

OWEN ROE O'NEIL
or THE BLOW OF THE HAND

M. A. Manning.

Concluded.

So absorbed was he that he never heard the click of spurs or the opening door. The stranger undid his sword buckles and leaned the heavy weapon against the angle of the wall. Then Owen looked up, but the deep shadows concealed the identity of the man. The Irish Chieftain bowed gravely and waved his hand to a honon oaken chair. When the stranger came within the light, Owen Roe recognised Cardinal Rinuccini. Hastily he advanced to greet the Nuncio, but Rinuccini stayed him with accents unusually soft and said—"I am here, General, not as the envoy of His Holiness, rather as one who, knowing the value of his friend, even though the knowledge came with lingering steps, would make some poor amends, though it be only to say farewell."

"Farewell! Surely my Lord Nuncio, you—you would never deem it right or honorable to leave us thus—now when?"

"When the black shadow of failure had fallen upon you and me. Now, when you are banished by your own kind; the fruits of your victories plucked from you; when every man's hand is engaged in slaying his brother; when I, the ambassador of the Year of the Divine Master, must needs hurry hither and thither—fly like a bat through the night in mean disguise."

The Nuncio threw off his heavy cloak and stood before O'Neill in the uniform of a trooper. Owen marked the wasted figure, the gray hair, and the lines of sorrow and disappointment that had ridged his forehead and circled his eyes. Yet the uniform became him as his robes never did. Like Richelieu, this Cardinal should have been a soldier.

"Your Eminence," said O'Neill, with some dryness, "might easily don a less honorable garb, certainly none more becoming."

"I have found it safer than my purple silk," returned the Nuncio, with a quick glance at O'Neill. "Tis a shame to confess it so. Yet will I forget this shame and trait the memories of days that were rosy with a great hope to linger in my thoughts. I would say farewell, O'Neill—but I would say more. Look you, you soldier of Ireland, your sun is set; darkness is creeping over this miserable land—ill-fated, destined, I spread my sail in Galway Bay before two days shall dawn. If you cannot accompany me, follow. There is brave work for you to do. Christendom groans beneath the sway of the Turk. It is Islam or Christ!"

The Nuncio arose; his usual calm was abandoned. The trembling lip, and the clasping and unclasping of the nervous hands, making the stone on his fingers flash blood-red light, told how his feelings moved him.

"O'Neill, O'Neill," he urged, "the gamester leaves when the stake is lost or won; the soldier surrenders when all hope is abandoned. Why tarry here and eat out the heart. Ireland is doomed."

"Then, my Lord Cardinal," broke in Owen, "my place is heret—hereto live at best. I may yet mend her poor fortunes as best I may, mayhap. If so it will be the good God, to center in a soldier's life like His sake keeping—a poor sacrifice for the Old Land."

The Nuncio would speak, but Owen, raising his tall figure erect, waved him to keep silence.

"I am O'Neill, descended from Niall King of Ireland—he who reigned over the land seven centuries back. 'Twas Shane, of our house, who mocked the English might; it was my uncle, Hugh, who held the Yellow Ford. I have done my poor part. I have fought the fight; I have kept the faith. It may be that my son will come after me and yield no better service to the old cause than his father hath wrought. Ours is the Isle of destiny. We may all fail, but we will fail with the failure of martyrdom. You cannot understand perchance, for you are not of our blood. The stakes are lost," continued Owen, with bitterness, "hope is abandoned, so be it—an gambler or soulless you do wisely to flee."

"The stakes are lost! It were more seemly that you left the taunt to fall from another tongue. I, playing a gambler's risk! Shame on you. Yet, maybe, I am over hasty, for they wear my own words. Alas! Owen O'Neill, do you, do you know how much I have lost—I, who let others take rich sees, that I might come on this service to Holy Mother Church? Have I not lost my private fortune, wasted years of my life, and now, must I return to the steps of Peter's throne as an old man, weary with defeat. I never looked to a dreamer awakened, brat of loss. I have sorry patience with you!"

Owen knelt reverently. On the wall

he saw the shadow of the uplifted hand that waved and blessed him. There was a dash of blood-red light from the ring, and Owen was alone. A hot tear was upon his hand, but it had not fallen from his eyes.

XL.—THE DARKNESS AND NIGHT.

Yea, howso we dream,
Or how barely we do,
Who end in the same,
Be we traitor or true,
And after the bloom
And the passion is past
Death cometh at last.

Owen is at Derry. He has relieved the garrison there under Coote—a strange turn of the wheel of fate when he aids Coote. There is rejoicing and a banquet is spread. There it is said, the poisoned cup was handed him. Appeal after appeal from the weather-cock Ormonde came to him. March south and save the people from the hate of Cromwell. With his death sickness upon him he breaks camp and turns his face to Munster for the last time. The shadow is falling, and disease is clutching the heart as they move by. He feebly thanks every regiment, a simile to the captain in word to the men.

Thou they bore him to the shores of Lough Oughter. A few only way eadene. The sob of a dying soul—a voice from a land of dismal shadows. How it rises and swells, comes again, and fills the chamber of death with its sorrow and warning.

So he says farewell. Strong men every one of them standing there—men who go south to battle, once more for the old land; but they turn away, ashamed of their idle tears and vanishing sorrow. Until the shadows wrap the barge, they watch, through a mist of tears, and mark treachery of the boat as it widens and widens and widens.

Across the waters of the lake they roved the dying chieftain. He lay in the stern propped up by arms as gentle as a woman's in their office, although they had dealt many death-blows. Over the lake, slowly, gliding, the ears muffled. Like the dusky barge that brought the body of Arthur, the peerless Knight of the Round Table, to the land of rest, the boat moved, but there was no voice raised in lamentation, only silence, silence unbroken.

The shadow of the Castle falls across him who never bowed to fear or failure. The poison is doing its work surely. He reaches Cavan; he is by the shores of Lough Oughter. Then he knows his strength is spent.

He would see his soldiers, his faithful followers once again,

There is death in the circles that hollow his eyes, death in the wasted neck, death in the fever-glisters of the eye. Yet how the poor face softens as they march past, the men of Fermanagh and Cavan, Tir-owen and Tirconnell. Old fighters many of them, many of them the sons and younger brothers of poor creachs whose bones bleached on the battle plains of Tyrone and Fermanagh.

Past the stricken Prince of Ulster, the march, and salute the dying lion in the water, the boat glides to the gateway. Owen is lifted in, and the iron door closes with a clang that appals the heart.

Inside the chamber was silence—that heavy, foreboding silence that reigns when Death stands at the door. A lamp burned feebly, the same was slanted by the night wind that entered through the open window. Its flicker dimly showed the heavy tapestries with their quaint figures wrought in threads that had lost their colors long since, battle pictures, and the coming and going of pagan heroes. They hung in heavy folds against the stone walls sombre like coffin-palls. The draperies of the bedstead made the couch seem like a bier.

The breathing from the man lying there was painfully labored. Two men were there, one kneeling, sobbing by the bedside; the other motionless, with a white, stricken face, as he fixed his eyes on the dying man. He was Owen's son, Henry.

Beyond the door a woman was crying as if her heart would break. She was Owen's wife, and before he sank back on his pillow, just now, he said to her—"You will go to France, my wife, and my son Henry will go with you. Louis will remember the man who held Arras against his arms. He is a generous foe, the French king. Alas, there is no home for you in France."

Alas, he never dreamed of his son's fate as he lay there dying.

His breathing was convulsive, but his face appeared to me, not the thoughts of the strong soul that kept back the life struggling to leave the stricken body.

"How is this, sir? Mark you, the glisten of steel amid the smoke yonder, there behind the broken wall. To the breach; every man who can bear arms a lamp burns feebly; the same was to the breach, my Ulster oxes, and

hold Arras for my lord the king."

Silence for awhile, then—"Oh, what do they do in Killkenny?—tis but idle waste of time. The enemies of our country are darling, her friends are false or false. My Lord Primate, give the blessing and the word."

A deep moan, then some name that sounded like Richelieu.

"Why, oh, why this haste? Rashness, my poor O'Carolan, is a capital crime in one who would lead men. Look you at their white faces and clotted wounds as they lie there pale in the moonlight, every man of them dead for Ireland. Ah, Clones, Clones, and you might have been a Bonshur. The pity of it, the pity—of it."

Outside the waters lapped the crags; the cry of the night-fowl sounded weirdly as they settled in the sodges by the banks of the lake. The moon was darkened by a drifting cloud as black as ink.

"We'll free our country," raved the dying chieftain, "free her from Lough Swilly to the strand of Kinsale—then we will—we will sweep the Turkforth—from Christian Europe. Oh, Ireland, my beloved, my life—my—

What means that awful wail?

It comes from beneath the narrow window, rising and falling in woesful cadence. The sob of a dying soul—a voice from a land of dismal shadows. How it rises and swells, comes again, and fills the chamber of death with its sorrow and warning.

"Gentlemen, I would that you'd raise me up. My hour is come. 'Tis the banlieue; the spirit that has ever keaned when the soul of a chief of my house may be unloosed. Farewell, Tell—my—wife."

He sank back, the lips rigid, the face drawn.

Once more the wail, the sad, awful death-song from the pagan spirit-land. Then it died away.

With the last strength of the dying, Owen suddenly raised himself, leaned upon one trembling arm, and cried out in a voice firm and without a quiver—

"Mark you, gentlemen, that I die in the faith of Christ, and in the love of Ireland!"

Then the voice once more sang. It is keen. Owen bent forward, wrapt in wonderment. Then the eyes flashed as in the days of Arras, and, raising aloft his clenched hand, cried out in the same full voice as rang along the lines at Bonshur—

"Forward! the word is Sancta Maria, and in the name of God strike a blow for the Old Land!"

Outside the waters lapped the dark stones, and the night-fowl sped overhead. The moon made sickly streaks on the lake.

Within, the hope of Ireland lay dead. The Great Shadow had fallen on the man who struck.

THE BLOW OF THE RED HAND.

WHAT IT IS TO BE A CATHOLIC.

The really remarkable thing about him was given by Rev. Louis A. Theron, of Cincinnati, state trustee of the

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"How is this, sir? Mark you, the

acting—high, noble, Godlike acting. This it is to be a Catholic. Faith, hope and charity, these are as the pillars of his soul to a Catholic."

NEW HEAD FOR THE JESUITS.

The General of the Jesuits has appointed the Rev. Thomas J. Cannon, the Provincial or head of the division known as the Eastern Province of the United States. This includes New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and the New England States. In this Province there are twelve colleges and foundations of the Order, and some eight hundred members—priests, scholars, novices and lay brothers. Father Cannon succeeds Father Edward J. Purcell, who left three months ago for England. Father Cannon is forty-five years old and comes from Cambridge, Mass. He has been a Jesuit for the last twenty-five years, during which time he has served as Professor of Philosophy at the College and Training School of the Order at Woodstock, Md., and has been twice the "Socius" or Lieutenant, to the Provincial. He has also been president of St. John's College, Fordham, N.Y., which office he left four years ago, to enter on his second term as "Socius." The total number of Jesuits in the whole world is now about 15,000.

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