

tervals from that side of the gaunt pile that rises immediately out of the water, and the probable use of these architectural curiosities has long exercised the ingenuity of local antiquarians.

In the days of our heroes and heroines the old castle still stood in all its strength. Its dark turrets rose in gloomy pride above the waves, and looked coldly down upon the tossing and tumbling of their summer playfulness, as upon the seething haste and uproar of their winter anger. The latter unamiable mood was upon the waters now. They could hear "November's surly blast" sweeping across the hills, they caught the groaning and creaking of the aged trees that stood sentinels about their resting-place, they heard the storm-gusts growling amongst the turrets and chimneys of the staid old pile in their midst, and they too grew churlish and sullen, and chafed and foamed and hurried to and fro in senseless haste, and beat themselves idly against the walls of the castle, and then went off, fretful and indignant, to mutter and sob over their grievances in the quiet nooks in the woods, under the branches, and in the secret chambers among the roots of the old trees. What cared they who was disturbed by their noisiness? Bah! They were angry and they would show it.

"It is a wild night, MacDermott," said a wasted invalid who lay in one of the chambers of the island fortress, to the solitary watcher who sat by his couch. "How the winds roar outside! How chill it is, too, and how dark the room is growing! The fire is burning low; heap fresh logs upon it."

It was not so. The pile of faggots on the hearth was sending out a warm, genial glow through the apartment, and showering upon the rough walls and the heavy vaulted roof a flood of rich purple light. The chill was at the sufferer's heart, the shadow was within his own failing eyes. With a painful sigh the watcher rose from his place by the bedside and obeyed the request of the sick man.

There was a pause. O'Neill lay motionless upon his couch, his eyes fixed upon the dingy roof, his chest heaving and throbbing from the lengthened effort his words had cost him, but answered nothing to his leader's parting advice.

"And if," pursued the sick man, when he had gathered strength to proceed, "before you quit this conquered land you should meet again the orphan girl who, as I have long ago perceived, has won your heart, and who is worthy of the love she has won, offer her a home in your native country; she will soon be destitute here."

Again the speaker paused. His companion was about to reply when he was startled by a prolonged and agonising wail, so wild and piteous that it drove from his thoughts the absorbing object that engrossed them. Again and again the plaintive cry rose above the moaning of the winds and the splash of the waters—now close at hand, as if uttered beneath the deep, narrow window of the room; now far away as if it issued from the gloom of the dark woods that swayed to and fro upon the shore. Was it the cry of some boatman in distress, or the scream of some startled night-bird frightened in the turrets

by the violence of the storm? MacDermott's ear was accustomed to sounds of terror and alarm, but in this weird and lonely cry there was an unearthly anguish such as he had never heard before, which made his soldier's cheek blanch and his soldier's heart beat faster.

"Did you hear it, MacDermott?" asked the sufferer faintly, as the last wailing note died away upon the waters.

"Yes," whispered his companion, with bated breath.

"It is the banshee," said O'Neill solemnly. "My hour is come."

"What mean you?" asked the puzzled soldier.

"The banshee," replied O'Neill, "a messenger from the world beyond come to warn me that my end is near." The chiefs of our race are thus strangely privileged: a spirit from the other world is sent to mourn in the strains you have heard their departure from this. This ghostly dirge is sung during the closing hours of all the heads of our clan. Its warning notes never deceive us. It is time for us to take leave of earth when we hear them. Request my Lord of Clogher to come to me, and let me be left alone with him a short time."

Strangely impressed by the incident that had occurred, MacDermott rose to summon the prelate. He was surprised that a mind so vigorous as O'Neill's should accord belief to what he believed a popular superstition. Yet the strange coincidence of time and place, and the peculiar unearthliness of the wild cry which still rung in his ears, shook his faith in his own wisdom. Perplexed, and somewhat awed, he quitted the sick room. Without he found the entire household indulging their grief as for one already dead. The narrow gallery that led to O'Neill's chamber was crowded with the retainers of the great general of Ulster, as well as with the family and followers of the chief to whose mansion he had come to die. They had heard the mysterious dirge, and, with a readier belief in its supernatural character than MacDermott had accorded it, had recognised in it the death chant of the chieftain whom they loved. It was a motley group of mourners: veterans with whitening locks and deeply scarred faces who had followed the dying man through the wars which had been his life's occupation, younger soldiers in the fulness of their strength who had learned the art of war from him during the campaign of the preceding four years; matrons and maidens of his own princely house, and ladies of the family of O'Reilly—his kinswomen by marriage; gray-haired servants who had served him with the fidelity which the clients of the great Irish family ever showed to their hereditary patrons; pages and huntsmen who had waited on him in the hall or attended him in the chase.

MacDermott closed the door softly, and with a warning gesture restrained the movement of the mourners towards the sick room. Hastily summoning the bishop, he ushered him into the chamber of the dying man, and left them alone together. The interview lasted but a few minutes. At the end of that time the door opened, the bishop reappeared, and beckoned into the room

O'Neill's more immediate relatives. Lights were brought, the assistants prostrated themselves in prayer, and the mystic ceremonies with which the Catholic Church prepares the soul for its passage into eternity were solemnly performed. The voice of the officiating prelate trembled perceptibly as he pronounced the words of the awful rite; he was the bosom friend and had been the companion-in-arms of the dying man. For him that poor, panting sufferer had once defied and threatened the Supreme Council in their own assembly-room; they had attempted to overawe him into a policy which he believed fatal to Ireland, and O'Neill bade them desist, on peril of incurring his enmity. Poor, poor, tormented, quivering frame! How often he had seen it in its bright clothing of steel lead the way through the storm of battle for the stout soldiers of Tir-Owen? How often he had seen those half-closed glassy eyes burn with the fierce excitement of the absorbing game where life was staked on the result, and that brow, contracted now with the agonies of death, beam bright and unruffled amid the tumult of angry debates and the gloom of despairing counsels. A modern philosopher will have it that striking contrasts provoke mirth—it may be so, but there are occasions when they excite sorrow; the contrasts which here occurred to the mind of Emer MacMahon made his voice stick painfully in his throat and the tears rise to his eyes.

The impressive rite was ended at length. The dying man lay motionless upon his couch absorbed in the dread thoughts which the ceremony just concluded suggested. His breathing became each moment more labored and painful, his features more ghastly pale. At intervals a low moaning sound, forced from him by the tortures he underwent, escaped his lips, and then he faintly uttered the Redeemer's name, and gently prayed that his impatience might be forgiven. A lady with streaming eyes and throbbing bosom bent over his couch and softly whispered his name. At the sound of her voice the sufferer struggled to raise his unnerved arm to clasp in his tender hand that wiped the death sweat from his brow.

"My own poor Rose," he murmured, with a painful effort, "grieve not for me. It is God's will; it is for the best. It troubles me to leave you thus without a home in the land where I had thought to make you a princess. When the worst happens, as happen it will, our son Henry will seek a refuge for you in Spain or in Italy. Say that you are the wife of the defender of Arras, and at the court of King Philip you will be received with honor. I suffer greatly, Rose. Pray that I may bear up to the end!"

Alas! poor sufferer, how well for him that he was not vouchsafed a glimpse into the near future! How it would have added to the agony he had endured to know that the gallant son to whose care he entrusted his weeping wife was soon to die an ignominious death by order of the man he had lately delivered at Derry from the clutches of his foes. The decree is merciful which debars us from the knowledge of events to come. It is a dispensation which, if it lessens the sum of our joys, materially abridges the catalogue of our sorrows.