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THE FIRST AND LAST LORDS OF FERMOY.

A LEGEND OF THE FUNCHION.

(From Legends of the Wars in Ireland, by Robert Dwyer Joyce, M.D.)

It was a fine June morning in the year 1216. The sun shone down merrily on river and shore, and gleamed brilliantly from the accoutrements of a herald, who, attended by two squires, was riding leisurely through the green forest towards the strong castle of Glanworth, in the county of Cork, at that time possessed by Sir William Flemming, Baron of Fermoy.

But perfect peace rarely falls to the lot of man. Sir William Flemming had an only child, his daughter Amy, celebrated both for her beauty and her goodness, and whose hand soon became sought for in marriage by many of the powerful chiefs around. Amy Flemming, however, was as hard to be pleased in a husband as she was good and beautiful, and refused all their offers. Among her suitors was Sir William Cantoun, or Condou, a knight of Norman-Welsh descent, whose father had won for himself the barony of Condons, adjoining that of Fermoy.

'I come,' said the herald as the stout old baron made his appearance, 'with two presents from my Lord of Cloughlea. This pearl chaplet he bids me offer thy daughter, the Lady Amy, and demands through me her hand in marriage.—In case she refuse his present and his offer, I am commissioned to offer thee this.' And he produced a steel gauntlet, which he laid before the Baron of Fermoy.

'To my daughter I leave the acceptance or rejection of such gauds,' answered Sir William Flemming. 'We will call her into thy presence and see how she takes thy suit. Now,' continued he, as the fair Amy, attended by her maids, entered the hall, 'make thine offer again, and I will abide by her decision.'

'Lady Amy,' said the herald, 'my master, Sir William Cantoun sends thee this fair chaplet, and asks thee to become Lady of Cloughlea and the green woods around it. What is thine answer?'

Amy looked for a moment at her father, but saw in his face no expression by which she could judge one way or the other of his sentiments.

'Take it back,' she said at length, as she drew up her fair and stately figure. 'The Knight whose iron mace is ever raised oppressively over the heads of the poor peasantry, whose hand is red always with unjust blood, he shall be no husband of mine. Thou hast my answer.' And with a haughty and indignant look at the herald, she withdrew with her maids.

'And now,' said Sir William Flemming, as his daughter left the hall, 'to me it is left to pay thee due courtesy. I accept this.' And

he took up the steel glove with a grim smile.—'Tell thy master to come as speedily as he lists, and that I and my crossbow men, and riders at arms, will give him the reception that befits his state from the ramparts of Glanworth.'

And so the herald again crossed the ford, and rode back to his master.

But it seems that Sir William Flemming miscalculated the power and influence possessed at that time by the fiery Baron of Cloughlea. These were days, when in Ireland, and in fact throughout every country in Europe, the strong hand with lance and sword held the place that the law holds at the present period. Each lord and baron was his own lawgiver,—a petty prince, who, after paying his tribute to the government, held himself absolved from all other obligations, and ruled his territories, and made war and peace with his neighbors, according to the dictates of his own will. And so it was with Sir William Cantoun.

That night the warder as he looked from his watchtower on the summit of Glanworth Castle, could see the whole wide plain to the eastward ablaze with the signal fires of the wrathful Baron of Cloughlea. During several succeeding nights the same portentous fires threw up their lurid glare into the calm, still sky; and day by day, by castle and town and hamlet, fierce riders spurred hither and thither to chief and vassal, summoning them to take up arms, and back the quarrel of their stout suzerain, till at length a large and formidable army was collected around the castle of Sir William Cantoun. Not content with this gathering, however, he sent for help to O'Keefe, the native and hereditary chief of the whole country stretching along the northern shore of the Blackwater, and obtained it, to gether with the aid of another Irish chief equally powerful.

With this formidable army, Sir William Cantoun marched westward from his castle, and began to lay waste the territories of the Baron of Fermoy. After going with fire and sword along all the eastern portion of the district, he at length reached Glanworth Castle, and sat down before its walls to commence a regular siege. A siege in those days was a very different affair from what it has come to be in more modern times.—There were then no cannon; and the only method of battering down walls consisted in the use of engines, which, on the introduction of gunpowder, were thrown aside as unavailable in warfare, and of which we now scarcely remember the names. Yet with engine, arbalest, crossbow, and javelin, Sir William Cantoun plied the castle, till, in a few days, the besieged Baron of Cloughlea again demanded the hand of Amy Flemming, but was again refused.

On the fourth day the sun that lit the fierce faces of the combatants in and around Glanworth was also reflected from the points of ten spears that were stuck, handle downward, in the soft sward of a little glade in the midst of the great forest that then clothed the back of the wild mountain range that walls in the territory of Fermoy to the southward, and ends in the romantic peak of Corrin Tiberoa. Their owners, as many knights, were sitting lazily upon the grass beside them, enjoying their noontide meal, while their horses were scattered along the glade in the exercise of the same agreeable occupation. The leader of this group was a young man of great stature and noble bearing, with light-colored hair, and a fine, sun-embrowned visage, that looked all the better from a small white scar that extended obliquely down his high forehead. His name was Richard de Rupe, or Roche. His father, Sir Adam de Rupe, fighting under the banners of Strongbow and Fitzstephen, had come into possession of Rosscarberry, and there built a magnificent castle on the river Bandon, called Poul-ne-long, whose ruins still remain to attest its former strength and splendor. On his death, his son, Richard de Rupe, succeeded him; and was on his way on the day in question to visit another strong castle of his, on the northern frontier of the county of Cork. The whole band were chatting gayly upon various subjects as the meal proceeded.

They were at length disturbed, however, by

the appearance of a horseman above them on the bare side of a hill, who came down at full speed upon their left, with the intention of making his way downward into the southern plain.

'A prize, a prize!' exclaimed Sir Gilbert Ridenford and a few other young knights, starting to their feet, and buckling on their helmets. 'By the hand of the Conqueror, a prize and adventure both!' And they ran towards their steeds, which each mounted at a single bound. Then, catching their spears in their hands, they sat looking towards their leader, for liberty to ride after the stranger, who was passing on the left without perceiving them.

'Away!' exclaimed Sir Richard de Rupe.—'He will be but a small prize, indeed. But, if he carry nothing else, he may tell us some news; for every Irishman is full of that commodity.'

Away dashed the wild young knights down the woods, till they came to the bottom of a deep valley, through which they knew the strange horseman must pass; and there, after much doubling and twisting, they at length captured him, and led him in triumph to their comrades.

'Gold, gold!' shouted one of them derisively, as the captive came sullenly in. 'Search him, Sir Gilbert; I will wager he hath a treasure.'

'I will barter my steed, trappings and all, against a Jew's donkey, but he hath the elixir of life hid in his pocket,' exclaimed another.

'What errand ridest thou?' asked Sir Richard de Rupe, in a commanding but respectful tone, which drew an answer from the captured horseman. He told them the substance of what is related above, and that he was riding southward to the castle of Sir Maurice Fitzgerald to beg aid for his master, the Baron of Fermoy, in his sore distress.

'There!' said Ridenford, 'I told thee an adventure would come of it; and now what is to be done?'

'First, to let the courier go,' answered de Rupe. 'We will hold counsel as we ride along.'

The courier waited no further liberty, but, turning his horse, rode down through the woods at the same headlong pace with which he came. The result of their consultation, as they rode over the range of mountains and crossed the Blackwater, was that the nine knights should remain in the forest near, while their leader rode forward to the beleaguered castle of Glanworth, and demanded admittance to its lord. The warlike customs of those days were strangely different from those of the present. Sir Richard de Rupe, on reaching the besieging army, at once caused himself to be brought before the Baron of Cloughlea, and made his request; which was granted without hesitation and with the utmost courtesy. And thus he was admitted into the castle of Glanworth.

'Sir William Flemming,' said he to the old baron, who received him in the hall, 'I have come to offer thee the service of my arm in thy strait. My father, Adam de Rupe, was, I believe, once thy companion in arms.'

The baron took his hand with a friendly grasp. 'Ah!' he said, 'I remember him well, and a brave companion he was. And thou—thou art welcome to my poor hall of Glanworth; although, God wot!' continued he, with a sad smile, 'I fear thy single arm will make but small change in our affairs; for we are indeed sore beset.'

'I have nine other knights at my back,' said de Rupe. 'Could we not send them word of thy plight, and make a bold sally upon the besiegers, during which they might suddenly mingle with the combatants, and get entrance as we withdrew?'

'I fear no entrance can be gained for more than thee,' answered Flemming. 'Yesterday we tried that ruse, to get in a small body of auxiliaries; but, by my faith! we were all beaten back, and half our expected aid slain.—Save that my old friend, Sir Maurice Fitzgerald, come speedily with a large force to relieve us, I fear me there is but small hope for us; for the bloody Cantoun and his followers are pressing us too hotly.'

'How long canst thou hold out, in case the aid come?' asked de Rupe.

'Not longer than another day, I fear me,' answered Flemming. 'The foe are in possession of every available spot around the castle, and have already half battered down the gates.'

'Then,' said de Rupe, after a pause, 'there is but one plan, and that is to offer myself to do battle with axe and sword against Sir William Cantoun for the hand of thy daughter.'

'It is a brave plan,' said the baron, 'and one that well befits thy father's son. But I have sworn by my knightly word, no matter what hap, to let my daughter choose for herself. If she choose thee for a husband, then I give my consent to the trial by combat; and I doubt not but Cantoun will accept of thy challenge; for whatever else he may be, he assuredly is brave. I will call my daughter, and do thou propose thy plan to her herself.'

The beautiful Amy Flemming was again brought into the hall.

'Fair lady,' said de Rupe, 'I would wish to woo thee in another and more befitting way, but cannot, as thou seest. Wilt thou consent that I should do battle with Sir William Cantoun for thy hand? With thy bright eyes to look upon me in the struggle, I hope to do my devoir as becomes a knight, and free thy father from his worst foe.'

Amy scanned the fine face and fair proportions of the young knight with a pleased eye. There was but little time for deliberation, for even then they heard the foe hammering at the gate.

'Yes,' she said, while a blush of maiden modesty mantled her beautiful face. 'My father is now brought to sore distress. An' thou relieve him and me from our foe, I will be thy bride.'

That night, notwithstanding the sad case of the besieged, a merry revel was held in the hall of Glanworth Castle. The fair Amy sat at the board; and, as she talked to the young de Rupe her heart confirmed the consent she was forced to give so suddenly the preceding evening. The next morning's sun shone gayly down upon the many bright objects around the castle,—the polished armor of the knights as they stalked in and fro directing the movements of the besiegers; the waving banners on plain and tower; the light lances of the kern; the ponderous swords, bucklers, and battle axes of the heavy footmen, who were now gathering in a mass within scaling-ladders, to make a final attack upon the castle. At this juncture, a white flag was suddenly raised from the highest tower of the barbacan, and its appearance caused for a moment a suspension of hostilities on both sides.—Immediately after, a herald rode forth from the gate, and demanded to be brought into the presence of the Baron of Cloughlea.

'Sir William Cantoun,' said the herald, 'I come to offer thee single combat on the part of Sir Richard de Rupe, good knight and true, now in the castle, for the hand of the Lady Amy.'

'And what if I refuse?' answered the Knight of Cloughlea, with bitter smile. 'The castle, father and daughter, champion and all, will be soon in my hands, without the trouble of trial by combat.'

'Then,' said the herald, 'Sir Richard de Rupe bids me say that he will proclaim thee recreant and coward through all the lands of Christendom, and false to thy badge of knighthood.'

'That were, indeed, a hard alternative,' answered Cantoun. 'But it shall never be said that William of Cloughlea refused the challenge of any mortal man. I accept thy defiance, sir herald, and will meet him at noon with axe and sword, on foot, on this very spot, and in sight of all.'

Noon came, and saw the besiegers all gathered round a level spot outside the barbacan gate of Glanworth, and the besieged, with eager faces, crowding on the walls to witness the combat; while the beautiful Amy sat with her maids at a high turret window that overlooked the scene, her face pale and her heart throbbing, and her white hands clasped in prayer for the success of her young and gallant champion. What must have been her feelings when at length she saw the two adversaries approach each other warily,

under the cover of their broad shields, each with axe in hand, poised and ready to begin the combat?

And now the axes were crossed, and again came down for some time alternately, with loud clanging, upon the interposed shields. Hotter and hotter grew the combat, till at last the axe of de Rupe crashed in through the shoulder-plate of Cantoun, making the blood flow out upon his arm and breast. This aroused the full fury of Sir William Cantoun, who was one of the most celebrated knights of his time for strength and prowess. He raised his axe suddenly, as if about to deliver a heavy blow upon the hip of de Rupe; but, changing the direction of the stroke, the ponderous weapon came down with full force upon the helmet of his antagonist, making him reel backward a few paces, and at length fall to the ground over the body of a dead archer that lay behind him. Now this Archer had been slain in the very act of posing his crossbow, which lay beside him drawn, and with the arrow in, under the very hand of de Rupe as he fell. Whether it was according to the laws of single combat, on the part of de Rupe, we will not say; but, as he fell, he grasped the drawn cross-bow in his hand, raised it as he lay upon the ground, and discharged it at his adversary as he advanced to despatch him, piercing him with the arrow through one of the joints of his armor. The arrow entered Sir William Cantoun's left side, and pierced in an upward direction through his heart; on which he fell heavily to the ground, and in a few moments expired. His body was borne away with loud lamentations by his sorrowing vassals; O'Keefe and the other chieftains departed with their followers, and Sir William Flemming was left once more in peaceful possession of his castle and domains. The lovely Amy and her champion were soon after married. The young knights assisted at the bridal ceremony, and wondered at, and laughed heartily over, the good fortune of their leader.

'By my fay!' said Sir Gilbert Ridenford to Cantemar, his brother-in-arms, after they had gathered a few merry measurs down the great hall, 'I told thee this was an enchanted land. I will ride forth to-morrow in quest of an adventure for myself, and try and win a fair bride like our leader.'

Amy was the sole heiress of Sir William Flemming; and, at his death, her husband, in her right, succeeded to the possession of the fair territory of Fermoy, which was in his lifetime raised to a lordship. And thus Sir Richard de Rupe, or Roche, won those fertile lands, and became the first lord of Fermoy, and the progenitor of a long line of barons, distinguished for their princely hospitality, their prowess, and often for their patriotic devotedness to the cause of their native land.

Pass we now over a period of some centuries, during which the successive lords of Fermoy lived, loved, fought, and died within their fair territory, like brave Norman-Irish nobles as they were, till we come to that stormy time when Ireland and the sister island groaned beneath the iron rule of the victorious usurper, Cromwell. Maurice, eighth Viscount Fermoy, was at this time a man in the prime of life.—His father David, after suffering severely in the great Desmond insurrection of 1599, was recompensed for his losses in the succeeding reign. Several large grants of land, partly from the forfeited estates of the Earl of Desmond, were given him by James the First; and, living peaceably for a long period in his ancestral home, he at length became one of the richest noblemen in Ireland. After the accession of the unfortunate Charles to the throne of England, and the breaking out of the great insurrection of 1641 in Ireland, this David retired to France with his family, and a regiment he had raised within his own territory, and there died leaving his estates, worth, it is said, fifty thousand pounds yearly, to his eldest son Maurice, the eighth lord of Fermoy.

The estates to which Maurice succeeded were, however, in a very insecure position from the sad state of the country at the time. North and south, east and west, the baleful fires of war