

castle were dispensed by de Burgh with that lavish hand and unflinching grace which have ever distinguished men of his name. And the entertainment on the night of our story was, as the chronicle avers, on a semi-regal scale.

While within, good cheer, mirth, song and story kept the guests in happy mood, outside the storm held high and fierce revel, as it can along the western coast where the gale is straight from the sea. The trees bent to it until their boughs almost swept the ground, whilst now and then might be heard a sharp snap, followed by the crash of falling timber, telling only too plainly that another ash or beech had, for the last time, bowed its head to the storm. Above the noise, terrific claps of thunder, whose reverberations seemed fearfully prolonged, succeeded the forked flashes of lightning that rent the ominous clouds in the west. Even the gayest and most stout-hearted of the company were awed, whilst the more timid or superstitious fancied that, amid the strife of the storm, they could catch the mournful undertone of that weird lamentation, the wail of the Banshee, now lost in the roar of the gale, again dismally obtruding itself, and finally dying away in that heart-piercing cadence which fills the listener with a nameless dread. Something unusual was about to happen, thought all, for in the words of the Shennachus, "so wild a night was never seen before nor since."

"Like," it is said, "begets like." So it is not to be wondered at that element of the preternatural and terrible abroad should also have its effect within. Faces reflected their sombre surroundings: the spirit of enjoyment which in the earlier part of the night had reigned unchecked appeared to have forsaken the gathering. Here and

there, however, might be seen a guest who, like the host of the evening, was undisturbed. These were veterans of stern war. One of them, an English officer, chancing to hear some mention of the haunted ruins, asked for the story. De Burgh, to whom the request was made, complied. Some of those present claimed they had seen the Spirit of the Long Black Hand; others gave credence to the tale. A considerable remnant were inclined to doubt it, attributing the realistic particulars in which it abounded to the vivid imagination of the Celt. One of the sceptical portion of the audience, an officer from across the channel, not content with characterizing it as the offspring of a dense superstition, offered to wager that of his house tenantry or domestics, there would not be found one with sufficient pluck to go to the ruins, say that very night, and test for himself the accuracy of the story.

Now, although de Burgh, himself, placed no credit in what he had heard of the apparition, yet for one who felt the tribal tie that in those old days bound chief and vassals together like the bond of kindred, the reflection implied in the proffered wager had all the force of an insult. The gauntlet thus thrown down, must therefore be picked up. The blood of the de Burgh's was stirred. An acceptance of the challenge, for such it was, or a duel, was inevitable.

Maurice de Burgh, however, was not one of those who let impulse run away with judgment. In a situation calling for one or the other, he was equally master of himself. Remembering at a moment so crucial, that one of the most devoted followers, his foster brother besides, was a man of proved courage and ready resource, his choice fell, instinctively upon him as one whom the event would not