

THE LEGEND OF THE OLD CASTLE.

BY ONE OF THE ROYAL IRISH CONSTABULARY.

Not far from Ballina, on the eastern shore of Lough Conn, Ireland, stand the ruins of a once mighty castle. The lone and dismantled tower still stands there in solitary grandeur, the time-defying memento of a by-gone chivalrous age.

The erection of this castle dates back to an age when the bright light of history became obscured in the mists of antiquity, and the scholar has naught to guide him in his researches save the dim, uncertain sparks of legend and tradition. In the days of Ireland's glory and independence this old castle belonged to one of the family of O'Malley, who ruled with princely sway the surrounding district; but during the troubles of the Cromwellian era, its possession passed away from the Irish chieftain; and in his stead a fanatical English trooper reigned, maintaining an iron rule worthy of his mean extraction, the strong right hand of iniquitous power in those halls where the princely O'Malleys had for ages lived amid the blessings and the love of their people.

Weird and ghastly legends are told about these ruins, and the place has a bad repute. Bold, indeed, would the peasant be accounted, who, at night, would approach its vicinity; for the place is looked upon as accursed, as the blood of the brave and the good, the innocent and the true, the holy and the sanctified, has watered the grass of its lawn! Oftentimes have I, by the winter's fire, listened to the tales which old men tell of the deeds that were enacted there; and, as the turf blazed upon the hearth, leaving the farthest corners of the room still shrouded in darkness, we would involuntarily shiver, and draw closer together as we listened to tales replete with crime and horror. According to local tradition the castle had been destroyed and left in its present ruinous condition by Satan, who, upon one stormy night, carried away, body and soul, the last Cromwellian owner of the place—a story not too good to be true. Many a time have I heard this tale, some repeating it one way, and others another; but all agreeing in the main facts that Satan had personally figured in the transaction. When I first heard the story it took a great hold on my young imagination; and though it—the story—is undoubtedly corrupted by tradition, as all stories and legends of the kind are, yet I will endeavor, as well as my memory serves, to give it in my own words as I first heard it, and as it then took my fancy, as an act of strict retributive justice.

The date of the story is in the commencement of the eighteenth century, that darkest night in Ireland's history, when the penal laws were in full swing, and when the misdirected ingenuity of man was exerted to banish all learning and religion from the land. In that unhappy time, when Ireland was ruled by the strong arm of tyranny, there lived in that old castle by Lough Conn, a lord of dark and tempestuous passions, one of those petty, base, cruel tyrants whose evil mind, exercising power over a limited space, poured to the dust all who came within the sphere of its influence. Surrounded and supported by a band of daring cut-throats, the scum of English gentry, sufficiently numerous to overawe the whole district, Sir Gilbert Massey was the terror of the surrounding country; and of him might be said that he spared neither man nor woman. The scaffold which he erected as a cogonial, ghastly ornament, on the lawn, in front of his castle gate, by way of permanent structure, was not in those "good old days" idle; for woe betide the person—he it man or he it maid—who ventured to oppose the torrent of his passion.

There was one class against whom this evil lord of the manor had an implacable hatred, a hatred too common in those unhappy days, and in which he was supported by the laws of the land, laws based on an antipathy which the framers shared with the devil. To each one of those daring prelates, in spite of the law, all the terrors pronounced against them by the law, by mountain and by wood, offered up, in secrecy and in hiding, the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass for their flocks, who still joined in sacramental marriage the betrothed hands of youth, who went through untold dangers to baptize the new-born to the faint, and to administer the last sacraments to the dying, he would give any reward. He hated them because of the contrast which their holy lives afforded to his own. He could not, whilst he himself knew no pleasure save the who, in spite of his evil passions, conceived against these holy men were content to risk all in the service of their Maker—to live lives of poverty and hardship, and joyfully die deaths of ignominy and shame.

There was one priest in particular, a Father John O'Rourke, against whom he had mortal hatred. This Father John was a young and very zealous man, who, containing dangers, was constantly, in all sorts of disguises, amongst his flock; and as he was a man of rare tact and cleverness, he contrived, on several occasions, to defeat some of the most cunning schemes of the evil lord. In vain large rewards were offered for Father O'Rourke's apprehension; in vain the whole tribe of the "Shawn" sought to place upon his track. He for a long time contrived to escape them, and evaded their most carefully laid plans. But the fox must sleep sometimes, the red deer must rest, and treachery prey on the blood of the blest.

manner which he expected to intimidate, addressed him thus: "O'Rourke," said he, "you are a man against whom I have long borne a deadly enmity. Do you see that document—it is a reward offered for your apprehension by the Government. Your life is forfeit. You have, contrary to the laws of this land, officiated as a popish priest; you raised up the minds of the people against the Government, and endeavored to excite rebellion in Ireland; yet I will give you a chance. Do you love life?"

"Life is sweet," answered the priest, "but his eyes had a far-off look, as if the "life" of which he was thinking was not of this world. "Yes," echoed the captor, "life is sweet. You will have it on one condition—will you renounce your religion and turn Protestant?"

"No! ten thousand deaths would not make me do so." "Take care, take care! We have instruments here not very pleasant to those upon whom they operate. And Shawn Dhu," here his lips parted in grim smile, as he looked approvingly on a hideous, broad-shouldered dwarf who stood by the rack, "is a good and clever operator."

"You can do no more than kill!" "No more than kill! And is it nothing to expire in a slow and lingering agony, to have your every joint drawn out of its proper place; and to endure the most excruciating agony it is possible for a man to feel? Is it nothing to be deprived of burial, and left upon a gibbet to bleed in the wind, to serve as a warning to all who pass the way?"

"It is sweet to suffer for Jesus." "Away with him," roared Sir Gilbert. "And you, Shawn Dhu, to your duty!" Instantly the poor priest was seized, and placed upon the cruel instrument of torture. His limbs and arms were painfully distended, whilst the tyrant stood by. In the badness of his heart, gloating over the tortures inflicted, and watching each spasm of agony that crossed the sufferer's face, with demonic pleasure. But no sound of agony was more that day, Father O'Rourke's, reached his ears as they moved in the darkness, to God to persevere in His cause to the end. At length, enraged by his patient suffering, and anxious to wring from him some sound of agony, he asked, "Well, now, is it sweet to die?"

"Yes," was the calm answer, "it is sweet to die for Christ." Another sign to the torturers, another turn of the rack, and Father O'Rourke's face lit up with an expression of exulting joy. His eyes, looking as it were, beyond all earthly things, saw opening to his vision the gates of that celestial abode where his Redeemer was waiting to receive him, and his countenance already bore the impress of heaven. What then, were tortures and pain? What, then, were earthly affections or love? What, then, were honors and dignities? A convulsive effort to burst his bonds, a fervent committal of his soul to his Creator, and he was beyond all the sufferings, and the tortures, and the pains, and the agonies of this Redeemer, there to reap the reward of his constancy here upon earth, and to wear forever the glorious crown of martyrdom.

For some moments the crowd in the hall gazed on in wonder and stupefaction. There was something in the scene which they were unable to comprehend—a something far beyond the compass of their ignorant and embroiled souls. They felt that, throughout the trying ordeal, there had been some unseen power standing by the priest's side, and supporting him under the torture; but they could not know that day, it was the spirit of God Himself who had opened to his vision the glorious beauties of His heavenly rewards. At length the chief bellowed the silence: "Release him," he said, "he has fainted."

"He is worse, my lord," replied Shawn Dhu, as he led the rack return to its former position. "He is dead!" exclaimed the chief, as he gazed down in the calm, quiet face, so beautiful in its repose. "Impossible!" But so it was, and when the truth was made fully known to him, he staggered from the hall like a drunken man. He appeared no more that day, and whilst the wailing wail of grief for their beloved pastor ascended from the people outside, their old and inveterate enemy was seeking to drown in drink the accusing voice of his conscience, and to shut out the sight of the calm, still face which seemed to menace him with destruction.

It is not to the disposal of the body, but that no order as to the disposal of the body, but that night it disappeared from the hall, and was buried in a consecrated ground, whilst a brother in the cause of Jesus read the burial service over his grave, which was plentifully watered by the tears of the sorrowing people who stood around, and who felt that they had indeed lost in the martyred priest a father and a friend.

"And his murderer," you will ask, "did he live on to continue his career of crime? Did he still go on as before, torturing and slaying, and hanging and oppressing, as his evil passion dictated? No! judgment, quick and speedy, overtook him. From the moment of Father O'Rourke's death a demon seemed to have taken possession of him, that would neither let him rest or sleep. He was continually drinking, and ever he was talking of a shadowy hand that from beyond the grave seemed to beckon him on into the shades of eternity.

level, noticing the roof at several points. It was found to be filled with various forms of vegetable life. Many large ironstone nodules were also seen, and very peculiar species of delicate white fungus was observed covering the timber work in several parts of the level. Proceeding along for nearly a mile the edge of the fault was reached, and the line of fracture could be traced striking upwards and downwards at an angle of about 75 degrees, the result being the upthrow of the coal for fifty-five feet. Here, then, was one of those peculiar difficulties incident to mining engineering, the problem was to prove the fault and again strike coal, and the next difficulty was the method by which it could be best got when found. To prove the fault a road had to be driven to the top, and up this the students proceeded, having first divested themselves of their coats, and headed by Mr. G. W. Todd, the company's surveyor, who had originally planned the road, they now ascended the incline of about 50 degrees with all the agility of a cat. When the road was driven it was found necessary to protect the sides, and in many places the roof, and upon reaching the top of the fault a large quantity of water was set free, which at once rushed in a strong stream towards the lower level, but in the face of these difficulties, the party proceeded, and climbing hand over hand, and in places literally creeping under the roof in a strong flow of water, small coal and clay, pulling themselves up by the jutting portions of rock, and, to use a seaman's expression, "holding on by the eyebrows," the top of the fault was reached. There were not wanting elements of danger in this difficult ascent, as had one of the party slipped he must have fallen for nearly 100 yards, and in his descent have knocked down those following him. The road was narrow, and the party were obliged to proceed in single file. Several slips did actually occur, and one dropped his lamp, which was extinguished by falling in the water, but was fortunately re-lit by the one following him. On reaching the top of the fault abundant evidence was given of the violence of the upheaval, the rock being polished and as smooth as a mirror to the depth of half an inch by the colliding of one surface on the other. The descent was now commenced, and this proved even more difficult than the ascent, owing to the insecurity of foot and hand hold of descending feet foremost. The sprags at two sides and in places across the road were all extremely slippery with the water and clay, but the level was reached in safety, and the party had more the appearance of excavators, but they had provided for this by wearing heavy boots and heavy boots. Many were the hearty laughs raised deep down in the heart of the mine as each recounted his individual adventures. It was now determined to explore the stone drift driven to reach the coal. This is a most extensive enterprise, a road large enough to allow the passage of carts to take in and repay, and of sufficient height to walk has to be cut out from the rock, with a gradient of one in one hundred. The work has now been going on for some months, sinkers being employed in alternate shifts. On reaching the head of the drift they were seen at work, drilling a hole in the rock for a charge, the fuse and powder, and the method of charging was shown, portions of the rock were examined and found to be composed of silica mica and felspar, cemented by some solution of iron. Here resting awhile, Mr. Todd produced a plan of the workings drawn to scale, and the students could at once see the difficulties that have to be surmounted. In cases where a coal seam occurs. 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