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THE IRISH WIDOW'S SON;

OR,

THE PIKEMEN OF NINETY-EIGHT.

BY CON. O'LEARY.

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

Cameron could ill brook this allusion to his cowardice, and adroitly endeavored to change the conversation. The rough nature of his companion, however, would not permit this, and the result was a bloody fight among the party. Tumblers and pewter measures were freely used, on both sides, and left evidence sufficient on the faces of the combatants, to show the strength of the hands that used them. The fellow who had accused Cameron so roundly of cowardice, had plenty to side with him, and, before they left off, Mr. Cameron's comfortable kitchen presented a scene of confusion, blood, and disorder, that was sickening to behold. He, himself, managed to come out of the fight with a whole skin, and not all the rough allusions of those who had come there, determined on bloody deeds on their inoffensive neighbors, could rouse Cameron's sluggish blood to fighting heat. One by one they departed, some of them in a state of beastly intoxication.

Cameron was as good as his word. Early next day he repaired to Captain Mackenzie, and swore informations against Cormac Rogan and the two Mullans. He further averred, that, empowered by a warrant from Col. Barber, of Belfast, he, "Duncan Cameron, gentleman, well known for his loyalty to His Majesty's government, did, at a certain time, call upon Cormac Rogan, and demand peaceable admission to search the premises of said Rogan for fire-arms; that while so engaged, was fired upon by said Cormac Rogan, or others within his place; and further, it is the belief of informant, and of others by whom he was accompanied, that Rogan's house is used as a rendezvous by members of the organization known by the name of United Irishmen; and that said Cormac Rogan is assisted by two men, named John Mullan and Peter Mullan, who are said to act in the capacity of servants to the delinquent Rogan, but who are well known to belong to a rebel party. All of which is true as deponent saith, on the Holy Evangelists.

In the middle of his triumph, Cormac and the Mullans were summoned to appear at the petty sessions, held in Antrim, to account for the refusal of admission to Cameron, who, by law, was entitled to enter the widow's house and ransack it in the search, and burn it to the ground, if that were considered advisable by Cameron, or by any of those by whom he was accompanied.

Three days must elapse before Cormac and the Mullans could be called on to appear, and in that time Mr. Milliken was to revisit the Randalstown District. Pat Dolan's advice was to make no arrangements, nor decide on anything, until Mr. Milliken was advised of the whole affair.

"Should he cross my path before that day," said Cormac, "I'm afraid he won't appear in good trim afterwards."

"I would prefer making his acquaintance first," said John Mullan, with great bitterness. "For my part, I won't even attempt to seek him; but, if by chance he comes in my way, I won't promise that I'll kindly inquire after his health."

More trouble! Times get darker, and the poor persecuted people cannot see the end.—They have a sort of dreamy and uncertain knowledge, that the time is not far distant when they will be required to meet their foes in open warfare. They had hoped and hoped again for aid from France. Their bold leader had made a full and perfect declaration or report to the French Directory in their behalf.

In that report, Wolfe Tone pointed out conclusively the unhappy and degraded position of the Irish Catholics, as compared with the adherents of the Protestant Establishment.—At the time when Wolfe Tone drew up his report, there were in Ireland over three millions of Catholics, not near half a million Protestants, and about nine hundred thousand Presbyterians and Dissenters. A little study of these figures, and into the state of serfdom in which the Catholics of that period were plunged, will go far to form a correct estimate of the people's minds, and to account for any extravagance of opinions which they held, or for the performance of any acts, either by way of retaliation or otherwise, which they performed. Wolfe Tone succeeded in his efforts, and the French Republic sent to aid the cause of Irish independence a fleet consisting of forty-three sail, of which seventeen were line-of-battle ships, and thirteen frigates of thirty-six guns; the rest were transports. On board this fleet was a force of almost fifteen thousand soldiers, veterans of four campaigns, all under the command of the young and gallant Hoche, one of the greatest Generals of the time, and a genuine Republican besides, and a sincere and attached friend of Ireland and her cause.

For the second time, England was saved by the treacherous winds of the channel. That splendid fleet and army of soldiers were driven about by storms around the coast, until the vessels were separated from each other and obliged to return to Brest.

CHAPTER VIII.—A MOTHER'S ADVICE TO HER SON TO SERVE HIS COUNTRY—CORMAC ROGAN AVOWS HIS LOVE FOR KATE O'NEILL—KATE'S ACCEPTANCE OF CORMAC—CORMAC'S ARREST AND SUBSEQUENT RESCUE.

"Tis love that murmurs in my breast,
And makes me shed the secret tear;
Nor day, nor night my heart has rest,
For night and day his voice I hear."

The day before Cormac's required appearance at court, Israel Milliken was true to his appointment. When made acquainted with the state of matters, he strongly advised the removal of Cormac to another part of the country. "There was no use," he said, "in walking right into the lion's den. There was no justice to be had, and for a certainty, Cormac would be imprisoned."

Milliken detailed several instances that had just occurred in Belfast, where parties were flung into prison, some after the mockery of a trial, and others without any trial at all. To be suspected was sufficient, and the Government did these things in order to outrage the people, and drive them into the commission of acts that would enable the authorities, with some show of reason on their part, to treat the people with any amount of harshness.

About one hundred men were present at this meeting, and the unanimous voice of the whole was, that Cormac Rogan, and his trusty companions, Peter and John Mullan, should retire from that part of the country, at least for some time, until better advice was had as to the future course they should adopt.

The brothers at once consented; but Cormac, still believing that some remnant of justice existed in the country, and especially not liking to part from his mother, appeared obstinate. "Your mother shall receive every attention," said honest Pat, "and nothing shall be wanting on the farm, that kindly hearts and hands can do. I'll guarantee that much."

Cormac consented, and Israel Milliken promised that all three should accompany him on his visit to Newry, where the county delegates were to meet. Next day, Cormac's mother was made acquainted with this arrangement, and to the young man's pleasurable surprise, she uttered a hearty "thank God." It was the very thing she most desired. "Go, my son," she said; "and whatever your country demands of you, do it with your whole heart and soul. Kate O'Neill shall visit me often during your absence, and both of us will pray that every blessing may attend you; and as for the brave fellows who go with you, they have my blessing and prayers, and should I be spared to live to see you all again, this will be their home as long as they choose."

Cormac's heart was relieved. He felt that he was a different man, and, after embracing his mother, left the place to pay a visit to Father John and Miss O'Neill. The latter had received intimation of Cormac's resolve.

When Cormac arrived at the place, Father John was absent. Kate received him with every mark of kindness.

"And so you are about to leave us for a while, Cormac?" she said.

"Yes; I came to say as much, and to bid you good-by. But how did you learn the news so soon? I should not like to have it travel so fast."

"Oh, never mind that. My informant, poor fellow, knows well what he's about."

"Mike Glinty?" said Gormac.

"The same," replied Kate.

Cormac was satisfied. "There is no use, Kate trying to mince matters," said the young man; "I came here expressly to learn your mind concerning myself."

"You have my good wishes, Cormac," said Kate, while she busied herself in the performance of some unimportant duties.

"I guessed as much, from the evening we walked together, after meeting accidentally at the old toll-bar. But I require more than that.—I am just now about to commit myself partly to an unknown course, and I wish to know if I occupy any hinder position in your regard than that of mere ordinary friendship?"

Kate hung her head; her face was almost colorless. Cormac took both her hands in his.

"One word, Kate," he continued; "I have loved you since we were children; I could not mention the exact time when that love for you entered my heart. The greater my love for you, the better I became, and more dearly was I beloved by my mother. Say, have I a place in your affections—do you return my love, Kate?"

The dear girl brightened up, as if some happy train of thoughts had just then winged their course through her pure, unsullied mind, while, with a warmth that astonished Cormac no less than herself, she answered: "Yes, Cormac, I love you with a whole and undivided love." And Kate bent forward to meet the happy kiss that Cormac joyously imparted.

"You know nothing, I presume, of the time of your return?" asked Kate.

"Nothing whatever," replied Cormac; "I am advised to leave quickly, and will not see you again until some change has been effected, that will deprive Cameron of the power to injure me."

"I trust in God, Cormac, that, no matter what happens, you will keep yourself pure in His sight, nor deign to commit an act that your conscience disapproves," said the noble-hearted girl.

"My dear Kate, whatever may be in store for me, rely upon it, no dishonor will attach to my father's name. The avowal of your love shall be to me a strong incentive to virtue and to patriotism. I trust to the promptings of your good heart to visit my mother as often as possible. She expects as much; and my dear girl will be a comfort and a solace to her during my absence. I am afraid I must take my leave without the sad pleasure of saying good-by to Father John."

"Oh, no, no," said Kate, "you must not go till he comes back. He won't be long, Cormac, and he would be very much annoyed at not seeing you before you left."

"He is aware of my intention, I suppose," said Cormac.

"He is, and he approves of it highly; but did not think that you would leave till to-night."

At that moment a loud noise was heard at the door, and a voice in command, shouting—"ground arms," too plainly revealed the danger in which Cormac stood.

The young man looked wildly around him, but saw no means of escape. Kate trembled from head to foot, and became as pale as death. In a few seconds, Captain Mackenzie and three men entered.

"Secure your prisoner," roared out the captain.

Cormac was instantly laid hold of, and his hands securely tied behind his back.

One piercing scream of anguish from Kate, and the poor girl fell fainting at the feet of her lover.

Cormac's heart was like to break. The hot blood was coursing madly through his veins.—He was entrapped just at the very moment when the influence of his beloved Kate was moulding his mind for future action. The whole current of his feeling became changed, and, had he the power, he would have slain the four men who stood before him.

"Proceed," said Mackenzie, and he pointed to the door.

Kate clung to her lover with a gripe like death. She was insensible, and Cormac could not move a step without hurting her. The poor fellow begged that one of the men would lift her and place her in a seat.

"No time for scenes like this," said one of the gang, in the most brutal manner; and he caught the girl by the waist and dragged her away, leaving her still lying on the floor.

When just on the point of leaving, Father John entered. Cormac felt inclined to turn away his head, but the old pastor came close to him and gave him his blessing, bidding him be of good heart. His voice faltered as he spoke. Cormac directed his attention to Kate, and the brave fellow was marched off a prisoner. Turning a sharp point of the road, Mackenzie, who was a little in advance, was observed to rise his musket; but before he had time to comprehend his position, he and his followers were surrounded by a party of men, about a dozen in number. Cormac was instantly unbound, and, quick as the spring of a tiger, he dealt the ruffian who insulted Kate a blow that laid him prostrate. One of the party of unknown friends—Cormac did not know a man of them—seeing the spring of the young man at his opponent, judging that he had good cause for what he did, kicked the brute until he groaned.

"Villains," roared Mackenzie, "you shall answer for this with your lives."

"Another word," said a man, who appeared to be the leader, "and your brains will be at your feet."

Mackenzie and his party were instantly disarmed, and permitted to go their way.

Cormac's rescuers remained until the others were out of sight, then breaking up into twos and threes, took different routes across the country.

CHAPTER IX.—BURNING OF CAMERON'S HOUSE BY MIKE GLINTY—DISCOVERY OF A PIKE MANUFACTORY—DIFFICULTY OF RE-FINDING THE PLACE.

"But see—what moves upon the height?
Some signal!—'tis a torch's light.
What bodes its solitary glare?
In gasping silence towards the shrine
All eyes are turn'd—"

Intelligence was at once conveyed to Cormac's mother; also to Father McAuley and Kate, that immediately after leaving the house he was bravely rescued, and that he had the hearty satisfaction of striking to the earth the ruffian who assaulted his beloved Kate.

Israel Milliken was almost ubiquitous at times. He was here, and there, and everywhere. Men seemed to spring out of the earth at his command. He had gone through a good schooling, in consequence of the accidents which

happened to many of his friends, by not being sufficiently cautious and guarded in the presence of those who would not believe in the treachery of Newell and Hughes, the two Belfast informers. Milliken, as he used to boast of it, could raise from twenty to a hundred men in as many minutes, for a distance of thirty miles, in any direction from Belfast.

He heard without the least surprise that Mackenzie was seen hurrying towards the chapel, and guessing that the party could not be engaged in any good work, especially when armed, at that time of day, instantly hastened to the spot, gathering assistance as he went.—Standing behind a hedge with his men, he gave them instructions how to act rightly, guessing that Cormac was the prize sought for by Mackenzie.

It cannot be denied, that those who were known by the name of Defenders, were often guilty of acts of aggression. It is not to be wondered at when we remember that the state of Ireland, at that period, was such, that those who could not or would not fight, were sure to lose all they possessed. When the charge of a district was given to, or voluntarily undertaken by, a party of Defenders, it sometimes happened, nay, it was a thing of common occurrence, that while engaged in the defence of one place, probably some poor widow's dwelling-house (for the Wreckers were generally very brave when they had none to contend against but women and children), three or four places would be destroyed in some other part of the country.

If the Defenders believed that they were able to hold their own in any townland, they were not slow, sometimes, to act by way of retaliation; and many unnecessary acts of cruelty were perpetrated by them at times.

Without becoming their apologists, I can safely affirm of them, that they never acted cruelly towards a weak party, nor injured anything belonging to the poor. Whatever they did in this way, was either to overawe some despot in authority, like Mackenzie and his satellites, or avenge themselves on those who were able to bear their attacks.

That night, as Milliken, Cormac Rogan, and Peter and John Mullan were on their way to Newry, the sky was lit up by the glare of a conflagration, in the direction of Cameron's house. On approaching it, it became evident that the whole premises was one mass of flames. Not a soul was within sight. Cameron was distracted. He ran about in the wildest manner, shouting, and calling for aid. Most of the farm servants were absent; a strong wind was blowing at the time, and the agony of Cameron's mind was intense. The sight of the flames attracted some of his friends to the spot.

Three men arrived only to add to the madness of Cameron. All were powerless to act, the supply of water was small, buckets and ladders were few, and almost useless; the barn, which was stored in the upper left with grain, was like the interior of a kiln. To add to the horror of the scene, the haggard was in a blaze, either by the hand of an incendiary, or by burning material alighting on the corn stacks from the surrounding buildings.

One man placed a short ladder against the wall of the barn, while another handed him a few buckets of water. Such attempts appeared only to increase the flames. When stretching himself, in order to reach a certain part of the fire, he fell and dislocated his shoulder. He lay there shouting for help; but Cameron called on the man who was handing him the water to come quickly with the ladder to another part of the building, so that the unfortunate man was left to shift for himself.

The fire burned fiercer and brighter, and drove back the few who attempted to stay its ravages. By degrees, more help arrived on the spot; but Cameron could not avail himself of the services of his friends. They were too late arriving; the fire had gained complete mastery, and there he stood, a prey to the fire that raged no less fiercely within his breast.

That night, Cameron's whole place was one mass of ruins!

No second thought regarding its origin seemed to enter the minds of those who witnessed the disaster.

None but the bloody Wreckers could, or would, have dared to commit such an act, and yet those who were blamed had nothing whatever to do with the business. Even as an act of retaliation, it never entered their minds.—Was it caused by accident, or, had some hand secretly, but surely, applied the brand?

We shall see.
Pat Dolan was busy in the smiddy. Phil and Ned, and some extra hands, were there at work, and Mike Glinty, to earn a promised reward, and leave to stop all night in the smiddy, had been posted outside of doors to amuse himself, and, at the same time, to announce the arrival of any stranger coming that way. Several times, Mike came into the smiddy to warm himself, and, as his entrance always caused a cessation of work, and the concealment of curious shaped pieces of iron, Pat ordered him to take out a few sods of turf and make a little fire for himself down in a hollow of the ditch; at the place where he was to keep himself stationed,

Mike did so, and, for some little time, enjoyed his small comfort merrily enough.

"Nin-nin-nobody comin' here," said Mike to himself. "Mike roast some pi-pip-potatoes for himself;" and he did so, not having far to go to obtain what he required. During his preparation of a meal after his fashion, a practice that he often indulged in, and not a bad one either, according to the poor fellow's philosophy, he began to ruminate on the possibility of burning Cameron in his bed that night. As a sharp breeze sprang up, Mike rubbed his hands with glee, and cackled, and laughed, at the strangeness of the ideas that took possession of him.—He wished it were darker, and soon his wishes were fully realized. The night fell as dark and as black as night ere fell, before. Mike lifted two or three half-burned sods of turf, and covered the burning parts over with a thick coat of ashes. After glancing around him—not to try to see if he was observed, but to fulfil his contract with Pat Dolan—he stole quickly away over the fields, in a manner that few could equal. Shortly he arrived at Cameron's, and, after pacing about in all directions, he climbed on the top of a water-barrel that stood close to the barn door, and instantly flung the burning sod into the middle of the building. His acts were like those of a well-trained Indian, so noiselessly, and at the same time, so adroitly did he carry out his plans. Another brand was safely stowed away into a corn-stack, at the rear of the haggard; then he retired a short distance to see if any one appeared. Shortly, he crept round to the back of the main building, and mounting the same ladder that had been used in the attempt to extinguish the flames, he thrust the burning coal in the spot most likely to succeed in setting the whole fabric in a flame. After removing the ladder to what he believed a place of concealment, the natural walked quietly but slowly away. Several times he turned around to witness the effect of his design, and not seeing any result, he sat down on a big stone to wait awhile, planning all the time in his mind, that, when next he tried to pay Cameron in his own coin, he would make surer of his business. As Mike arose to leave, he saw a flash burst out of a side door, in the barn; then came a thick volume smoke; another, from the roof of the dwelling-house, soon convinced him of the success of his work, and instantly he sped across the fields, back to his old spot. The remains of his own little fire were a lot of warm ashes, which he scattered with a kick of his foot; then rushing into the smiddy, his wild and excited manner alarmed those within, who, without waiting for one word of explanation, caused them to damp the fires at once. In two minutes the place was in utter darkness, and all had retired, Mike along with them, never dreaming that his appearance had caused them to thus leave off.

Well was it they did so!

During Mike's temporary absence, one of Mackenzie's yeos, who had been specially sent for the purpose, approached unobserved to Pat's smiddy, and, with his open eyes, beheld the unconstitutional work of pike-making going on. The man happened to be a stranger to that particular locality, but he soon managed to return and give information to his party. Five men, together with Mackenzie, instantly accompanied him. He knew not the name of the places he passed through, but that made little difference, he being a stranger, so that if observed, he was likely to pass unnoticed. After walking for a considerable distance, Mackenzie got to be uneasy; his informant seemed restless as he led the men near to every house where a bright light appeared.

There they were, marching and counter-marching, wandering here and there, and repeatedly going over the same ground three and four times.

Mackenzie's temper was evidently sorely tried, but the chance of finding out where pikes were manufactured was too good a thing to lose, at a time when the government was showering golden rewards on all who assisted to crush down the rising power of the United Irishmen. They kept at it bravely. The square indicated by the four houses referred to in another chapter, was the favorite ground for the informant. He felt, he knew, he was near to the place; but where had the house gone to? Oh! he must be altogether astray! He half-acknowledged as much, and so the search continued.

"Ha! yonder it is; see the lights from here," said the fellow. Mackenzie looked in the direction pointed out.

"Hurry on, boys," said the chief; and they did hurry, and finally reached Cameron's house as the last few flickers escaped from the ruins. Cameron was first to recognize Mackenzie.—Never thinking but the latter had come specially to give assistance, and to protect the house, Cameron half-yelled out: "Time for you to arrive."

"What's the matter? My God! what is this!"

"Don't you see what it is; are you blind?" said Cameron. My whole place gone—burned to the ground—turned into a hell ruin, devastation! and all through the agency of your confounded papishes!" exclaimed Cameron, like a man thoroughly bereft of his senses.