

## OWEN ROE O'NEIL or THE BLOW OF THE HAND

M. A. MUNNIG.

The Scottish troops quartered in Ireland became saturated with the Parliamentary doctrines, and by-and-by they stood out under General Monroe for the Puritans. Those were then the men Owen had to face. Those were the men Owen had to count with.

With every difficulty and trouble of the Stuart King, the Scottish soldiers grew more and more daring. Their excursions into Tyrone, Armagh and Tyrone were blood-bettings, massacres, burnings and wastings. A dull, heavy pull of smoke marked their march. Smoke from the burning cabins and fired heather, smoke from the golden corn of the autumn fields and the root-trees of the kernal. Walls of despair went up with every day's march. They were a cry to the good God for vengeance. Owen heard the cry, it found an echo in his heart. Like Joan of Arc, he heard the spirit voices, he heard voices in every breath of air and in every whisper of the winds that came down from his native mountains.

He had attended the Kilkenny Convention. It was the Parliament of the people. Like a true soldier, he took his orders. The curse of Ireland was upon him; he went thither to receive instructions instead of going to dictate terms, like a Cromwell or Napoleon. The Catholic gentry of the Pale, half blind at finding their power and prestige overestimated, the Ormonde faction finding they could rule and govern as no nominees of the people ever ruled before, gave Owen Roe a general appointment to the command of the Ulster army. Then they, the Supreme Council—saw the mark—went on their own sweet way. Officials, officials, nominees of Ormonde and all the others, went about the country "organising"—in gilded char-lots and accompanied by suites of servants. These officials of the people's Parliament went about, gathering in money, making promises, fooling the people. In place of distributing arms and preaching fight, fight, fight, they brought companies of prostitutes with them to dispel the evening's tedium; paraded in silk and satinettes—half-nude persons paying compliment to Ireland for taking an interest in her affairs.

Owen's soul abominated all this futility and play-acting, and he saw with the stuff, honest impulse of the true soldier that such practices would end in dry rot and ruin. So back he went to his arms in the North, and the daily drilling and the grinding-round.

In all the rascally business of the Supreme Council of Kilkenny, with its years of pride, lustful, and treason, there is but one man who stands out towering above all and shoulders above the Ormondes, Muskerry's, and Mount Garretts. It was the Papal Nuncho, Cardinal Ruthven.

The city was in tote the day this swarthy Italian priest arrived, gracing his face with a sweet smile and blessing for all. At that time there was but in the square bay and deep set eyes which made a woman think that the velvet veiled foreigner could strike with a hand of iron—when the tim ead the hour was at hand.

The Rhinebeck saw clearly and at once that it was no national stand this convention of Ormonde's hangers-on were making. Ormonde the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin Castle and his under-trappers and creatures in Kilkenny dawdling away time, missing golden opportunities, playing a waiting game—the stakes, disaster and shame.

Owen Roe was eating his heart out in the North through all this pitiful mockery. He had taken the oath of allegiance to the General Assembly; Supreme Council—the halting, doubtless congregation of Catholic Prelates, corrupt priests, and thund noblemen. So he held that his first duty was to his superordinate authority. Owen was over the soldiers' element to a fault. The discipline, the readiness to obey, he insisted on in others he himself showed by example.

He was growing weary of the factions of Kilkenny, and their inaction. Moreover, he had to bear bitter losses in unequal battles with the Scottish Puritan troops—the army sent into Ireland by the Parliament of England.

O'Carroll, the trusty friend who came to Ireland as his precursor, was killed along with hundreds of gallant pikemen. In this battle fight, Near Charlemont, where Owen had fixed his headquarters, he himself was assailed by Monroe again and again, and at Clones he met dire defeat through the treachery of his lieutenants. But by-and-by he paid them back with compound interest, these Scottish Puritans, their Portector. He

away as the crow flies, I will fall back to this spot, and I will crush him here."

Owen's eyes flashed as his leaders saw them flash in the broach at Arras. "You will take the cavalry, all but one troop, and advance along the Dungannon road. You will meet George Monroe, with his Coleraine contingent, he must not come to his brother's aid to-day. Push on rapidly, but cautiously. It will not suffice to hold him in check; you must scatter his forces. We must not be attacked in the rear by this reinforcement. Nor can we spare you altogether, for we may not win Bonnibur until you return. Therefore, speed you, gentlemen, and remember that the fate of Ireland depends on your quick going and sure retreating."

The bugles sounded, sharp orders were heard, and in a few minutes the two captains were at the head of a compact line of cavalry that swept along the road to Dungannon.

"They are coming at last," said Owen, as the dust now hung in clouds above the Armagh road, "they are coming, and God grant we give them a bloody welcome. To you, Colonel O'Farrell, will be the task of holding the pass through which these Scots and English must march on their way to Bonnibur—you will draw them on. Remember we fight against time; we must attack with the sun at our back."

The Irish Infantry, for the first stroke of the battle, fell into place, and at the word of command marched slowly and cautiously along to the Blackwater stream.

### IX.—THE BLOW OF THE RED HAND.

Through the dust and the mist of the golden west,  
New hosts draw nigh—is it Ireland or foe?  
They come! They are ours! Like a cloud their vanguard lours!  
No help from thy brother this day, Monroe!

They form; there stand—they one moment still—

Now, now they charge under banner and sign;

They breast unbroken, the slope of the hill;

It breaks before them, the invader's line;

Their horse and their foot are crushed together;

Like harbor-locked ships in the winter weather,

Each dash'd upon each, the churning wave straying

With wreck upon wreck, and ruin on ruin,

The spine of their battle give way with a yell,

Down! drop their standards! that cry was their knell!

Some on the bank, and some in the river,

Struggling they lie that shall rally never.

Along the banks of the Blackwater marched the English army, and the strong division of the Irish forces, the river, a wide sweep of swirling eddies, keeping them apart. The slopes to the water's edge were long inclines of tide-washed earth, soft and slimy, tall rushes in places growing thick and rustling in the light wind. No musketry fire would be effective at the distance that lay between the two armies, so on and on they marched.

Owen had his plans fixed in his mind, he was inspired with a confidence that became contagious. On the other hand, Monroe believed that his enemy was simply making a supreme effort to prevent his crossing the river, and if he attempted to fall back upon Charlemont Fort, the great square shelter of masonry that unto this day looks down upon the broken waters of the river, a grim sentinel over the broad valley that is dotted with the battle-fields of long ago. Tals the Scottish commander determined to frustrate.

So on they marched. Near Caledon the river was forded, and Owen began in his series of masterful feints and stubborn stands, fighting back inch by inch, killing time, leading them on and on till he reaches the hill that stands at the junction of the Oona Stream with the Blackwater, just two miles from the village of Bonnibur. There he took up his position.

Brave Colonel O'Farrell held the pass. Obeying his instructions to the letter, he, after delaying the enemy's advance, fell back in good order, covering his retreat with musketry fire. Many a saddle he emptied that day; Monroe's cavalry he decimated.

Without a particle of confusion, quickly and decisively the Irish General made his final dispositions. The main portion of his army rested upon the hill, a deep bog was on the right, and the left was protected by the Oona and Blackwater.

It was now the early afternoon, and the sun was blazing above, and men heavily clad and armed were well nigh exhausted. But the English and the Scots had marched longer, and the majority of the latter made the day's work less heavy on them.

Then for hours Owen fought the battle of Bonnibur. No heavy onslaughts, but a number of harassing attacks delivered unexpectedly on the English flank, forcing Monroe into the bit of triangular ground between the two rivers. The formation of the English army was thus broken.

Then there came to him, where he stood unmoved by battle passion, or doubt, or fear, the turbulent Sir Phelim and many another whose voices were hoarse, and whose hands were swollen in their blood-stained sword hilts, crying, "Give us the word, man, for we have them in our grasp!" And Owen answered back: "The time has not come."

His eyes are now strained northwards—Dungannon lies beyond. O'Doherty met the brother of this Monroe with his Coleraine reinforcements. Did he go down in the battle shock? He was wont to be brave and quick to perform. If he, the victor, why does he tarry?

What is that? Over there you can see it moving towards the trees clumped by the side of Dungannon. "Tis the liberators from Coleraine," said Monroe, but Owen knew it was not. It was his own O'Doherty. nearer and nearer they come.

Then both armies held their breath. The dust and swords, horses and men swing around to the Irish flank.

Then a cry, such as Monroe never heard in all his life, nor the Scots either, nor the English Puritans, went up on the evening air.

Owen knew the hour had come. In front of his foremost line he spurred his horse, and his voice rang along the lines—"Gentlemen, your word is Sancte Maria. Advance in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and charge for the Old Land!"

And from the ranges of the McDermotts and O'Reillys, of Cavan; and the McDermotts and O'Kellys, of Connacht; from the throats of the O'Neills and the O'Donnells, and all the others went up an answering roar—"Strike in the name of God!"

Like panthers the Irish hurled themselves on Briton and Scot. Oh! they went down before that wild rush ere then at the Yellow Ford.

Lord Blaney, who commanded Monroe's artillery, bravely faced the onset. His thigh was pierced by a musket ball, but he still mounted his charger and cursed the "Rebels," and dared them to come on. Down he went, his breast torn open by a pistol ball, his face as stern in death as it was last defiance.

Strike in the name of God!

Do you hear, you O'Reillys, from Cavan, you who returned home one chill winter's morning to find your wife lying stark and still in the barn, and your little ones pierced through the breast?

Strike in God's name!

Do you hear, you poor Creight, who followed Owen's urines for four long years, driving your herds of cattle before you, asking nothing from any man's bounty, only doing what you believed to be right. Homeless, half-starved at times, trusting and valiant without, with a valor that creates terrors, you waited and watched for this hour. Therefore strike, and cut and slay in God's name.

And you, O'Kellys, from Connacht, with the McDermotts, O'Connors and O'Rourkes, hear you the cry, Sancte Maria! swing the heavy sword, thrust with pike until your hands are swollen and the breath of your lungs choke in the throat.

Remember, if you have hearts of men, your blackened footstools, your desolate hearths, your twisted harvest fields! Remember, your religion proscribed, your "mass-priests" hunted like ground game and vermin, your homes despoiled, your women dishonored! Think, think of this, and, in God's name, strike home! Let every push of pike be a heart-thrust.

All ye, you men of Tyrone, and you sons of the martyrs of Island Magee, think on the faces of the sea-washed dead that were heached by the savag soldiers who fell upon your fathers whilst sleeping, and slew them just as the Campbells did the Macdonalds in the Pass of Glencoe in the years that were then unborn.

Hear you the cry. Strike in the name of God! you sons of brave old Ulster, whose fathers were stalwart and shot like the wild deer by the colonists of Merril England.

Monroe's horsemen stumbled in the Oona Stream, at half-dried rivulet. Then the pike-head found a narrow passage through armour-clad, or the little boy who swung and the brains oozed out through the clefts in stout steel helmets. They sank beneath the waters of the narrow stream that sang its way to the Blackwater, and out into the reaches of Lough Neagh; and the waters washed their dead faces and left them bloodless and unbroken. And from the eddies their dead eyes stared out meaningless and awful.

Face downward on the banks many fell, their heads tightened into the clay in a death-grip. Some stood, pierced by the cruel steel, erect and swaying in agonized effort to free

their wounds and deal back death. But the final message had come to them, and they tottered and fell. A moment and they knew the unwritten secret of life and death.

Above the clamor and din of steel rolled battle bugophones and shrills for mercy and calls upon the good God that shed upon the lips, and awful, guttural, meaningless shouts that no spoken when a last of blood tears the heart.

There is no mercy, no pity. It is a great revenge.

Tall and sinewy these Scots-men of a hardy race. They fight bravely. But in the blood of Connaught and Ulster rages the fever of hate—the hate of men who remember. Every blow wiped out a debt. On, on in the crush, battle blade and musket ball, ceasing life, on and on through rank and file. Trample on the fallen to reach the next foeman, walk on their dead faces with their death-team on their hips. It is your chance this blessed summer evening. Take it, you Ulster men—drink your cup of revenge and dash the lees in the faces of the fallen.

Oh! the will shout. Hurrah for the Bloody Hand! Hurrah and hurrah again! In front of the officers who had led many a gallant charge in Flanders, gripping their swords, with hands swollen from smiting, the ring of their blows sweet music—exultant hate.

What can withstand their terrible onset? Bitten, crushed, overwhelmed by the English-Saxons turn and fly. Fly in every direction away from sure destruction—panic-stricken, terrified.

Monroe himself dashes away, casting his sword aside in his abandonment of despair.

After them, sons of the men who held the passes of the Curlew mountains or reddened the sluggish waters of the Yellow Ford! Follow them up! The God of battles smiles to-day—he may frown to-morrow. Slay until the right arm hangs stiff and useless; slay until the one chapter at least in your history is written in the blood of the Scotsmen.

No mercy, no mercy—let no prayer for pity turn your steel aside. What mercy did they show to you or yours? Let the twisted corn and the charred walls of your cabins answer back.

And the flying men fell with the death rattle in their throats.

Many a mother away in the valleys of Scotland will mourn, and many an eye will dim when the news travels to some cot on a heather hill—but it is no matter. These children of the Scottish valleys showed no pity—no mercy.

In bog lands, by the roadside, in the hill-slopes they fell, slain by the pike and the pistol, the spear and the sword. And O'Neill's men passed over their corpses to kill afresh.

Night. Tired, famished, the Irish returned to Bonnibur and laid them down. The camp followers of the routed Monroe came and looked upon the dead by the light of the summer moon.

And Owen Roe had the dead counted and the spoils gathered; and he reckoned 3,219 corps and many prisoners, and 20 standards and 1,500 draught horses and vast quantities of provisions and stores, and many captains of rank were found among the captives.

And the brother of Robert Monroe and the Edwards fell back dismayed and made no signs.

The tidings of this day of victory spread over the land and the faces of the Dublin garrison grew pale, and the heart of Ireland was gladdened. Then Owen spoke and said—"We will live after Monroe to Carrickfergus; we will complete the good work; we will hold Ulster against the devils of England; we have fought the good fight. We have kept the Faith—let us reap the harvest!"

Flames were lighted on the sides of the dark Cumbery mountains, and the tide of the Munster Blackwater gave back the glare. Flames licked the black night on the slopes of the Galtees, and on the sides of Mangerton and the Blackstairs. And the Irish came forth fearlessly in the wild and desolate west, and rejoiced aloud and gave God thanks.

CHAPTER X.  
A LONG FAREWELL.  
Let all the ends thou almighty art, be thy country's, they God's, and truth's."

The glorious victory was robbed of its fruits. Owen was summoned to Kilkenny. Delays, delays, always delays. Then he and Preston had to go to Dublin. Owen found Preston dealing with Ormonde and should have pleased the traitor. The city was handed over to the Puritans by the noble Ormonde and Owen marched north.

Ireland he must see this Owen Roe again; so he sets out.

Owen was poring over a map, the same as was sent him from Ireland; which by every merchandise he lost in Flanders, one it took years to come to.

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