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THE RETURN OF CLANEBOY.

(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

'Merciful God, they are murdering the Earl!' screamed Honora, as she saw him drop from his saddle, Robert Fitz-Martin drawing his sword all bloody from his side, Robert Fitz-Richard and Sir John Logan striking at him as he fell, and the Erenach and kerns engaged in deadly combat with his servants.

As the cries of 'Treason' and 'murder,' and the shouts of the assailants, mingled with the plunging of men and horses in the water, and the clashing of weapons above, rose into the undistinguishable din of battle, Lady Gyle raised her head, and sat erect with a firm brow and compressed lips, gazing at the scene, while Honora, clinging to O'Neill, with prayers, tears, and locked embraces, held him back. His first impulse had been to strike in with his own people; then to arrest the bands of the murderers, and call off his men: but all had been the work of an instant, and he now sat indignant, but irresolute, while the attendants of the Earl, disheartened by the death of their leader, and the desertion of their captains, yielded before the aggressors, and fled in all directions. The two Sir Roberts, spattered with blood and the black soil thrown up by their horses' feet, galloped from the scene of their dishonorable victory to where Lady Gyle still continued gazing at the spot where William had fallen. Fitz-Richard embraced his mother with affectionate ardor, and turned to kiss his sister, but Honora shrunk from him and exclaimed, 'Oh, traitor! I touch not the hand of a murderer.'

'Thou doest me wrong, Honora,' cried he, 'thou doest me foul wrong—I was his prisoner, not his squire; and I tell thee I had been a headless corpse ere morning, had I not struck that blow for life and liberty.'

'Oh, Robert, thou hast done that which will bring down tenfold ills upon us all,' she said, yielding him her hand mournfully; 'but if it was for liberty you struck, brother, who has known bondage, can blame thee. And for what hast thou stained thy hands in this young and noble gentleman's blood?' she said to Fitz-Martin!

'To save thine uncle's lives, niece; had he lived till night, they had been dead men ere eight-and-forty hours,' answered Fitz-Martin.

'And for other reasons, which thou shalt learn anon, daughter,' added Gyle, smiling faintly through all her bitter suffering. As she spoke, the Erenach was seen re-crossing the river above, from the pursuit. 'And here comes one who I doubt not, will satisfy even thee,' she said, pointing to him; but although his horse made towards them, it was soon evident that it was not by direction of the rider, for the reins trailed with a little track of foam through the water, and a cry arose that the Erenach was wounded.

'He holds both his hands on his side,' cried the lady; 'Ah! I see the broken shaft of an arrow between his fingers. Ride down, Sir Robert, and thou, son, ride down and aid him hither.' But O'Neill had already started out to his assistance, and a kern had reached him, and was supporting him on the saddle before even he arrived.

'Prince,' said the wounded man as he slid heavily into their arms, 'I am hurt to death;—grant me thy pardon that I may die in peace.'

'I forgive thee, Loughlin,' said O'Neill, 'I forgive thee freely, although it is unworthy our house to set upon a brave gentleman, at odds and unawares.' Loughlin made no reply but groaned and turned his face to the ground. By this time all the party had approached, and were gathered round the spot where he lay bleeding and ghastly among the discolored rushes; he heard the rustling of their footsteps, but could not raise his head to look around.

'Is the Lady Gyle amongst you?' he inquired, in a low voice.

'I am here,' she answered, 'let me essay my skill to draw the arrow.'

'Touch it not,' he said, 'else the life that is fast going will have left me ere I can ask thy forgiveness for what I have this day done.'

'Thou hast not played us false, Priest?' said Fitz-Martin, sternly.

'Sir Robert, I am a dying man,' replied the Erenach; 'vex me not now with upbraidings.—If I had lived,' he said, with a moment's returning energy, 'all had been well. I came hither to draw William into revolt. I saw and heard him, and despaired of success. Let no man blame me for then seeking his death. I had done that, good service, and therein I am satisfied. But, lady, to engage thee and thy kindred in this adventure—and without that aid it could not have succeeded—thou well knowest what I have promised to perform.'

'And if thou hast deceived us in any tittle,' cried Manderill, 'I will burn thee on slow fire.'

'Knight,' said the dying man, 'I have done thee wrong, but I have done greater wrong to others who are now silent.'

'What hast thou done, unhappy man?' asked

Gyle; he made no answer, and seemed suffering great bodily pain; the question was repeated.

'I have deceived you,' he said, with a groan of anguish, 'Claneboy knows not of our agreement.' All stood in the consternation of sudden despair. 'Had I lived,' he repeated, 'all would have been well; but as it is, without one to play out the part in which I am thus stricken down, you will be but the tools of my policy, the deluded tools of my ambition.'

Fitz-Martin struck his brow with his gauntleted hand, and would have done violence to the apparently dead body, (for the Erenach had drawn out these words with almost the last gasps of parting breath) had he not been restrained by Fitz-Richard and O'Neill.

The eyes of Honora and her bridegroom had met, as they looked up in their first hopelessness, and they had mutually derived from that silent conference a power to bear whatever might happen; but Lady Gyle and her kinsman seemed utterly despairing. In the midst of the confusion of the rest, while some cried that the English were coming down upon them, and others urged to fight, they still sat upon their horses, or stood around the dying man. His lips moved again, and he tried to sign with his hand. Gyle, who was nearest to him, stooped, with strong abhorrence marked on her countenance, to bear his hardly distinguished accents; but she had not listened to more than the first imperfect sentence, till her face assumed an expression of interest, and she bent her head lower and lower, till at length, holding up her hand to warn those around to silence, she knelt down, by his head, and, till the limbs stiffened before her, and the death rattle choked the last syllable, continued to catch every word he uttered with the most intense eagerness.

'Poor wretch,' she said, as she rose and remounted, 'he meant not to have deceived us in the end; even now, he would in some sort atone for what is done, by teaching us what to do.—Dear children, forgive me also, for I have helped, alas! ye know how unwittingly, to bring you into this trouble; but, trust me, I will not desert you now, since that is done which cannot be undone, and all must use our remaining chances for the best.'

'What chances now remain?' cried Fitz-Martin. 'What chance have we now of land or liberty or even of life, in Claneboy, drawn, as they are by us, into a war and an alliance against their knowledge, and I doubt not against their will?'

'Ride by me, Sir Robert,' replied Gyle, 'and thou, Sir John Logan, bear also what I have to propose.'

She rode forward with the two Knights; and Honora and O'Neill, uncertain what might be their fate, but contented in enduring it together, drew the scattered kerns around them, and, followed by a lamenting band, bearing the dead Erenach on a bier of branches, took their way after the elder leaders, along with liberated and exiting Fitz-Richard. They directed their course over the heights of Deris and Donegor, and, as they came in sight of the distant Bann beyond, the noon-day sun shone upon their counsils still mournful and uncertain, but far from the despair of their first consternation on the confession of the Erenach.

In the evening the headquarters of the Clan Hugh Boyle swarmed with retainers of the numerous chieftains of Inis Owen, TyrConnell, Oriel, and Orlither. The O'Doherty, O'Donnell, O'Hanlon, MacMahon, and others of less note, had been invited to a solemn conference in the Castle of Aodh, the exile king of Dalaradia.—O'Neill's fortalice, although built for a temporary refuge, and admitting no stone into its structure, save those on which the numerous fires burned, was nevertheless, an extensive and imposing pile. Huge trees had been felled from the surrounding forests, and sunk so deep, for the main timbers of the walls, as to defy the most violent storm that ever swept from Slieve Gallen above down to the expanse of Lough Neagh that lay beneath. The interstices had been closely wattled and covered over all with plaster of gray loam, wrought into rude mouldings round the doorways and narrow windows. The roofs on the meaner parts of the building were of straw, or rush thatch; but over the great hall all was of massive planked oak, that glistened in the sun with a thick varnish drawn from the pines around. The whole was surmounted by a watch-tower, rising full fifty feet from one end, and supporting a flag-staff, whence the red hand waved out on its ground of white, far above the green tops of the highest trees.—In the open space that sloped away on every side to the verge of the forest, temporary huts had been erected, and some hundred kerns and gallow glasses might be seen lying about their sunny sides, or busily engaged in games and feats of strength upon the field. Here and there a horn still went its round among a circle of a dozen together, showing that the evening meal

was just finished. In the court immediately before the Castle, there was a better sort of gallowglasses, with some middlemen or esquires, still busied in directing the quartering of men, and stabling of horses; while among piles of arms and armor, two war chariots stood opposite the gates, with the gilded harness not yet removed from their poles.

Crowds of butlers were hurrying to and fro among the lower buildings, where the banquet was still going on, and bearing ale and honey-wine from the cellars to the great hall, where the chiefs themselves were assembled, each seated upon a boss of rushes covered with a cloak, before a separate table, with his butler behind him, and his sword-bearer by his side. The walls were hung with tapestry of crimson freize, festooned between the timbers, each of which rose like a trophy, sustaining its load of sylvan and military decorations. At the upper end of the hall, upon a raised platform, stood three huge candles, formed of rushlights, bound together to the full thickness of a man's body, and nothing less than ten feet in height. Every one was supported by two butlers, whose office was to feed the pith with oil as fast as the flame consumed that in which it had been originally steeped, and to guard against danger to the wood around from a body of flame so great and high as rose from each, and filled the hall from end to end with intense amber light. Of all the assembled chieftains, Aodh O'Neill himself was, by his yellow head, the tallest. He stood up at his table, a horn of mead in his hand, and as he rose into the light of the torches, which the height of the platform had hitherto shaded him, the brazen flash of his head in sudden glare caught every eye.

'He rises like a comet in the night,' whispered Callough Moyle to the MacMahon's harper at the foot of the hall.

'Like bright iron from the furnace when the sword is to be hammered that shall consume the stranger,' responded the bard of the Bear's children.

'Royal and noble Princes,' began the yellow King, in a voice that filled hall and passage even to the outer doors, 'famous chieftains and worthy Knights, who have this day done honor to our retreat here among the hills which we can hardly call our own; I pledge you, one and all, and pray you, of your loving-kindness, that you would now assist our counsils with your wisdom and advice. You have all seen how the false Englishman, with spiteful and malicious perseverance, ceases not to make daily some farther encroachments on the little that has been left us. But why need I speak of wrongs that all have felt from year to year? What say you, Princes of Leath Con—shall we endure this longer, or fall upon their sentiments with united arms?'

Chieftain after chieftain gave his voice for peace or war, as each was more or less acquainted with the real power of the English. Various plans were proposed, and had been debated, when questions arose of the extent to which English defection might be reckoned on in case of a general rising. Many families were named, and among the most considerable, the DeBurgios of Galway and Mayo, who had already assumed the Irish patronymic of MacWilliam, or sons of the renowned Sir William De Burgh, a warrior of the preceding generation.

'Of these we have the assurance,' said O'Neill, 'and of their kindred of the north I should ere now have had intelligence, but that my messengers delay, I know not why, in Dalaradia.'

'For the northern De Burgh I am here to answer,' said a figure separating from the crowd at the foot of the hall.

The stranger was enveloped in a cloak, but the voice was that of a woman, and the face, when advancing, she removed the hood that had concealed her features, was that of Lady Gyle. All were mute with astonishment. Aodh advanced, took her hand with natural courtesy, led her to the upper end of the hall, and drank to her health, but it was plain that all this was half involuntary. Gyle dropped the cloak from her shoulders, passed her hand over her brow, and for a moment looked up as if seeking strength to bear the scene she had ventured into; then took the silver goblet that was handed to her by the chief butler, looked round the gazing assembly, and said—'King Aodh, and ye, Princes and Gentlemen—I pledge the health of all with unfeigned good will. I am here an unbidden guest, but the grand-daughter of an O'Brien need not fear, methinks, to come among the Princes of Ireland in their council. I have come, noble Aodh, to answer for our house; that we were weary of the pride of Richard the Red, so are we now ready to rebel against the tyranny of William the Cruel, who has already slain and imprisoned his own kinsmen, confiscated their estates, and scorned the applications of his own Peers, and of the Holy Church herself, in their behalf. Princes, and I will say kinsmen, for our house has mixed blood with the nobility of Ulster, as often in happy wedlock as in honor-

able battle, we have, by this severance of the English tie, through the keen cruelty of our leader, become the natural friends and allies of our nearest protectors; and to whom, save to the Chiefs beyond the Pale, shall the revolted Englishman look for protection? I am here, a weak woman, to plead the cause of many, and you may well wonder that the cause of such a family should rest in hands so feeble. Alas! my Lord is long dead, my son is a tender youth, my brothers are slain or captive, my noble kinsmen of Mandeville are themselves at feud with Claneboy. I alone am left to dare peril and hardship in our children's behalf, and I have travelled hither, Princes, to urge you to take back your own, and to admit us partners of your dangers and alliance.'

She paused; a hum of approbation rose on all sides, and she continued—

'What service do you crave of us, Princes? We are fewer than we have been, but never yet so well disposed.'

'Seize upon Cragfergus Castle,' said a south-country chieftain, 'while we overrua Leeaile, and so cut off their communication with Leinster.'

'The Castle is strongly garrisoned,' she replied, 'we are too few to essay it.'

'Yet,' said a voice in the crowd, 'although the boar's hair be unspooled, we slew the wild boar to-day in the wood.'

'Ha!' cried Aodh, 'the closed eyes of William were truly a gladder sight than even the open gates of his castle. I had not sought the alliance had I known Princes, of your rising, or of thy friendship, lady—the kinsmen are ever by him—he is our worst enemy.'

'Let me not disguise it,' said Gyle, but she faltered as she spoke; 'we do offer you freedom from that pest and scourge of your nation. But much as we long to prove ourselves trusty and prompt allies, we would not shed blood in the quarrel without full assurance of protection in defeat—and blame me not, Prince, that I stipulate where life and fortune are at stake—neither will we without also equal and just recompense in success.'

'Ask what thou wilt,' cried Aodh, 'that service gains it,' but his sons Neal More, and Brian, and all the younger chieftains, murmured, and there were expressions of disgust heard among many of the elder Tanists.

'We will buy no man's blood,' said Brian Ballagh.

'Let the assassin look for accomplices among the Scot,' cried Neale; 'we have neither Bruce nor Kirkpatrick in Tyrone.'

'Be silent,' cried Aodh sternly, 'I would that we had even such brave men in the place of vain and irresolute boys. I tell thee, lady, thou hast named the price of what thou listest to ask.—This William is a worse than Conyn; and the man that makes him sure, shall be a better Baron than ever was Kirkpatrick. Say what thou demandest, lady.' But the color came and went upon Gyle's cheek; she covered her face with her hands, and burst into passionate weeping.

'Rash and unmanly boys,' cried Aodh, to his sons, 'your insolent taunts shall not go unpunished.' And he took the lady's hand, and strove to soothe her with kind words and apologies; but Gyle's tears flowed faster and faster, and she sobbed aloud. Those who had reproached her, already blamed their own rashness and the sons of O'Neill joined their father's entreaties that she would forgive them.

'Oh, my Lords, my Lords,' she cried, forgetting in her agony, alike forms of address and prearrangement of action, 'I do not deserve these reproaches. I cannot longer bear your unworthy thoughts of me. My Lords, the Earl is already slain.'

She had no sooner made the avowal than the shame of her former apparent hypocrisy again assailed her; and amid the confusion that her intelligence had created, she again hastened impatiently to justify herself.—'Oh, hear my story,' she implored with uplifted hands; 'judge me not till I have told what brings me to this degradation. King Aodh, I have been wrought upon by thy name; it was thy legate who deceived me. Let me but speak and I will tell all.' She dried her tears and continued—'Thy legate sought to tamper with William, he saw that his designs were hopeless and strove to bribe us to the attempt that has been accomplished. He offered us in thy name, as a reward, all the lands of Duflern, with oblivion of all ill-will to my son and men of Mandeville; all the lands of northern Dalaradia, from Clough to the sea, to my imprisoned brothers, and then he engaged to set free from Norburgh within six days; and to confirm the compact, Aodh, he offered us, in thy name, the hand of thy youngest son in honorable marriage with my only daughter.'

'William?' cried Aodh, 'I never authorised him—and thou hast been duped, lady.'

'I call God to witness,' she replied, 'that I sprang his bribe, rich as it was, with scorn—

but, my Lords, there came a messenger from the council with orders for my brother's death without delay, and William had to ride from Ardes next morning to sign them.'

Aodh's brow had been cleared up at first on her reply, fell again, and he sternly questioned, 'What then, lady? is the son of a hundred kings married to thy daughter?'

'My daughter,' replied Gyle, kindling at the imputation of inferior birth, and now unchecked by the consciousness of dissimulation—'my daughter shrinks not from comparison of ancestry with even thee. Her great forefather, Charlemagne, was Emperor of nations and countries, out of which as many kingdoms of Claneboy as the King of Claneboy can boast lineal ancestors, might have been taken, without staining a horse in his hundred stables, of one pile of barley. Her ancestors by the side of her noble father, were barons of Normandy, whose vassals led each as many men to their standard as half of the master roll of thy people—and her great grand father was the O'Brien, at whose foot-stool kings of such nations as shme have knelt and done their homage.'

'Thou bravest it well, lady,' said Aodh, 'well and boldly—but we of the Tanistry wed not our Princes thus rashly to the daughters of Saxon Knights.'

'Oh, had I but a little longer concealed the truth,' cried Gyle bitterly; 'had I tempted thee with offers of a service to be performed, as our miserable deceiver counselled me to do with his dying breath, and as he would have done himself had he lived to finish what he began; had I bidden thee to kindle thy warning fire on Slieve Gallen, and shown thee an answering light on every hill in Antrim, as I was prepared by him to do, and as I should have done; had I out shown our strength, and stipulated for its exercise, I could have gained whatever I desired. But I am a weak woman, Aodh, and I could not stand before an assembly of men, and bargain for the price of infamy. My daughter is the bride of thy son, but she brings thy nation a richer dowry than ever did the wife of O'Neill before. Alas, alas, Honora, thou hadst little thought of what would be thy marriage portion.'

'And Phelim, lady,' said Aodh, 'did my son know of thy compact?'

'He knew not,' she replied, 'he knows not even now the peril I encounter for his sake:—he and his bride await thy determination in security; if they receive not thy pardon ere morning, they will have fled far beyond thy displeasure. I only am here, a weak, widowed out-cast woman—I and one trusty kinsman, who has shared my fortunes in peace and honor, and is willing now to share them in danger, and, if need be, in death. Stand forth, Sir Robert Fitz-Martin Mandeville, and show this ungrateful Prince the testimony of thy sword.'

Ere she had finished, Mandeville advanced into the hall, holding in his hand the sword with which he had slain the Earl—'Behold the blood of the tyrant!' he exclaimed, and struck the point of the weapon into the ground; it quivered from the weapon, and shook the red crust that still adhered to it in flakes upon the floor. The boldness of the action, and the sight of an enemy's heart's blood scattered at their feet, joined to the spirit with which Gyle had already won the respect and pity of all, raised such a triumph of stern admiration, that the whole hall rang with acclamations, and Aodh, whether it was that he could not resist the universal voice, or that he really sympathized with it, advanced and extended a hand to each.

'Noble lady, and valiant sir,' said he, when the tumult had abated, 'Claneboy knows how to honor constancy and courage; and if I were forgetful of the worth of this service, I would well deserve the reproaches which thou, lady, hast not made unprovoked; but forgive the anxiety of a father for his son, of a King for one of the Princes of his people. Sir Robert, this good sword has healed the quarrel it caused last summer; thou shalt have all my legate promised thee—I will make good the pledges of my name in all things.'

'On noble Aodh,' cried Gyle, 'it was neither for land nor lordship that we consented—rescue my brothers, and we care not for the woods of Duflern.'

'By the staff of Marcus,' cried O'Neill—and all of his name, at the great household oath, bowed—'I will have them in the possession of their lands within three days, else will I raze the walls of Norburgh stone from stone. And lady, for thy daughter she must be worthy any Prince in Ireland, else were she not thine: I would fain see her as Phelim's bride; where hide they?'

'We left them in Clan Conkem,' said Gyle—and her voice now lilted as much from joy, as it had done so shortly before from shame and sorrow—they think that we are at the abbey of Coleraigne, to procure their shipping for Scotland; for pardon from thee they do not hope, and had they known the peril of this adventure, they had not easily parted with me. Sir Robert