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THE "HIBERNIAN" NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS. It was the close of a bleak and stormy day, in the winter of 1592. The mists rising from the marshy banks and bare bed of the Liffey, met the descending gloom of twilight, and thickened into palpable darkness the obscurity that hung around the old castle of Dublin. Birmingham Tower alone stood out, dim and huge, against the dusky sky, like a great rock from amid the sea of vapors that filled the wet ditches, and lay in dense volume on the Castle-yard.

and how caged ye the flown birds again? 'O'Toole to whom they fled, after harboring them for a space of a week, returned them to us; but whether through treachery, or because he could no longer protect them, I cannot aver.' 'But how came they at first into our hands?' questioned the soldier. 'That is a longer story,' replied Nicholas, 'but as the warden has no need of me till after settling his accounts with the keeper of the stores, I shall take a turn along the battlements, for the sake of old friendship, cold as it is, and tell thee. The O'Neills have been kept close prisoners here, since Tyrone made his first peace with the deputy. They are sons of Shane a Diomas, that is, Shane the Proud, of whose wild exploits thou hast so often heard; and it is feared that if they got abroad among their northern kindred, we could have all Shane's old retainers in arms again. As for O'Donnell, his capture was both strange and wonderful; and as I was present at the exploit, I shall tell thee how it was brought about. It is now almost four years since, but I well remember the morning, when being ordered with my comrades to embark ourselves in a ship, then lying in the bay, we went on board, not knowing what expedition might be destined for us, or whether we might be about to sail. Neither knew the crew, nor any on board, save the captain of the bark, and one or two of his chief friends.—Having laid in a good store of French and Spanish wine, we set sail, and steering southward, held along by the coast of Wicklow and Wexford, so that many thought we might, perhaps, be bound for Bristol haven, or the narrow seas; but after passing the point of Toskar, our captain altering his course, turned our vessel's head towards the west, and for three days bore onward towards the ocean; so that many surmised that we might be on our voyage to the new countries, whence they bring the gold and silver of the Indians; but, anon, altering our course once more, we began to sail northward, having many mountains and islands on our right hand, by which we judged we had gone the circuit of the whole southern parts of this realm of Ireland, and were destined to land upon its western side, as we at length did, after passing innumerable rivers, rocks, and headlands. So steering landward, we sailed up the mouth of a great river, with fair green meadows, and high hills, on either hand, until we came in sight of a strong castle, built on a green mound by the shore.—Here having cast out our anchor, and furled our sails, we waited in some amazement what we might be ordered to do; for it seemed to us that we were about to lay siege to the castle, and much we marvelled that such an enterprise should be undertaken with so small a number; but instead of arms or armor, our captain now commanded us to take forth five casks of Spanish wine, and place them in our boat. We did so; and rowing on shore, where the wild Irishmen now stood in great crowds, wondering at the strange sight of a ship, such as ours, upon their river, we set the casks upon the land, and by an interpreter invited all who wished to come and purchase.—The wine was so excellent and cheap withal, for he asked but ten cows' skins for a cask, that in a short space all our store was purchased up, and from the castle to the shore was nothing to be seen but dancing and jollity thenceforth till evening. We meanwhile returning to our ship, remained awaiting the issue of this strange adventure, uncertain what might be our captain's design, but marvelling much that such a voyage should be undertaken for the sake of so poor a return. Next morning came a kern, in a small boat, from the castle, who bore a message from the great MacSweeney, desiring that more wine should be sent on shore, as he wished to purchase provision for a feast to be given to the young tanist of Tyrconnell, O'Donnell, surnamed Hugh the Red, who was then staying at his castle, with others of the young Irish nobility. Then our captain commanded one to go with his messenger to the castle of MacSweeney, and to say that all his merchantable stock had been already sold; but that, if the young princes of Donegal would come on board our ship, they should be freely entertained from his own store, with whatever of the choicest wines of Spain and France, he kept for his private pleasure. When our messenger reached the castle—they call that pile, if I remember right, Dundonald—there were about the young princes only their servants and gallo-glasses; and, having none to restrain them, they, with one accord, leaped into their skiff, and came laughing and jesting towards us. Our captain, doffing his cap, received them cordially on his vessel's side; and, dismissing all but O'Donnell, MacSweeney Oge and another, placed before them the most savory meats and the most delicious wines. Then the young princes continued feasting, till being warned with wine and strong aqua vitæ of France, they forgot their desire to return to the shore, and sat singing and jesting till sleep overpowered their senses. Whereupon our captain taking their swords from their sides, and their daggers

from their belts, called upon us to carry them into the small cabin. We there shut them down under hatches, and set sail. An eastern breeze carried us safely out of the river, for the mere Irish had no vessels in which to pursue us, although many thousands, hearing of their princes' capture, thronged the shore on either side eager for our destruction. And thus we bore away the young heir of Tyrconnell, who now lies with a chain round each ankle in yonder tower, where save the week of his escape, he has lain for three twelvemonths, and where the Deputy hath, I think, decreed that he shall lie till the day of his death.

native tongue, briefly and with kindness, but emphatically, and they pressed him no farther.—Presently, having washed down their slender fare with a draught of water, the young men withdrew from the table, their chains clanking as they moved, to their original seats upon the bench, beside their fellow captive. The warden then having seen the table cleared, retired with his men, and closing the door, left their new attendant, who had hitherto remained unnoticed in the background, seated in the farther corner of the chill and gloomy apartment.

Saint Columb Kill, if he will but release me out of bondage before New Year's day! 'Noble prince,' cried the bard, 'thou shalt be feasting again in the castle of Dundonald before that day, if there be truth in man? I have not come hither only to gaze on thy face and tell thee to despair—no—we fly together on next Christmas night: till then, dear sons of my heart, be patient and discreet, nor let your jailers suspect that you have ought of new hope since my appointment to your charge. Blessed Mother! it wrings my heart to see the sons of your kindly fathers perishing for cold in the dark dungeons of their enemies. Here let me pile these faggots on the embers and trim our wretched lamp.—Dear Saviour! that my eyes should ever see Saxon fetters on the limbs of my heart's children. Alas, alas! I cannot now undo them, but while you sit I can relieve you somewhat of their weight.' While he spoke he renewed the sinking fire, and supporting the chains upon the footrail of the rude bench, in some measure relieved the sitting captives of their weight; then placing himself on a low seat or a side, forgot for a time the danger and discomforts of his and their situation in mutual enquiries and fond recollections.

* 'The Red Hand for ever!' The war-cry of the O'Neills.