may be—God bless us, she may be dead; I hear no sounds within, eh?'

'Well, what if she is?' said Coyle, with an ugly forced smile, and a real shudder, 'sure moping Molly's there, at all events, and she's not dead, I take it.'

He turned the key in the door, and they entered a wretched, damp-stained apartment, in the further end of which a door stood partially open, and a faint light gleamed through the aperture.

Treading cautiously, he scarce knew why, Coyle led the way to the chamber of sickness, perhaps of death.

Cowering over a wretched fire sate the half-witted girl, the sole attendant of the unhappy lady—a pale, withered, smoke-dried creature, with smirched face, and filthy hands, and arms, muttering and jabbering to herself, and stealing looks of idiotic malevolence and jealousy toward the intruders.

'She's asleep; asleep only,' whispered Coyle, pointing to the bed; 'the coverlet moves with

the breathing; see it; but hish,' he added, grasping Garvey by the arm; 'I do hear a step coming; if it's flesh or blood, it's that rip of hell; she's at her tricks, hish! here, sure enough, here she comes; she's resolved she or I must go under the daisies, the red burning villain!'

Thus speaking, Coyle waddled swiftly to the outer door; and just as he had passed it, and took his stand upon the lobby, the tall form of his repulsive help-mate glided into the passage from the stair-head, and advanced, with a slight degree of unsteadiness and with many a sinister grin and toss of the head, carrying a candle in one hand, and, as her husband descried, much to his uneasiness, a case knife in the other.

'Well,' said Coyle, in a tone whose gruffness but imperfectly disguised its trepidation, 'what in the fiend's name are you after now? Did I not tell you to keep below, eh? did I not warn you against the floor? yes or no?'

'An' who cares if you did,' said she, with an ominous grin, while her face glowed absolutely scarlet, with the combined excitement of whiskey and wrath; 'why, you lump of gallows carrion, is it for you I'd turn drudge in my own house? Do you think I'm afraid of your knuckles, you coward. Ay, shake your fist as long as you like, but dar to touch me, as much as with a finger, and at that minute I'll let the light into your puddens.'

As she thus spoke, she continued to advance; and when she came to the concluding threat she flourished the knife and uttered a kind of hiss through her gapped and carious teeth, which might have rivalled the sibilations of an awakened viper.

'Keep back, I tell you, or I'll make you,' he ejaculated, with all the vehemence of fear.

'Keep back yourself,' she cried, with another flourish of the weapon she carried; 'keep out of my way; back with you, for into that room I'll go this night or I'll know the reason why.'

As she spoke the virago advanced with an infernal glare upon the unwieldy sentinel, who watched her motions in return, with a gaze of mingled fear and rage. As she came up to him he propped his broad shoulders resolutely against the door-post, and drawing up his sinewy leg, received her upon his clouted heel with a kick, so well aimed and vigorous that she reeled back to the end of the passage, and stood with lack-lustre eyes and livid face, gaping and gasping against the wall.

'Ha, ha! take that, young woman,' cried he with brutal exultation; 'your tongue doesn't wag quite so glib, now, I'm thinking.'

He was interrupted, however, before he could complete his triumphant apostrophe; for, recovering her breath, the enraged and murderous hag hurled herself rather than rushed upon him, and dashed the knife at his throat. It ripped the skin from the chin to the ear, but nothing more; and, scarce knowing what he did, he swung her from him against the side wall, and then sprung backward to secure himself from a repetition of the assault behind the door. Ere he could close it, however, the drunken beldame had thrust her head, shoulder, and one arm through the aperture, and with eyes whose deadly gleam lent new vigor to his terrified resistance, while the veins of her forehead actually stood out with the prominence of knotted cordage, she tugged and strained at the door with the frenzied exertion of a strength which tasked that of her bleeding spouse to the uttermost. As thus they strove her foot slipped, and she would have fallen across the threshold had not the door closed, with the full pressure of Coyle's whole strength and weight across her neck, and held her thus suspended and helpless. Setting his knee and his shoulder still more firmly against the planks he strained the door with strangling pressure upon the throat of the wretched woman, watching the gradual blackening and quivering of her frightful face, with an expression half vindictive and half horrified.

'Let it go, man; let it go, Coyle,' cried Garvey, who saw enough to fill him with horror; 'let it go, I tell you, for God's sake, and in the impatience of his terror and irresolution, he actually wrung his hands, and danced upon the floor. Coyle, Coyle, are you mad? Don't you see she's black?—she's dead; let go—it's murder; I tell you, let go.'

Coyle, meanwhile, kept staring with the same impression, at once malignant and appalled, upon the gaping, livid face of his victim while he still continued to exert the whole pressure of his deadly weight.

And this scene of hate and murder was enacted at the very threshold of death, and under the awful voice of heaven's thunder!

'I hear voices, and steps, too; voices and steps—they are coming,' cried Garvey, 'come here Molly—moping Molly; for God's sake, Molly, bear witness; I had nothing to do with it. Coyle, remember it was all your doing; my good little precious girl, you saw it all. Oh! my God, is there no way out; is there no way