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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.

The sentinel, pacing his narrow stripe of platform, cast a glance at the dim outline frowning above him; and, as he strode to and fro more rapidly, to drive the increasing chillness from his limbs, solaced the tedious dreariness of his watch with the reflection that, cheerless as was his walk upon the bare battlements, still more miserable was the plight of those he guarded.

'By my troth, Miles Dymock,' he muttered, 'cold as is thy watch upon these old walls, yonder young bloods, I trow, have colder quarters in the Deputy's dungeon; little space for any exercise to keep their limbs from freezing on the length of a traverse bar and a sliding fetter. Poor gentlemen! 'tis cruel usage, by your noble blood; unworthy usage, by my head, if I dare say it; for it is reported that they are princes by birth among their own people. Well, what hath Miles Dymock to do with either chief or taniat? Harry Moulton will shortly be coming hitther to relieve my post; and then for a flagon of ale and a sleep on the guard-house bench, with thanks to Heaven that I am neither prince of Tyrconnell, nor taniat of Tyrone; but a plain English yeoman of Kent, and a poor halberdier in the service of our good Queen Elizabeth. Ho! who goes there? The sentry's colloquy was broken by the sound of advancing footsteps. 'Tis I Raymond Fitz Walter, warden of the tower.' The countersign was given, and the warden, with his men, passed on to the postern of the keep.

'So, friend Nicholas,' said the sentry, detaining one of the keeper's attendants as they passed, 'bear you a good supper to the Irish nobles? By the rood, they had need of hearty entertainment to qualify the discomfort of their lodging! What new face is that I see among the warden's men? A new comrade seat hitther in the place of Pierre Waldron, who lieth sick in the Kilmainham hospital—an old serving man of the Earl of Ormonde—an Irishman himself, but of English blood, and a loyal subject of the pale.' 'How like you the new comer?' 'Not over much, in truth. He is a grave man, and taketh little part in our merriment over the can; but, as I hear, a shrewd scholar, knowing in both tongues, and a man of discreet counsel. Wherefore, he hath been chosen by the Deputy to be private guard over the princes, that he may, perchance, discover from their conversation something to the advantage of the Queen's government.'

'Foul fall the spying traitor!' cried the sentinel, 'what can the poor gentlemen have to say in their confinement, that it importeth any but themselves to know?' 'Be that the affair of my Lord Deputy, my friend, who hath appointed them to be watched,' replied the other; 'there may be reasons, I'll warrant, for what is done which we know not; certain it is, however, and I have it on good authority, that the North is again quiet, where the great Earl of Tyrone still hatches mischief with Maguire; Kavanagh, too, is daily plundering Kildare, and here upon the southern border of the pale, 'tis but a month since Feagh MacHugh, the great O'Byrne, burned and pillaged the country from Rathfriland to the city wall; five of mine own bullocks which his kers drove from the pastures of Rathgar, are even now grazing in the fastnesses of Luggelaw, or Glensmalaw, if they be not already eaten by his hungry galloglasses.' 'But what have O'Donnell and O'Neill to do with thy five bullocks?' said the soldier. 'They may have helped to eat them, for aught I know,' replied the attendant, 'while abroad with O'Toole; but that is not to the point; the reason of this strictness is to gather from them whatever they may have heard of their friend's intentions, while lurking among the mere Irish of the mountains during the six days of their last escape. Knowest thou not that they are but newly recaptured, after breaking out of the Castle as never man broke before?' 'Something I have heard since my return,' replied the soldier, 'of their needing a stricter watch; but little of the reason.'

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 taniat 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 warmed 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.'

'By the mass, it was an unworthy and a churlish snare to lay for any noble gentleman,' cried the soldier, 'and if we can conquer the island by no manlier means than treachery and ambuscading, I care not how soon I give up my chance of the five hundred acres promised me in the forfeited lands of Sir Brian MacWalter of the Bore.'

'Nay,' cried Nicholas, 'thou art over nice in judging of the devices of our governors. I'll warrant thee it was not without authority from them we dare not blame that our captain did the exploit I have told thee of—but there, I see the warden's light in the loophole of the tower stair: I must go—farewell, honest soldier—keep thine own counsel and a strict watch—adieu!'

'Farewell, comrade,' said the soldier, resuming his walk, while the other joining his companions and master ascended the winding stone stair that led through the thickness of the wall from the postern of the tower to the upper chambers. The warden turning his huge key in an iron-bolted door, led the way into a stone-floored and vaulted apartment of confined dimensions, for the thickness of the walls was so great that their bulk left little room within. In this chamber were the captives. They sat on an oaken bench before the embers of a decayed fire; and the clank of iron as they moved on their keeper's entrance, told that they were fettered. Two were young men fully grown and large sized, but sickly from long imprisonment; these were the sons of John the Proud, Art and Henry. The third was, by his auburn head, taller than either of the others, although a youth of little more nineteen. His ruddy cheek showed a symptom of ill health, and his eye was bright and quick as that of a free mountaineer. Large boned and sinewy, although perfectly proportioned, the noble young man seemed formed by nature for equal excellence in action and endurance. He was dressed in the British costume, but the long hair curling to his shoulders, and the unshaven upper lip, proclaimed his nation—this was Hugh Roe O'Donnell. He seemed scarcely conscious of his keeper's entrance; but kept his eye fixed on the dark wall before him, as if on its dingy plane he were, in imagination, marshalling those warriors whom he afterwards led to victory, through the broken battlements of Elizabeth's bravest armies.

'Sirs,' said the warden, as his attendants placed upon a rude table their evening repast, 'be pleased to conclude your supper with what despatch you may, as my orders are to remove the instruments by which you might do mischief to your attendants, or to one another, with the greatest convenient speed.' So saying, he took his seat near the door, while the two O'Neills turning with indignant glances, addressed themselves to the viands before them; but perceiving that O'Donnell took no notice of their preparation, one of them addressed him. 'Fair cousin, wilt thou not eat? The keeper fears to leave his knives among us, lest we cut a breach in the castle wall, and stab the guards, or make our way to the chamber of the Deputy himself, avenge our wrongs with one shrewd thrust of a carving knife.' 'Ha,' cried Hugh, awakening from his reverie, 'does the Saxon dog dare to impose his presence at our meals!' and starting up forgetful of his chains, strode towards the door to expel the unwelcome over-seer; but the letter checked him, and he had almost fallen from the sudden shock; he recovered himself, and returning to his bench, sat down without a word, and relapsed into a similar fit of abstraction to that from which he had so ineffectually roused himself. 'Sirs,' said the keeper, 'it grieves me to intrude upon your privacy, or to limit your enjoyment of your repasts; but my orders are too strict to be infringed, and I must need remain with you for a little longer. When I shall retire, I also leave, by the lord chamberlain's commands, an attendant to continue with you during the night. He is well armed, and instructed to oppose any violence that may be shown him. Sir Hugh O'Donnell, time presses; if thou wouldst sup, I pray thee fall to.' A deep imprecation in Gaelic burst from the lips of the young chief; but he remained where he sat, with his back to the table, gazing as before at the blackened wall over the low and ashy hearthstone. Equally unavailing were the solicitations of his companions—he answered them in their

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.

The three youths spoke not for some time, for Hugh's superior energy of character had gained him an ascendancy over the others, which forbade their interrupting his meditations whenever they took that fierce earnestness that marked his present manner. They sat in silence, without bestowing a look on their attendant, and he had not moved from his seat, since the warden's departure. He was a man of advanced age, yet still of an impaired vigor. Locks of pale yellow fell from his partly bald head down upon his shoulders, and a close beard of grizzled red curled round a well-formed and expressive mouth: his dress was that of a yeoman of the guard, but the sharp features and the lightlimbed figure marked the Irishman. O'Donnell at last, drawing a hard breath through the distended nostril, and casting himself back on his seat, exclaimed to his companions—'So, cousins, we are not to be permitted even the poor privilege of unnoticed conversation. This spying villain, I'll warrant is to report all our words to the bastard Deputy—a knife in the churlish hound's throat, I would to God and Saint Columb Kill, I had him and his ten best men-at-arms before myself and my three foster brothers for one short hour in the gap of Barransmore. Ha! Henry, if we ever get back to the Black Valley, we will make a bright bon-fire of Ardnullen castle for this!'—'I would rather see Glenwhirry,' answered Henry, 'and the blue mountains of Dalaradia—ah, Art! if we were once in merry Antrim, we would soon drive the black strangers from the country of Hugh Buy?' 'I'd give the best year of my life,' cried Art, 'to hear the war-cry of our house once more upon the hills of Killultagh—Mother of God! for one note of the gathering of Glaneboy!'

'Lambh derg aboo!' Cried a voice, low but tremulously earnest, at their backs. The three young men leaped to their feet with a simultaneous cry that drowned the clash of iron, and standing before them, be-held in their attendant the well-known features of their forester and clansman, Turlogh Buy O'Hogan, the Bard of Tulloghogue. For a moment the old man stood gazing with inexpressible love on the three noble youths so long and hopelessly denied to the longing eyes of their people; then rushing forward cast himself on his knees before them, and clasping their hands successively in his, pressed them to his lips and to his heart, in silent but adoring affection. 'My son, my prince, my king!' he at last articulated, 'my joy, my glory, my hope and promise!—branches of the old tree of nobleness! lights of valor and generosity! do I again behold your fair faces, and the gleam of your bright heads like waving gold? Long, long have I planned and pondered, long have I done and suffered what no price but the hope of seeing you again before I die, could have bribed me to endure. I have been the servant of the Saxon, and the slave of the Saxon's servant for your sakes, and if need were, I had been the menial of the slave's slave, that I might at last put my old eyes to rest upon the faces of your royal father's sons! News for you, my princely masters, I have brave news from the north! Maguire and O'Rourke are stirring like stout gentlemen in Roscommon and the Breeny, and the earl is drawing his country to a noble head at the Blackwater: Donell Spaniagh holds I drone by strong hand; and the bold O'Byrnes overhang the very city walls from the Three Rocks to the gap of Glencree. Mac Carthy More and Desmond are ready to take up the game in Munster, and it wants but O'Donnell in Ballyshannon and O'Neill in Castlereagh to raise such a storm about the head of this cruel queen, as shall ere long beat the ribbed crown from her withered brows, and blow across the seas those cobbers of our lands and snares of our chieftain's children, never to trample on our blessed soil again!'—'Ah, Turlogh,' cried O'Donnell, 'thou tellest us a tale we have already heard in the castle of O'Toole ten days back—alas, we were then at liberty, and thy hopes had ere long been verified but that mischance befel us as thou hast heard, and here we stand to-day with fetters on our feet in Dublin Castle, while others play the noble game over green woods and broad mountains; but our friends and people, languishing for their lost leaders, stay idly in their duns and castles, and strike no stroke for liberty or honor! I vow a stone chapel and two bells of silver to

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

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 hitther 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.

At length O'Donnell, recurring to the subject nearest his heart, broke in on the conversation by demanding—'How many days till Christmas?' 'One-and-twenty,' replied Turlogh.—'And before Christmas we may not make the attempt?' continued O'Donnell. 'Not till then, prince; for, until Christmas that company of halberdiers in whom I have my trust, take not the guard of the wall next the city, over which I would, with God's and Columb Kill's permission, purpose our escape.' 'Enough,' replied O'Donnell; 'until then, as well as we may, let us forget our hopes and fears; and as thou art to be with us every night, let us sleep during the day, if watched by any other, and while away our hours till morning in thy company, with some pleasant occupation of making rhymes or story-telling, as is the wont, when not employed in any enterprise of moment, at the castles of our chieftains and knights. Alas, 'tis now four years since Owen Ward last sang his verses in my father's honor, to the music of the harp, in Ballyshannon hall. Ah, when shall I hear again the sweet sound of strings, and melodies of ladies' voices? When shall I sit again by the great hall fire, wandering in fancy with Finn and his old warriors, through enchanted castles and over magic seas? Ho, Turlogh, do but tell us some story of interest—to pass away our time.'

'Then, noble prince,' said Turlogh, 'I shall tell you a tale that seems to me to be suitable to all your tastes, which I learned of a friar in the church of Killyshin, when last in O'More's country with the Earl, my late master. I have seen confirmation of its truth in a certain pleasant chronicle much studied among the English nobles, written by a French gentleman of note, named Frossard; but that which I have heard is, doubtless, the truer, as it is the fuller and more explicit history.' So saying, Turlogh addressed himself to his tale.

THE CAPTIVE OF KILLESBIN. On a pleasant autumn evening, towards the end of the reign of King Richard the Second, the horse-boys and galloglasses quartered about the court-yard of Killesbin Castle, a strong pile hard by the ancient church of that name, in O'More's county, were started from the various games and recreations in which they whiled away their leisure hours, by the sudden appearance of a horse-man who urged his pating steed up the green slope to the gates at a desperate but totering pace. He bore all the marks of recent conflict and rough-riding; his torn mantle streamed loose from his shoulders; his head was bare, and he reeled in the saddle, as if exhausted by loss of blood.

'Ababoo!' cried a young battle-axe man, starting from the dice-board and clapping his hands, 'what mischief has happened to Black Donogh, the chief's gilly? Donogh Dhu, son of my mother's brother's,' he exclaimed as the horse-man cast himself from his reeking and jaded charger, and stood panting for breath to tell his errand, 'who has done this? who has drawn the blood of a Mac Ranall in the woods of Sheumargue?'

'Where is the chief?' cried the clansman; 'I will go to him at once. Let him stab me where I stand if he think fit. Let it be my blame and mine only—I care for nothing that can happen after this.'

'Bones of Saint Bride! after what?' cried his kinsman; 'has Fitzgerald driven a prey into Kildare, or is Dunsamse fired by the Butlers?'

'I would rather, Rory Buy, see the rock of Dunsamse level with the meadows of Moy Luffy,' replied Donogh Dhu; 'I would rather see the whole clan Gerald sunk in the deepest pool of the Barrow, and my own wretched body lowest of them all, than have to say before these gates of Killesbin what I have to say this day—'