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THE PROPHET OF THE RUINED ABBEY.

By the Author of "The Cross and Shamrock."

CHAPTER VII.

At the break of earliest dawn, the drum and file sounded merrily through the main street of Cloughmore.

The column was about 1,700 strong, and marched in the following order: 300 of the fourth dragoon guards led the van, followed immediately by about 200 yeomen, led on by Sir Anthony, or rather driven on by him, for he rode in the rear of his troop, between the cavalry and infantry, where he kept an animated chat with Sheriff Juggler and A. B. Westrop, who followed the yeomanry, comfortably seated in their gig.

About 1,100 foot soldiers, with a dozen artillerymen in charge of two light field-cannons, which brought up the rear, completed this armament. Cautious and slow the column moved along, as its head gained on the gradual ascent of the winding road, and dreadful was the alarm created through all the ranks, on beholding the advance-guard rush back at a rapid gallop, to report that the enemy was in view at the very pass where the troopers fell in the action of last night, as they could tell by seeing their helmets and knapsacks on the roadside.

Two hundred picked men were now ordered by the colonel to lead on the attack, consisting of 140 tall grenadiers on foot, and 60 cavalry, 40 of whom he picked from the yeomanry corps, on account of their knowledge of the place.

'Onward, advance,' set the column in motion; and Sir Anthony and his men moved on like automata, through fear. They had not advanced many yards forward, when a spark was seen to issue from behind the famous 'Cloughnagour' rock, and then instantly the report of a rifle, and Sir Anthony dropped dead on the road.

'All right,' answered the colonel. 'Fury, take that horse of Gummell's and mounting the prisoner on it, conduct him back to the town well guarded. Tell Capt Jones to lead back the whole of the dragoon guards, as there appears to be no enemy here, nor sign of one, while myself, with the infantry, will prosecute the search for this missing rebel, who, you say, disappeared here.'

Off the dragoons rode, striking the very earth and causing the mountain to resound with the echo of their heavy tramp. They quickly gained the formidable pass, when, wonderful to relate,

there was not a single soul to be seen. The only sign of life was a peat fire, that lay in cinders and ashes, at the foot of the great rock of 'Cloughnagour!' But back! what, or who is that running along the level flat between the two mountain peaks on foot? A solitary individual foe. Pursue him, guards and take him alive if possible, shouted Sergeant Fury, who had the command of this forlorn hope.

The colonel forthwith came up, and so did the whole force, but no prisoner, nor any account of one could be given by the unhappy soldier who chanced to be foremost in pursuit of the enemy.

The poor fellow was unborsed immediately, and after a summary examination, ordered on his knees, and one of the grenadiers singled out from his rank, and on a giving signal a bullet pierced his heart. 'I will enforce something like discipline in this troop,' said the colonel, 'or decimate you by lot, you cowardly rascals! Would to Heaven, Mr. Sheriff, said he, addressing Juggler, 'you had kept your dastardly yeomanry at home at their congenial warfare of murdering old men and defenceless women and children, rather than that this confusion should be created among our men by their contagious cowardice.'

He then ordered the whole troop to deploy into a wide circular line, so as to take in the whole plain as far as the road between the two peaks of the mountain; and giving them instructions to close in till they met in the centre, so that if there were man or mouse secreted there he could not be missed.

The men were disposing themselves under the instructions of their officers, and the sound of the bugle announced that all was done according to instructions, when on the opposite, or left peak of the mountain, near its base, a man, wrapped in a cloak, was observed to move in rather a hurried gait up the side of the hill. The colonel placed his telescope to his eye, and taking a close view of the man so spied, cried out to Sergeant Fury, 'Go, capture that man, who, if I am not deceived, the escaped priest. Speak not a word to him, and do not offer him the least violence.' In less than fifteen minutes the order was executed, and Fury, coming back to make his report, remarked that he doubted not it was the priest, for he could recognize the cloak, which was seen by himself frequently on the prisoner; and it being rather an elegant one, he could not be mistaken.

'All right,' answered the colonel. 'Fury, take that horse of Gummell's and mounting the prisoner on it, conduct him back to the town well guarded. Tell Capt Jones to lead back the whole of the dragoon guards, as there appears to be no enemy here, nor sign of one, while myself, with the infantry, will prosecute the search for this missing rebel, who, you say, disappeared here.'

Sergeant Fury touched his cap, and went to execute his orders. In the mean time the search for the 'enchanted warrior' commenced, and there was not a foot of the square mile that constituted this mountain level but was walked over foot by foot and inch by inch by the colonel and his eleven hundred men. This search was not confined to the smooth surface plain, but the bog-holes, out of which turf was cut, the ravines, the turf-clumps, or 'groggins,' and every other possible hiding-place, was examined and searched most carefully, but all to no purpose.

Finally, it being now near noon, and the sky becoming suddenly overcast with dark, portentous clouds, the colonel, chagrined in mind and sure in temper, ordered a quick retreat back to the town of Cloughmore. No time was lost in making good their retreat, for the column had

not advanced a mile when the thunder roared over their heads, the forked lightning struck the earth, which groaned and shuddered beneath their feet; and the heavy rain, which a frightful south-east wind blew right in their face, drenched them to the very skin. That fine body of men, which, at six o'clock on this eventful day, moved along from the town so gay, so neat, and in such good spirits, returned back about four o'clock in the afternoon, in the most wretched plight, with their firelocks and buckles rusty, their red coats washed almost white, their pantaloons and boots coated with mixed bog and road mud, their feathers, gay and formidable furs, flabby and deformed; and to add to their woes, their stomachs empty, after the foolish and profitless expedition to Knockmellown.

The peasantry, on the other hand, felt rejoiced that God, as they said, 'did not allow the holy priest to die without showing his anger.'

'O the Lord save us!' said Mrs. O'Halpeen to her husband, Mihaul; 'isn't that a shure sign that Father O'Donnell is put to death wrong?'

'Oh,' cried Judy, 'it's the last day of the world. Come, let us say the rosary.'

'Wid all my heart,' said Mihaul, who though he trembled like a leaf, sought to comfort his wife by seeming courage.

We may here remark that, though thunderstorms are of rare occurrence in Ireland when compared with other countries, and are seldom or never injurious in their effects to either life or property, the peasantry, regarding these phenomena as so many warnings from the Deity to His creatures, are strongly impressed with the fear of His awful attributes on such occasions. Nor can this feeling be condemned as superstitious or wrong. We know from sacred tradition that God frequently communicated His will to men, when the most awful thunder and lightning rent the elements, and that the stoutest heart will quake and faint with fear at the terrors that will precede His second coming to judge the world. So far from condemning, then, we should rather encourage these sentiments of humble and repenting fears of God's Majesty with which the Irish peasantry recognize His terrible voice in the loud roaring of the thunder when it shakes the earth, or kindles up the boundless expanse of heaven by its dreadful light.

'Pugnabit pro Eo omnis orbis terrarum contra insensatas.' 'The universe will fight for Him against the insensate.'

CHAPTER VIII.

Joy of the most tumultuous character pervaded the fourth dragoon guards of King George III., as they returned from their formidable expedition to the sides of Knockmellown.

The Sassenagh troopers were in great glee, at the idea of having secured the rebel priest, as well as at the prospect of having established their clear claim to the liberal reward which they expected for having secured him alive. Many a gross jibe and ribald joke was indulged in at the expense of his reverence, whose capture, singular enough, took place on Tuesday of the last week of Lent.

As they approached the town, the hedges and fences were crowded with the townspeople, particularly the young of both sexes, who had come out to see the return of the dragoons, as well as to sympathise with the recaptured priest. Many a loud prayer was offered by them for their benefactor, as they supposed him to be, when seen by them at a distance, while his guards were saluted with a vehement hooting. As the troop approached, however, and the prisoner was recognised, the sorrow which was depicted in the countenances of the peasantry was replaced by a sudden mirth, and a suppressed laugh ran along the fence line as the people got a nearer view of the prisoner. At length, the humor of the townspeople broke out into audible jokes and witticisms at the stupidity of the dragoons.

'Oh, Dick, Lord bless us,' said a servant girl, 'doesn't his reverence look mighty well after his long time in gaol? I can't help laughing, I'm so rejoiced.'

'He does look well,' said Dick. 'I wonder where they caught him. The Lord he praised, he must be a great man, intirely, when it required so many soldiers to catch him.'

'Dragoons, draw and disperse these idle spectators,' said Lieutenant Scarcecrow, who felt indignant at the audacity of the townspeople. The fences were soon cleared, the heads drawn in from the windows, and a closer guard placed around the prisoner, so that he could not communicate, even by a look, with the people. The courtyard of the prison was just opened, and with three loud clappers for the king, the prisoner was given up to the governor. But that official, whose face was radiant with royal smiles since he heard of the recapture of the priest, now became suddenly overwhelmed with grief, when he was satisfied by the testimony of his senses, that this was not the man. Mr. Bremner, said Lieutenant Scarcecrow, 'is not this the escaped prisoner? Do you not recognize him as Priest O'Donnell?'

'No, sir, nor you can't recognize him nor nobody else. If am'n't mistaken,' continued Bremner, 'that is Lord Barterborough's fool, Darby Anglum.'

'Thin, you're right for wanst, Mr. Bremner,' said Darby, bursting out into loud laughter. 'I am shurely mee Lord Barterborough's friend and fellow-servant. Yes, faith, and clothed by his high lordship's honor and glory. He, he, he! haw, haw, haw!' continued the fool. 'I had my white saddle ride on a dragoon's horse, and all for nothing. Id bates Banier and Ballinasloe.'

'Whoever he is,' said Sergeant Fury, 'keep him in close custody till the colonel arrives. You will find the knavish priest is counterfeiting madness. I will wager 'tis nothing else.'

'Counterfeiting humbug, sergeant,' said Governor Bremner; 'do you want to deprive me of the sight of my eyes? Do you think I do not know this fool as well, and better than I do you?'

'I have no more to say about it, sir. I have done my duty, and but acted according to orders,' replied the sergeant.

Soon after this dialogue, the courtyard of the prison received a coach and four within its ample gates, and in this carriage were seated Colonel Clive and Lord Barterborough. They came to examine the captured priest, and to decide regarding his execution. A subordinate turnkey was despatched with instructions to conduct the prisoner from his cell to the presence of these high officials. A fit of loud laughter seized the simpleton at the idea of his being mistaken for any decent gentleman. 'I am glad to meet mee lord safe and sound here,' said he, turning to Barterborough, 'after this mornin's great battle up at Poul nagour.'

'Who is this you here got here?' exclaimed his lordship in astonishment.

'Mee lord,' said Darby, whose ears were very acute; 'an haust man, as your honor and glory can prove, who know me and supported me this twenty years.'

'Confound me,' said the colonel, 'if I know who is accountable for this blunder; but the report being made to me that he was the escaped priest, I, of course, ordered him back to the town under a strong escort for execution.'

'For execution,' exclaimed Darby, who understood not the meaning of the word. 'Yes, and for a good dinner, and good pair of new breeches, too, for now I will gentleman out and out, if I only could get a velvet breeches, as I have a dragoon's horse and a marshal's cloak. But if execution be a clean shirt, your honor needn't mind it, for it was only yesterday I got this shirt from Miss Mary O'Donnell, God bless her; and this cloak I got from another O'Donnell, long life to his reverence. All I want now is a good pair of shorts, if it please your honors; I don't want the execution at all.'

It was with difficulty that the lord and the colonel could command their gravity after reflecting on the ludicrous position of matters, and listening to the above speech of the simpleton. At length Barterborough, pretending great indignation at Darby, addressing him, saying, 'You arrant knave, bow came you by that cloak?'

'Arrint knave! that isn't my name at all, mee lord, but your own and friend Darby Anglum.—Yarrow, maybe your honor and glory don't know me in account of this cloak,' said he, throwing it on the table that stood in front of him.

'Silence, sirrah, or I will hang you. Answer what has been asked you.'

'Hang me! What for? Did I ever steal, or lie, or kill, or rob, or—'

'Where did you get that cloak?'

'Where did I get it, eh?'

'Yes, where did you get it?'

'I didn't get it at all, shure. It was gev me by that holy man Father O'Donnell, for God's sake; so it was. Now did you ever hear the like, to say that Darby Anglum ever stole anything, let alone the priest's cloak?'

'And where did you see the priest?'

'Where did I see him?'

'Yes.'

'I saw him in chapel celebratin' the Holy Mass, where you could see him if you war of the right faith! I saw him goin' to sick calls. I saw him at the fair when the boys war fighting, making pacc between the 'Caravats' and 'Shannavests.'

'Where did you see him last time?'

'I saw him in the road going up the mountain near where the battle was to-day.'

'And where did he go then?'

'He went to Cork, I believe, to sail to Amerikee, I think, may God preserve him on his journey.'

rely on the testimony of this idiot, who won't tell a lie if he was to escape hanging by it; but you have to repeat the question once or twice before he can comprehend what you say.'

'They were now joined by the sheriff, who came with his death-warrant, and who asked the colonel whether the priest was well watched, for that there were reasons for suspecting his resolution to commit suicide rather than die the ignominious death of the gallows.'

'Catch the bare first,' answered Colonel Clive, 'before you prepare to cook him. Where is your priest?'

'What do you say, colonel? Did I not escort him inside these walls within an hour, and only went to the court-house to procure the death-warrant and give instructions to the hangman?'

'So, so; but you see your prisoner turning out to be no other than his lordship's entertaining guest, honest Darby Anglum.'

'Why, colonel, you must joke. My lord, I assure you I saw—'

'We are in too serious a mood now, sheriff, to indulge in such conical rascals,' said the colonel; 'there is your recaptured priest for you.'

'Faith, I'm very like him now shurely,' said Darby, 'in this cloak. Amn't I, mee lord Shurruff?'

'Well, well, what's to be done in that case?'

'What do you recommend?' answered the colonel, giving a meaning look towards his lordship. 'We await your wise counsels. Speak your mind.'

'My mind is at once to hang this fool in the place of the priest, for sure he deserves hanging, at any rate, on account of his treasonable trick.'

'Hang me!' cried Darby. 'Do if you dare, and mee lord present. You want hangin' yourself may be, or killing, like Sir Anthony, the 'Keolau,' who never let Darby inside his beggar kitchen. His head is now up the 'boreen,' and yours ought to be there too, your hangman, said the fool, rushing at the sheriff as he spoke with clenched fists.

'Oh, save me, save me, or he will murder me; take away your fool, my lord,' cried the half-strangled official of the rope.

'You ought to have a little better sense, Mr. Sheriff, than to bandy words with a poor simpleton, and somewhat more humanity than to recommend the murder of a poor harmless creature such as we all know Darby to be,' said Lord Barterborough, rather bitterly.

'It is really a shame, added the colonel, 'that men having the administration of justice confided to them by the sovereign should display such utter incapacity, such puerile levity, such absolute want of common sense, and, I may add, such barbarity as I must confess I have witnessed in the servants of the crown almost without exception since I have been entrusted with this unlucky command. I am not at all astonished that the people have lost all confidence in their natural leaders and rulers; I am not surprised that they should become disloyal and rebellious under such treatment as they have met from those whose chief duty it was and is to protect them in their lives and properties. Think of the idea of unhappy Sir Anthony Sharper proposing to bang his own butler I and you, Mr. Sheriff, proposing the execution of an idiot, a perfect innocent, and all this, as you say, through loyal motives—to keep down the peasantry and maintain the king's rule in Ireland! Better that the island should sink in the ocean, or that the Hottentots or Algerines should rule it, than that its sovereignty should be upheld by such blundering misrule as I have witnessed since I came to the country.—Mad, I do not blame or censure the administration in London or Dublin; I only include in my unreserved condemnation the local government as administered by sheriffs, justices of the peace, town councils, and other minor officials.'

To this severe reprimand the sheriff answered not a word, but humbly awaited the colonel's instructions regarding the duties of his office and the disposal of the death-warrant. It was agreed that the sheriff should dispose of the body of one of the soldiers, who fell in the action of the morning, so as to awe the peasantry. The head of one of the yeomanry was accordingly affixed to a pike after a mock execution under the instructions of the sheriff, and placed on the highest gable-end of the court-house of Cloughmore, where it remained for many a day to shock the public eye; and it was from this circumstance that the impression went abroad that Father O'Donnell was executed instead of having escaped, as it is the object of this history to show. This impression, however, though a general one, was not universal, for the officials, who were actors in the deception, knew well that the priest had escaped their hands, and so did his friends and relations, as well as those of the few people who knew of or aided in his delivery from the power of his enemies. Amongst these latter we must not omit to include the honest fool, Darby Anglum, who, we are happy to say, escaped hanging on the occasion, and spent the remainder of his days partly at the 'Great House' of his no-