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O'CONNOR'S FATE; OR, THE LAST DAYS OF ROSCOMMON CASTLE.

A Tale of the Williamite Wars.

There is not, perhaps, in all Ireland a town of the same extent possessing two such remarkable mementos of its former greatness, as Roscommon, the assize town of the county of the same name. On one side, towards the north, stretch the ruins of its magnificent castle; and on the southern side, in the midst of rich green meadows, and embowered in large old ash trees, stand all that remains of the once beautiful abbey, founded here in the year 1257, by King Felim, for friars and preachers, with the tomb of its royal, ill-fated founder, standing on the right of the high altar—he died 1265. Much of the walls have crumbled away, though it must be confessed that the trees which have risen in their stead fully compensate the old building for whatever it may have lost otherwise. There are no remains of a southern transept visible, and the window in north is now quite denuded of its ornaments; in the great east window, however, enough remains to show that at one time the finishing must have been beautiful; the Gothic mullions of this window, as seen from the inside, present a strikingly handsome appearance, standing out in bold relief from the deep close background of ivy with which the whole outside of that gable is richly and exuberantly clothed. The choir seems to have been lit also by a number of tall narrow windows, some of which are still visible under the coat of ivy.

Of the castle there is nothing standing but a part of the outer shell, no portion remaining roofed except one of the round towers—that to the left of the ruin—in which there is still a spacious oval apartment, the height of the structure, and vaulted over head, said to have been a council chamber. At the earliest periods a castle stood on this site, which, being in ruins in the year 1268, was then rebuilt, by John D'Uford, Justiciary of Ireland. The walls surrounded a spacious area, and were immensely thick, as may be seen from some massive fragments which lie scattered around. A large Norman tower stood at each angle, but the one alluded to is the only one in the building in anything like preservation. Tradition says that this once splendid structure was not utterly ruined until the period of the wars between James and William, when the fugitive Irish from the battle of Aughrim, are said to have set fire to it; and some burnt joists, yet protruding from the walls, are pointed out as evidence. Some even go so far as to enter into details of its latter days, many of which will be found embodied and connected in the following narrative.

When the weak and vacillating James the Second made his last effort to recover the crown which had been snatched from him by the subjects to whom he was so partial and the children on whom he had lavished so many tokens of affection, many of the ancient strongholds of Ireland were as much as possible repaired, from the devastation which time or the arms of Cromwell had effected upon them, and garrisoned each by some neighboring chieftain, who held them for the deposed monarch. Among the number, the castle of Roscommon was, perhaps, the strongest in that district. It was held by one of the O'Connors, but which of them we cannot say; however, by an O'Connor; it was held and, what is far better worth remembering than who his father was, he was himself the father of the fairest girl that Ireland, rich as she is in that commodity, could boast of before or since.—When the tide of battle began to roll westward, checked only by the broken bridge of Athlone and the hitherto fordless Shannon, it could not be well expected that a patriotic Connaughtman should sit quiet in his hall while the boom of the distant cannon ever and anon interrupted the song of the harper, or the fond playfulness of his daughter; so, after enduring the temptation with the most exemplary forbearance for a whole day, he, on the next, summoned together his little garrison, and calling a few to remain behind, kissed his daughter affectionately, and rode away, night and main, with the rest of his followers.

Daily communication was for some time kept up between the castle and the beleaguered town, which was distant little more than sixteen miles, and all spoke with confidence of the impregnability of the defence—an assertion verified every morning by the reiterated roll of the cannonade, borne over the flat intervening country by the calm summer breeze, and which announced that Athlone was yet in the hands of the Irish. At length a day came without any tidings except the booming echoes, and it was followed by one uncheered even by that partial assurance. The warden on the highest tower denied that he could hear what even imagination could torture into the noise of the conflict, although the little wind that blew came direct from that quarter, and all the agonies of suspense were inflicted on the isolated garrison, heightened by the varied and unsatisfactory accounts and rumors flying among the townspeople of Roscommon. Next day broke

but gave no relief; and the whole day had been spent by them in gazing from the watch-tower in vain. Towards evening, the group which occupied this situation had dwindled to two—an ecclesiastic and a young and beautiful female—the brother and daughter of the absent chieftain.

"Ha, Grace!" said the former, hurriedly pointing to a turn of the road which lay within kin at no great distance, "what see you there?—a band of spears and some dozen kerns, as I am a true priest."

A hasty exclamation of delight, as she caught the object, escaped from the anxious daughter, but the slowness of their movements did not escape her notice, and she remarked it to her companion.

"Ay, child," said he, now first perceiving it; "heaven send it bodes no evil to your hot-brained father. Let us down to meet them, however,—they'll be at the portal as soon as we"—and, descending the narrow stairs, they crossed the court-yard, and met the party already arrived at the entrance.

"Where's my father, Cormac?" asked Grace of a tall, middle-aged man, somewhat in advance of the others, the foster brother of O'Connor; but he answered her nothing save to point to a litter which the kerns had that moment laid on the floor of the hall. She raised the covering, and met the grizzled face of the chieftain, stiff in death, and stern with the fierceness of battle. She needed no more, but, in the poignancy of her anguish, uttering one loud cry, and escaping amid the cautions of the attendants, she fled to her chamber, to indulge her deep wild grief in its solitude.

"How, in heaven's name, did this befall?" exclaimed the priest, when he had recovered from the first shock of the announcement.

"Athlone has fallen, father," answered Cormac, sorrowfully.

"Worse and worse!" ejaculated the inquirer, striking his brow with his open palm—"he had died well, if he saved it, dear as he was to all of us."

"But tell us, how did it befall?" exclaimed the ecclesiastic.

The sorrow which affected poor Cormac was so bewildering as to make his answer to this question so broken and incoherent that it added but little to the information of his auditory, and would, perhaps, add less to that of our readers; we shall, therefore, tell the story for him.

When the partisans of William reached Athlone, in pursuit of the remnant of that army which his craven rival had so shamefully sacrificed at the Boyne, they found their further progress impeded by an arch of the bridge being broken in the flight of the Irish, to place the natural and unfordable barrier of the Shannon between them and their enemies, thus rendering the town actually impregnable, so long as they could oppose the many energetic and well directed efforts of Ginkle to create a passage by stretching a gallery across the breach, where the whole weight of the battle was thus necessarily concentrated. Nor were the friends of James remiss on their part in the defence of this all-important post, as by their unceasing vigilance they baffled every attempt made by the enemy to effect their object; having erected a strong wooden breastwork almost at the brink of the breach, similar to which was another on the opposite side—the one backed and defended by the strong and ancient fortalice, the other by the ruins of the suburbs, in which Ginkle had posted his army and raised his batteries.

Leaning on the battlements of one of the towers of the castle, were two officers of nearly one age and appearance—both in middle age, and giving in their countenances all the promise of that wild, forward bravery for which they were both so noted.

"How provoking," exclaimed one of them, "are those English! There they stand, you see, under the tremendous cannonade our gunners pour on them, and there they will stand, until the river grows dry, or the last man of them be a corpse. Blockheads! if they want to get in, can't they build another bridge—it would save them time. How say you, O'Connor?"

"Even so," answered the father of Grace to his querist, who was no other than the gallant Sarsfield; "and yet I would it were otherwise. Beswore me, if it be worth my while to remain here to look for manhood or hard blows! For a day or two I amused myself firing off that cannon yonder; but though they said my bullets all told well, it gave me not the least satisfaction, so I got tired, and left it to the gunner: and, saying that, I might as well be in my own quiet hall, whither I'll off tomorrow."

"For the love of old Ireland and King James, don't pray to see an Englishman this side the river, unless he be a prisoner," said Sarsfield. "Marry, I love hard blows as well as you, yet will I wait patiently until they are forced to raise the siege, and then—but hold, in the name of heaven, look at the breast-work!"

A discharge of grape shot had been fired from an adjacent battery, raised by the English that morning to command the breastwork, which had not only the effect of nearly clearing that post of its defenders, but also set on fire the dry and shattered timber of which it was composed. The tumult that ensued was horrible: the crackling of the blazing wood—the occasional explosion of the ammunition—the groans of the wounded, unable to escape the horrible death that threatened them, and the shouts and confusion of those who attempted to stop the conflagration, making the din indescribable; while the smoke and scattered ruin completed the horrors of the scene. Nor had the English neglected to avail themselves of the diversion which they had effected. The planks which had prepared for such a contingency were vigorously pushed forward, and now it seemed as if they had nothing to do but to cross the narrow bridge and win the town so opportunely defenceless; for the last man, half suffocated, and singed from head to foot, had already sprung with difficulty out of the fearful enclosure, and, as he did so, fell senseless in the arms of those without. The important advantage won by the Williamites had not, however, escaped the eagle of Sarsfield, raised as he was above the smoke and flame which concealed it from those more near; so, shouting to his panic struck followers—"Cowards! cowards! to the breach—to the breach, or ye are all lost;—they have the planks across!" he rushed headlong down the stairs after the more forward O'Connor, who, on the first prospect of the fray had flown to the dangerous arena. An Irish serjeant, standing at the foot of the tower, had caught the concluding part of Sarsfield's exclamation; nor did he hear more; with a wild cry he gathered some six men loitering near the spot, and ran at their head to the bridge.

"Erin go Bragh!" shouted the daring leader.

"Bas air son Eivann!" responded his eager comrades; and with one simultaneous bound the devoted band sprung into the midst of the flame and smoke and disappeared. A moment of thrilling suspense followed—it was but a moment—it was but a moment—plash went one beam into the water—and another, but the shout of triumph which burst from the lips of all was quickly deafened—another; shower of grape was hurled from the fatal battery full on the defenceless little party, and with the red blast of blood and tattered flesh which it drove before it, half quenched the raging fire behind. To a man they had perished, and, it seemed, without having thoroughly effected the daring object for which they had so nobly confronted a certain death, since, when the din ceased, the voice of a Huguenot captain on the opposite side was heard exclaiming—

"N'importe, mes fils; c'est une encore! suivez—vites, vites—et toute est gagnée!"—while burst from his soldiers, in answer, a shout of "Vive l'Orange!" and one by one they commenced their passage over the single tottering plank, which the ill-fated band had been occupied in loosening when they were so suddenly cut off. Just at this critical moment Sarsfield and O'Connor both reached the spot with the few followers of the latter, and almost at the one moment saw, over-topping the smoke, the helmets of the advancing Huguenots: in another minute they would have effected a lodgment on the Connaught bank, and that object won, the conquest of Athlone should inevitably follow.

"Farragh! Farragh! O'Connor aho!" exclaimed the reckless chieftain, and his whole band, like hounds slipped from the leash, dashed forward on that fatal path, already travelled by the lowly heroes who had preceded them, while O'Connor himself on attempting to accompany them, found himself held firmly by Sarsfield.

"'Tis certain death; if you go you never return," whispered the latter.

"Nabocklish!" exclaimed the fiery chieftain, still struggling to free himself.

"But there are enough already—I tell you, you will be useless. Nay, then, if you will go, I go too."

"The more the merrier," answered O'Connor, laughing, and plunged on after his men. Sarsfield laid his hand on one of the burning barriers to vault over and accompany him; but the half-consumed timber, unable to bear his weight or the impetuosity of his attempt, broke under him, and pitched him heavily on the ground, whence the surrounding soldiers raised him.

O'Connor and his men, on emerging from the blazing ruins, came in full view of their antagonists, and of that spot which had been so fatal but a minute before, strewed with torn limbs and masses of mangled flesh and disfigured corpses, while blood, oozing out of them, fell heavily in torrents into the roaring stream be-

* Death for Ireland.
† No matter, my children, there is one still; follow—quick, quick—and all is won.
‡ Never fear.

neath. But little time had they to survey the disgusting scene, for the Huguenot was already within eight feet of the brink, and the foremost of his men close behind him. Not a moment was to be lost on either side—a crisis of terrible importance had arrived; and swiftly as the chieftain passed forward over the unequal ground, ere he reached the end of the plank, the Huguenot leader, by a vigorous spring, gained the ground likely to be so hotly contested, and now stood on the defensive. But he was not able to sustain the impetuous charge made by the O'Connor.—His guard was beaten down—his rapier shivered by the heavy broadsword of his adversary—his pistols fired ineffectually—and he was at his mercy. One sweep of that broadsword, and his dis severed head bounded into the water, followed by the gory trunk, and a couple of his soldiers, who, in the meantime had made good their landing, but to meet death on the shore. Still an overpowering number were advancing within one yard of the bank, supported by thousands on the opposite side ready and eager to follow them, but not daring to fire a shot in their defence.—Another soldier leaped forward and was cut down by the hand of O'Connor, and in falling backward tumbled into the water the five next him. Now there was some hope for the Irish, and they did not miss the golden opportunity, but essaying altogether with might and main, succeeded in hurling plank and soldiers all into the boiling current below.

Up to this moment the silence with which the operations were viewed by both armies was truly appalling—the deep interest of both forbidding them scarce to breathe; but when the catastrophe was no longer doubtful, the triumph of the one, and the bitter disappointment of the other, broke forth in cries of widely different meaning.

"Back! back! my children!" shouted O'Connor, "ye have done well. But this is no place for men who love to give claw for claw."

His command was about to be obeyed. He himself had stooped forward to take a last grim look at the wretches beneath, struggling and drowning, borne down by their heavy armour.

"The outlandish man's hat were a prize worth fighting for," ejaculated Cormac; "twill win me favor over all Connaught my life long;" and he stooped to lift from the bloody ground the richly laced and plumed hat of the Huguenot.

The momentary delay was fatal; again the deadly battery opened its fire—again the blast of grape hustled in amongst them—and again a mass of disfigured, mangled bodies clothed the narrow glacis. Cormac alone, from his stooping posture, escaped unhurt. On recovering the awful shock, he looked round for that object dearest to the heart of every true clansman, but doubly dear to him. He looked in vain—he was the only living thing that stood among that heap of death. His eye glanced next hurriedly over the bodies, and recognised that of the chieftain, his head bleeding profusely, but without a sign of life. He stood in the stupor of deep grief looking at the fallen warden, until a few dropping musket-shots, ineffectually discharged at him from the English post, awakened him to a sense of his danger, so; proudly shaking aloft the spoil of the Huguenot, he threw the rich and glittering trophy towards his enemies, and lifting in his arms the body of his chieftain, crossed the smouldering breastwork, and laid it sorrowfully among his comrades.

"Alas for our cause!" exclaimed Sarsfield, "it has lost a brave and true champion. Does any life remain? Ho! the poor gentleman lives—room there, and let him have air—get water, good fellow—air—he has escaped by a miracle!"

The water was brought, and O'Connor slowly revived, and was carried to his quarters.

In the mean time the guns of the castle were directed against the obnoxious battery and quickly silenced it. The damage which it occasioned was next repaired, and Athlone was once more safe for King James. The wounds of the O'Connor, though fearful, were yet not such as threatened immediate death, nor did they altogether preclude the hope of recovery among his anxious friends—one of whom scarce left his apartment unless when rigid duty demanded it. This was Sir Walter O'Kelly, a young cavalier, aid de camp to Sarsfield, who, long before the commotions which now separated the nearest and dearest, was the accepted suitor of the daughter of the wounded gentleman, and now tended him even as she would have done. Nor was this the only solace possessed by O'Connor; for, on the very morning after his mishap, the English, dispirited by their last signal failure, of which he was the prime instrument, had fallen back from the bridge, and were every moment expected to retreat altogether from the scene. This, alas! was a vain expectation. One morning, at day dawn, the unwonted tolling of a bell awoke Cormac from his slumbers, and he started up to prepare the bandages and dressings for the wounded chieftain, who still slept, amid the tumult which every moment increased. At length the tread

of a hurried foot, which Cormac knew to be O'Kelly's, sounded on the stairs, and that gentleman entered the room so abruptly as to awake the chieftain.

"Alas! O'Connor," said he, on entering, and perceiving him awake, "we must remove you to Roscommon."

"Wherefore, man?" asked O'Connor, faintly, "if it be to bless my child before I die, cannot she come hither? I would she were here, that I might see ye wed—tell her so."

"Who is she?" exclaimed the cavalier, "this is no place for either of you now. The English are in the town—have crossed the river, no one knows how or where—but Sarsfield is still between us and them. Gracious heaven! how pale you grow. Haste, Cormac, with some water, and tell my fellows who are below to hurry up with the litter."

"No," said the dying chieftain, with difficulty; "no water—no litter; tell my child my last prayer was for her—my last wish to see you united. Let it be done when you meet—and swear to me—by this stiffening hand, that you will ever—ever—cherish her."

O'Kelly swore; and as he did so, a gleam of satisfaction passed across the pale face of the O'Connor.

"My son! my son!" he faintly ejaculated, and fell a corpse into the arms of the cavalier. It was no time for weeping, and yet he wept; and laying the body on the litter, gave, under the command of Cormac, a few of his own soldiers to bear it to his home—his duties forbidding him to quit the side of Sarsfield.

"Requiescat in pace!" groaned the priest, when the relation we have thus given had been concluded; "but what of Sir Walter? Sent he no token to the Lady Grace, or to me?"

"He told me to say the troops were all on the retreat, he believed, to the hill of Aughrim, and that he couldn't quit his post, but within a day or two he would contrive to come over."

"To Aughrim?" said he: "then all is not lost—they'll have one battle more for the good cause, and who knows the issue. Now, bear my sacred pledge; the chief of my house shall never wear cowl, or finger beads, when helmeted heads and gauntleted hands are doing a man's work for their country. Ho some of you! bring me the armor that hangs yonder, and let these weeds lie idle till the battle is won, and then I'll put them again."

Loud shouts from his auditory applauded the extraordinary intent; and in another minute the unrocked ecclesiastic stood among his admirers in the garb and plight of a mail-clad man; that defence not having fallen so much into disuse in the wilder regions of Ireland as elsewhere at the time of which we write. Scarcely was his apparel complete, when a loud knocking and demand for entrance at the outer gate seemed to afford an opportunity to the new cavalier to appear in his unwonted vocation. But no sooner was it announced that the intruder was the Sir Walter mentioned by Cormac, than the gates were thrown open, and a handsome, well-armed young officer rode hurriedly in, attended by some score men at arms, all bearing on their persons the marks of recent conflict and uncurbed flight. The young man dismounted, and was met full in the porch by the armed priest, at whose appearance he recoiled, appalled and gasping.

"Gracious heavens, I saw him dead!" said O'Kelly, in those low and hollow tones which extreme terror alone can utter.

"Nay, Sir Walter," replied the other, "does my new gear liken me so much to poor Richard, that you see not the difference between a living priest and a slain warrior? I had armed myself to head my kerns to Aughrim, where I heard but this moment our friends had retreated. What tidings bear you thence?"

"Aughrim is lost!" answered the cavalier, somewhat recovered from the terror his very natural mistake had thrown him into.

"Lost?—and St. Ruth?"

"Slain!"

"And Sarsfield?"

"Fled!"

"And the army?"

"Broken and scattered! The few that stayed together fled to Limerick, whither I am come to escort you."

"Evil tidings, Sir Walter!" said the priest, sinking in deep melancholy on a stone bench beside him; and lifting the helmet from his head he threw it on the floor, while his companion proceeded, but with a changed and more faltering tone—

"I would wish to speak with Grace, father—where is she?"

"Waiting in her bowler. Go to her, and tarry not. I remain behind to take order for a speedy interment, and arrange our departure."

The young soldier turned away, and proceeded by the well-known stair to the chamber indicated: A low tap at the door awakened the orphan from the reverie of tears into which her