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SHAWN NA SOGGARTH; OR, THE PRIEST-HUNTER.

AN IRISH TALE OF THE PENAL TIMES.

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CHAPTER III.

The boat, in which were the priest and Frank, after having coasted rapidly with the wind for about half a league, again put to shore to allow them to debark for the purpose of continuing their flight by land.

"We shall have a better chance of safety by separating here," said the priest. "Farewell, then; and I trust neither impetuosity nor fears will disable you from fulfilling your intentions.

"I will be calm; and as for fears they seldom trouble me, however the wind may blow.—But is not your own course, Father Bernard, more beset with dangers than mine?"

"Oh, I knew the perils I was to brave before I quitted Portugal, though I certainly did not expect to be recognized and pursued at my very landing. But if our path be dangerous, it is the path of duty; and whatever evils may beset it from men, God and the good angels are over us, and light will I esteem any hardships or dangers I may have to undergo if I am enabled, even in secret and by stealth, to administer occasionally the bread of life to my famishing countrymen.—Oh, my young friend, you know not the strength of the ties that bind a faithful pastor to a persecuted flock, and can scarcely imagine how the comforts and elegancies of refined life were turned to poison by the accounts I occasionally received of the wretched state of my unfortunate parishioners, excluded by bloody statutes from the hope and the consolation which the practice of the true faith might impart, amid all the blackness of their worldly sufferings, or you would feel that personal hardship or peril, however imminent, would weigh but as straws against the chance of administering the holy offices of religion to those broken down still more by spiritual than by bodily privations. Again, farewell. In three days we may meet again in Ballintubber, if Providence afford us protection until then; and I hope you will be induced to give up the companionship of those fierce and lawless men I now find you associated with.—May the grace of God be with you."

He bestowed a parting benediction on his companion, which was reverently received; and they separated, each taking a different direction. Our course lies for the present with Frank Lynch, who, pushing on through bog and over mountain paths, and avoiding town and village, made his way, with rapid steps, towards Ballintubber.

Frank Lynch was a young man of high respectability, by hereditary descent, but of impetuous passions, and, owing to the penalties then imposed on the instruction of Catholics, of but very limited education. He had, some three years previously, through some wild acts of his own, and the persecution of the times, been obliged to fly to the Continent, whence he had just returned and was now proceeding to visit, at all risk, his uncle, Sir Edward Lynch, who (he had learned) had been dispossessed of seat and property by his son Robert, and who was, in consequence, sinking fast into the grave.

It was nearing sunset of the following day when he reached the fine domains of the Abbey of Ballintubber, on whose gray and ivied walls the melancholy October sunshine was shedding a saddening light, completely in unison with the scene. There it was, the gray old pile, familiar as the prayers or childhood, and utterly unchanged in its solemn loneliness since his last visit to it; and wild as were the scenes he had since been occasionally engaged in, the recollection of that visit, and its occasion, affected him so strongly that he leant for a moment, overpowered, against the side of the low gothic doorway ere he entered it.

The ruins of Ballintubber Abbey are among the finest in Ireland, and decidedly the finest monastic remains in Mayo. Cong Abbey is distinguished for its historic associations and richly wrought entrance—Moyness, for its preservation and beautiful situation, near the estuary of the river Moy; but both are greatly inferior to Ballintubber in extent, grandeur of arches, and exquisite tracery. The situation of Ballintubber is low, and, being without a steepie, it makes no prominent figure in the surrounding landscape, until closely approached. Then, however, you are at once convinced that it fully sustains the characteristic taste of the monks in their selection of sites, as it is embosomed amid rich lands, and immediately adjoining an inlet of Lough Carra, while somewhat more distant are visible the remains of Castle Burke and Castle Carra, with the picturesque ruins of the small abbey of Burreiscarra and the little island church.

A portion of the nave still retains its stonework.

roofing. Here, among the few places in Ireland still consecrated to the purpose of their original construction, Mass continued until lately to be celebrated; and the central arches remain quite perfect and are of striking boldness and extent of span, springing from beautifully tapering and richly ornamented shafts with their grotesque faces, so that the re-roofing of them would be still quite practicable. Indeed it has been often contemplated; and, doubtless, apart from all religious consideration, such attempt to renovate one of the finest of our monuments of antiquity would be hailed with delight by every Irishman of taste.

The eastern or grand window is also finely finished; and in the small chapel, interior to the grand altar, is a beautifully chiseled afterpiece, surmounted by three exquisitely carved cherubs, still in complete preservation; while beneath are extended, in separate compartments, the figures of the twelve apostles, now in a mutilated state, through the wanton barbarity of a party of carbiners, who, on their disgraceful retreat before the French, at the battle of Castlebar, in 1798, having ventured to halt at the abbey, lodged in the offending stone the bullets they had not had the courage to discharge at their bold assailants.

Beneath this private chapel is the vault of the ancient family of the earls of Mayo; but there is no external monument or stone bearing a high date, though there is a luxuriant mantle of ivy with its thickly matted roots—such as we have seldom seen elsewhere—to tell of many a long departed year. In this vault were also deposited the remains of Frank's mother, who was a member of the Bourke family, and whose interment was the occasion of his last visit to the abbey, shortly previous to his leaving the country.

On the slab covering its entrance, Frank now knelt, shedding tears as fast as rain-drops, as he recalled the death-bed of the beloved being that slept below, unconscious of his approach, and called to mind, with vehement regret, all the anxieties and cares he had cost her.

Time is, indeed, "the beautifier of the dead." Oh! when visiting the grave of a parent—when the beloved lineaments—the eyes beaming affection on us alone of all the world—the mutual endearments, and the innocence, and the happiness of early days rise vividly before us in the glass of memory—when the well-remembered tones come distinctly to the ear, more dear than the music of all the voices life can now supply to us, what a flood of tenderness rushes on the heart. How we wish the grave would give up its dead, that the past might be lived over again. With what keen regret do the best of us recall the frowardness and petulance of youth, and how infinitely deeper a shade is on the follies and errors that pained those who now so deeply mourn, and who are now alas! insensible to our affection or regret. How vividly we remember, at such moments, the prophetic warnings of affection or reproof, and how fondly and confidently think, that if we had the utterers again in life, they should never more receive from us aught but limitless obedience and love the most unbounded.

Such are the thoughts common to our nature. Such thoughts were strongly stirring Frank's mind as he knelt; and there was an added bitterness in the recollection that his wild impetuosity, and thoughtless acts in troubled times, had, in all likelihood, made still darker the closing days of his last parent.

"Yes, my own beloved mother," he exclaimed vehemently, after a brief but fervent orison for her soul's repose, "that art now a saint in heaven, keenly, bitterly do I now feel the truth of your words, when you warned me that few years would pass until I should find your neglected admonitions weigh like lead on my heart. Thank God—thank God, you were spared from witnessing what your unfortunate son has sunk to. But," he continued with fiercer vehemence, and starting from his knees, "by the blessed bones around me, those that shortened your days, and drove me to what I am, shall not triumph always—"

"That's the way to talk, my darlin' Masther Frank," said a voice behind; and in the next instant he was in the embrace of Fergus Cormac, his old tutor's son, a young man about his own years and stature, but darker and fiercer of feature. This was their first meeting since Frank had gone to sea, and cordial was now their greeting, and numerous and eager their mutual inquiries.

"The last three years have changed us both greatly, Fergus," observed Frank, gazing at the strongly knit frame, and swarthy and passion-marked features of the man he had left a mere stripling.

"You may say that, Masther Frank. Your hand that was as soft as a lady's is now almost as hard as my own, an' your face, barrin' where the red is, is as brown as a berry—though I was in the abbey when you kem in, I didn't know you at wanst; an' faith I b'lieve we're changed every

way, too. You're become, Masther Frank, a— a smuggler."

"A free trader, Fergus; and you're at the head of a band of rapparees, I learn."

"I have, sure enough, a lock of the boys under me," said Fergus in a lower tone and glancing through the window into the sunlit fields, and through the door-way into the abbey's chancel; "an' it was to meet two or three o' thim at a funeral I ventured here to-day, not dhramin' I should have the blessed luck to find yourself," Masther Frank, that I thought was still in foreign parts, just for all the world as if you fell out o' the sky to me."

"I fear we both have been driven among the breakers," said Frank; "but I have often imagined that you would probably never have steered such a course, were it not for the persecution you suffered for striking on my side, the day of the scuffle with Ffoliot and his people."

"An' wasn't it my part to lose my life for any wan that had a throp o' the Lynch blood in him—barrin' wan," (he frowned fiercely) "not to say the masther's own nephew, an' the best loved an' liked o' the name."

"Well, Fergus, and when did you see my poor, dear uncle and cousin—and how do they weather their stormy trials, and has my cousin Bob behaved as rascally as report states?"

"It's a black day, Masther Frank, that I have to say the bad word o' wan o' the Lynches," replied Fergus, slowly and with contracted brow; "but Masther Robert—Sir Robert, he's now made himself—is a disgrace to the name.—Oh, he's an ornathrel villain. Why it was only last Whitsuntide that he kem with that hard-hearted ould skinflint, Ffoliot, an' a party o' Sir John's throopers, till they took possession, an' put his own father an' his own sisher, Miss Ellen, out o' house and home, and all bekaise he bekem what they call conformist, but what my father calls a Judas, while the ould masther an' Ellen wouldn't, in course, change from the religion that belonged to their ancestors."

"And did he really bring troops to eject them?" asked Frank, his accents trembling with passion.

"Sure enough he did, the villain, Masther Frank; they'd have to shelter themselves in a cabin, an' glad to get id, barrin' that the good-hearted Protestant clergyman gev thim the use o' the purty cottage at the lake beyant, that, you remember, his brother Ahuk used sometimes to have for a fishin' lodge; an' there they're still. Mr. Gordon, in spite o' Sir John and Ffoliot, often visits them, though not to alter their religion; an' he sids thim many a present—an' it'll stand to him yit, maybe, when others 'll meet a fall. The ould masther's heart is broke, they say, since he was turned out by his own son; in Miss Ellen is taken up night an' day nursin' him. As to Masther—Sir Robert—he's livin' like a rale divle, dhrinkin' an' gamblin' an' makin' game of his father's scruples of conscience; an' ever more in with Sir John and Ffoliot, an' goin' to church when he's sober.—Oh, only that I wouldn't have a hand in the blood of any Lynch, I could murder him with my own hand; an' sometimes I'm hard set to —"

The conversation was interrupted by the wild funeral lament which broke fearfully on the silent loneliness of the scene, as the procession, alluded to by Fergus, was visible approaching the abbey; and, as Frank wished to avoid observation, with another cordial grasp of the hand, he was moving off, when his wild companion, laying a hand on his shoulder, said, in a whispered tone, "Masther Frank, we can't be doing much these times, from Sir John and his throopers, barrin' ov an odd time. Still, if you remain, it'll go hard if we don't all have revenge, soon an' sudden."

"Well, Fergus, I'm not, at any rate, going to hoist sail at once, and we'll talk over this again," said Frank; and quitting the abbey to proceed to the cottage, he left his wild acquaintance to await the burial procession.

The angle of the lake, hardby which the cottage stood, was then skirted with thick woods which, on the day in question, wore all those exquisite but mournfully autumnal hues so dear to the painter's eye, but speaking, amid all their beauty, of fast approaching decay and death.—The air was breathlessly still, and the lake glanced blue and tranquilly between the thin foliage, as Frank passed along the well-remembered wood-paths, while the yellow leaves rustled slowly before him in the tender sunshine, as if reluctant to quit for ever the boughs they had so long adorned, and the woodland choristers were pouring forth what might seem to be a parting hymn for decaying nature. Altogether so strong was the melancholy charm of the scene that, long ere he had got clear of the wood at the unequal pace he was pursuing, it had completely sobered down his late excitement. Unequal, indeed, were his movements. Sometimes he moved slowly; and more than once he paused and leant against a tree, overcome by shadowy and undefined fears respecting the state in which

he should find his relatives. Would he not find his uncle sinking rapidly, like nature, into dissolution—or might not the spirit have already flown? Then, under the impulse of this thought, he hurried onward for a space, as if life and death were on every step.

Through those desultory movements, twilight had gathered over the scene by the time he reached the cottage. He paused a moment at the low garden wall, to ascertain, if he might, from appearance, the position of the inmates;—and while he stood, a man shot through the little wicket, and passed rapidly by him. He had barely obtained a single glance at the passer, but that glance, imperfect as it was in the fading twilight, induced him to think he recognized the person of Cornet Ffoliot, the son of his old enemy; and almost involuntarily he clutched his weapon. The person, however, whoever he might be, was out of sight in an instant, and all thought of him was forgotten for the time. The next moment Frank had sprung over the low paling, and was approaching the small opened window, at which sat his cousin Ellen, with her arm supporting her cheek, as if in mournful meditation.

A slight scream—the door opened, and, with an exclamation of delighted recognition, she was folded in his arms, and speechless.

"And my dear uncle—how—where is he, Ellen?" asked Frank rapidly, when they had both recovered their speech.

"Speak low, dear Frank, he is slumbering.—But, come this way, and you will see the wreck, that sorrow and persecution have made." She led him noiselessly in; and, opening a door, pointed to a sofa, on which Frank could distinguish by the firelight within, the wasted form and haggard features of her father—how sadly altered from the stately figure and fine countenance for which Sir Edmund had been remarkable. "He is frequently slumbering now, Frank," she continued, "and I'm almost glad of it, because, when he's awake, he sometimes talks so, that I'm beginning to fear—greatly—that misfortune has turned—that—that my darling father's mind is gone entirely"—the last words were half choked by her tears.

"And Robert, the renegade—good God, that he should be your brother, Ellen—knows all this, and feels no compunction, I understand."

"Name him not, dear Frank; his acts are so monstrous, so out of nature, they can scarcely be his own. He must have been compelled to them by some evil spirit, to whom he is subject. He offered me an asylum when we were—expelled the hall; but I would as soon have linked myself to the arch-enemy, as accepted his offer; may I be forgiven for speaking so of a brother, however vile."

"You would have more need of forgiveness, Ellen, if you spoke or felt otherwise," said Frank, fiercely; "but, were he your brother and my cousin ten times over, he shall both hear my abhorrence and feel my vengeance."

The loud and eager tones startled the slumberer, and he recognised them at once. Starting to a sitting posture, he exclaimed in feeble accents, "I dreamt I heard my boy Frank's voice."

"My dear father, it is no dream; thank God and the Virgin, you are right," said Ellen, fervently, as she sprang forward to the sofa, leading with her Frank, who, dropping on his knee and seizing Sir Edmund's wasted hand between his own, exclaimed, "yes, dear uncle, 'tis myself at last."

"And why did you stay so long?" said Sir Edmund, as he gazed intently into his nephew's face; and the next instant his own resumed the painful expression of mental imbecility, and an uncertain and wavering light gleamed from his eyes, as leaning back he uttered a faint laugh, and muttered at broken intervals, and in weak tones, "I knew all along he would be in time for the hunt; and a glorious run we'll have, the day is so favorable. Peter, saddle Jacobus for me—hush (sinking his voice in an indistinct whisper) Nassau, I believe, I should call him these times. No matter; let Mr. Frank ride his old favorite, Tempest, and lead out the chesnut—no, the piebald pony for Miss Lynch; and do you keep close to her; and, bark you, Peter, tell the steward we must defer that business he was speaking of, till to-morrow. This day must be all for pleasure. Hark, forward, boys—tally-ho—tally-ho—ho, ho, ho!" The last words he uttered with energy, and the exertion overpowered him. He leant back silent through exhaustion, while the cousins looked from him to each other in melancholy speechlessness, the scalding tears falling nearly as fast from Frank as from Ellen.

After a moment's pause, Sir Edmund resumed with a start, "Ha! Ellen, my love, tell your unfortunate brother, Rob—Robert that I'm not within. Your mother whispered me last night, that he was dangerous"—he put his mouth to her ear—"when he had wine in—ha! there he is. Draw the curtain, my love."

"My own, own dearest father, it is your nephew, your favorite Frank, that has returned to bring hope and comfort to us all," she said in a voice almost inarticulate with emotion.

"He will force himself, will he?" continued her father, unconscious or heedless of her words. "Let him come, then, and do you, love, stand from between us"—insanity lent an unnatural fire to his eye and strength to his voice. "He has apostatized from the faith of his fathers.—He has sent to a premature grave, the dearest, the fondest of mothers. Let him come, then, and receive a father's heart-wrung mal—ha! my beloved Julia, (the voice sank gradually) are you here, from among the blest, to plead for him? Then I will not curse him. But, Julia, O my love, ask me not, with that voice and that look, I never before refused to bless him! I cannot, can—not—bless him!"

Towards the conclusion of this heart-touching rhapsody, his voice had been gradually failing; but so powerfully was he wrought upon by the imaginary scene, that he uttered the last words with gasping energy, and, after their utterance, fell back completely exhausted; his agonized auditors remaining by him in silence, broken only by an occasional bursting sob from Ellen, till an unquiet slumber gave a partial respite to the sufferings of mind and body.

CHAPTER IV.

The only domestic in the cottage was Katty Kivlin, the old housekeeper, who had lived the better part of half a century in the family. Katty was one of those persons, so often met with, who possess a good heart with a bitter tongue. She seldom did anything without first expressing an intention to do the very reverse—was constantly grumbling, to herself or to others, about real or imaginary grievances, and was ever ready to give her advice in public or in private, as well respecting what did not concern her as what did, and, in general, as richly seasoned with proverbs as ever was the far-famed governor of Barrataria's own. But Sir Edmund and his daughter had now been long accustomed to her habits; and her peculiarities were over-looked or forgiven in consideration of her attachment and truthfulness.

Frank was a late riser on the morning after his arrival at the cottage. He was barely dressed when Katty entered his room, to inform him that from her mistress, Sir Edmund was now perfectly collected and anxious to see him.

"Oh, Masther Frank," continued the old woman, "a black change has come over the family ever since you saw them before. But 'as they brewed they must bake,' an' 'the bed they made they must lie on.' Of'en an' of'en I told the ould masther an' misthress (the heavens be her bed this day) that it was 'spare the rod an' spile the child,' when they'd be humorn' all the froics an' wickedness o' that divle's darlin', Masther Robert. But what would they care about what an ould woman ud say, though my words kem in throue ather all?"

"Well, Katty, you know the proverb, that 'when things come to the worst they'll mend,'" said Frank, smiling, "and the wind may soon change, you know."

"No, no, Masther Frank; the curse of Cromwell's come over us entirely. 'It never rains but it powers,' an' I'm afeard every day that goes over our heads, 'it'll be a day oulder an' a day worse.' At the rate things is goin' on the black Susscragh won't allow us the blessed light o' the day at last, no more nor the Mass or the funeral."

"Well, Katty, these are matters we cannot remedy," said Frank, anxious to change the theme, and escape from her grumbling; "but, how are our neighbors? I have not yet had time to inquire for them. How are the rector, Mr. Gordon, and his family? You will yourself allow them to be worth asking for, though Susscragh is enagis."

"They are, indeed, as different from the black breed they come from as chalk is from cheese. What ud the poor Catholics do at all, those black times, but for them? God give them the benefit of all their goodness, an' turn them to the throue religion at their dying day! But you know, Masther Frank, 'wan swallow makes no summer.'"

"Well, and how is our neighbor, Mr. Andrews, the founder? He, too, is not a bad Protestant, I hope."

"The ould churl is well enough in his way," said the old woman, bitterly; "but what business has an ould blacksmith, from the black North, with his bellowses an' hammers, to be hopin' (coping) up with ginlemmin, that spint more money in their kitchens nor all the ancestors that ever went afore or ever 'll come after him, was worth? Cock him up! and so, I told Sir Edmund, the day he gev him the green acres, and allowed the blue naiger to put up his forge. But, to be sure, I was only a dotting ould hag, an' had my pains for my thanks."

"And, how is—his pretty dauy, later—Bessy, is n't it?"

"An' do you call her purty, masther Frank,