

THE WILD ROSE OF LOUGH GILL.

A Tale of the Irish War in the Seventeenth Century.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

He could not get about answering those mental questions, or give up their solution in despair, his horse reared wildly, almost unseating him, and at the same time he saw a man holding his reins with one hand, while with the other he presented a pistol at his head.

"Dismount or I fire!" came the words in stern tones.

Quick as thought he plunged his spurs into his horse's flanks, causing the animal to bound forward, and that moment a report rang out and a bullet whistled close by his ear. Being in his horse and drawing a pistol from his holster, he covered his assailant, who flung down his empty weapon and stood with folded arms awaiting the deadly ball.

"Who and what are you?" demanded Edmund, his finger on the trigger.

"Fire away, bodogh," was the only answer he received.

The Irish epithet, a contemptuous one though it was, assured him that this strange individual was not one of Hamilton's scouts. He now repeated his question in Irish, and the result was that the stranger answered it readily, becoming at once communicative. It was a brilliant idea of Red Hugh O'Donnell's, forty and odd years before, to command his stalwart gogolach and mialbo chimeach to "slay all who spe k no Irish."

Time and an alien Government, acting conjointly, have reduced our mother tongue to such an extremity that, were such a mandate as that of the famous chief of Tyrconnell issued at the present day, sanguinary should be the result, dreadful the mortality in this Isle of Destiny. At the time treated in the present tale, however, the Irish might have acted on Red Hugh's plan with little risk of injuring any kindly Irish to the Irish; for the latter universally spoke their own language. So this individual, whose bullet was so nearly proving fatal alike to our hero and to our story, could deliver himself on learning that O'Tracy was neither Sassenach nor Albanach.

His name he said, was Murtogh Mac Sharry, a Brennyman born and reared, a true friend of the Irish cause, and an enemy of all bloodthirsty Sassenachs and Albanachs, whom he would never spare as long as his hand could raise a pike or shan fada; for the dogs had visited his district, massacred all whom they laid hands on, and above all, had slain his destined wife—the prettiest girl, he asserted, to be found from Lough Erne to the sea.

The poor fellow, who was a young man, only a few years senior to our hero, spoke with a fervid earnestness and vehemence which bore strong witness to the truth of his story. Surprised and rather pleased at meeting something like a kindred spirit to console with, Edmund leaped off his horse, tied the bridle to a broken fence, and entered into ready converse with the acquaintance thus cursorily made.

"You live in those parts, then?" he inquired.

"I was born on the shore of the lake yonder," was the answer, "where the black and roccess walls of our cottage are still standing—my curse on the bloody Albanach crew that laid it in ashes! I am the last of my family. Father and mother, sisters and brothers, are all dead—heaven rest them, and bless their bones, in old Drumliss!—and only Murtogh, poor wild Murtogh, is left. Would I were with them!"

"Cheer up, ma bouchal," said Edmund, trying to give the consolation of which he himself was in such need—"cheer up, and hope for the best."

"What have I to hope for? Corp an dion! what can I hope for? Could I not throw myself into the deepest part of the lough this minute, and end my madness and misery? They say that's the road to Tir-nan-Oge, and maybe some good fairy or leprechaun that I'd meet there would help me against my enemies. But no, no—not that. Father Donnell Lynch—the poor sogaorth, you know, that was killed by black-headed Hamilton's devils the other day—said often that anybody who had a hand in his own death was a murderer, and should go to hell; and may heaven keep me from the bad place! No, I will live, and I will send the murderers of the innocent and helpless, of the old and infirm, of the weak women and children, to the black pit that was made for them!"

The speaker had worked himself up to a high pitch of excitement, and his eyes were ablaze with wrath. As he went on with his wild speech Edmund drew back from him in some apprehension.

"Isn't the lough beautiful under the blessed moonlight, a-bouchal?" and Mac Sharry laid his hand on the other's arm. "Mianam an Dha, isn't it a gile na gile of a lough? Many a happy day I called over it, many a fine brackshaw and brack (salmon and trout) I caught in its bright waters, and many a lough I lay on the big ivy-covered rock—O'Lady's Bog, you know, a-bouchal—on an Inismoney yonder. And who was I thinking on all the time? Who but my own sunny-faced colleen dhas machree, who is now cold and dead—dead—dead!" And he wrung his hands in despair.

Edmund saw with pity that the young man before him was insane, and rather dangerously so. Thinking to allay his excitement by some means, he again addressed him soothingly: "Have patience—we all have our troubles to bear. You say your poor colleen has been killed by the bloody Albanach. Alas! I fear terribly that my own betrothed wife has met the same sad fate—rather that, I pray, than another worse one still should befall her. Surely, my friend, you must have heard of the red-lipped, brown-haired Kathleen Ny-Quinnin, the Wild Rose of Lough Gill."

"You lie!" thundered MacSharry, in a fearful voice. "O'Tracy started back with a shudder as he noticed in the moonlight the horrible appearance which his companion's features had suddenly assumed. They were livid with rage, the eyes were afe, and the white teeth were bared. The man's body was trembling with the violent passion under which he labored.

Then commenced a terrible struggle for the mastery. The wrestlers for life or death were well pitted, save that our hero was the more agile, and his opponent the stronger of the swim. They swayed backwards and forwards, and from the front covered ground beside the pool, lake, or pond slipped and fell on the level ground, but he was up again in a trice. The knife was the principal bone of contention; now O'Tracy wrested it free from the grip of the other, but Mac Sharry seized it immediately, cutting his hand severely in so doing, and endeavoring to use it, but in vain; then he made a fierce attempt to elch his sharp teeth in O'Tracy's shoulder, but in vain also; and then, exerting all his powerful muscles, he bent the slight frame of his adversary backwards—backwards—backwards—until the latter, weak and gasping from the strong pressure, felt his legs bending beneath him and his strength fast ebbing. At this moment, with the desperation of despair he recovered him self, and by a dexterous movement of hand and foot, tripped up MacSharry; but his own scabbard becoming entangled between his legs at the same time, both wrestlers came heavily to the ground together, where they rolled over and over, looked in the same fearful grapple.

At length MacSharry got uppermost, and seizing the other's throat with an iron hand, he pressed him downwards on the earth, laying his strong knee on his chest. The cold glitter of the deadly shan fada danced in Edmund's eyes, the madman's breath was hot on his face, and the hellish glare of his eyes seemed to scorch into his brain. Closing his eyes to shut out the frightful vision, he murmured a prayer and awaited the fatal stroke.

But that stroke never came. The man's grasp relaxed, and the weight of his body was removed from O'Tracy. Looking up, the latter perceived his dreadful antagonist standing over him, holding the long knife in his hand, but making no attempt to use it. The man was still in a state of wild excitement, and, on perceiving his fallen adversary's eyes turned to him, he spoke in a loud, shrieking tone: "No, no, not you, a-bouchal—not you! Poor Kathleen is dead, and you can never see her or woo her any more—never, never, never! So you can do me no harm. But you must live to avenge her—to help me to slay her murderers, the bloody Albanach. Live then; live, a-bouchal, and have revenge for poor dead Kathleen! Ay, dar ma corp agus anam, revenge for Kathleen! red, bitter vengeance for Kathleen!"

And brandishing his shan fada, the maniac dashed away into the dark recesses of the wood. With a sore and aching body, but with a thankful heart, Edmund arose. The sudden revulsion of feeling at being restored as it were from death to life caused him to lean for some moments against a tree, uttering a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. Proceeding to the place where he had tied his horse, he unfastened the reins and mounted. Then with a parting look at the black walls of the late home of his betrothed, he rode back the way he had come, musing deeply on the strange events of the night.

CHAPTER X. THE WAR-CLOUD OVER BREFFNY.

"Now, we'll teach the shameless Scot to purge his thievish mail; Now, now the court may fall to pray, for justice is the Law; Now shall the Undertaker square, for once, his loose accounts— Will strike, brave boys, a fair result, from all his false amounts."

DUFFY.

On a gentle eminence in the Breffny valley watered by the fresh and foaming mountain streamlet, the Owenmore, an affluent of the Bonet—stood the castle of Manor-Hamilton; and this castle was one of the strongest—probably the strongest—of the fortified buildings of Connaught. A large stone edifice, 105 feet in length, 93 in breadth, and about 40 in height, surrounded by a strong wall with bastions at its four corners, it had been built at immense cost by its lord, Sir Frederick Hamilton, the Scotch Undertaker who had got possession of the surrounding tract of country. In the neighborhood of the castle stood, on the banks of the Owenmore, the town of Scotch or Albanach settlers, which had sprung up at the time of the "Plantation," a snug collection of Undertakers' dwellings, with their appurtenant mills and farmyards and haggards. Also in the vicinity of the castle lay a vast deer park, enclosed by a high wall—in which park a portion of the Irish army under Barfield lay encamped at one period during the Williamite wars. The wide, irregular valley in which the settlement lay was enclosed by a girdle of mountains of bold and picturesque outline, chief among which was Benbo, rearing its rocky crest to the northwest over Lurganboy.

The settlers of Manor-Hamilton, shrewd, close-fisted Scotch Presbyterians of the lower order, imbued with all the narrow prejudice and religious intolerance of their class, looked upon the surrounding race of "Irish Papists" with hatred, equalled only by the contempt of the natives, Breffnyans for the "boghgh Albanach;" so that little love, indeed, was wasted between the two races.

A bitter scourge of the natives was the lord of the castle, a man who undisturbed all other "pillars of the state" in Ulster or Connaught in the extent of his tyranny and persecution. A combination of moss-trooper and fanatic, his was a nature formed in a school of blood and iron. The younger son of Oland Lord Hamilton of Paisley, he wielded the sword of a soldier of fortune in the Swedish wars under Gustavus Adolphus. Becoming afterwards a parasite of the Scotchophilant King James, he came to Ireland, obtained a grant of land in Leitrim, married Sidney, daughter of Sir John Vaughan, Governor of Londonderry, and had his vast acquisitions in land, amounting to about 5,000 acres of arable and pasture and 10,000 of wood and bog, formed into a "manor" to which he gave his name. Sir Frederick Hamilton was absent in Londonderry at the outbreak of the insurrection, but shortly after the "28rd," had managed to throw himself into his stronghold, since when, as often as opportunity offered, he plundered and burned the surrounding country at the head of a strong force of the Undertakers of the settlement.

Galled by these repeated acts of hostility and the merciless and vindictive spirit in which they were carried out, the Irish leaders determined, if possible, to put a stop to them. On the morning after our hero's strange adventure on the shores of Lough Gill, the Irish forces in Leitrim, both horse and foot, about a thousand strong, marched towards Manor-Hamilton. The little army was a badly armed one at best. Some of the cavalry carried matchlocks and wore bandolier belts—arms acquired in the capture of Sligo—but many had only swords or pikes, and very few

helmets and coats were viable. The footmen were armed with the long pike—the weapon of all weapons—and took the spear-charge of the Irish insurgent. No other weapons had they save their shanks, and save also the large round stones ready to their hands; for they could handle those missiles with the skill and precision with which the ancient Irish warrior discharged his brain-ball and his "lagh-lamba-lach" or champion's hand-stone, and could test the strength of a trooper's helmet at many yards' distance. Drill and discipline had as yet done little for these hasty levies, but they marched onwards gaily though determinedly, in a rude kind of order.

Arrived nearly within musket shot of Hamilton's Castle, they halted at a command from Colonel Mac Donogh, who held the chief command. The Undertakers' town seemed to be totally deserted, but there was a dark group visible on the castle battlements. The Irish sent up a hearty cheer, but it remained unanswered save by its own echo.

"Ho, men," said Colonel Mac Donogh, after he and the other Irish leaders had consulted for a short time, "that of you will volunteer to bear a flag of truce to yonder castle?" Instantly Edmund O'Tracy, actuated by an impulse he could not account for, spurred forward from amidst the cavalry and saluted with his sword.

"Well done, young man," said the Colonel; "you're just the right person for our purposes."

"Soberly, Colonel," remarked Owen O'Rourke; "remember, the boy's bitterest enemy is within yonder walls." "It matters not," said our hero; "he is scarce villain enough to fire on a flag of truce." But Owen shook his head ominously.

"Prisoners to the front!" said the colonel, aloud, adding, "Now, Sir Robert, if you please, here's your messenger."

The latter words were addressed to a grave and anxious-looking man in puritanical garb, the foremost of a group of prisoners who had been brought from Droghabra for the purpose of exchange. These were a party of Undertakers and their families, about twenty in all, who had been conducted from the castle of Belleek on the Moy, in Mayo, along the coast to Sligo, to be transferred thence in safety to the nearest English garrison. But on their arrival at Sligo it was determined that the proper course would be to exchange them for Irish prisoners in the hands of Hamilton, who had begun to hang his unfortunate captives.

Sir Robert Haunah, the most important of the party—his name MacDonogh addressed—was a Scotch baronet who held the titles and offices of Esquire of the Body to Charles I., and clerk of the Nicholls in the Exchequer. He was accompanied by his two daughters, one of whom afterwards became Lady Mount-rath by her marriage with the younger Sir Charles Coote.

The baronet handed a note to O'Tracy. It was an epistle to Hamilton, requesting him to consent to an exchange, and winding up with the following sentence:—"Sir, you are nobly disposed, so that in honor we hope the means of relief; being now in yourself, you will not suffer us to perish, who will ever remain, sir, yours, truly obliged to you."

With this quietly couched epistle in one hand and a white kerchief on a sword in the other, Edmund rode boldly forward on the road leading to the castle entrance. On arriving at the very gate, he looked up at the battlements, and saw a row of hard faces frowning down on him with rather dangerous looks, while the barrels of several matchlocks were gleaming over the parapet. And he saw, not without a start, though he had expected it, the vindictive face of Harrison among the rest. It was not a very reassuring prospect, truly; for he saw the black muzzies of many of the firearms bearing full upon him. There was, however, a grim silence maintained, until a harsh, deep-throated voice inquired:—"What seek you, fellow?"

"I am the bearer of a letter from Sir Robert Haunah to Sir Frederick Hamilton. Here it is"—and Edmund held aloft the missive. "Let me have it, sirrah, though I think it know its import already?" The speaker was Hamilton himself. A cord being lowered from the battlements, Edmund attached the letter to it and it was drawn up. The stern Puritan tore open the note and read it.

"Ha! I guessed so much," he said, tartly. "Wait, rebel, and you shall have an answer to the point." Hamilton disappeared, and our hero's arch-enemy took occasion to heap taunts and curses innumerable and exasperating on him as he waited below.

"Ho, ho, my friend, so you are back again with your friend's luck. But you see, you imp of Bellal, I am here to stay. You thought, perhaps, you left me stark and dead when I met you last, but curse you, Gilbert Harrison is here to take a bloody vengeance on you, your Irish hoodlum! And you have felt my vengeance already. Where is your pretty lady-bird of Lough Gill? Saw you her dainty nest since your return, oh?" Though boiling with emotion, Edmund only replied to Harrison's taunts with a glance of contempt. Hamilton again appeared.

"There, Irish rogue," he said, throwing down a letter, "bear back that answer to Sir Sir Robert. I trust he shall find it to the purpose." "And that to your fellow-rebels yonder," cried Harrison.

A flash and report, and the long cavalier feather fluttered from the messenger's hat to the ground. "What think ye of that for an aim?" shouted Harrison, with a horse-laugh. "Would to heaven that my hand had been as steady when I saw your accursed face in Dublin!" Edmund rode towards the Irish force, and banded the answering note to the old baronet. The latter tore it open with nervous fingers, and on perusing it uttered an exclamation of despair. Hamilton's answer was a direct refusal of an exchange. The disloyal falsehood of the Irish traitors throughout the kingdom—so ran the reply—had made him vow and swear never to give nor take quarter with them; and he besought Haunah and his companions to continue constant until it should please God to give them deliverance either by life or death.

"In the meantime," he concluded, "I am persuaded that they will use you with no worse measure than their prisoners, who were apprehended by me in the action of rebellion, were used." This was a cruel stroke of sarcasm, for Hamilton's usual course was to hang his prisoners with short shrift. "Be it so," said Colonel Mac Donogh;—"and now to action. As our friend yonder vociferates us such a very cold reception, we must on kindle a fire to warm ourselves. We can do no less than pay him back the debt we owe him in his own coin. Ho, there, let a corps of our pikemen advance and fire those goblin buildings yonder as a beginning. Glad of the opportunity to thwart their merciless enemy, a party of the Irish foot

rushed forward into the deserted town and commenced the work of destruction. A brisk musketry fire was opened on them immediately from the castle walls, but the distance rendered the shots ineffectual, and, after a short time, the party returned laden with spoil to their companions. Very soon from each house arose a dark wreath of smoke, which grew momentarily darker and denser, filling the air overhead. The small of burning timber rested on the air, and soon appeared lurid tongues of fire greedily lapping the wood work of the doomed habitations. Fire gleamed brightly through doors and windows, the thatched or shingled roofs of houses and the beams and rafters of lofty halls fell with a succession of loud crashes, and high columns of fire leaped up, dancing and flaring, in their places. The entire Undertakers' town became a fiery mass of flame, from which black volumes of smoke rolled up to the sky, and from which came the noise of the roaring of fire and the crackling of burning wood; with which sounds were mingled weirdly the exulting cheers of the galling Irish. The fire-demon triumphed and rejoiced in his glowing abode. The blazing town looked like a miniature hell, and the river Bonet, gilding past so coolly and serenely, like the stream mocking the thirst of the tortured Dives.

"An interesting spectacle, surely," remarked MacDonogh coolly; "I wonder how does Sir Frederick like it. Perhaps he will let us have a petite guerre while our blood is warm, if only on the head of it." "See, see!" said Owen O'Rourke, pointing to the castle, "as I live, my brother Con! What can this mean, I wonder?" "And there is Connor MacLoughlin, too," cried another of the party.

All eyes were turned to the summit of Hamilton's stronghold, where a sudden movement was visible among the garrison. Mounted on a platform, full in view of the Irish, were the forms of Hamilton's two principal captives. They were silent of their hats and coats, and had their hands bound behind their backs. As the insurgents continued to gaze, they saw two beams, with ropes attached, thrust out from the castle wall, and then each and all knew the tragedy which the truculent Puritan had in contemplation, and cries of horror, mingled with deep vows of vengeance rang loud on the wintry air.

Edmund's heart grew sick and chill as he perceived the awful situation of his almost life-long friend and companion. The thought of the love message sent by the fair-haired maiden of Cloughboughter to Con O'Rourke, of the gold cross with its fine ribbon—which message and cross he had now no hope of delivering—increased his sorrow and emotion. He was almost afraid to glance at his Yoster-father, and when he did so he saw the Breffnyan chieftain bending forward on the neck of his horse, his face buried in his hands as if to shut out the piteous spectacle of a brother's death.

"By heaven!" exclaimed Mac Donogh, "this Hamilton is a greater villain than I thought; but, ere things go further, we will give the fellow a hint." Riding forward a little in advance of the rest, he shook his clenched fist towards the castle, and then pointed significantly to the Puritan prisoners still in the centre of the Irish cavalry. The answer was a yell of derision from the garrison, and the colonel rode back with flashing eyes and compressed lips, his face pale as death.

At this instant there was a wild groan of sorrow and compassion from the insurgents, many a man sank on their knees in fervent prayer for the dying, as the bodies of the ill-fated Con O'Rourke and his companion were hurled out from the castle battlements and hung dangling at the ends of the fatal beams.

Dead silence reigned for a few moments, broken by the sobs of many and the revengeful shouts of others of the Breffnyans. At that moment most of them, at a word from their leaders, would have rushed madly and blindly against the stronghold of their enemies, and thrown away their lives in a vain attempt to burst open the strongly-barred portal or scale the smooth stone walls.

"Attention, men," at length shouted Mac Donogh to the cavalry; "separate the male prisoners from their wives and children; let the Mac Gwarran's division conduct the latter back in safety to Droghabra." The command was obeyed, but the leaders gathered around Mac Donogh with looks of inquiry.

"No," continued the colonel, sternly, "we will teach that wolf yonder a lesson he may not readily forget. We have paid him back one debt already"—and he pointed to the smouldering ruins of the town—"but a graver and heavier one has been contracted, and this one we will pay ere we leave this spot."

"How so?" inquired one of the party anxiously. "What have you never heard, then, of the stern law of retaliation? That find yonder seems to believe that we are unwilling to resort to it, but he shall soon know his mistake. Two of our friends, prisoners in his hands, have just been put to death, contrary to the laws of honorable warfare; but they are not the first—fourteen other victims have already met a like fate at the orders of Hamilton. To put a stop to this infamous system of murder only one course is open to us. You will understand me when I say that three of these male prisoners of ours shall be executed on the spot, in view of yonder garrison."

Murmurs of abhorrence arose at the proposal. "No, no, not that, above all," said Owen O'Rourke, in a broken and hollow voice, which betrayed his deep grief and heartbreak at the unfortunate circumstance which had just taken place; "no, no, for heaven's sake, MacDonogh! I beg you to desist from this project; let us leave such cold-blooded slaughter to our enemies."

"Pshaw!" was the stern reply; "our children-heartedness has served badly for our murdered friends. Had we at first done what I now propose, our cause should have been more respected. Henceforth, as long as we return mercy for mercy and slaughter for slaughter, our enemies will be in no hurry to exchange an exchange, and shall not dare to murder their captives in cold blood."

"By heavens, the colonel is right!" cried several voices—voices of those whose friends had been sacrificed by Hamilton. "But, colonel, the shame and the—?" "Do I command here, or do I not?" exclaimed Mac Donogh, in peremptory tones. "Come, let us get through with the business as speedily as possible."

The determined speaker carried his point without further opposition. The unfortunate captive Undertakers heard their fate, some with terror-stricken faces, some with manly fortitude and resignation. A number of pieces of paper, three of which were marked with the word "Death," were placed in a hat, and only once the prisoners approached and drew from the fatal lottery. The names of the fatal slips were by name William Lister, Thomas Fullerton, and Patrick Drummond, the latter being a serving man. The doomed men were led away.

The rays of the setting sun fell that memor-

able evening on the two bodies, grayed to and fro from the gibelets on the battlements of Manor-Hamilton; but three other ghastly corpses hung suspended from the branches of trees in the surrounding valley below. To order not to increase the sorrow of his foster-father, Edmund O'Tracy allowed a month to pass ere he disclosed to him the message of affection with which he had been entrusted by Lassarina Orlise that night in the old lake fortress of Cavan. As the lord of Droghabra took the little gold cross into his hands, a tear fell from his eyes on the mournful token, and a deep sigh escaped him.

"Mo nuar! mo nuar!" he exclaimed; in a sad undertone, "that I should live to see and hear all this! Poor colleen! poor colleen! she was true to him to the last—and, sure, Con loved the very ground she walked on. Avio machree, never shall I part with this little relic of their devotion, never shall I leave my keeping. Both their troubles are over, I pray, for ever. My murdered brother has been laid in his unknown grave by the rude hands of his slayers, and poor Lassarina is dead!"

CHAPTER XI. THE NIGHT RAID ON SLIGO.

"The wailing of women, the wild wail, Dread tidings from cabin to cabin convey; But loud through the plains and the shires, which ensue, The war-cry is louder of men in array."

Dr. MADONN.

Several months had elapsed since the occurrence of the events described in the preceding chapter. The springtime had come and gone, and now the bloom and beauty of summer reigned over the land. Lough Gill was as bright and as lovely as ever, and the old woods of Breffny were bending beneath the weight of their luxuriant emerald foliage. Midnight, on the 1st of July, 1642. A tranquil summer night, without one straggling cloud to veil the brightness of the stars or the soft, tender radiance of the crescent moon, or to mar the solemn serenity of the blue dome of heaven—the beautiful dome of Nature's vast cathedral, illuminated by myriads of brilliant lamps, lit by the glorious hand of the Almighty—and now, as it were, bending lovingly and watchfully over one of the loveliest districts of Northern Connaught, namely, that on the borders of Leitrim and Sligo. Silence, dead, heavy silence, lay over this wild and romantic region of rugged mountain crags, and spreading meadows, and hoary forests, and singing rivers—silence broken only by the long, solitary howl of the prowling wolf, the dismal shriek of the night-bird, and the mysterious music of the countless streams that rushed onward babbling and dashing to the sea. For, from the impetuous Erne to the Godunach, or Cownab, of winding current, embracing the sea by Columbkille's hoary monastery and stately round tower—now no more—of Drumcliff, and thence to the beautiful stream of salmon—to use the expressive language of the old sea-sailing topographer—viz, the Arrow river, at Ballysadare, the fair country was almost a howling wilderness. The deserted dwellings of the Dartry, along the southern shore of Lough Melvin, of the famed green land of Bin Bulbin, of historic Oarbury of the Battles, and of Oairy of the Swords, whose "droppy, sandy, fine land, an angelic pure place of meetings," met the poetic praise of Giolla Iosa More Mac Firlis in the fifteenth century, stood open to the wolf; the grass had begun to spring on their old and forsaken hearths. The brughaddhs who were not bearing arms in the forces of their countrymen had bid adieu to their poor huts and sheelings, and had removed with their wives and families to the more tranquil district. Even the farms of Creevelea had abandoned their ancient residence and sought shelter in Sligo. And so desolation and solitude reigned almost supreme.

For why? The district was the chief theatre of war between the Irish and Puritan forces in North Connaught. Strengthened by new reinforcements and a large supply of ammunition, Manor-Hamilton still held out against the insurgents, whom the great want of artillery left but little hope of its reduction. Furious with rage at the burning of his town and mills, the vindictive Sir Frederick had since that event made several desperate night raids, extending for many miles in various directions into the country surrounding his stronghold. On these occasions he had glutted to a fearful degree his inhuman thirst for blood. Among his fiendish exploits was the surprising of the dwelling-house of the chieftain Mac Connsava (a name anglicized to Ford), within ten miles of Manor-Hamilton, when the house was fired by his orders, and about sixty hapless human beings burnt therein to death. Mac Connsava himself and his two daughters being brought to Manor-Hamilton, were there hanged, not even women obtaining mercy at the hands of the pitiless Scotch Puritan. On another night forty or fifty men, he and his crew surrounded at night the house of Donagh Maguire. Donagh was absent, but his wife and about forty other people perished in the flames, or escaped from their fiery prison only to fall by the steel of the Undertakers. No wonder, then, that the country for miles around Manor-Hamilton was a stark and silent desert.

The great haven of refuge for the fugitives from the wasted district was the town of Sligo, which now nestled peacefully and silently on the shore of its romantic bay, on whose strand the plashing wavelets were now rattling and jingling the innumerable shells which had given the place its name—Sligeach, the "river of shells." And yet, though nearly all its quiet old houses were crowded with an excess of guests and lodgers—mainly the late inhabitants of the neighboring scene of hostilities—Sligo was a place of little or no security in case of an armed assault. The town itself was open, straggling, and indefensible. The ancient castle, which had been assaulted and carried over and over again by O'Conors and O'Donnells and MacWilliam Burkes in the fighting times of old, was still standing, but in rather a dilapidated condition. Strong and stout enough it seemed to all appearance, like a sturdy old giant reposing after his many battles, with all his scars, and wounds, and wrinkles about him; but its massive buttresses were cracked and crumbling, and its gray walls broken in many places, the large fissures looking like gaping wounds which the constant ivy endeavored in vain to bind.

The massive gates, which the fiery Ullok Burke, after burying his skin in the body of the Elizabethan commander, George Bingham (his dispute about the plunder which the pirates of the latter had brought hither from the monasteries of Tory Island and Rathmullan), had thrown open to the eager rush of Red Hugh's clansmen, were falling from their rusty hinges; the battlements from which the Tyrconnollans in the same year (1685) had rained down the rocks and beams that destroyed the English tents and beams that prevented the ebbing of the walls, and rendering obnoxious the efforts of Bingham's elder brother, the infamous Sir Richard, of ex-crated memory, to recover the place for

Elizabeth—were in a decayed and ruinous condition. The earthen raft which in later days the gallant Sir Fregus O'Regan and his Spartan band held long and well against the Williamites, was as yet unburnt. In a word, Sligo was practically untenable, and liable to storm and sack at any moment.

In this old historic town of North Connaught, in an upper chamber of a two-storyed house, immediately on the north side of the old-fashioned bridge that spanned the Garrawog river, sat at that midnight hour two females, the one a young girl the other an old, wrinkled dame, whose gray hair peeped from beneath her spiral beehive of linen.

"Ooh, ooh, agra machree," the latter was saying, in a cracked and feeble voice, "but 'tis you that has the lone and sorrowful story to tell;—but have patience, agra, have patience, for the saints in heaven know 'tis a common tale enough these times, had as it is." The tale the maiden had just finished was, indeed, not an unusual one at the time, so far as the main points went. Compelled at the outbreak of the insurrection to abandon her peaceful home, she had fled with her only brother westward into Mayo. There, in one of the picturesque valleys of Glen Nephin, she had obtained a secure and comfortable home in the family of an honest Milesian farmer, and her brother had returned to fight the battles of his country. After a lapse of nine months he had come and brought her back to her native place; and now, alas! she found that their once happy dwelling was but four bare and blackened walls, and that the dreadful war was raging as fiercely as ever. That very day her brother had marched out of Sligo with his regiment to encounter the enemy, leaving her in this home which he had procured her, in the care only of the old dame to whom she now disclosed her tale of vicissitude.

However, the stern and adverse fortune of war could not be said to have dealt harshly with the exquisite beauty of the Wild Rose. The vigorous mountain breeze of Glen Nephin had kept the roses of her cheeks fresh and blooming and the berries of her lips ripe and red. Her dark eyes shone right brilliantly beneath the shade of the long, lank eyelashes; her magnificent hair, which now, unfettered by ribbon or comb, streamed over her back and shoulders—was as dark, luxuriant, and glossy as ever. But there was a lingering expression of weary anxiety, and mental pain now visible on her countenance.

"But, colleen machree, sure sitting up at this time o' night will do nobody any good," continued the old woman;—"and, more b'oken, 'tis little good fretting will do any of us. 'To bed, alanna, to bed." "I cannot sleep, Noreen. I cannot sleep. Go you to bed, I beg of you, for you are in sore need of sleep. As for me, there has been a dark, dark cloud over me this whole day, ever since poor Niall went away. I feel so lonely—oh, so sad and lonely!"

And a long-drawn sigh escaped from Kathleen's lips. "Lonely!" echoed the dame;—"at all, snilish machree, that's only natural; but bear up against it, like the brave little girl you are. Na bia bron ort, as the old song says. My soul to heaven, but your brother Niall looked every inch of a brave young sudeeha as he marched out the Droghabra road this morning, with his musket on his shoulder, in the ranks of our own county Sligo boys, with Teag O'Conn. I hold MacDonogh by his side—my hearty blessing, and me seacht mile beannach (my seven thousand blessings) go with them! Don't fret, agra; Niall will be back to you soon, when the cruel Albanachs are driven away."

"But I've had such an awful dream—" commenced Kathleen. "Worra, worra, listen to this," exclaimed the worthy counselor—"was there ever such rumshag? Sure, agra, you ought to leave dreams and all such pith-progs to foolish old callaghs like me—ha, ha! Sure, I had such a terrible dream last night—such a dream as would frighten all the old women in Sligo—full of coffins and skulls and corpses, the Lord save us! And I don't care a traneen for it, after all—ha, ha, ha!"

A merry cackle broke from the hearty dame, who strove hard to dispel the gloom that seemed to hang over her young charge. But the latter remained pensive and despondent. "Och, avourneen deishah, have courage," resumed the dame, impatiently; "and then, with a happy thought, added: "Sure it's proud and happy you should be to have a fine, able brother to strike a blow for the old country."

The effect was great and instantaneous. "And it's proud and happy I am, Noreen O'Hart." The young girl arose and drew herself up proudly to her full height. How like a queen she looked, so erect and stately, with all her old Irish clan pride, hot and obnoxious, beaming in her face! Delighted at the adroit stratagem by which she had thus suddenly raised the impulsive spirits of the daughter of the Olan Oultrinn, the old woman slipped her withered hands in sudden glee.

"That's my own brave colleen!" "Hear me, Noreen," exclaimed the young girl, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing with enthusiasm;—"not one drop of my brother's blood or of my own would I begrudge in the cause of creed and country. But, oh, may God grant Niall—and Edmund—Kathleen kneel to say her night orisons before a small crucifix that hung on the wall of the room. But ere she had finished the first pater-und-ave, a cry of alarm from her aged companion caused her to spring to her feet in fright.

"Oh, saints above, look there!" The old woman pointed to the small window of the room, which was wide open. Kathleen uttered a slight shriek as she gazed at the narrow casement. At the open window appeared a face—a gaunt, pinched and wan face—the face of a man! The eyes, sunk and surrounded each by a livid crimson circle, glared from their depths like lurid coils of fire, and were fixed upon her with a terrific wolfish intensity. The lower part of the face was covered with a dark, shaggy beard, through which a white row of teeth glistened like those of a wild beast.

"Wittrathru! wittrathru!—my dream! my dream!" cried old Noreen, shrinking back from the ghastly spectacle. "Blessed angels, protect us!" exclaimed Kathleen, in horror. "Man, man, what seek you? What brings you here? Go, go away, for heaven's sake!"

Two large hairy hands grasped the window-sill, and, with the utmost lightness and agility, the owner of the dreaded countenance clambered into the chamber, and stood on the floor before the two trembling females. The body and limbs and attire of the strange being were in keeping with his visage. Clothing he had none, save a ragged, nondescript garment, bound round his waist with a rope girdle, in which glittered a bright shan fada, or long-knife, and in one hand he bore a huge knotted club. There was no covering on his head save his great matted curls of black hair, which fell far down on his back; as his

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