



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

TURLOGH O'BRIEN;

OR, THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER. CHAPTER LXVIII.—THE PATIENT—THE TRAITOR'S FATE—THE MILLS OF GLINDARRAGH.

As Sir Hugh descended, the cold earth-damps that lurked in those dismal regions gathered oppressively around him—the darkness was complete, and he heard, as he advanced, the rats scampering through unseen passages, and living things, he knew not what, flopping and floundering upon the wet pavement under his feet. Thus he pursued with extreme caution, and scarcely less anxiety than disgust, his dubious course—now actually treading upon one of the huge rats that swarmed there, with a tameless shock enough in all conscience—now encountering with his outstretched hand a pile of rotten coffins, which came down at the touch, with a rattle and reverberation that startled the introductory intruder.

At last, however, his perplexities were ended by a gleam of fire-light, shining through the crevices of a distant door, and with renewed confidence, and a quickened pace, he stepped onward to the place, and knocked hastily for admission.

'Who's there?' asked a voice from within, suspending a low wild song in which it had been exercised.

'Sir Hugh Willoughby,' replied the knight, instinctively giving his name, although with small likelihood, as it seemed, of being recognised there.

Such, however, was not the case; on the contrary, the door was instantly unbarred, and Sir Hugh found himself in a stone chamber, furnished with a huge hearth, and indented with dozens of odd niches and nooks, quaint and unsymmetrical, and which even widowed of the clocks and presses, and bins, which doubtless had in old times lodged cozily within their embrace, had yet a certain comfortable irregularity of aspect, which prevented the chamber appearing quite so desolate as it might have done.

Shutting the door, and barring it as before, the inmate of the chamber, who wore a tattered military coat, motioned Sir Hugh to remain by the fire; and himself proceeded into another chamber, opening off that in which they stood. He returned almost instantly, and desiring Sir Hugh to follow, he led him into a room.

It was also vaulted like the former. A wrecked, extempore bed, covered with a military cloak, supported the wounded form of 'Turlogh O'Brien—a solitary candle shed a dim, comfortless light over the dreary scene—and a dapper little gentleman, whose pursy face plainly enough expressed that he did not very well know which to be most affronted or frightened at his situation, sat upon a rough wooden stool by the bed-side, holding the patient's hand, and regarding his wretched while with a pugnacious leer from the corner of his eyes.

There was in the punctilious adjustment, brand-new gloss, and accurate finish in every particular, of the little gentleman's dress, a contrast to the dreary and sombre desolation and surrounding recklessness, which, under other circumstances, would have provoked Sir Hugh to smile.

As he entered, the patient turned his head, and showed the pale face and sunken eye of fever; he smiled, however, faintly, and would have striven to rise, but the little gentleman pre-emptorily prevented it—enjoined Sir Hugh to stand where he was, and observe silence; and then proceeded to demonstrate the danger which must attend the utterance of so much as a dozen words by the patient.

Spite, however, of all he could do, the words were spoken, answered, and spoken again; and what was more, the patient, instead of dying, appeared much the better of the experiment.—After a short time, however, it became apparent that he was really beginning to be exhausted;—and Sir Hugh having withdrawn, Turlogh O'Brien sank, greatly to the physician's edification, into a profound sleep.

The little man joined Sir Hugh in the large room, and sat down, in like manner, by the fire—the uncouth attendant shambled, in grim factuality, into the sick man's chamber, there to keep watch while he slept.

Return we now to the two rapparees, whom we left in the upper chamber of this dilapidated building, in familiar communion with the cool-headed musketeer, our old friend, Deveril, whose mission involves so much alike of danger and of hope to himself.

Sullenly and silently the three companions sat in the ruinous and darksome chamber we have described.

Again and again did Deveril, as the time wore on, and brought him every moment nearer to the critical point, which was to determine his own fate and that of the two men with whom he sat, wish himself, whether for good or ill, fairly out of suspense.

The door was barred, as we have said, and Deveril began to eye its ponderous bolt with no small uneasiness.

'What,' he bethought him, 'were the two desperadoes, whom he deigned to betray, to suspect his mission, ere his accomplices could force these barriers, and come to his succor.'

The thought, however, did not dismay him, for at every movement he felt the pressure of the heavy horse pistols which swung in his pockets. These, at least, were a pair of friends, good at need, and whose honesty even he suspected not.

At length the long-expected moment arrived—steps were heard outside.

'Deveril,' said Hogan, carelessly addressing the soldier, who had risen, 'mount that barrel will you, and look through the window; there's some one stirring outside.'

Deveril ascended the post of observation accordingly, and Hogan exchanged a significant look with Ryan.

'Well,' he continued, 'what do you see there?'

'It's one of ourselves,' said Deveril, clearing his voice, which was a little broken and husky; 'it's one of ourselves, an unfortunate fellow called Tisdal, that was witness against old Willoughby—do you remember? I suppose he's hard up for a hiding hole, like the rest of us.'

As he thus spoke, Deveril had descended, and stood for a moment between the barrel and the door, undecided, with his hands in his coat-pockets.

'He's a safe man—isn't he?' asked Hogan, carelessly; 'let him in; it would be a hard thing, surely, when the dogs are loose, to stop the earth against a poor devil of an old fox like that; open the door, I say.'

Deveril turned carelessly on his heel, and approached the door; his heart swelled almost to bursting, and the hand which he raised to the bar was damp, and cold as clay, with agitation. His hand was raised, but it did not reach the bar; for a light sound struck his ear, and quick as light he turned. He turned and saw a sight of terror—close to his shoulder a human countenance, livid and distorted with the fearful energy of hate. There was this face, and an upraised arm. For one breathless instant it was revealed, and in the next Deveril lay quivering and tumbling like an epileptic upon the floor;—and Hogan, stooping over him, with a second blow despatched him.

'Now, Ned, now!' said Hogan, 'shoulder to shoulder—we'll do them yet.'

'Drag back the body,' said Ryan, 'while I stand by the door. There,' he continued; 'now one look from the window, without showing yourself. Quick, man—quick.'

Meanwhile, although this occupied scarcely half a minute, those without began to grow impatient.

First came a low whistle, then a louder one; and, at last, a peremptory knocking at the door. Hogan had mounted the inverted barrel so lately occupied by the wretched Deveril, and reconnoitred stealthily the position of the enemy.—Two sturdy soldiers were standing on the little stair platform before the elevated door; another, backed by Tisdal, occupied the stair; and the sergeant himself stood underneath, upon the ground, no doubt, conceding to his subordinates the post of danger, in the generous belief that it was also that of honor.

Hogan jumped lightly to the floor, hitched up his breeches, pressed down his hat upon his brows, and drew the buckle of his belt a hole or so tighter.

'Are you ready?' he asked of his companion. Ryan assented.

'Now for it, then. Stand fast. I'll take the stairs—you the other scoundrel and the sergeant.'

He then applied himself leisurely to undo the iron bars which secured the door, responding to the impatient and repeated summons of the soldiers in a tone of terrified and deprecating entreaty, which seemed but to stimulate the insolence of their assault.

At last the task was ended; and Hogan, drawing a long breath in preparation for the stupendous effort he meditated, on a sudden swung back the door; with one blow of his herculean fist smote the foremost of them headlong to the ground, a distance of nearly a dozen feet; buried the next backward down the precipitous steps with irresistible violence, carrying Tisdal and his companion along with him. And at the same moment Ryan sprang lightly to the ground, and ere he had recovered from his astonishment, thrust his rapier twice through the sergeant who fell senseless to the earth.

Amid shouts and curses, with the bloody rapier still in his hand, he vaulted nimbly through the window of the ruined church; while Hogan, with a wild halloo, sprang through the archway beneath the central tower.

A shot from the musket of the only one of the soldiers who had escaped untouched, struck up

the tiles and rubbish between them as they ran; and in the next moment they had crossed the outer wall and so, pursuing devious ways, were gone—who could say whither?

Sir Thomas Neville, as we have seen, had set his heart upon entirely and hopelessly dissolving whatever ties subsisted between his son, Percy, and the rustic maiden, whose aspiring audacity had filled him with so much horror and indignation. Of the actual nature of that connection he had, indeed, no suspicion. His measures, as we have seen, were promptly taken; the letters which his son had intended for poor Phebe, Sir Thomas, in the exercise of what he considered to be his paternal rights, intercepted and destroyed. Percy he managed to have removed to England, and he himself wrote a stern and peremptory letter to Phebe, which, if anything of which Percy himself was not the author, could have done so, would unquestionably have broken the poor girl's heart.

So much importance did Sir Thomas attach to this affair, that he despatched a special messenger—a trusted domestic of his own—from Dublin, to bear this decisive document to its proper destination.

The messenger accordingly set forth, and at the first Irish outpost upon which he stumbled procured a 'protection,' which carried him without adventure to his journey's end.

It was evening as he turned into the little by-road, which, breaking off at the old bridge of Ghindarragh, winds under oak and thorn trees along the river's bank, opposite the grey walls of the castle.

A ride of little more than five minutes brought him to the now silent mills; and beyond this picturesque little group of buildings, and embowered in sylvan seclusion, by the brook's side, stood the quaint farm house, with its deep thatch, and two stories of diamond casements, softly and sadly lighted in the mellow evening sun. In a moment more, the messenger stood in the homely chamber, occupied by our, now alas! mournfully altered little friend, Phebe. Pale was her cheek and dim were her eyes with untold watchings and patient sorrow. She rose, as he entered, with the untaught and artless grace with which nature had so beautifully endowed her.—He intimated that he was a messenger from Dublin.

'Sir,' said she, while her cheeks flushed with a bright and sudden glow, and then grew paler even than before, 'Oh, sir, do you bring any news—of him?'

'Mr. Percy Neville is in England,' said the messenger, with involuntary respect. 'He is in England; and I believe not likely to return for a long time—'

'Oh, did you see him?—is he well?' she said, hurriedly.

Yes, well; very well—very well,' answered the man.

'And is there—is there—have you'—she trembled so violently that she could not, for a moment, go on; 'is there any letter, any token—any message?'

'None from him,' answered the messenger.—'I have one from Sir Thomas, Mr. Percy's father—Sir Thomas Neville.'

She took the letter with a trembling hand, and broke the seal. What it contained he knew not; but he saw in her face, first a momentary wildness, and then such a look of unutterable desolation and anguish as no limner could ever paint. In silence, she pressed her thin, clasped hands upon her side, as if in anguish insupportable, but no word betrayed her agony. She stood without motion, in the same woful attitude minute after minute. At length nature relieved her bursting heart, and the tears flowed fast and silently down her cheeks.

'I feared it. I long feared it, sir; oh, how I dreaded it night and day; and now, it's come at last—after all, after all, the worst, the worst is come.'

She wept on in silence, wringing her little hands in untold agony. 'Sir, I have no friend that is able to advise me in this great sorrow; she resumed at length; 'but I often thought, and I told him—I told him then, and I thought it many a time since—I was not worthy to be his wife—for I thought his people in England, sir, and all his friends, could not like me the way he did; and when the time passed on, a year—oh, a long year—now, sir, and no tale or tidings of him, I began to think—for I could not help it—he was maybe wishing himself that it was all over—that he had never seen me, and I could not blame him even if he did; and it often came into my mind to write him word to get the marriage broken, and that I would not say against it—and but for one thing I think I would have written; the little child—his little child and mine. It was the loveliest, sweetest—all its little ways, and, oh, sir, it was so like himself—I think it often kept my sore heart from breaking. But it's there now, lying in that bed—it's dead and gone; oh, my darling—my darling—my darling.'

She drew the curtain of the bed where lay the lifeless infant, and clasping its cold form to her heart, she kissed it, and wept, and wept, and kissed it again.

The messenger was leaving the room, but his heart was full—he turned again, and drying his eyes hastily, he took the poor mourner gently by the arm and said, hastily—

'Never mind that letter—Master Percy knows nothing of it—he loves you better than his life—I know it well—and he'll be back soon, I tell you—soon—God knows I speak the truth.'

And God bless thee, honest fellow, for thy frank compassion; in this parting sentence—a few words of rough pity and truth thus briefly spoken—thou hast bequeathed her a hope—one hope—without which the poor heart that shall cling to it, through many a day and month of disappointment, with desperate trust, would soon have lain as still and cold as the little form she folds so passionately in her lonely bosom.

CHAPTER XLIX.—A DOUBLE RECOGNITION.

The political and military struggle in whose events the current of our tale is woven, was, as the reader is no doubt well aware, a singularly protracted one. It was not until the third year after the English revolution that the Jacobite army was withdrawn from the shores of Ireland. To this, the closing year of the grand and tragic drama of Irish resistance, our story brings us.—Nearly a full year had passed since the events recorded in our last chapter—a year which had witnessed William's ineffectual siege of Limerick, and Sarsfield's brilliant exploit, achieved in the interception and destruction of the heavy-battering train and ammunition destined for the destruction of the beleaguered city. William's forces were, with the approach of winter, withdrawn, and the hopes of the Jacobite leaders again revived. Meanwhile intrigue, ambition and jealousy were at work in spreading dissension and its attendant weakness among the party of the exiled king. Tyrconnel, the haughty favorite, had become hateful to many, and suspected nearly by all. Sarsfield now openly aspired to the chief command of James's army in Ireland; a post, which had he obtained it, he might have filled with signal effect. His boundless popularity—his daring promptitude, and strong common sense, were qualities which in conjunction with his high rank and immense sacrifices, might reasonably have secured for him the object of his ambition. But French interests and intrigues prevailed, and the Marquis de St. Ruth was commissioned with a command, which Sarsfield certainly had earned by his services, and which he would probably have yielded if not with ultimate success, at all events with better fortune than attended the foreigner.

The waste which had been so recklessly committed upon the country now reacted with fearful disaster upon those whose recklessness had wrought it. A dreadful scarcity, little short of famine, prevailed throughout the west and south, except in such parts as were accessible to supplies from abroad—and the Irish army was reduced to extremities which, perhaps, no other army in the world would have endured with a like patience, and, indeed, without disorganization or mutiny.

It was a lovely summer's night, then, in the year of grace, 1691, when a coach—one of those clumsy, straight-backed vehicles, which we see in old prints, came jogging and rumbling along a narrow road, somewhere in the rich county of Kildare, and between a double row of fine old trees. This vehicle contained two personages—a venerable old gentleman, richly dressed, and a beautiful girl, somewhat pensive, and dressed also as become a person of wealth and worship. Irish roads were by no means then what they have since become. A steep and broken acclivity made it necessary for the travellers to descend and walk, a task, however, which the softness and beauty of the night rendered peasant rather than otherwise, and which no sense of danger or insecurity disturbed; for, as the reader is aware, the perils and uncertainties of war were now removed as far as the beleaguered town of Athlone, between which and the capital Ginkle's army interposed. The district through which wound the quiet road in question was safe as in the most tranquil time of peace. It was therefore with a feeling of perfect security that the young lady placed her arm through that of her venerable protector, and paused with him to enjoy, from the eminence they were ascending, the moonlit landscape that expanded before them.

At this moment a tall and stalwart figure stood near them. He had just descended from a footpath upon the road. He carried a rough walking staff in his hand, and was dressed as might becom a thrifty yeoman, with a grey cloth mantle hanging upon his well-formed shoulders. He stood—gazed on them intently, and exclaimed—

'Gracious heaven! can it—can it be they?'

'What!' said he, fervently advancing towards them; 'Grace, dear Grace—will you not know me?'

'How—who—Turlogh!' she gasped.

'Yes, dearest,' he said, and in an instant Turlogh O'Brien stood by her side, paler and thinner, indeed, than when she had last seen him—but still her own betrothed, and adored lover—yes, your own true lover—your betrothed, and if heaven spare me, your proud and happy partner through all the years of life in store for us. Dearest, dearest, how I bless God for this chance meeting. Oh! that we were met here and now to part no more, dearest Grace. And you, my kind, my dear, my honored friend, he continued, addressing Sir Hugh, 'what happiness—what fortune to meet you here. My letters reached you, did they not?' he proceeded addressing Grace again.

'Oh, yes—but—but I have been very anxious, very wretched,' and the poor girl burst into tears, 'are you indeed quite recovered?'

'Quite, dearest, though my recovery has been slow, and long doubtful,' he answered; 'had they but given me my way, I should have been out and serving months ago; but when did a leech suffer his patient to pass through his fingers? As for me, I have been literally a prisoner among a set of good-natured savages, who, in the excess of their kindness would, I believe, have knocked me on the head, rather than permitted my escape, until my strength and health were duly certified by a doctor of physic. I incline to think I've suffered more from this compulsory confinement than I could have done nearly by my wounds.'

'And now,' resumed she, looking earnestly in his face, 'what means this strange dress—this disguise?' Oh, Turlogh, I fear me you are again about to hazard your life and mine—for mine is now bound up in yours. If you die, Turlogh, I care no more for life: oh, tell me, tell me—say you will not hazard your life so soon again. Oh, Turlogh, dear Turlogh, I fear I fear we shall never meet more.'

'And better even so, dearest,' he answered, 'than you should wed a disgraced and dishonored man. No, dear Grace, while my regiment serves in these wars—while I hold King James' commission, and have health and strength to carry my cross, and draw my sword, it never shall be said that Turlogh O'Brien was unseen upon the day of battle.'

'The lad is right—aye, right in every syllable,' said the old knight, with emotion. 'Give me your hand again. I honor you, my friend, for your brave resolution, although, in truth, I would fain those honest barbarians had held you still in durance for a month or so longer.'

Turlogh smiled, and then replied more gravely: 'This war is near its close—everything proves the crisis is indeed upon us—a month or a week may see it ended. Ginkle is a capable campaigner, and St. Ruth, his opponent, is an over-estimating general also. With such antagonists war is a quick game, and the end of suspense, at least, is not added to its other woes.'

Thus the conversation was pursued, which, having so far followed, we need pursue no further. Suffice it to say, that they parted with a thousand renewed and passionate pledges of undying love.

A hurried farewell, and the two fond hearts were once more severed. A way rolled the old-fashioned coach, by a quiet bye-road, in a southerly direction, where some five miles further the knight and his fair daughter were to remain, for a time, the guests of an old friend, in a fine old rambling mansion, with terrace gardens, and long lovely fish-ponds, closed in with dark yew hedges, and boasting every scenic accessory, in a word, which a love-sick damsel need desire.—Here we leave them until the military events, which as yet impended over the country, shall have determined finally the prudence or the danger of venturing a homeward journey to Glindarragh Castle.

Our resolute friend, meanwhile, with a firm and vigorous tread, pursued his way upon the morning following, loitering occasionally in the villages through which he passed, to learn, without suspicion, whatever he could glean of the movements of the contending armies.

The day was now spent, and the summer moon was sailing high in the heavens, and shone upon a dreary sweep of heathy hills, so low and gradual as scarcely to deserve that name; bleak and monotonous, the white mist lurking in the hollows began now to creep chilly over the dark slopes and undulations of the uplands, and was a living form, save that of our wayworn friend, was visible over the expanse. Still, with firm tread and constant purpose, he pursued his way, conscious-meanwhile, that as he approached the neighborhood of the hostile armies, his own personal danger—in his present uncertainty of the exact position of the contending parties—of falling in unexpectedly with some detachment of the enemy, was of itself enough to inspire anxiety, and whet his vigilance.