



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, AUGUST 23, 1861.

No. 2.

TURLOUGH O'BRIEN;

OR,  
THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER.  
CHAPTER XVII.—THE SLASHER—THE BLACK  
GUEST OF DRUMGUNNIO.—THE ALARM.

We need not stop to tell how, early in the morning, ere the cold grey of the coming dawn had warmed into a blush before the rising god of day—amid the shrilly clangour of trumpets, and the ringing and jingling of accoutrements, and the neighing and thundering tramp of war-steeds—several successive detachments left the castle, until the body of the king's cavalry, who occupied that fortress, had dwindled down to two companies, about two hundred men, together with their colonel and other officers, now occupying Gindarragh, and destined, perhaps, for some time to do so, as the head-quarters of the regiment.

The noise and bustle of departure, and all those stirring sounds of military preparation and movements, fell heavily and painfully upon the fevered ear of Percy Neville, who lay, with throbbing temples and parched lips, weak and in sore anguish, upon his hot and sleepless bed.—The roll of the kettle-drums and the swell of the trumpet seemed, in his disordered fancy, somehow identified with the fiery heat and pain which tormented him—a part of his own fevered and agonised sensations; and these sensations in turn seemed again something no longer within himself, but rather as it were, so many external influences, perplexing and tormenting—moving with the moving soldiers, and waxing more oppressive and thrilling with the wearisome clatter, and laughter, and snail trumpet sounds, which vexed his sick head; the dullness and stupor of dreaming were upon him, with all the reality of pain—an anxious, restless, helplessness—which seemed always prompting the monotonous idea that some slight adjustment of the tossed and crumpled bed-clothes, or some new arrangement of his weary and burning limbs, if he could but achieve it, would assuage all his torment, and refresh and relieve effectually his aching head and harassing fancies.

Let us glance for a moment at another chamber, blessed with a very different tenant. We left Mr. Richard Goslin, a gentleman who had an invincible repugnance to doing any thing but precisely what he was bired to do, cooled, for double assurance alike against the troublesome importunities of his friends, and the more troublesome molestations of his enemies, securely in the bottom of a huge iron caldron, in a sequestered apartment, the orifice in the boiler being covered over with much dexterity, as we have described, by the cautious contrivance of its interesting tenant.

Now, it so happened that, early in the morning, hot water being in great request, two of the handmaids of Gindarragh bethought themselves of the identical caldron in which our friend had enshrined himself with such admirable providence and profound mystery; and—one with a lighted candle and a bundle of bog-fir, the other with a mighty hamper of good dry turf—they both entered the little chamber together, neither caring to visit it alone, for sundry fearful considerations—to wit, the generally accredited reports which stated that a certain quondam dervisor in the castle, whose pugnacious and dervid dispositions had earned for him, while in life, the expressive appellation of 'The Slasher,' was wont, for lack of better employment in his disembodied state, to frequent that uninviting apartment, and there, under divers strange disguises, varying in an ascending scale, from tomcats and black-rabbits up to full-sized men in armour, to play all manner of unmeaning and unmanly pranks upon defenceless females, and occasionally, as they expressed it, even going so far as to take a rise out of the men. Not caring, therefore, to loiter unnecessarily in these haunted premises, the two wenches hurried through their task with all possible despatch; and just as they had completed the arrangement of the turf, and applied the light, so that the thin blaze began to writhe and curl through the crisp sods and crackling wood, they heard, or thought they heard, a strange, unearthly sound, whether proceeding from above, or below, or behind them, or before, they neither could devise. This was no trick of fancy; their senses had not played them false; they had heard, in truth, a long-drawn grunt, which proceeded in an uneasy movement from the slumbering tenant of the caldron, and boomed in cavernous reverberation and half-stifled echoes from the metallic inclosure. The girls clung to one another as they gazed around them; but nothing met their search; and as the sound was not repeated, they took courage, blessed themselves, and hurried to complete their labors, by drawing water at the well in the castle yard. While they were thus employed, the fire beneath the caldron began to act, the air within became gradually rarified and heated, like that of an oven; and its temperature at least reached such a pitch, that Dick Goslin awakened slowly from a dream, in which the

great fire of London, and other images of a like glowing kind, were awfully combined, and found himself in a perspiration so profuse, and in a state of impotence so absolutely helpless, that he almost fancied himself neither more nor less than a given number of quarts of some simmering liquid, a sort of conscious soup, steaming away at the mercy of the cook, and only to be extricated by the assistance of a ladle. With no distinct recollection of where he was, or how he had come there, and enveloped in total darkness, he yet wanted energy to rouse his faculties, or to move a single muscle. The heat became momentarily more oppressive; a faint, half-painful, half-luxurious languor overpowered him, from which he would not, if he could, have released himself; and thus gradually dissolving into brine and vapor, the grosser elements of what had once been Dick Goslin lay passively in his enervating retreat.

Meanwhile, the two strapping wenches returned with a mighty tub of pure cold water between them. With marvellous strength, and almost apoplectic struggles, it was lifted, by their united efforts, to the brink; and while one of them slipped aside the cover of the boiler, the other, in a twinkling, soused the sparkling, ponderous torrent full into the caldron. What language can describe the shock, the astounding revulsion which seemed at that instant to reverse all the functions of Dick Goslin's corporeal system, and as it were, to turn him inside out and upside down, and drive him ten thousand ages backward into a pre-existent state! With something between a sob and a shriek, he started up madly from his lair. The maidens responded with a piercing squall; and she who held the tub in her terror, dashed down on him as he rose, with such Amazonian force, that one plank started from the bottom, his head came through, and the tub spun round on his shoulders, and hung there like a gigantic suit of armour—back-piece, breast-plate, and gorget, all in one. Without trying to extricate himself, he rushed in a state of frenzy after the terrified girls, who careered along the passages, shrieking, "The Slasher! the Slasher!"—an ejaculation which Mr. Goslin believed to be elicited by some object of terror behind himself, and which, therefore, lent but new wings to his pursuit. In their terrified flight, several other maids, who, peeping from other chambers, beheld the mysterious figure rushing onward in the background, were quickly involved, and with new energy swelled the chorus of alarm, until every passage rang with the terrific sobriquet of 'The Slasher.' To stem this torrent, however, the valorous butler and adventurous Tim Dwyer started forth in various athletic attitudes; but being neither of them quite so steady as they might have been, had they confined their morning's potations to the pure fluid of which their Saxon comrade had had so much, they were instantly overborn, and, along with the foremost of the female fugitives, rolled upon the floor; and so, one over the other, higgledy-piggledy, the whole troop shrieking and yelling, tumbled and bowled, and Dick Goslin, last of all, with a crash which staved in the tub; and when they arose, full half a dozen persons, all of unquestionable veracity, among whom was Dick Goslin himself, were prepared to swear, if required so to do, that they had themselves, with 'their own good-looking eyes,' beheld a gigantic form in black armour, in full pursuit of the party, and that having flung the tub among them, he had vanished with a terrific roar. It is, of course, needless to observe, that henceforth even the most sceptical among the servants looked grave, and forbore to sneer when the subject of 'The Slasher' was upon the tapis.

Meanwhile, in this cold, dreary twilight of coming morning, Jeremiah Tisdal, with aching eyes and swollen face, scarce half recovered from his last night's strangulation, and with his sombre and sad-colored vesture, and yesterday so quaint, precise, and saintly, now all torn and soiled—stole from the castle gate, and, like a troubled spirit speeding towards the scene of its earthly sins and habitation, glided darkly along the shadowy pathway, through the wild trees and brush-wood, among which the damps and darkness of night were still lingering. With trembling knees and quickened respiration he approached his ruined dwelling; there stood the tall gables, grey and wan as gigantic spectres, and through the roofless summit and the sashless apertures of the windows, the cold faint light was staring; the reek of fire still filled the air, and the floating wreaths of smoke rolled lazily about its base, and clung to the damp grass and weeds around. With a gaze of dull despair, he stared for several minutes upon the ruined dwelling-place. He walked toward the yard door mechanically. The sight of a spade, lying in its usual place, however, recalled him for a moment to himself; he snatched it up, and hurried with faltering steps, to the spot where his gold had been concealed. Some one had anticipated; the earth was thrown up around it;

the treasure was gone. 'Oh! God of my hope, it is gone,' cried the Puritan, finding voice in the extremity of his agony—'gone, gone—spoiled—plundered,' he continued, frantically, as he threw himself upon his knees, and with his bare fingers delved and rummaged among the loosened earth. 'Bligh has robbed me—robbed me of all—the villain robbed his master!—not a chance coin left—the wretch—the robber—the treacherous dog—the villain—may the curse of Gehazi overtake and cling to him!'

While Jeremiah Tisdal thus railed and cursed in hoarse accents, as he burrowed with his crooked fingers among the upturned earth, he might not inaptly have presented to the fancy of the spectator the image of a famished ghoul cowering over some open grave, and searching for the fragments of his unclean feast. 'Gone, gone, gone,' he cried, in a voice of almost childish rage and grief, as he sat down in despair upon the cold earth beside the spot, and smote his clenched hands sometimes upon his breast, and sometimes upon the dull soil, until gradually this frantic energy of woe subsided into a sullen, black moroseness, from which, however, after a lapse of some ten minutes, he on a sudden started up—

'Ay, ay,' he exclaimed, with a new and hercer interest, 'let's see how Deveril has fared.'

With this exclamation, he hurried towards the ruined walls. The lower windows had all been secured with iron bars, which had of course survived the flames, and now showed in sharp black lines against the grey light of morning which streamed through the building. Passing the corner of the still reeking ruin, Tisdal stopped short, with a shuddering ejaculation which had a strange mixture of joy and horror in its intonation—

'Then it is done!—ha, ha!—the hunter caught in his own toils, the robber bereft of his spoil, the murderer of his precious life!'

The spectacle which elicited these words was one of sufficient horror. Through the bars of a window, within a few yards of which the speaker stood, were thrust the knee and the head of a figure whose escape had been rendered impracticable by two transverse bars, which, deeply sunk in the side walls, secured the rest. The head, and one arm and shoulder, as well as one knee, were thrust through the iron stanchions, and all was black and shrunk, the clothes burned entirely away, and the body roasted and shriveled to a horrible tenuity; the lips dried up and drawn; so that the white teeth grinned and glittered in hideous mockery, and thus the whole form, arrested in the very attitude of frenzied and desperate exertion, showed more like the hideous, blackened effigy of some grinning ape, than anything human.

With a horrible and icy fascination, old Tisdal gazed upon this appalling spectacle, till it almost seemed, to his disordered fancy, that the fiendish grinning thing was greeting him "with mop and mow," as the coal-black, sbrunken mask, with its shining white rows of teeth, set off by the hideous grotesqueness of its attitude, met, and appeared to return his fixed and thrilling gaze.

'Deveril! Deveril!' muttered the Puritan, scarce daring to speak above his breath, as he drew back a little; for though he knew it was but fancy, the light curling smoke rising between him and that fearful object, gave to it an appearance of motion, which enhanced the horrible effect of the spectacle upon his imagination. 'Deveril! Deveril!—this is horrible. Who could have thought he'd have struggled so hard? Why did they not pike him? How could they let him roast there? It was frightful!'

With a violent effort Tisdal turned, and two steps placed the corner of the building between him and that terrible object. A strange feeling, something bordering upon a gush of tenderness, came upon him, as he continued—

'Deveril! Deveril! poor Deveril!—it was dreadful—it was frightful—he was my staunch companion in my evil days. Oh, Deveril! Deveril!—he saved my life once—why did I forget Blackheath? Oh, Deveril, was it for this you saved it? Oh, my God! that I could call him back—or—at least that he had died elsewhere, and an easier death! He was my comrade—my comrade—when no one else would consort with me! Is he dead?—is he quite dead?—I wonder is he quite—quite dead? If he had but bute enough left to forgive me!—oh, that he had but life enough to forgive me.'

Thus speaking, with a strange hysterical revulsion of feeling, Tisdal distractedly returned to the spot where first the dreadful apparition had met his eye. There, fixed as the bars themselves, still stood the awful, monkey-like figure, black and grinning as ever.

'Deveril, Deveril!—old boy Deveril!' cried his former associate, almost frantically; but the sounds echoed unheeded through the empty walls, and the thin vapor curled, undisturbed by breath or movement, like the smoke of his torment for ever ascending about and above the sooty, grin-

ning effigy. 'Deveril, Deveril, is there any life in you? Old fellow, it's I—it's Tisdal—burnt brandy. Oh, God! Deveril! Deveril! won't you answer Captain Gordon? It's I—I—it's brother Snap. Oh, Deveril, my boy, you saved me—you saved me—I know it—I remember that night. Speak, old boy, one word. I think you moved—you *did* move.'

Tisdal distractedly snatched up a long charred joist, which lay among the smouldering rubbish, and stretching across the smoking embers and ashes, he, with the end of it, pushed the ghastly figure.

The effect was horrible; for though the pressure was but slight, the grinning head separated from the body, and rolled, amid a cloud of dust, towards Tisdal's feet, while the body dropped back into the ashes and rubbish within the walls, leaving but the blackened arm still clinging and sticking to the bars.

If the frightful apparition had spontaneously sprung from its position, and leaped at the throat of its betrayer, Tisdal could hardly have felt a pang of terror wilder than the paroxysm which froze him, as he saw the head of his victim thus rolling and plunging through the ashes, towards his feet. At length, relieved by something between a sigh and a shudder, and trembling so violently that his legs could scarcely bear him, he managed to withdraw as far as the low fence which enclosed the little paddock within which stood the mansion of Drumgunnio, now but a scorched and smoking ruin, and seating himself upon the low grassy bank, he strove to collect his scattered wits, and to quiet his terrible agitation.

Let us return, however, to the castle of Gindarragh, where, by the strange and wayward chances of fortune, the stern and fiery soldier, whose manly beauty and gallant bearing, and more perhaps than all, the wild and melancholy interest with which his name was there associated, had so impressed the imagination, and perhaps the heart, of fair Grace Willoughby, was now become an inmate. Seldom, indeed, she saw him; for whatever his motive might have been, he seemed studiously to avoid all intercourse and even occasional encounter, with the ordinary inmates of the place. There was, however, to her—she knew not and asked not wherefore—an indescribable interest, and even a happiness in the bare consciousness of his being near—in the feeling that the same roof harbored them both, and that every moment might, by some slight and unforeseen accident, bring them again together.

More abstracted, and more pensive, and more timid, she grew day by day. She would sit for whole hours leaning on her hand, and reading her far-off fortunes in the clear fire that shifted and sank on the great hearth before her, or at the feet of her old nurse would seem to listen to her interminable tales of other times, while her thoughts were far away in the dim, cloudy regions of wildest romance and sweetest fancy.—In love! The pride of Grace Willoughby would have repudiated the charge with high and maidenly disdain. In love! She never even suspected it; or if she did, perchance, for a moment, she haughtily repressed the rising doubt. What could he be to her, or she to him? In love! Impossible! And then to prove to herself how easily she could dismiss his image from her mind, would she take her work, or her music, and for a time pursue them; but what madrigals or tapestry, gentle Grace, could now interest and delight thee as before? None. They are all grown irksome, and thrown aside ere well begun. Alas! are all her light-hearted merriment and pleasant pastimes—the thoughtless glee of girlish innocence—gone, never, never to return? Silent and saddened, with many a sigh and many a blush, in deep absorbing reveries, she whiles the day away; and many an unknown vigil of many an hour she keeps by night; and when at last soft slumber seals her saddened eyes in bow many of the wild and airy pageants of her dreams does that graceful, manly form appear.

Some ten days had now elapsed since the arrival of the king's soldiers at the Castle of Gindarragh, when, in the forenoon of a gloomy and somewhat tempestuous day, Sir Hugh Willoughby stood, booted and spurred, and with his hat on, before the fire of the old and spacious parlor to which we have already introduced the reader. His horse, for full ten minutes, had stood saddled and bridled in the yard; and still the old knight loitered in moody abstraction by the hearth. Thus anxiously ruminating, his eye wandered from object to object, until it lighted upon the fair face of his daughter, turned towards him with a look so tender and loving that its influence soothed his troubled spirit; and a smile—not, indeed, the joyous, unclouded sunshine of happier times—but a smile of fond affection and paternal pride, chastened, and saddened, as the evening glow reflected upon some time-worn tower, lighted up his rugged features.

'Grace, my girl, we must not be cast down,' he said, with a feeble and melancholy effort at encouragement, 'the troubles which threaten us, even should they come, and in their worst form, have yet their allotted limits, beyond which they cannot pass, and their allotted seasons, beyond which they cannot endure. Our family have weathered many a storm before; let us remember this, trusting in God's mercy, and prepare ourselves to breast the coming adversity, with brave assurance of His powerful aid in time of need.'

There was something so subdued and mournful in the tone in which the old man spoke, that spite of the smile he wore, and the encouragement conveyed in his words, his daughter felt grieved almost to tears as he uttered them; for though she lacked not fortitude and courage to look the coming danger fully in the face, and to meet it firmly when it came, she could not, unmoved, remark the obvious and mournful change which care and anxiety had already wrought upon the old man's once buoyant and fearless spirit.

'The troubles of this afflicted country are, I fear, but now beginning,' continued Sir Hugh, seating himself gloomily by the fire; 'our country is the destined theatre of war; the king—King James, has landed—is now in Ireland.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed the girl, with a mixture of interest and of awe.

'Ay, Grace; indeed, and in truth. Advice reached this morning, acquainting the colonel with the fact,' continued Sir Hugh. 'He has disembarked at Kinsale; they make no secret of it; why should they?'

'Then, father, let us hope that he has so much of the generous nature of true loyalty about him, that he may not leave his honest subjects unprotected and exposed to the assaults of violence and rapine,' said the girl, proudly. 'If, coming as a king, he but carries in his heart one spark of kingly virtue, his oppressed and disregarded Protestant people of Ireland will be gainers, and not losers, by his coming.'

'Poor Grace!' said Sir Hugh, sadly. 'Then you see increase of danger in the king's arrival?' inquired she, doubtfully, and after a pause.

'Yes, my poor girl,' he replied, dejectedly;—'when the king set his foot upon our shores, all hope of a peaceful issue from out our present difficulties vanished. There can now be no accommodation with England; the sword must decide the quarrel; and, in the struggle, what ravage, what destruction, what suffering must ensue.'

Grace sighed and changed color; for her sad heart told her, and with a pang that wrung it even to the very core, that all the airy fabric of her fond fancy was shivered and dissolving; the loved creation of her deep and passionate imagination, in which alone was now stored all her treasure of happiness and hope, in which, altho' she knew it not, lay wrapt her very life, was fleeting fast, and disappearing from her sight—for well she knew, that war with all its heightened animosities, if, indeed, its chances should spare his life, must so widen and deepen the gulph between herself and the secret object of her thoughts, that they might never again, in all human probability, meet more.

'Then—the soldiers will soon go hence?' inquired the girl, hurriedly, after a short silence; and while she spoke, a blush of glowing crimson mantled in her cheeks.

'I know not, child,' he answered bitterly, unheeding the agitation which had called the conscious blood into her face; 'they are quartered here, as elsewhere, but to vex and harass an obnoxious man—to crush and plunder one whom they suspect and hate; when they have done their work, they will go elsewhere. But hark! he continued, turning abruptly, and approaching the window; 'there's some one asking loudly for me in the yard.'

As he spoke, they saw the plumed hats (for they could see but these) of several men pass the high-silled casement—the chamber-door flew open, and old Donovan, his purple face, nay, his very nose almost white with agitation, and his silvery locks streaming backward in the air, rushed into the room. With one arm raised in frantic warning, trembling with eagerness, while panic and ghastly woe, and something akin to rage, were struggling in his furrowed face, and glaring in his eyes—

'Master—for God's sake, quick—quick, for the love of Heaven,' he almost shrieked; 'they're here—for your life—your life, master dear, hide, hide. Oh, my God, they're here, they're in—for your life, quick—for your life!'

The old man yelled the last words, stamping like a maniac upon the floor, and hurling the door, shut with all his force, he flung himself against it, cowering towards the floor, and straining with his shoulder to the sturdy planks in a frenzy of vain, but almost sublime resistance.

(To be Continued.)

The man who lives for himself alone, lives for mean fellow.