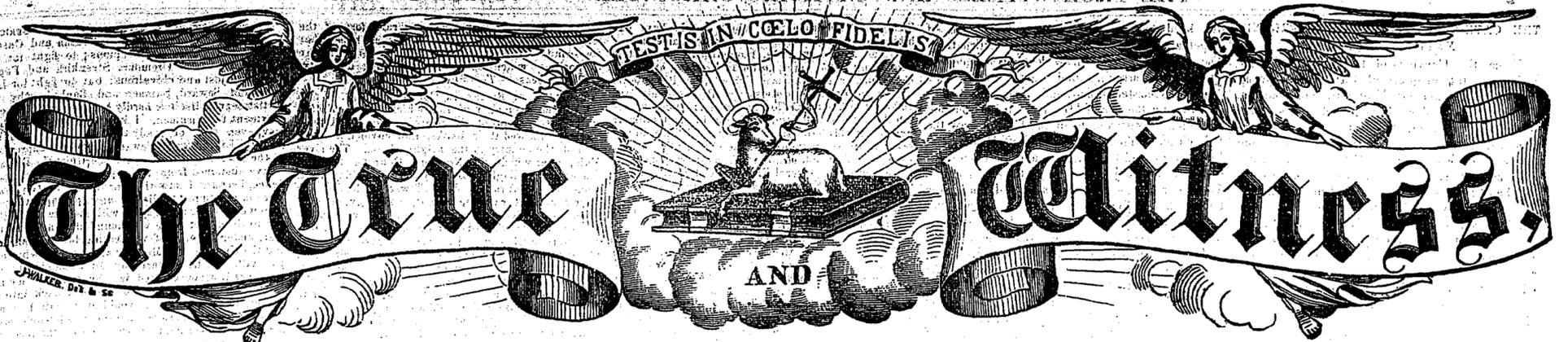


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TURLOUGH O'BRIEN;

THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER. CHAPTER XXX.—THE CELL AND THE RIVALS—THE BROKEN CANE AND A LAST CHANCE FOR LIFE.

The evening of the following day had consigned Sir Hugh to a chamber in the Birmingham tower, then the usual state prison, and one of the gloomiest in the old Castle of Dublin.

'This extremity,' continued the old man, pursuing the current of his melancholy discourse, 'would cost me, broken and humbled as I am, scarce a sigh, were it not—were not, he repeated with an accent as though his heart were breaking, my pretty Grace, for thee; who will guard thee and guide thee through these terrible times, my gentle, loving child?'

Sir Hugh turned haughtily from him, without rising or speaking a word, and drew his daughter still closer to his side. Miles Garrett took off his hat, then dashed it on again, and glanced with an uncertain look from one to the other; at last he spoke, but not until he had twice or thrice essayed in vain; and when, clearing his husky voice, he did succeed at length, it was with an appearance of something between shame and anger at his own weakness.

'Cousin Willoughby,' he said, gruffly, 'you see how it has gone. I told you so—you would not believe me; but who was right?'

'What do you seek here—what can you want with me?' asked Sir Hugh, without looking towards him, and speaking in a tone of subdued sadness.

'Look ye, cousin Hugh—I don't mean to make professions of friendship; you refused my offers, and I was vexed, spited—what you will, said he, growing more fluent as he proceeded.—I have let matters take their course hitherto—I have not interposed my interest to protect you—I have stood neutral. Now, mark me, cousin Hugh—I speak advisedly, perhaps—perhaps, I say, it is not yet too late.'

'Words—words—words,' muttered the old knight, softly, as he looked down upon his irons with a bitter smile.

'Yes, words and deeds to match them,' said Garrett, with sudden sternness, 'that was my way from a boy, and that being so, my words are well worth weighing. You think it is too late for help; I say it is not, and the result will prove it.'

'I will save him,' pursued Garrett, vehemently, and then added, dashing his hand upon the table; 'but if I do, you—you must marry me.'

a look in which horror and astonishment were blended. 'God forbid—God in his mercy forbid,' he muttered, still drawing his child further back, as if he dreaded even the contagion of his looks. 'Enough!' cried Garrett, ferociously looking from the frightened girl to the indignant countenance of the old knight, and reading at a glance, the hopelessness of his proposal; 'you have had your last offer—your last chance; fortune shall run her own course with you now—you to the gibbet—and you to the streets.—You'll not be the first of your blood who that has come to shame.'

And with a brutal laugh of spite, he shook his hand at the affrighted girl, then turned on his heel, and strode out of the room, white and trembling with rage, which his affected carelessness in vain essayed to conceal.

The last words of the wretch smote like a death-blow upon the brain and heart of the old man. He stood speechless and stunned for a moment, and then a convulsive burst of sobs relieved him, and burying his face in his hands, he sank into his seat.

Meanwhile, along the footway leading from the Cork Tower toward the Birmingham Tower upon the broad platform of the castle wall, a dark-visaged handsome dragoon, his face pale, and his eyes bright with rage, was pacing swiftly.

'Traced home to him—the wretch!' muttered Turloch O'Brien—for he was the soldier who thus strode along the castle wall—with bitter distinctness, muttering his suppressed imprecations through his set teeth; 'that I should be made the sport of his murderous craft, practised upon by fraud, and made unconsciously to lend myself to such an accursed conspiracy. I could have saved that fine old man; my testimony would have made it impossible to find him guilty; and now, I fear, he is indeed lost—irrecoverably lost! But ha! who's that—by heaven, the murderer!'

With a flushed and stormy countenance, Miles Garrett was just ascending the last step of the long stone flight which led up from the castle yard to the elevated pathway which Turloch O'Brien trod. As he reached the same level, these two persons confronted one another, at an interval of less than half a dozen paces.

Turloch O'Brien paused; light and firm he stood upon his graceful limbs—and scornfully shook back his glittering showers of black hair, from his still bronzed features, as he awaited the shambling approach of the ugly and repulsive personage who strode listlessly towards him.

'How comes this, Mr. Garrett?' exclaimed Turloch, sternly, extending a letter towards the astonished magistrate, 'you undertook, sir, to forward this letter to me; you knew that in all probability a human life depended upon its reaching me in time; and knowing this, you deliberately held it back for two whole days, and let me have it at last too late; explain this, sir, if you can.'

'You've got your letter, young sir; early or late is no affair of mine,' rejoined Garrett sturdily; 'I've neither time nor temper for further questions; and don't imagine, for all your scarp and gold, that I'll be hectoring here by you; move aside and let me pass.'

'Traucherous coward and ruffian,' retorted Turloch, incensed at the tone of insolent superiority with which he attempted to carry off his villainy.

'Coward and ruffian in your teeth, you scarp-let popinjay,' thundered Garrett, with a sudden burst of ungovernable fury; 'and liar and bully to the back of it. I owe you an old score, and afore God I'll clear it.'

Garrett raised his cane threateningly as he spoke, and strode forward. Perhaps the gesture was one merely of preparation or menace; be that as it may, it had the effect of precipitating the physical collision which it seemed to portend, for Turloch O'Brien instantly grasped it, and a hot and furious struggle ensued. Three or four seconds, however, determined its issue; the young dragoon, decidedly the more active of the two, forced his antagonist against the lower parapet of the wall, and exerting his whole weight and strength, forced his body so far over it that he had lost his balance; and after a few ineffectual struggles to catch by the edge of the battlement, tumbled backward headlong into the fosse, which at that time was swamped by the river, and presented a broad mantling cesspool of mud and slush. Filthy, stunned, and thoroughly drenched in inky slime, without hat or wig, Miles Garrett ploughed and floundered to the other side, greeted all the way by the hootings and jeers of the idle spectators.

'You come down to us, did you,' said one. 'Why, then, the top of the morning to you,' exclaimed another. 'Your wig and your hat's coming afther you with the sarvants, I suppose,' suggested a third. 'Oh, but's himself that's butthered all over;'

ejaculated a fourth. 'He's the sign of the Black Swan all over, bedad.'

These, and a thousand other pleasantries, enlivened his efforts to mount the bank, which at last he did, half blind with his bath, and giddy with rage.

Meanwhile, having glanced after his discomfited antagonist, and flung his broken cane after him, without waiting to see the issue of the adventure, Turloch O'Brien descended the steps which Garrett had so lately mounted, and readjusting the disorder of his dress as he proceeded, he made his way directly to the Birmingham tower, where, as we have said, Sir Hugh Willoughby was confined.

With little difficulty or delay, he gained admission to the tower. With feelings strangely agitated and conflicting, he silently ascended the steep dark stairs. The hoarse lock screamed—the bars groaned and clogged—the door rolled open, and Turloch O'Brien stood before Sir Hugh Willoughby. When the brave young soldier looked upon the old man, whom, spite of the untoward circumstances which made their fortunes, as it seemed, irreconcilably opposed, he could not help liking and admiring when he beheld him thus rigorously a prisoner—when he saw the irons on his limbs, and indignation thrilled him; and a rush, almost of tenderness, on a sudden overpowered his softened heart.

For the first time in his life, he grasped the old man's hands, and wrung them again and again in the warm pressure of unrestrained and generous feeling.

'Sir Hugh—Sir Hugh,' he cried: I did not look to find you thus; you are wronged, you are greatly wronged. 'Fore heaven this must be righted; you shall not lose your life, you shall not perish; there shall be no cruelty, no sacrifice, no judicial murder. Great God this a crying sin, a shame, a burning shame; my heart swells at the sight of these irons.'

'My good friend,' said Sir Hugh, returning his grasp as warmly—for friend I may, and will call you—grieve not for this, it cannot be mended now; and when all is done, 'tis but a few years at most, taken from the end of an old, a very old life; although—'

He was going to have added somewhat, but he sighed bitterly, and became silent.

'No, no, no—it shall not be,' cried Turloch, passionately; 'there has been foul play here; the king shall bear of it—you shall have justice—you shall not be wronged—you shall not be murdered; I will lose my life first. Let us think of all means—let us try everything; something must be done, one way or another. You shall be saved, cost what it may—you shall not die.'

He turned and looked upon the young lady with a gaze of undisguised pity and admiration; and was there not—or was it fancy—in its quenched and melancholy fires something of a deeper, and still tenderer passion? It seemed as though he was upon the very point of speaking, but some secret influence sealed his lips.

'My poor child has prayed me to suffer her to speak with the king for me,' said Sir Hugh, looking upon her with a faint smile of fondness and melancholy.

'It is wisely thought, Sir Hugh; she may succeed; at least, it is worth a trial,' said Turloch, earnestly.

'You hear what he says, dear father,' said she with joyful confidence; 'let me go and speak with the king; and God may give me words and wisdom to prevail.'

So speaking she rose, with a bright eye, and a pale and solemn face.

'Nay,' said Sir Hugh, dejectedly, 'it were but a vain endeavor. The spirit in which I have been pursued has been that of uncompromising severity. I have no friends near the king; but, as I have too much reason to believe, many malignant, though, God knows, most unprovoked enemies. What chance, therefore, has this poor child of moving the king's purpose, and softening resolutions so stern and inflexible?'

'Let it be tried, however,' urged Turloch O'Brien.

'It were but to show a cowardly love of life, ill befitting an old man and a brave one,' responded Sir Hugh; 'it were but adding needless humiliation and shame to misfortunes which have brought me low enough already.'

'Yet, suffer the young lady to make the attempt,' pursued Turloch, 'I implore of you—I conjure you to permit her.'

The old man heaved a heavy sigh, and answered not.

'Suffer her to go, Sir Hugh; it may be that the wisdom and the mercy of Heaven have inspired this thought; oppose it not,' continued Turloch; 'and if, in the prayer, be not too bold a one—I will entreat, in all humbleness, of the lady, to allow me to attend her steps, and render whatever service my poor ability can afford.—Command me to the uttermost. I shall be but too happy, too proud to obey.'

The lady lowered her lustrous eyes, and a

faint tinge warmed her pale cheek. With a beautiful struggle of embarrassment and gratification she murmured her low, sweet thanks for his fervent proffers.

'This is about the hour,' continued Turloch, 'when the king usually walks in the Castle garden. If it seems well to you, let the attempt be made now. I will endeavor to procure admission for you, and you will then see his majesty face to face, without fear of interruption, and free to listen to your supplication. Let us then, if it be your pleasure, go at once; and, in God's name, try whether you can now prevail with him.'

'You will meet but a cold hearing and a stern judge, my poor Grace, said her father, slowly shaking his head: 'nevertheless, as you desire it still, in God's name, as you say, so be it, go and try. Here,' he added, as he selected a paper from among several which lay upon the ruddy table beside him; 'here my poor child, is the paper; place it in the king's hand as you desire; but I warn you, be not sanguine; for, calmly viewed, the project is indeed but a hopeless one.'

With a countenance in which hope contended with awe, the pale girl calmly arose, and did on her simple cloak and hood in silence; then kissing her father fondly and sadly, with a lofty and serene, and mournful mien, she passed from the chamber, followed closely by Turloch O'Brien. The official outside the door closed it with a heavy swing, and Grace was now fairly committed to her agitating enterprise.

CHAPTER XXXI.—KING JAMES IN THE CASTLE GARDEN.

Close upon the further curtain of the Castle, lay the formal garden, in which it was King James' wont, during his anxious sojourn in his Irish capital, to take air, for at least an hour every day.

Across the quadrangle of the old Castle, did Turloch O'Brien, with his plumed hat in his hand, respectfully conduct the beautiful and silent lady. He led the way into the doorway of a small round tower, one of two which occupied the wall between the Birmingham and Wardrobe towers. A sour-looking bag of some seventy winters, seated upon a stool in a far recess, was at first scarcely visible in the imperfect light of the stone vaulted chamber, as she busily plied her distaff, and chanted, from time to time, a snatch of some old Milesian ballad. As the two youthful visitants entered this grim and darksome abode, the crone raised her shrivelled yellow arm, and with her smoke-dried fingers, swept back the straggling long white locks, peering at them with an expression which was anything but inviting.

'Is Nial in the tower, good dame?' asked Turloch.

'Is Nial in the tower?' she repeated deliberately, to allow herself full time to reconnoitre; 'no, he isn't—sure he's never where he ought to be—the stork, and why 'ud he be here? Nial indeed!—aye—aye! if its Nial you want, you better go down the back lanes, an' hunt through the shebeen shops, for it's little his ould mother sees iv him.'

The latter part of this harangue was delivered in the way of a discontented soliloquy, and sunk into an inarticulate grumble at the close—and so she pursued her task, as though she had wholly forgotten their presence.

'Well, honest dame,' said Turloch, endeavoring, by a gentle address, to conciliate the wayward hag—though Nial is not at home, I dare say the keys are, and if so, you will do us a great kindness by allowing us to pass into the garden.'

'Into the garden, is it? Why then, an' id nothing else sarve you but into the garden itself,' she ejaculated, with all the arrogance of office, as she surveyed them both with a half contemptuous leer. 'Why, then, yez id look well, and the king himself, God bless him, there this minute; maybe it's to walk with himself yez want? well, but that's impudence, is airnest.'

'Nay, madam, we may desire to see the king, and even speak with him, and yet be guilty of no audacity,' said Turloch, half amused, in spite of his anxiety, at the old woman's official insolence; 'and even such is the truth; this young lady has a message of life and death to deliver to his majesty. I pray you do so much kindness as to turn the key, and suffer us to enter. I will bear you harmless against all consequences—and,' he added, stooping over her, and placing a gold piece in her hand as he spoke, 'and reward you for your pains.'

'Well, well, acushla, stop a bit,' said she, in a softened tone, as she deposited the coin in her withered breast; 'ax me whatever you please, an' I'll not refuse you anything in raison, barrin' letting you into the garden, for that's a thing I wouldn't do for the holy St. Patrick; let alone a sinful young dragoon like yourself; take a pinch iv the snuffin, an' ax anything but that alone.'

her, and affected to partake of its contents.

'Well, then,' said he, 'if you will not allow us both to enter, at least admit this lady.'

'Nonsense!' cried she, 'isn't it all one? I said I wouldn't, an' I'm not going back iv my word. No—I know what it is to crass a proud gentleman like the king. My husband—God rest him, an' glory be his bed—went agin General Cromwell once. They called him bloody Cromwell, an' he had the look iv it—glory be to God—in his face, for I never seen him but my heart riz into my mouth. There was some powder in the store-house tower, over the way, and the general ordered how that no one should smoke a pipe iv tobacco within the two cannons that was outside iv it; an' my husband, the saints resave him, poor Connor—he was an aisy goin', good natured boy, he was so, an' inamin' no harm himself, never troubled his head with diramin' any one else ineant mischief neither; an' the dear man, sure enough, he was smokin' his pipe, quite an' aisy, serenadin' along, right between the two cannons, an' he feels a walking cane just laid on his shoulder: so when he looked round, who id be in it but the general himself, an' he was so bothered that he stood lookin' at him just like a fool, all as one; an' General Cromwell just puts out his hand this way an' he takes the pipe out iv his mouth, an', says he, 'Clap your thumb in the bowl iv it, friend, an' walk before me to the gate-house.' Them was his very words, and poor Connor dar'n't say boo, for there never was the thing yet, barin' the devil maybe, dar crass him—so he stuck his thumb in the pipe, and he was so freckened, he hardly felt it, though it burnt him almost to the bone, an' he walks before him to the guard-room at the drawbridge, and Cromwell gave him in charge iv the officer, and, says he, 'Bring out a file and shoot him at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, for there must be an end of smokin' near my powder,' an' as sure as you're standin' 'ere, there, he'd have shot him dead the next mornin', only for ould Sir Charles Coote that knew him, and begged his life; but he lost his place, an' for twelve years we wor out iv the Castle, an' a sore time we had iv it; an' it's that that makes me guarded ever since iv going against great men, even in thriffles, do you mind.'

As she thus spoke, a key was turned in the door communicating with the garden; it opened, and a tall, striking-looking officer entered from the garden; it was Colonel Sarsfield.

'Ha, O'Brien!' said he, gaily glancing from him to the cloaked form of the girl, 'why, what a romantic tableau!—a youthful warrior, a deserted damsel, and something very like a self-enchanted in the background of this sombre tower. Pruthee, what part is reserved for me; giant or—?'

'Nay, deliverer,' said Turloch, 'for unless you enact that part, I fear me the adventure must stand still for lack of it.'

And so saying, he drew him aside, and spoke earnestly with him for a few minutes, during which time Sarsfield's countenance grew grave, and he several times glanced with apparent interest at the form of the young lady.

'Certainly,' said he; 'but take my advice and let the lady go alone; his majesty's respect for the sex will ensure her a more courteous hearing, if not a more favorable one, than, perhaps, you or I could hope for.'

Grace thanked him, hurriedly, but earnestly, said she would follow his advice, and go alone; and passing through the narrow portal which he held open with one hand, while with the other he gracefully raised his military hat—she found herself within the tall close hedges and darksome alleys of the formal garden. She walked on slowly to recover her self-possession, and to prepare herself as well as she might, for the agitating interview which was now at hand. She thus passed through the length of the garden, without encountering any living thing, and in like manner through another alley, with its stately statues, showing in classic relief against the deep shadows of the straight yew hedge. As she drew near the corner of this, she felt convinced she should, on turning it, behold the object of her search—and the suspense of that moment so overwhelmed her, that she could scarce summon resolution to pass the angle of the closely shaded walk. She speedily mastered her agitation, however, and drawing a long, deep sigh, like one about to plunge into an unfathomed and perilous sea, she passed onward and entered the long walk. A single glance down its long perspective sufficed to assure her that her anticipations had not misled her. From the further extremity two figures were slowly advancing towards her.—One was that of the king, plainly dressed, and leaning upon a cane; the other was that of a younger man, attired in a suit of black cloth; they seemed to be communicating earnestly, for they often stopped and faced one another, and thus, pursuing their desultory ramble, they slowly approached the spot where she stood.

(To be Continued.)