

reverberated in dismal echoes by the dismantled halls of the nunnery, and the dark arches of the surrounding wood.

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT WANDERER.

Our traveller, a burgess of Nottingham, John Osmond by name, involuntarily drew his breath with a gasp at the horrid cry. A superstitious person might have referred that sound, so unearthly and appalling, to a supernatural cause, and supposed that it proceeded from the wailing spirit of one of the poor nuns, so many of whom had, throughout the country, died of want when turned, by the atrocious monarch, from their holy and happy homes.

Such was not the case with John Osmond, as practical a man and a steady a tradesman as any member of the corporation, before or after his own time.

From human lips that woeful cry proceeded—that he knew. That it might be a note warning of danger to himself, as well as of anguish to the unhappy person who uttered it, he also knew.

The destruction of the convents and monasteries had done much to damage social order.

Not only were the members of the various religious communities involved in the most dire distress, but innumerable persons among the trading, as well as the agricultural classes, whose industry had been employed by the religious establishments, were deprived of their means of living and made destitute.

The result of this was not only an alarming increase in the ranks of the poor, but in the numbers of idle, dissolute men, who banded together for the purpose of robbery.

It flashed like lightning, then, on the mind of Osmond, that some strayed traveller like himself had been set upon, and was perhaps being murdered in the ruins.

No man travelled unarmed in those days.

Osmond drew the short, strong sword he wore—a serviceable weapon all unlike the slender gentlemanly rapier—and dashed through the yawning aperture of the dismantled doorway.

The door opened to a spacious hall, on one side of which a lofty open archway gave ingress to the convent chapel, on the other to a cloister or perambulatory.

Osmond ascertained this by the light of a hand lamp, which stood in a niche, from which probably the statue of the founder or patron of the convent had been torn.

Some living person, then, was about the ruins, who must have placed the lamp there.

Osmond caught it up, his first thought of robbers dispelled—more probable it was that some sorrowful votress lingered about the desolate building, where she once had hoped to end an innocent life.

Osmond entered the chapel; all there was in the confusion of ruin.

The altar overthrown, the snow drifting through the gap in the roof, the wind howling through the tall casements denuded of glass, with a fury that well nigh quenched the feeble flicker of the lamp.

There was naught in the ruined chapel save the blind bat, which, dazzled even by the faint ray of the lamp, quitted its roost and flapped its leathern wings in Osmond's face.

He paused, and looked anxiously around him. Surely he had not been the sport of fancy. It was a human shriek he had heard.

Hark! it comes again, echoing more dismally now he stands within the ruined sanctuary. The sound comes, however, from an opposite direction. He turns back, he goes towards the cloister, and there he sees a tall, slender figure flit along, and out into the driving snow.

It is the figure of a woman, draped in a sable robe—not the habit of a nun, for that it would be treason to wear.

Osmond is a man in the prime of life, strong and swift of foot, and he pursues the fugitive.

As she passed from under the open arch of the cloister, into what had once been the convent garden, she turned her head.

Then, by the pale ray of the lamp, which he held, Osmond beheld a fair sweet face, very pale and wasted, and lighted up by a pair of wild dark eyes.

The face of a young creature who could scarce have passed her twenty-second year; but, in strange contrast to her youth and beauty, the hair that surrounded it and swept down the shoulders, was white as the descending snow.

In vain Osmond called upon this female to stop, assured her that he himself was a harmless and benighted traveller, with renewed shrieks she fled before him and disappeared.

The dismal cries, however, ceased suddenly as it seemed at no great distance.

Shading the lamp with his hand from the wind, which threatened to extinguish it, Osmond was slowly making his way through the snow in the direction in which, by her footprints, he could tell that the woman had fled.

He had not, however, taken twenty steps, when a redder and stronger light than that which he carried, flashed athwart the gloom.

Then he heard an exclamation about his horse, which he had left tethered to the shaft of a broken column in the porch.

The next moment two men carrying torches appeared.

One of them was apparently advanced in life, the other, a well-built, good-humoured-looking young fellow, about five and twenty was probably, from the resemblance between them, the son of the elder man.

Both were attired after the fashion of the better sort of peasants, or small farmers, of those days.

They advanced rapidly when they saw Osmond with the lamp in his hand.

Their anxious brows smoothed when they accosted him, for his staid and respectable appearance reassured them; for, even as he had done, they feared that some bandit had chosen the ruined convent as the scene of his exploits.

"ENGLAND A CIPHER!"

THE enemies of Great Britain have been for some years declaring in no secret fashion that England is no longer a first-rate power. A distinguished Irish priest and orator has been recently perambulating America with the intelligence—pleasing enough, doubtless, to the Yankee ears—that the sceptre has departed from England, that she is despised in Europe, that her empire is on the point of crumbling into fragments, and that the annexation of Ireland by America would be a step against which England would not dare to raise a finger. Let us consider the truth of the assertion, and when he who brings it quotes statistics in favor of his anticipations, and, indeed, is only expressing in strong language what many among ourselves have been hinting and whispering for years, the time will not be wasted which we may spend upon a cursory and candid review of the position in which the empire stands with respect to the other great powers of the world. Moreover, we must remember that, in spite of the enlightenment and civilisation of modern times, the day has not yet gone by in which annexation as the right of the conqueror has been recognised and acted upon without chastisement, hindrance, or intercession from other powers. Germany has annexed Schleswich-Holstein at the expense of Denmark, and Alsace and Lorraine at the expense of France. The idle tale that these were once German provinces was but vamped up to deceive the world. Whatever may have been the case with Schleswich-Holstein, Alsace and Lorraine, at all events, were French to the core and marrow, yet they were annexed to Germany. An ominous fact! An unnatural appetite, which we believed to have become as extinct as the craving after human flesh, has sprung into light and activity again, and "earth hunger" is once more to be reckoned upon as one of the bad passions of the Aryan nations. How, then, stands England in her offensive and defensive capacities, now that civilised warfare is gradually assuming the character of a struggle for existence, when Holland and Switzerland tremble as the partridge trembles in the stubble when she knows that the hawk is hovering above her, and when the Berlin journals hint openly at the annexation of Denmark? It is a fact patent to all, that England is simply nowhere in Continental warfare. The ostentatious protectorate which we have assumed over Belgium is the act of a madman who stands in the front of a rushing train. Germany can pour into the field 1,400,000 trained soldiers, and has the same number of men whom, without arms in their hands, she can employ for purposes of a semi-military character at a moment's notice. France has a military establishment whose strength and effectiveness are scarcely 100,000 men behind that of her mighty rival. Russia can march a million of men to the frontier; Austria has eight hundred thousand, Italy six hundred thousand. England has available for active service between three and four hundred thousand men. In that tremendous conflict of armed nations, which cannot many years be delayed, and of which Woerth and Sedan are but a Quatro Bras to Waterloo, what has this puny combatant to do with the jostling of giants? Yet we guarantee, forsooth! the independence of Belgium—and have cast over that fluttering and timid form the shield of the empire upon which the sun never sets. The simple but unpalpable fact remains that on the Continent the British empire is a cipher, and means nothing. It is curious but true that the empire upon which the sun never sets has no power of aggression as a whole. Our colonies must stand or fall by themselves as far as England is concerned, and England must stand or fall by herself as far as her colonies are concerned. Such is the result which fate and time and events have brought about. There is kindness, indeed, and mutual goodwill, but substantial union and solidity there is none. For aggressive purposes we are powerless in America and Europe. What about about Asia? Doubtless our Indian resources in men are great, but it would be impossible for our Indian Government, without great sacrifices, to establish a military force capable of competing with the vast hordes of Russia. However, there is in that quarter no danger. Russia has yet Central Asia to conquer and assimilate, and will, even after that, prefer attacking China, which cannot fight, to India which can. What, then, becomes of the glory of an empire upon which, indeed, the sun never sets, whose commercial activity and adventure are boundless, which absorbs the carrying trade of the world, but which is powerless to effect the destiny of nations in any Continent, which is unable to chastise the unrighteous strong and to uphold the weak, to succour warring nationalities, and retrench the overgrowth of ambitious governments? For all these purposes England is a cipher.—*Daily Express*.

The 'London Tablet' says:—"We are glad to hear from a Masonic dignitary that the time will soon arrive when Masons will not "have the painful duty of referring to what has occurred," and when the fervor of their anti-Catholic zeal will be somewhat moderated—at least as regards its public expression. In the meantime the same speaker talks of the acceptance of office by the Prince of Wales as "a defiance against the interference of a foreign potentate with the liberty of conscience of England." We notice this only to point out that the view thus expressed is quite inconsistent with the doctrine propounded last week by another dignitary—a "Grand Deacon" we believe—in Warwickshire. This gentleman explained that "Freemasonry was a religion of good work," asked for no priestly intermediary between a man and his Maker, and was "broadly tolerant of differences in faith and creed," and that "when Roman Catholics were permitted by their spiritual rulers to uphold such opinions as these, then, and not till then, could they consistently continue members of the craft." It is thus admitted that Catholics, if they hold the Catholic faith, cannot consistently be Freemasons. Why then should people talk about "interference of a foreign potentate," when one who becomes a Catholic ceases to be a Freemason? If Freemasonry is one religion, and Catholicism another which is incompatible with it, why should it be any cause for wonder that a man cannot belong to both?"