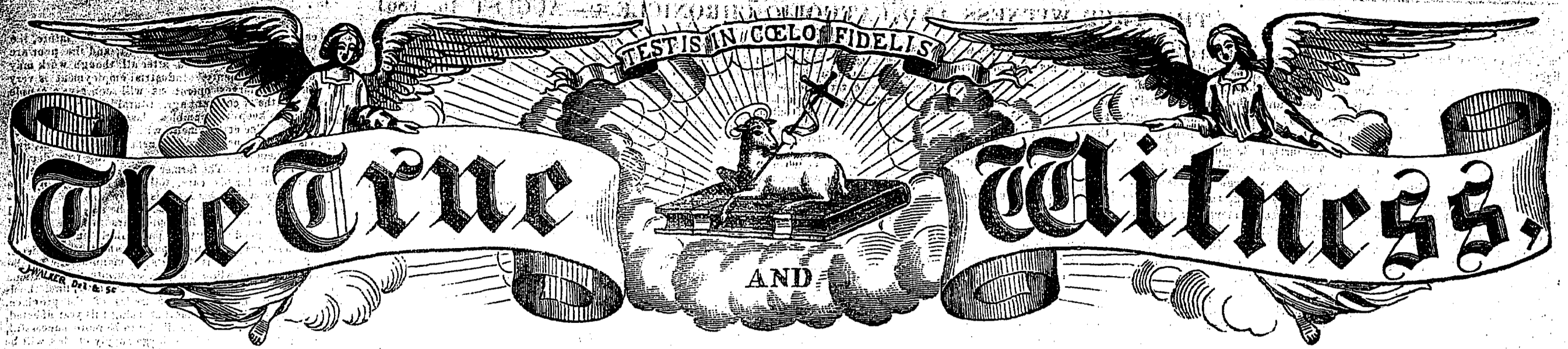


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TURLOUGH O'BRIEN;

OR,  
THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER.  
CHAPTER XV.—THE STRUGGLE IS OVER.

The great oak gate had now given way; and through the arched passage the flame was roaring like a torrent thro' a mill-slucice; and still downward, thro' the eddying smoke and sparks, poured faster and thicker the storm of fiery missiles from above; and all amid the fiercest and wildest tempest of thundering execration, triumph and fury—in which the occasional discharge of musketry and the whizzing of the bullets, were wholly lost and swallowed up. And now the air grew too hot almost for respiration or sight—stifling, blinding, and intolerable. Forced into shelter within the buildings at the further end of the yard, the desperate defenders of the place stood by the closed windows, with their loaded weapons in their hands; and with contracted brows and pallid faces, watched the fluctuations of the dazzling and gigantic surf of mounting fire which roared and tumbled before them.

Meanwhile, without, the motley thousands thronged and pressed with fiercer and sterner exultation around the outer ring of the gradually receding fire; and, foremost, reeling in the gripe of some dozen of the crowded assailants, with his arms bound and face bleeding, and apparently insensible or lifeless, was thrust and tumbled onward, amid a storm of jeers and execrations, the helpless form of Jeremiah Tisdal. Anathemas, sarcasms, and terrific menaces, chiefly delivered in the strong, emphatic guttural of the native tongue, rang around him, amid yells and threatening laughter to the full as frightful.

'Wring the tongue out of the dog,' cried one voice; 'rip him up,' yelled another; 'drive a nail down his throat,' shrieked a third; 'sink the pikes in him,' 'roast the black Sassenach,' 'plough him up with the knives,' 'lift him into the bonfire,' such and such like were the conflicting suggestions of the multitude.

'Hands off there,' cried Hogan, authoritatively, so as to deter those who seemed practically disposed; 'hands off, ye bliguard, an' take it easy. Can't yeze have common patience, an' not be spollin' your own sport. Where's the good in skivvinn' the prisoner—devil's cures to him, for a black old scoundrel—in such an unreasonable hurry. See, Mara,' he continued, addressing the most athletic of the party who held Tisdal; 'I'm thinkin', after all, there's no use waitin' with him all night; so just take him up to the top of the gallows hillock, and swing him up in sight of the scoundrels, in the castle, to comfort them while they are roasting.'

The mandate was hardly uttered, when the luckless Puritan, torn, breathless, stunned and helpless, was dragged through the crowd by the wild victors, who were to preside at his execution; and borne onward rather than walking, was forced up the steep and abrupt eminence, on which, in former times, used to stand the gallows, upon which the lords, of Glindarragh were wont to exercise the sternest prerogative of a savage feudalism. A long ladder was speedily unrolled, sunk in the ground to the depth of a few feet, inclining forwards towards the castle walls, and propped in front by three, or four stout spars.—And while this extempore substitute for a gibbet was in process of erection, others of the party were hotly engaged in twisting a strong lay-rope or sougaun.

And now, the preparations being all completed, a wild, half-naked boy, with one end of the halter between his teeth, climbed nimbly up the ladder and passed the cord over the topmost round; and as soon as both extremities of it rested upon the ground, the grinning urchin descended with a whoop of savage delight.

Meanwhile, those who were employed below had torn open Tisdal's shirt at the throat; and the old man's bull neck, with all its swollen cordage of veins and sinews lay exposed to the gripe of the rope.

'What are you going to murder me for?' growled Tisdal, almost inarticulately, as his eye wandered over the tremendous spectacle which lay beneath and about him. 'Don't kill me in cold blood, boys; don't kill an unarmed man.'

'Unarmed, you murderin' wolf,' retorted the fellow next him, dealing him a buffet in the mouth, which had he not been so closely wedged among the crowd of his eager executioners as to render prostration impossible, must have felled him to the ground; and which, as it was, bathed his chin and throat in streams of blood; 'unarmed, sure enough; for we took it from you, you black-hearted villain, before you could get into your friends. But look down there—look at them all, where they're roastin' before you—look at bloody Willoughby, an' the rest o' them.'

'For God's sake, boys,' Tisdal essayed to speak; 'for God's sake—'

The adjuration was, however, drowned in a yell of curses and derision, and a perfect hurricane of anathemas, jeers and denunciations, stunned and overpowered the wretched man. And

now, amid this uproarious jargon, the noose of the rude rope is forced over his head, and drawn tight upon his throat. He tries to struggle, foery, to pray—the dreadful scene reels and dances before him, and now the cord is strained—tug after tug raises him from the earth—and with every fresh swing a yell bursts from the surrounding crowd, of fierce exultation and defiance; but to his ear they sink into a stifled hum—before his eyes a pitchy darkness, flashing with balls of fire, is spread—a ringing, as of mighty bells, is in his brain—an intolerable sense of suffocation and bursting, along with the dull throes of maddening terror, supervene—and now, he feels no more.

The clamorous crowd, straining with weight and muscle, hardly succeeded in raising their convulsed and blackened victim eight feet from the earth, when the lay rope which sustained his body, gave way, and breaking, suffered the now unconscious, though still living, burthen to tumble heavily to the ground.

'Knot it?' 'bad luck to it for a sougaun;—splice it;' and a hundred such exclamations followed; while dragging Tisdal back, they set him half upright, against the foot of the ladder, a hideous effigy of glaring, livid strangulation—and hastily repaired the rude appliances of this savage execution.

While this scene was passing upon the little hillock overlooking the castle, the main body of the aggressive party, more keenly interested in the progress of the fire, and the prospect of speedily forcing an entrance through the passage which it had opened, scarce turned their thoughts or their eyes upon the dreadful spectacle. The fire had now evidently exhausted its fiercest strength, and was beginning perceptibly to wane; and Ned of the Hills and Hogan were already marshalling the best armed and the most reckless and powerful of their men in the van, to enter the castle, in a compact mass, sustained by the momentum of all the others, who, in a wild rabble-rout, would drive onward from behind, the moment the subsidence of the now nearly expended conflagration should have rendered advance practicable.

Matters were in this position when a cry arose among the more distant stragglers of the rapparees, which speedily spread itself onward till it penetrated the denser body around the castle walls, and gradually hushed the threatening clamors with which, but a moment before, the surrounding echoes were pealing: 'the sogers!—the dragoons!'

Such were the words which wrought this magic effect.

'This is the devil's luck,' said Eaman a Kruck, who, with Hogan by his side, was at this moment, with earnest gesture and fiercely rapid orders, reiterating his commands to his guerrillas; who, firmly planted, shoulder to shoulder, with their pikes grasped short, or skeans gleaming in their snowy hands, bare-armed and bare-headed, awaited the moment when the signal for the last tug of conflict should end for ever the protracted struggle. Suddenly pausing, and with his blackened hands throwing back his damp sable tresses, he turned scowling in the direction from which were now faintly heard the distant signals of the trumpet floating onward upon the night wind, with the fiery and fretted eye with which the hawk, wheeling to stoop upon his prey, might first descry, in the dim distance, the sable presence of the soaring eagle who hovers onward to wrest it from his talons. With such a glance did the swarthy rapparee for a minute scowl into the darksome void from whence this martial music came sweeping toward Glindarragh.

'There are several trumpets there,' he said at last, in his native Irish, in which tongue the colloquy was continued; 'what in the fiend's name brings them here at this hour?'

'What, if we make a night of it, and try a brush with them, too?' urged Hogan, recklessly.

Ned of the Hills looked for a moment contemptuously in his face, and then said—

'Pshaw! Mr. Hogan, you're not serious.—Donovan,' he continued, addressing one of those who stood near him, 'get the boys under cover; here, you, Ryan, give them warning at the other side; they must be over the river in no time.—It is a cursed chance,' he muttered, as the messenger sped upon his mission; 'but, with my consent, no man shall lift his finger against King James' troops.'

The castle and its blazing front no longer rivet the eyes of the surrounding multitude.—Doubtfully and irresolutely the gaze of all turns towards the deep obscurity in which the advance of the approaching soldiery is shrouded; one look of blackest frustrated rage, the rapparee flung at the old time-worn building, whose chimneys, towers and battlements, piled one behind the other, rose in the blood-red flame and smoke more like an airy fabric of fire—an unsubstantial pandemonium—than a solid fortress of ancient masonry; and, with a muttered curse, in

which were concentrated the very bitterness and rage of his inmost soul, he turned, and in a changed tone, issued furiously his new commands.

'As for you, Mr. Hogan,' he continued, addressing that person, and observing the deep, ferocious discontent which impressed his features; 'you can act as you think fit; do what you list with your own.'

'Ned Ryan,' he retorted, bitterly, 'you are little better than—'

'Than what, sir?' demanded the rapparee, with an emphasis so stern that Hogan paused, and then added in a subdued tone—

'Than a captain in the king's dragoons, Ned; there's no great harm in that.'

'Get your men home,' replied Ryan, sternly, 'or you'll find yourself in the end little better than a fool, Mr. Hogan?'

And so saying, the dark featured speaker rapidly descended the steep road, threw himself upon his good horse, and sat by the bridge head until all had passed over. Then just as the first ranks of the buff-coated dragoons began to show themselves in the red light of the still glowing fire, as their vanguard appeared above the brow of the eminence, which, at the distance of a few furlongs, and upon the same side of the river, overlooked the old fortress of Glindarragh, he wheeled his steed, and, riding slowly over the bridge, was soon hidden among the close stems and branches of the old oak wood.

Amid the wild confusion that reigned within the castle walls, the frantic howling of the cattle and the busy clang and clatter of renewed preparation, it was long ere the sounds which had already reached the attacking party, were heard by those within.

From the flanking towers, farthest removed from the still burning masses of corn and turf, the hurried movements of the rapparees, had, indeed, been discovered, though the cause of this general and sudden withdrawal of the wild Irish, as the defenders of the castle called them, was as yet a mystery; and the jaded and heart-sick garrison scarcely dared to entertain the hope that this cessation of hostilities would not, like the last, prove but the prelude to some new assault, if possible more terrible than that they had already experienced.

As the fire rapidly subsided, those upon the summit of the towers, however, at last discerned the martial front of the cavalry, and heard the shrilly braying of the trumpets, as, in obedience to the signal, a squadron of dragoons clattered down the broken road, and crossing the steep bridge, halted, and formed at the opposite end—their buff-coats and low-crowned cocked hats showing clear and sharp in the light of the fire as they might have done in the blaze of noon.—These were quickly followed by two other squadrons, who, dismounting at the bridge, unslung their musketoons, and spread themselves partly among the wood at the far side of the stream, and partly upon the hillock and rising grounds which overlooked the castle and the adjacent road; and meanwhile, the whole body of horse, with the clang of hoofs, and ringing of accoutrements, and the occasional hoarse voice of command, and the heart-stirring blast of the trumpet, prelude every new movement, began to advance at a walk, in all the imposing silence and regularity of military order, full in the lurid glow of the subsiding conflagration, down the steep and winding road to Glindarragh Castle.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE DRAGOONS IN THE GREAT HALL—THE EXECUTION.

The dragoons halted, and dismounted upon the road leading up to the castle gate, until the fire, already subsiding, had sunk into red masses of glowing embers; and the lighter fragments of the corn and hay, which had blazed so fiercely but an hour before, now swept in trains of sparks along the howling wind, and strewn high in the troubled air, floated away in the darksome void.

Meanwhile, the party within the walls, relieved from the more urgent terrors of their situation, had already begun to speculate, with anxious suspense and alarm, upon the purpose with which the troops—the neighing of whose horses, and the loud voices, and laughter of whose soldiery already filled their ears—had arrived before the castle walls.

Those who are acquainted with the melancholy history of the times of which we write, need not to be reminded of the terror in which, but too justly, the new levies of Tyrconnell were held by the perplexed, old-numbered, and (as it must be confessed), the disaffected Protestant population of the country.

The excesses of these troops did not, perhaps, transcend those committed in numberless similar cases by other soldiery; but, in addition to the licentiousness and rapacity from which no army in a relaxed state of discipline is free, there were here old heart-burnings to be slaked, and old scores to be settled—feuds and animosities the most bitter and implacable. Ireland was, actually the theatre of war. The Eniskilleners,

unsupported as yet by a single company of regular troops, maintained an adventurous struggle against the royalist forces in the north; and these military collisions, while they chafed and provoked the fiercer and more fiery antipathies of the two antagonist parties, served also to involve in a too just suspicion of actual disloyalty to James, the Protestant population of the other provinces.

Under the menacing and almost desperate circumstances of the royalist cause, it is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at that measures of extreme severity should have been directed by the Jacobite government against a party justly feared, and more dreaded, perhaps, than actually disliked.

The sympathies of the Protestants, and, whenever they could give it, their co-operation also, went zealously with the invading army, and threatened with multiplied and formidable dangers the interest of an already well-nigh ruined and almost desperately embarrassed dynasty.

If obsolete statutes were, therefore, revived and enforced, and quibbling law points raised to disarm them in masses, or to disable and crush them in detail, the zealous loyalist who availed of such tortuous instruments, found ample justification for the equivocal nature of the means employed, in the paramount importance of the ends which he pursued. An army of upwards of forty thousand men, almost entirely newly raised, and, for the greater part, ill-officered, and scarcely half disciplined, held undisputed possession of the greater part of the country; and while the executive, in times so excited and 'out of joint,' wanted the power, even had it possessed the will, to control their licentiousness, they in turn were inadequate to restrain the excesses of the native marauders, who, under the well-known name of rapparees, pillaged and laid waste the property of the country, and carried on a trade of outrage and rapine upon their own account. It is, therefore, injustice to judge the severities and the losses sustained by the Protestant population of Ireland during that terrible struggle, by the rules which would apply to well-affected subjects, and in peaceful times.

The passage into the castle being now safe and free, and the fires everywhere nearly spent, the officer in command of the detachment, accompanied by several others, and followed by a guard of dragoons, rode slowly through the open archway and into the castle yard. Amid the wreck and confusion which here presented itself—the cowering cattle, broken palings, and smouldering turf—old Sir Hugh Willoughby and a party of his friends, some of them bleeding, and all grimed and smutted with gunpowder, heated with exertion and beared with smoke, stood together to receive their military visitants, and presented a group, haggard and wild enough in all conscience.

'Sir Hugh Willoughby,' exclaimed the officer, as he walked his horse in front, and fixed his eye upon the little party with a stony and imperious gaze; 'my business is with him. If Sir Hugh Willoughby be among you, let him come forward.'

'I am here, Sir Captain,' replied the old gentleman, with more than equal hauteur, advancing a pace or two in front of his friends, 'and desire to know your message.'

'You shall,' interrupted the officer, impassively. 'Cornet Burke,' he continued, addressing an officer by his side, 'let half the squadron keep the gate, and the other half dismount and follow me.'

'Where is your authority, sir, and what your purpose?' demanded the knight, whose fiery spirit was stirred within him.

'The king's colors, sir, in times like these, are authority sufficient with all loyal men; and for my purpose I shall unfold that presently,' retorted the officer, coldly, as he dismounted, and gave the bridle of his horse into the hand of one of the attendant guards.

'Be pleased, Sir Hugh Willoughby, continued the officer, 'to lead the way into the great hall; I attend you, sir.'

This was added in a tone of emphatic command, which seemed to say, 'hesitate or demur at your peril;' and Sir Hugh, with an effort which nothing but an overwhelming sense of the madness of attempting resistance, and the ridiculousness of exhibiting an unavailing irritation and reluctance, enabled him to exert, proceeded to lead the way to his own castle hall, accompanied by the little party of his friends, and closely followed by the commander of the detachment and his subordinate officers, the file of dismounted dragoons bringing up the rear.

In this order the irregular procession entered the long and now deserted chamber, to the upper end of which the officers proceeded, while the guard halted and formed in front of the doorway, and Sir Hugh and his assembled brethren stood aloof in a body at the foot of the long table, whose further extremity was occupied by the colonel and his party. With a stern and invidious curiosity he scanned the extensive chamber, illu-

minated as it was by the red glare of some dozen torches, and then his dark eye fell sternly and coldly upon the motly party at the further end. Meanwhile they had ample leisure to admire, were they indeed disposed for any such emotion, the symmetry of his graceful and athletic form, and the striking beauty and nobleness of his stern and handsome features.

Had Sir Hugh recognised in the imposing form on which he looked, the champion to whose strong arm he owed his daughter's safety, gratitude might for the moment, if for no longer, have overcome the harsher feelings which struggled in his breast. But whatever he was hereafter to learn of the handsome swordsman before him, at present he knew him not.

'Gentlemen,' said the officer, addressing them in a deep and peremptory tone, which well accorded with the haughty and decisive character of his pale face, 'some of you, I see, are armed; in the first place, then, in the king's name, I charge you, deliver your weapons into the keeping of the guard at the door. Corporal Flaherty, advance two paces, and receive the gentlemen's arms.'

The order was obeyed in silence by the grinning corporal, whose face, as he eyed the little group, wore an expression of exultation and derision, which was anything but conciliatory.

Some shook their heads resolutely, others hung down theirs with a sense of bitter humiliation, others again exchanged significant looks of menace, and some even clutched their muskets with a firmer gripe, and laid their right hands on the locks. This hesitation and confusion, however, was little favored by the stern soldier who presided, and the orders, "unslung carbines," "ground arms,"—"prime and load"—delivered in a rapid succession, and followed by the jingle of some dozen of iron ramrods, precipitated the crisis ere time was given for deliberation, or even for action.

'Surrender your weapons, my friends, obediently; let us give the adversary no needless advantage over us,' said Sir Hugh, mournfully.—'God knows!' he added passionately, and snatching his sinewy hand upon the table, 'were it not that the king's name enforces the demand, I would yield my weapons only with my life.'

The obvious agony of the brave old man seemed, in some sort, to touch the stern nature of the colonel, for he said—

'Your courage, Sir Hugh Willoughby, is not disputed, and if you like it better, for the sake of honor, loyalty, and obedience to the laws, I will entreat you and your friends to yield up your arms peaceably, and without delay; and further, gentlemen,' he continued, 'you will not object to giving your names and places of abode, as my duty obliges me to make a list of all whom I have found in arms in this place. Captain Luttrell, you will please, yourself, see to the drawing up of such a list.'

While the measures necessary to carry out these directions were going forward, the stern young officer in command again addressed himself to Sir Hugh.

'It is right, sir, I should at once inform you,' he said, abruptly, 'that two companies of my dragoons are billeted upon you, for how long, will depend upon orders from Dublin Castle; for the rest you must find quarters for to-night.'

'Two hundred men and horses billeted upon one gentleman's house?' cried Sir Hugh, with wrathful astonishment. 'So, heaven guard me, but this is the very extremity and extravagance of oppression!'

'It is no affair of mine, sir,' replied the officer, coldly. 'If you deem yourself oppressed, you had best memorialize the Lord Lieutenant.'

'Memorial him!—memorial the arch-bird rather!' cried Sir Hugh, stamping furiously upon the floor.

'You must not lose your temper, Sir Hugh,' interrupted the soldier, coldly, 'or you may chance to lose something not so easily recovered.'

'What's that?' demanded the old man, rebelliously.

'Your life, sir,' replied the colonel.

'My life?' responded the old knight, passionately.—'my life! God knows 'tis little worth—God knows how cheap I hold it.'

The knight spoke these words with such a sudden and mournful change of voice and aspect, that his friends gathered about him, and bidding him be of good heart, and fear not for the issue, shook him by the hands, and pledged their souls and honors to stand by him to the last, with protestations as passionate and fervent as only in scenes of transcendent excitement are evoked.

While this was passing, an officer entered the room, and, raising his hat, observed—

'We have secured two prisoners, colonel. Where are they?' asked he.