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THE IRISH LEGEND OF M'DONNELL, AND THE NORMAN DE BORGOS. A BIOGRAPHICAL TALE.

BY ARCHIBALD M'SPARRAN.

"The march continued in a kind of suspicious silence along the many windings of the Roe, until the broad glaring windows of Castle O'ahan, lit up at the coming of their lord, extinguished all other lights. When, with his attendants, he came to the abbey, all was silence and darkness, save two apartments dimly illumined by a single taper in each, and through the lattice it was easy to discover the reverend professors, after they had finished the noisy labors of the day, enjoying that sweet hour of heavenly meditation of which none but the sincerely studious ever can pretend to participate. 'Let us not disturb these good men,' said he, 'they appear solely wrapt in meditation, and you will all confess, have been spending their time to better purpose than we.'

"Why, said one of his friends, 'you certainly cannot accuse yourself with anything criminal in our pastime to-day, not with the death of a single animal?'

"I am not altogether," said he, "condemning myself for what I have done to-day; our amusement, I may say, has been harmless, but I am comparing with myself the life that these good men lead, and thinking to what a different purpose they set apart their time. I find them always engaged, and at the end always happy. The only ordinance of human life that I hear them regret is its shortness, and that we should apply it to better use than what we usually do."

"They had now given their horses to the servants, and O'ahan, bidding the company good-night, walked into a small apartment of the castle, west of the abbey, which was built on a projecting butment of rock, much after the manner of a swallow's nest, and overhanging a ravine of some hundred feet in depth. In this apartment stood a large oaken chair which had accommodated his father and grandfather in hours of leisure, and suitably antique was all the furniture of the place; casting himself into this chair, he pulled out the key which he had found in such a wonderful manner, and whilst he was busy examining it, Finvola, his daughter, the constant attendant on her father when convenience served, came to welcome him from the chase.

"After asking her whether she had attended to the instructions of the abbess since he left her in the morning, and also divine worship, which was kept regularly twice a-day by the fathers, he presented to her the key with a sigh, saying, 'How do you suppose, my daughter, I have come by this?'

"Both were lost in a deep reverie, Finvola meditating as well how her father had come by it, as also the cause of the sigh which he heaved on presenting it to her. As they were engaged in a matter which seemed so inexplicable to both, a light foot passed hastily across the floor—O'ahan raised his head—'twas Angus M'Donnell.

"In the times of which I am speaking, the custom of fostering was prevalent among the Irish, and so strong were ties formed between the parties, that they not unfrequently outlasted those of blood.

"The servant was equipped with a pair of bagpipes, and being led from the shore by the light at the foot of Evenney, they had reached the summit just as the toast was about to be drunk to the immortal guardian of the rock.

"The joy of the noble Hibernian on seeing at his right hand the son of his friend from a neighboring nation, and also his own and his children's deliverer, although great, was no way extraordinary from any individual of the same family.

"Taking him by both the hands, with as firm a hold as an old sailor, and at the same time looking him full in the face, 'You are,' said he, 'my brave fellow, a thousand times welcome; or perhaps it would look better in my vernacular tongue, that is, a head muel a faultie, my bochiel more, to the land, I may almost say, of your nativity. How are all our friends on the other side of the water? Your arrival has been late? Flora, why do you not salute our common friend?'

"All these unfinished sentences were delivered in quick succession, the interrogator not waiting for an answer to either.

"Finvola scarcely recognised the stranger at first, but hearing her father speak of their deliverer, it immediately brought to her mind Angus M'Donnell, son to the Lord of the Isles.

"The errand of young M'Donnell to Castle O'ahan was very soon understood by all the family save one, and that was she on account of whom it was undertaken. Ever employed in reading instructions from those holy people who had withdrawn themselves from the world and all its allurements, and who alone were supported by the beneficence of her father, she was become religiously serious, and wholly bent upon executing whatever either of her parents pointed out to her, as knowing no law but their orders, nor retaining a wish in her breast unrevealed to them. It was evident that her unbounded affection was well returned on their part.

"Her mother was only daughter to O'Connor of Ballanagar, descended in a direct line from Milesius, and concerning whom might be said, even down to this time, as was said of the great Israelite, that the sceptre had not departed from him, nor a lawgiver from the family, &c.

"If the person coming to pay his addresses to the daughter of such a nobleman as either of the two I have mentioned could count a long enough pedigree of Avuses, pro-Avuses and Atavuses, it was considered in Ireland everything. That is, wealth, nobility and dominion.

"But to return to Angus M'Donnell, Prince of the Isles, and also the subject of our present narration.

"His father having only him, and intending, as another Neptune, that he should succeed him in the government of this watery region, had sent him to the family of O'ahan, in Ireland, to be fostered; and perceiving, since the departure of his Irish guests, the vigorous constitution and flashing spirits of his son begin to sink, was at no loss to divine the cause.

"My boy," said he to him one day as they sat alone, 'I fear the draughts which you have sucked in the green island, have not been draughts of oblivion; may I not attribute the cause of your disease to the departure of Flora O'ahan from our shores? Is she not the root of your malady, and if so, my son, be not ashamed to inform your father regarding the matter, that we may apply for a remedy at least, whether we be successful in procuring it or not.' The reply of young M'Donnell was bold and affirmative of his father's conjectures.

"I own," said he, 'that Prince O'ahan's daughter is the cause of much uneasiness in my mind since the first moment I saw her, which was no earlier than the morning of their disastrous shipwreck on our island, or if before this time I have seen her, she did not create so much interest in my breast, and would it had always been so.'—'You must not despair,' said his father; 'Prince O'ahan will rejoice in an alliance with our family, I am convinced, and if you cannot obtain the young lady's good wishes, my son, as the old adage is, Scotland is broad and wide, and full of bonny lasses.'

"'Twas on this embassy that Angus M'Donnell came, when he met Dermot O'ahan and his men feasting at the foot of Benn Evenney.

"In a few days, the noble islander, being a little unhappy regarding his errand, delivered to her father a letter from the Lord of the Isles, in which a proposal for his daughter was made, and asking for dowry twenty-four chieftains' sons of the O'ahans, married to the daughters of as many chieftains and sons of the M'Donnells.

"The contents of the letter were the subject of some days' meditation in the family; and from the time it was proposed to fair Finvola, all the change that was observable in her countenance was a silent yielding languor, intimating, as we might suppose, that she was ready at all times to obey the will of her parents.

"The marriage was solemnized in the abbey, in presence of their friends and allies, who all came forward, both to greet the happy pair and bid a final farewell to Finvola, the gem of the Roe.

"The conditions on which O'ahan parted with his daughter were, that her remains should be brought back and deposited in the old abbey of Dooneven, the family burying-ground; and these promises being agreed upon, she, with her twelve maids, and twenty-four gallant cavaliers, set out for the Isles, leaving many a sorrowful heart behind them.

"Revolving time, however," said the bard, "which is still in motion, brought the period when she must be gathered to her fathers; and so dear was she to her partner, that he was even willing to violate the treaty which he had made, and retain the ashes of his best beloved in the land of Caladonia; and, indeed, if a breach of any sort was justifiable, we should extend an indulgence to one of this kind sooner than any other. She was worthy of admiration, and if she was, Angus M'Donnell showed that he held her so, never being able to place another in her room—no, not from the nobility of Scotland.

"At her decease the Isles put on mourning, and though he was sunk in deep affliction, yet the strictest charge was given lest news of his Flora's death should reach the shores of Inis-falia, and bring over her relatives, who must severely hurt him in whatever way they acted; for should they only reproach him with want of faith in fulfilling the sacred engagement by which he obtained Finvola, the trial he dreaded much; but should they carry off her remains to her native land, he feared it was more than he and her children could bear.

"The ties that are cemented in youth between the sexes are usually of long duration, frequently only dissolved by death.

"In few countries have we found attachments so strong and deeply rooted as the two of which I am speaking. But in regard of my own people," said Cairbre, "they never wish to lie in a foreign land, and I'll make the reason plain to you all. Saint Patrick, on his coming over amongst us, blessed and consecrated every inch of our island, and so you see it is no wonder if it is called the Holy Island, nor is it either to be wondered at if one of ourselves would rather sleep in it than in a land which never received the blessing of our saint.

"But although strenuous exertions were used to keep secret from her family the death of Finvola, yet Granie Roe O'ahan, the banshee and guardian spirit of that family, ever watchful over her children, soon wafted the mournful tidings over the cerulean deep, and howled them through the rugged caverns of Benbraddagh, beginning at twilight and plying the doleful lamentation through the night, until chased away by the voice of the morning cock.

"From the seat of Sir Angus M'Donnell's castle, he could easily perceive the splendor of the torches which illumined the friths as the vessels approached the shore, and the first sight of land that they saw, a choir of females that they had prepared for the purpose, joined with Granie Roe, singing the death song of Finvola, the gem of the Roe, in the most afflictive strains, and when they came to the grave, there they repeated over her all her good parts, her beauty, her virtue, her high descent, frequently asking her why they did not bring her home to the land of O'ahan, and not leave her among strangers.

"The Islanders being alarmed by the unusual splendour of the torches nearing the shore, and then seeing the whole band surround the family burying-ground of M'Donnell, came swarming toward the mourners, and called aloud, to prevent them from raising the body. 'Stand off,' said Turloughmore O'ahan, who stood in the door of the cemetery, with a ponderous sword in his hand, 'stand off, you faithless Islanders, who can pledge your vows to-day and break them to-morrow; the man wears not tartan, either in Æbudæ or Morven, dare force this pass, otherwise should he attempt, he shall bite the ground under my sword.'

"What proud Hibernian art thou?" roared a tall Highlander from Glengarry, who wore a broadsword and targe; 'what art thou, I say, more known by words than deeds?' and rushing forward, threw up the targe, and cut deeply at him with a lusty arm.

"No strife, my friends," said Sir Angus; 'Finvola was honorably given to me; she came in love with me, and shall depart in the same; the fault was altogether mine, and if I have erred, it was only too much love. Do not dare to molest my Irish friends, their countrymen are with me, and my affections are with them.'

"The clan O'ahan halted with Sir Angus during the following day, and at eve, having embarked with the remains of their much beloved Finvola, bearing aloft their flaming torches, they howled aloud the Irish cry, and turned the helm for the sacred land of Inis-falia.

"When the body was laid down in the old

abbey of Dooneven, the relations and followers standing each according to his rank, but all with drooping heads, the family bard to his harp sung these lines over the bier:—

In the lands of O'ahan, where bleak mountains rise,  
O'er whose brown ridgy tops now the dusky cloud flies,  
Deep sunk in a valley a wild flower did grow,  
And her name was Finvola, the gem of the Roe,  
And her name was Finvola, the gem of the Roe.

From the Isles of Æbudæ, appeared to our view,  
A youth clad in tartan, 'tis strange as 'tis true;  
With a star on his breast, and unstrung was his bow,  
And he sigh'd for Finvola, the gem of the Roe,  
And he sigh'd for Finvola, the gem of the Roe.

No more up the streamlet her maidens shall lie,  
For wan the cold cheek, and bedim'd the blue eye,  
In silent affliction our sorrows shall flow,  
Since gone is Finvola, the gem of the Roe,  
Since gone is Finvola, the gem of the Roe.

"She was now committed to her kindred dust, and each departed to his respective habitation.

Dermot O'ahan, the father, was then a considerable time dead, and Shane, the son, being appointed to succeed him in the castle and estates of Dooneven, was applied to by some of the northern Irish barons to assist them in driving his Majesty's forces out of Ulster.

"O'ahan replied, that for himself he had always lived on friendly terms with the King of England, and it would be an unprincipled act of him now to rise in hostility against that monarch, nor, until he should receive an injury from him, could he ever unsheath his sword in such a cause.

"These Irish chieftains who wished to stimulate him in supporting their plot, wrote letters to the monarch of England, broadly accusing him as a traitor, and they had it the more in their power, as shortly before this time he had been authorized by the king to embody fifteen hundred men for the British service, and so great was the esteem which his Majesty had for Prince O'ahan, or rather such weight did he hold him in, that he valued his compliance rather as a gratuity than an obedience.

"But what was his surprise when he found his castle one morning surrounded by armed men, and the king's broad warrant produced for his apprehension? In vain did the battalion of the Roe draw their shining blades; in vain did they surround the guards, and order them to deliver up the prince, and also their arms.

"What are you about to do, my friends?" said O'ahan. 'Are you come to make me appear as guilty as my enemies have represented me? I am this day conscious of an upright heart,—you are all witnesses of it; and why should we use opposition when we know that the justice of our cause will defeat the base intentions of our weak-hearted enemies?'

"I'll die sooner," said Turloughmore O'ahan, his relation, 'than allow you to be dragged from amongst us like a malefactor, while I stand coolly by bearing this useless sword in my hand; and knitting his dark brows together, he strode across the pathway, and unsheathed the weapon which he had little thought should be useless.

"Strike me," said O'ahan, 'but injure not these innocent men, who only obey a rigid mandate, which, had they refused, their lives must pay the forfeit.'

"He and his lady were then taken to England, and kept prisoners at large until the matter would be fully investigated. He also brought with him some of his attendants, and four of his best horses, for in these was his great delight, and the breed from O'ahan's stud were known throughout the kingdom.

"Matters for some time went on well in favor of the prisoner, until witnesses were summoned over to substantiate the accusation, and they, knowing that their own safety rested chiefly in his condemnation, confirmed the deed, and now nothing remained wanting but the royal assent that noble O'ahan should lose his head.

"'Twas one morning as he and his lady had finished breakfast, and as it is natural for the mind to wander back to scenes wherein it has enjoyed the purest happiness, they were entertaining each other with the affairs of their own country, and chatting over every little incident that could recall former days to their minds, when they were interrupted by the clanking of chains and sound of voices approaching the door of their apartment. 'We have orders from his Majesty, Prince O'ahan,' said the chief of the guard, 'for reasons unknown to us, to invest you with these shackles, until his further pleasure is known.'—'Is it said I have committed a new crime? or what is the cause of this undeserved punishment?' said O'ahan.

"The most I can inform you," said the officer, 'is, that two strangers arrived yesterday from Ireland, and had a private conference with the king.'

"As he finished this sentence, uncovered as he was, and kneeling on one knee, he applied

the manacles to his hands and bolts to his feet, to which the prisoner submitted with a sigh, saying, 'When my enemies have done their utmost, matters will straight be well again, but had I permitted the battalion of the Roe, these hands never should have bound my hands, nor a guard-man ever visited the shores of Britain.'

"During this scene, Lady O'ahan, who was young, beautiful, and only a short time wedded to her lord, sat as if bound to the earth, looking alternately at the prince and the guards, then dissolving into tears, she sunk down on her husband's bosom, who, as well as his pained arms could, supported her until she recovered.

"The officer informed her ladyship that she was at liberty to walk where she pleased at all times for the penalty of the law rested only against her lord.

"Seeing that grief would do no good to his cause, O'ahan consoled his lady as well as his situation would allow, and with breasts prepared for the worst, they awaited the final event.

"It happened exactly at this period that there was to be a stag hunt in Windsor forest, at which all the nobility of England were to be present, besides many from Normandy and other parts of the continent, attended by the best dogs and horses.

"There was then a custom practised, I believe, at the British court alone, that the person, who, after the stag was run down, could first dip his hands in the blood, was honored with the royal pardon for whatever crimes he or she or the person for whom he or she supplicated was guilty; but as this attainment depended on the most superior performance both of man and horse, few could hope for it.

"O'ahan had an old blood, named Benroe, once famous on the turf, and which, when taking the country over brakes and precipices, few could equal.

"Allowing even that Benroe had a chance for this privilege, of which there many doubts, his master had no person in England capable of riding him, and therefore, any little spark of hope which the excellence of this animal had kindled in his breast, was altogether extinguished. Like an electric shock was his mind affected, when, few days preceding the appointed day, his lady proposed herself to mount old Benroe, and put in for the life of her beloved lord. 'The undertaking, my love,' said he, 'is much too arduous for any female, and you must know, it is not on the plains on which you have been accustomed to ride, nor are you to contend with those whose only care was to protect you.'

"Let us talk no more," said his lady, 'Benroe and I are well known to each other, 'tis not the first time we have been crowned with laurels among those who pretended to be victorious on the sod, and I shall hazard the attempt, terminate as it will.'

"The matter being settled, a petition was sent forward to the king, requesting that he would allow Prince O'ahan's horn to be sounded previous to the chase. To this his Majesty could not fully assent, as in the conditions published, it had been said, that when the royal trumpeter should sound three times, the huntsmen would mount; but he graciously ordered that as often as the trumpeter should sound, Prince O'ahan's huntsman would repeat the blast.

"Old Benroe being now by the groom led to the window of his master's prison, and hearing his well-known voice, neighed aloud, and stretching forward his lofty neck, rolled around a fiery eye, seemingly in great anxiety to know the place whence the voice came.

"The royal trumpet being sounded, and the gentlemen mounted, Lady O'ahan appeared, arrayed in a robe white as snow, with a green filligee studded with diamonds, and running in tripple order around her head in form of a shamrock.

"On the first blast of the Irish cornu, her courser made a rush forward, and all thought she would have been pitched from the saddle. 'Twas at this moment that a gentleman, clothed in green, and mounted on a tall grey, alit, and proposed to exchange horses with her, 'for yours, my lady,' said he, 'becomes ungovernable, and mine, I can assure you, will be more easily managed,' she politely thanked him for his courtesy, but told him there was not the slightest danger, for she was well acquainted with her courser's gaits.

"As every new opponent entered the arena, Benroe, considering himself as necessitated to contend against all, still became more furious, the same gentleman who made the proposal of his steed to her, observing tears trickle plentifully from under her veil, rode forward to her a second time, and entreated that she would desist from the chase, as he saw she became afraid; 'and moreover,' said he, 'I fear the contest will be severe to-day between some knights from the continent, and us, who, I am informed, are come over to try the mettle of the British breed.'—'The terrors of the chase,