



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. X. MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1859. No. 18.

THE LAST IRISHMAN.

(Translated from the French of Elie Berthel, by C. M. O'Keefe, for the Boston Pilot.)

CHAPTER VII. (Continued.)

Julia rose with difficulty. "Is this the only consolation," she asked, "in which you can offer me in my frightful fall? Should the fatal secret get abroad I should not have sufficient energy to sustain the hatred and contempt of the world. Could I conceal my shame from my family, and brothers, and all who are dear to me—I could not hide it from my own conscience? Already I feel a horror of myself. In my family a dishonored daughter is not allowed to live. My family pride has told me this, and a terrible voice has lately repeated the decree. But, Sir George, I consider myself too young to die. My religion tells me that Divine justice is inexorable to those who anticipate the hour appointed by Providence.—Sir George! I ask you, for the salvation of my soul, to give me a father for my infant?"

The unfortunate girl dragged herself to the feet of Sir George, and concealed her face, inundated with tears, against the ground. Sir George divided his attention with nice equality between the lady and the fluster of his line, with which a mischievous fish appeared at that moment to be playing.

"Come, come, Miss O'Byrne, get up," said Sir George, in a dry tone. "This really ridiculous. Your lamentations will not change the past. I do not—so to say—belong to myself—come, stop crying—I blush to see you in that attitude. I must really leave the place, from a feeling of respect for you. This place, indeed, is not worth remaining in; your agitation and noise have frightened away the fish, and I must try my fortune in some other locality."

He drew his line from the water, and was preparing to depart, when Julia clutched his dress with a convulsive grasp. "Sir George, stay, Sir George; take pity on me; I have much more to say—listen to me."

"No, no; not at this moment," replied Sir George; "this evening, or to-morrow, when you are less disturbed, we shall resume our conversation; but allow me—I desire it—let me go then—!" He loosened himself by a sudden wrench, and repulsed the girl in a brutal manner.

She raised her hands to Heaven and exclaimed in heart-rending accents, "Oh, my God, will you not assist a poor female who has not merited this contempt and degradation?"

"He has sent you an avenger, Julia O'Byrne," cried a loud voice behind her. Sir George stood aghast. Julia turned her head, and Richard appeared at a few paces from them.

Richard's costume was that he wore the previous evening, with the exception of the mantle, which on the present occasion, might embarrass his devouring activity. Though this costume was simple, in the countenance and features of O'Byrne, there was so much nobility and dignity that it was impossible not to recognise the gentleman. At the present moment his brow was corded with anger; his eyes gleamed like coals of fire; he held a loaded pistol in each hand. To do justice to Sir George, the threatening apparition of O'Byrne appeared in no way to affect his phlegmatic insolence. He looked at Richard, whom he was unacquainted with, then at Miss O'Byrne, to whom he said in a loud voice, "What carrion is this—what brings him here? Ah! Miss O'Byrne, in spite of appearances, I will not suppose you have laid a trap for me."

"No, no; Sir George, do not suppose so," cried the poor girl, in a state of distraction. "I swear that I was ignorant—. In the name of mercy," she cried, placing herself before Richard, "no violence, I beseech it."

Richard put her aside by the motion of his arm. "Allow me," he said in a firm tone;—"your part is ended, mine begins." Then turning towards the Englishman, who, leaning on his rod, listened, and looked more surprised than terrified, "You have not fallen into a trap, Sir George," he resumed; "you need fear no violence, if you act with frankness. Take this weapon, sir." Richard O'Byrne presented Sir George with one of his pistols.

"What am I to do with it?" "I am desirous," said O'Byrne, "that we should stand on a footing of perfect equality, while discussing interests which are extremely serious."

Sir George shrugged his shoulders. "You are wasting your time," said he with an air of contempt. "A man of my rank can never be placed on a footing of equality with a highwayman."

"Miserable wretch," cried Richard; but checking himself immediately, "let me not use bad words," exclaimed Richard. "Sir George, I ignore nothing of what has passed between you and Miss O'Byrne; reparation on your part has become indispensable. Before I demand what is most to my taste, let me inquire if

you intend to marry this poor girl whom you have so foully dishonored."

Sir George only answered by a disdainful smile. "That is sufficient," resumed Richard: "I was certain of it.—" "Well, take this pistol, place yourself at the distance that you consider requisite, and defend your life."

"Why really this is a duel," said Sir George ironically, pushing away the pistol: "a duel without witnesses—a duel without seconds in the corner of a wood, with an utter stranger. But to induce me to accept this proposal you should at least tell me your name, and what right you have to interfere in this matter."

"My name!" resumed Richard, "I have not sufficient confidence in your honor to confide it to you. That name was long illustrious before an obscure adventurer concealed his ignominy with the title of Powerscourt; and I have held rank in the army superior to that of a lieutenant. As to the right to defend the cause of Miss O'Byrne, it will suffice if Miss O'Byrne acknowledge me as her champion."

"Oh, with all my soul!" cried the young girl; "I cannot find a braver or more generous defender. Nevertheless—"

"Enough," interrupted Richard. "Come, sir, you hear the lady—are you ready?"

Sir George shook his head: "No," said he, at last, "I cannot accept a duel under such conditions."

"Why, sir?" "Because I do not like to be entrapped—I am not willing to fight with a man who probably wishes to cover the weakness of his mistress with my honorable name."

Richard's eyes became as red as blood; he uttered a hoarse dull cry like that of a wild beast still master of himself, he succeeded in subduing the ebullition of his anger. "Sir," said he, "if you are unwilling to fight without witnesses, you can call your servant."

"It does not become a man of my rank," said Sir George, "to fight a stranger, in the presence of a servant, you can assassinate me, but I shall not defend myself."

"Sir George," cried O'Byrne, striking the ground with his foot, "you are desirous that I should tell the world you are a coward."

"Say what you please," replied the young Englishman, "no one who is known to be a gentleman will repeat that insult with impunity in my presence."

"Sir George," cried Richard, "are you only courageous when defenceless women are the object of your attack—you are a coward, a base coward—do you hear! You will now fight, I hope."

"No, I will not," replied Sir George.

"Insolent villain and abominable seducer, you shall not escape," cried Richard. He struck the Englishman furiously with the pistol he held in his hand, while Sir George endeavored in vain to parry his blows. Notwithstanding his skill as a pugilist, the slender scion of nobility could not resist the vigor of O'Byrne. The butt of the pistol fell upon his head and face; blood spouted from his wounds.

Richard in all probability would have killed him if a noise behind (for he had turned his back upon the lake) had not now attracted his attention. He could not see his sister; Julia had disappeared; but the violent agitation of the waves, which rolling to the shore, accounted for her disappearance.

"Good God!" exclaimed Richard, "the unfortunate girl—!" Rapid as lightning he plunged into the lake. At this moment Julia reappeared upon the surface, buoyed up by her clothing, her hair streaming with the fluid. Her brother grasped her, in spite of her efforts to elude his clutch, while she murmured, "Let me alone—I must die."

Richard, without heeding her expostulations, swam manfully towards the shore. When he reached the rock that jutted into the lake, two strong hands relieved him of his burthen, and laid the lady with tenderness on the dry grass.—It was Jack Gunn, who stood upon the bank as suddenly as if he had dropped from the sky, just when his master needed his assistance. Owing to the exertions of Gunn, Richard and Julia, after a few moments, stood upon the bank in perfect safety.

This drama was enacted in perfect silence;—not a sound calculated to attract the attention of the vicinity escaped from the actors; indeed, vulgar observation was excluded by the configuration of the shore and the adjacent country. Jack Gunn, nevertheless, began to reconnoitre the neighborhood the moment the brother and sister were out of danger. Sir George might be seen, hurrying with precipitous steps in the direction of the ditch where he had ordered his servant to await him. His hat and rod lay upon the spot where he had encountered O'Byrne; his dress was in disorder, his countenance discomposed, his face disfigured with wounds, and as he hurried along, he spat up from time to time gobbets and mouthfuls of blood.

Jack felt a strong inclination to pursue him, not knowing if his master should feel satisfied at the escape of an individual for whom he had recently manifested so much antipathy. But all idea of Sir George appeared to have escaped from the memory of Richard O'Byrne. The condition of poor Julia occupied all his attention, who, with her eyes half shut, shivering in her wet clothes, murmured in a broken voice, "Why should you hinder me from executing justice on an unworthy creature who has brought ignominy on your name? Did you not yourself pronounce my sentence?"

"My darling sister! my beloved Julia, you must forget the insane words, which in a moment of distraction, escaped my thoughtless lips. To consider you accountable for that monstrous attempt would be horribly unjust. In the eyes of your brother you are still as holy and pure as before; I require and command you to live."

"What is the value of an existence which must be a burden to others as well as to myself?"

"Julia, you are a Christian; in order to suffer you must live."

"Since you desire it, I shall obey; but I hope that God in His infinite mercy will abridge the period of my sufferings."

Richard O'Byrne embraced, kissed and pardoned his sister, while Jack Gunn, clambering a lofty bank, looked out over the whole country. Having ascertained that all was solitude, he gave a signal to O'Byrne, who took Julia in his arms.

"Where are you carrying me, Richard?" she asked.

"To Daly's, in the ruins of Lady's Church, where you shall be perfectly safe. There you can dry your clothes, and return home without attracting attention."

CHAPTER VIII.

A few hours after the setting sun, an assembly of conspirators met in the secluded residence of the blind man. The outer room, in which Daly generally lived, was occupied by about twenty men—undistinguishable from the peasantry of the surrounding districts, except by their warm and substantial clothing—evinced that they belonged to the better class of small farmers. Every man present was draped in a large great coat. Blocks of stone, topped and cushioned with mats of woven straw or twisted rushes, formed their seats. An old door, which had been taken from its hinges and laid on its side, appeared in its centre, propped on four rocks, and serving as a table. The damp of the room was counteracted in some degree by a dull fire composed of heather and *car-runs*. The faces of the conspirators, when from time to time the fire light flashed upon them, looked shadowy, sinister, gloomy, savage, and forbidding. Few words passed between them, and these few were whispers. There was a certain constraint or undefinable uneasiness pervading the assembly, which proved that some important matter was brooding in their minds which chained their tongues, and imposed reserve and caution on their expressions. The inner chamber, separated from this by a closed door, was evidently better lighted, as streaks of pure light came out clearly from the chinks, or cracks, or crevices of the door. In this room Richard was seated on a large log of bog oak, covered with the skin of a kid, before a crazy deal table, on which maps and papers were spread in vast profusion. An Indian dirk and a case of pistols served as paper-weights. A lamp burned before him, and he appeared to peruse with interest the numerous documents which covered the table.

As the night was pretty far advanced, Daly arose and stepped softly into the room occupied by Richard O'Byrne. He remained standing in the presence of his chief for several minutes before his appearance was observed by O'Byrne. "Oh, Daly," he cried, at last perceiving him, "is this you? It is, I suppose, full time to depart, for certainly much remains to be done."

"It is past twelve o'clock," said Daly.

"Have all the delegates arrived, Daly?" asked O'Byrne, keenly perusing the blind man.

"Yes, my lord, all—barring one from Glendalough; but I can easily account for his absence. He was thrust out of his cabin, and robbed of his little property this morning by Lord Powerscourt."

"I trust, Daly, we shall avenge him in a few days. I trust we shall punish the brutal, bloated aristocracy of Ireland—foul with vice, and horrible with crime—by hanging the titled miscreants in the lawns of their own castles, from the boughs of their own trees." Then, after a pause, "Can Kavanagh be depended on, Daly?" asked O'Byrne, in a calmer tone. "May he not have turned informer with the view of being restored to his farm?"

"No, my lord, Kavanagh is a faithful man.—I'll answer for poor Tom Kavanagh."

"Your guarantee is the best evidence of his honesty," said O'Byrne, "you at least have been always faithful."

The face of the blind man was lighted up by a flush of manly pride. "I hope my lord there's good news in the letters, the delegates of distant counties are ready I hope, and the young Irishlanders true to their word?"

"Well, they are and they are not. The working classes are as ready as present circumstances will admit of—quite willing to strike a blow for the liberation of their country. Here are letters from the suffering sons of the north from Farney—from Louth—Meath, Cork and Galway, and several other counties. The men of Wexford in particular pledge themselves to be ready without any reservation at an hour's notice. But I am sorry to find the higher classes shamefully hanging back. According to them the time has not yet arrived—it is madness to attack the British army—forty thousand strong—backed as it is by the ferocious Orangemen of Ulster. I am myself convinced that we should first begin with the Orangemen. Until they are disposed of, nothing can be done. This is my private opinion; but I am overruled by Mitchel, Meagher and Duffy. The linen of Ulster should be burned by the exiles in America. Unless we speak to their pockets it's useless to speak to their hearts. The fire which burns their linen will cool their loyalty or even convert them into patriots. This is my private opinion. But I cannot prevail upon Duffy or Mitchel to adopt it. They foolishly imagine that the Orangemen of Ulster can be propitiated by leading articles. But this is insanity. Ulster must be beggared into patriotism and none but the American exiles can beggar the Irish Orangemen. In addition to the Orangemen and the army, we have to encounter timid and time-serving Catholics, men who have acquired a little property and are reluctant to risk it. These men are afraid to offend their aristocratic acquaintances, whose influence hangs—in war as in peace—like a millstone round the necks of such underlings. Were the green flag of victory once floating broadly from the towers of Dublin Castle—as it yet will be—these time-serving wretches would come flocking round our standard in reptile-swarms. As it is we must calculate on their hostility."

"Nobody ever expected the like of them to join us, my lord, at the first brush. We must have success first."

Richard O'Byrne opened a printed sheet displaying the royal arms of England. "Here is a proclamation which has been or is about to be published by that shallow charlatan, Lord C., making it treason and felony to call an assembly of Irishmen or address them on political affairs. It commands the arrest of the principal leaders of the movement. The principal chiefs have meantime dispersed over the country to organize the insurrection. We strike a hurried blow in a premature manner. Smith O'Brien is to hoist the standard of rebellion on the hills of Tipperary, Maurice Leyne will issue by night from Dublin with four hundred covered cars, each containing four riflemen. He will rip up the rails of 'the Great Southern,' and prevent the transit of the troops which are to be sent on the part of the government to suppress the rebellion headed by Smith O'Brien. Meantime, I trust I shall strike a blow in my native Wicklow which will resound through Ireland. Something must be immediately done, or all is lost."

"My Lord, the night is far advanced—it is time to be moving. The way to Rath Laoghair is both tedious and difficult."

Richard O'Byrne placed his Indian poignard in its sheath, secured his pistols in his belt, flung his mantle over his shoulders, and passed into the room where the delegates sat waiting his commands. Murmurs of joy and suppressed cheers welcomed his appearance, while on his part friendly nods and words of recognition reciprocated the greeting of his friends.

The party issued from the cabin and proceeded by the winding road that skirted the lake.—From this lake they diverged into a ravine lined with sheets of perpendicular rock, capped and dotted here and there with bive-shaped furze and skirted with briars and brambles.

A stranger could never find a passage through a gorge so unencumbered: but it was perfectly familiar to their guides. Now they clambered steep accents, supporting themselves by tufts of heath or protruding masses of stone which cropped up through the thin soil; and again they passed along a narrow ledge of rock which resembled a shelf skirting a precipice. The blind man displayed more courage than any individual in the band. He advanced when the guides hesitated—he struck the earth with his staff, and determined by its sound the nature of their footing. At length the party reached a plateau of some extent, where they could rest, near the summit of the mountain. Meantime the moon became visible—rising lurid and red—as if it were a ball of fire brooding over the lips of a crater. The red light of the portentous moon—enveloped from time to time in a dark cloud, which buried the lurid disk in its murky bosom—gave the conspirators mysterious, but magnificent, glimpses of

the shadowy lake and the gleaming waters—occasionally ruffled by the fitful passage of the breeze of night. The opaque shadow of the overhanging mountains seemed to assume strange and grisly forms—calculated to impress the superstitious with feelings akin to terror. The party paused on the plateau to recover breath and contemplate the scene.

They were not long here when they saw with no little wonder a column of fire issue from the earth, and shoot up towards the sky, which it lighted and licked with streaks of purple. The breathless gazers were lost in astonishment.—"What can it be?" "Whose house is a-fire?" "A huddle of conjectures followed these interrogatories. "That's Tom Kavanagh's house," said one of the guides. "He was turned out of it to-day, and the boys are burning it to-night, to punish the landlord. That's Tom Kavanagh's house." "Oh! that's it."

"My lord," whispered the blind man, "this accounts for poor Kavanagh's absence. I told you he was true."

The conspirators hastened to quit the circle of light which the conflagration threw around them. But they had little need to bury themselves in the shadow, as the dangerous way they had chosen was rarely traversed at such an hour. The conflagration was speedily lost to the conspirators by an intervening panel of the rock.—After they had proceeded for a considerable way in night and silence, Daly whispered to Richard, "Your honor is doubtless aware that we are about to enter the haunted ravine, and that we shall meet at the end of it a band of desperate characters."

"I am aware of everything which a man in my dangerous position ought to be acquainted with," said O'Byrne. "I hope to give them an opportunity to expiate the misdeeds and crimes of the past, by their patriotic devotion to their country in future."

"You are right, my lord," said Daly, "the cold selfishness and wolfish cruelty of the Irish aristocracy and the English government have made them what they are, rather than their own instincts. They have been goaded by oppression into licentiousness."

While conversing in this manner they reached the mouth of the haunted valley. 'Twas a long, deep, dark trench—a *sculp*, as the native Irish term it—a yawning chasm cleaving a massive mountain, which at some distant period of geologic time composed a single hill. This black mass was never penetrated by the rays of the gentle moon, which, trembling on the forked fringe, fringed its horrid apices with silver. It was rough with boulders and tangled with bushes and briars. The strange, mysterious and discordant sounds which wafted from its dark breast, assumed, as they approached it, louder and more terrible proportions. At times the pale listeners heard, or fancied they heard, the clamors of a pack of hounds, intermingled with the hideous howlings of some prodigious prey—some distressed monster of primeval ages, which gigantic dogs had hunted down, and which howled out its brutish life under the fangs of its furious assailants—some megatherium, or dragon, or monster that rent the mountain with its roar. These horrible sounds were explained by men of science, on incomprehensible principles, which were perfectly scientific. The explanations of the terrified peasants, though less philosophical, were unquestionably more intelligible. The howlings of the damned who were tortured in hell, became audible—were roared out in this black gulf, which had the reputation to be one of the mouths or orifices opening to the infernal regions. This was the popular explanation.

CHAPTER IX.

The most superficial observer might soon perceive that a thrill of superhuman apprehension seized, silenced, and paralyzed the followers of O'Byrne, or at least was fast creeping over their hearts, and freezing their courage. Whispers were perpetually passing among them—their pace was growing slower and slower, and finally degenerated into a halt. It was in vain that O'Byrne exclaimed, from time to time—"Come on, my lads"—as he was accustomed to do in the army—their sluggishness grew more and more apparent.

"What is the matter, boys," he suddenly exclaimed, "why don't you come on?"

"O Lord, sir! don't you hear them," gaped one of the party in sheer terror.

"Hear what?" demanded O'Byrne, in indignant astonishment.

"Why, the horse of the white messenger, my lord. Don't you hear the cry of the hounds, and the yelling of Old Proby? Listen! there—O Lord!—isn't it frightful? Nobody dare stand in his way barring a priest in his stole. O Lord! O Lord!" he continued, as he listened—"isn't it frightful entirely?"

To explain this exclamation of Charley Healy—for such was the name of the speaker—we must observe the peasantry believed that, from a cavernous opening which gaped in the valley, a