

## A TRADITION

It was the eleventh of September in the year 1649. All day the English artillery had battered the walls of Drogheda, and by five o'clock there were two practicable breaches in the walls. A storming column of some eight hundred men, under Castle, essayed the most practicable one, but, after severe fighting, in which Castle was killed, they were driven out. The defenders had a short respite; for, as their enemies were pouring back beaten and discouraged, Cromwell threw himself in their way. "Oh! ye of little resolution," cried the general, "this day must we complete the work of the Lord. The cup of wrath is full. See that ye spare not. Down with Baal—let none escape the edge of the sword."

Then, as he took his place at the head of the column, the assault was renewed with fanatical fury, and, brave and stubborn as was the defence of Sir Arthur Ashton's little garrison, it could not stem the tide of the Ironside deluge. On the Roundheads pressed, and stormed the Millmount.

"Fire that cursed temple of Belial," screamed Oliver as they passed St. Peter's Church, where some thousand persons had taken refuge and were maintaining a desperate resistance. It was done. Hither and thither fled the scattered garrison and the excited townsmen—the slaughter was prodigious—all was lost.

At that moment Ludlow met Cromwell in the principal square.

"It hath pleased God to bless our endeavors," said Cromwell.

"Yea," answered the other. "I do not believe thirty of their whole number escaped with their lives."

"It hath been a marvelous great mercy," piously returned the Protector.

But we must draw a veil over the barbarous massacre of Drogheda, and come to our story.

At a distance of some ten or twelve miles West of Drogheda, stands the brave old Castle of Slane, beautifully situated on the banks of the Boyne. Close by it are the romantic remains of the Hermitage of St. Erc, the first bishop of Slane, consecrated by Saint Patrick himself. It was on that historic spot Saint Patrick first lighted the

Pascal fire, and made the first remarkable conversions on the Isle of which he was to become the Apostle.

On that fateful evening of September, 1649, a man might have been observed wearily approaching the castle. On closer examination you would have seen that he was bloodstained and wounded, and, had you looked into his eyes, you would have thought him blind, so glazed and staring were his eye balls. He was not blind; but his soul was seared with the sights he had seen, and his mind was a prey to the insanity of helpless rage.

To the porter he was unintelligible. That he was not Irish was evident. Yet he was exhausted and wounded, and he was brought in. News was carried to the Lady Mary, Chatelaine in her husband's absence. The wanderer was brought into her presence—still nothing could be learned from him. He continually kept mumbling to himself, and the word, "Tredagh," recurred very frequently in the jumble. At that moment, Thomas, Archbishop of Dublin, and uncle of Lord Slane, entered the room. The Lady Mary made a deep courtesy, and the new arrival seemed to restore somewhat the equanimity of the fugitive.

After a short colloquy between the Archbishop and the Lady, the Archbishop asked him once more who he was.

"Rochester, My Lord; and I came from Tredagh—Oh! God, let Your curse descend on those fiends."

"Calm yourself, sir,—calm yourself, I entreat," broke in the Archbishop. "You are from Drogheda? Has it fallen then?"

"Aye, fallen—scourged—martyred—but God will have vengeance for that blood. The devils—merciless—and Sir Arthur, too!"

"What, Sir Arthur slain?" cried Lady Slane.

"Alas—cold blood," was all the answer Rochester vouchsafed.

"God receive him—he was a noble gentleman," murmured the Archbishop.

Rochester's paroxysm seemed to be wearing off, and he now began to speak collectedly.

"I am Rochester, Henry Rochester—subaltern in Ashton's own regiment. Heaven knows how I got here, for the country is full of scattered horse. Cromwell must have ten thousand men in Meath."



"God save us from his wolves!" ejaculated the Archbishop.

"Mary Virgin, protect us!" added Lady Mary, and she whispered a prayer for Charles—absent, fighting for the King.

"I doubt if you will be spared," said Rochester. "I believe Cromwell has sworn to destroy every 'Papallan nest' in Ireland. I saw his ranting devils burning New Grange, and there was another troop of them despoiling Knowth House, as I came along."

"We'll defend this House till the last." The Baroness spoke resolutely, but her lip trembled in the speech.

"Madness, My Lady, against Cromwell's seige train—but suicide for the inmates, and destruction of a noble house," returned Rochester.

"You are right, sir. 'Twould be but useless slaughter, though my mind would try the issue. Yet I must not be found here," rejoined the Archbishop.

"Nor I. These are terrible days, Lady Mary. You harbor a criminal, because I am one. I have fought for my king. That is a hanging matter in these days of Roundhead freedom. A little food, a horse, and I'll try to get to Ormond. And should I see Lord Charles, Lady Mary?" Rochester rose.

"Tell him we are safe yet—our trust in God."

In half an hour Rochester was gone.

"My daughter," said the Archbishop some time later, "we can't delay. I must to the Hole—and console myself as best I can until our hypocritical regicide, Oliver, betakes himself and his Parliamentary wolves elsewhere."

But the castle tenants were not disturbed that night, though they could see reflected on the sky the fires throughout the countryside, and hear the firing of muskets in the distance.

Lord Charles, twentieth Baron of Slane, a young man of twenty seven, was at that moment not more than fifteen miles distant at Kells, on the road to Oldcastle, at the head of some four hundred horse. He had been on his way to Trim when he was met by the news of the Drogheda disaster. He expected Cromwell would spend some time completing the conquest of Meath, before marching South against Wexford, which still defied parliamentary power. In this surmise he was correct.

For a time he was in doubt. Should he make a dash down on Slane, and, if the castle were still free, defend it to the last? A moment's reflection convinced him of the uselessness of such a proceeding. Should he retreat West, and join Ormond? Ormond was miles distant and, as Slane knew, already had difficulty enough with his commissariat. The last alternative was to maintain a guerilla war in Meath Hills, harrassing and occupying Cromwell's main force as long as possible, to give additional time to Ormond and O'Neil to outline and begin their campaign.

So he drew off his troops to Slievenna Calliagh, beyond the Blackwater in Upper Kells, where they were hidden from the Puritans. Unaware of hostile troops in the vicinity, the Cromwellian Horse scattered to pillage and destroy. One devoted band (some seven hundred in all), under Jones, one of Ireton's favorites, was awakened at Kells by the fearful cry of "Bhear na Righ gan," "strike for the King." Jones, and two or three others, escaped, owing to the fleetness of their horses. The rest perished to a man. These were grim times, and quarter was seldom given or asked.

The Royalists immediately disappeared as though swallowed by the earth. None knew their whereabouts. The peasants did say that Charles of Slane was a necromancer, that he was possessed of magical powers, and the superstitious Puritan credited him with being a devil.

In the meantime Slane Castle had been occupied by none other than the Protector himself, and the fact that he established his headquarters there probably explained its immunity from destruction. The soldiery were held in check fairly well, though they destroyed all the statuary in the Church, broke and burned the altar, and even held their nasal psalm-singing services in its ruins, long ranting sermons and prayers, long drawled fighting psalms. But there was something not right about the place for them. There was some subtle atmosphere of another faith that overpowered them, and they finally gave over, saying that it was the house of Baal and idolatry, and accursed. And so the Chapel stood vacant, for the people feared the troopers.

And now occurred that event which is really one of the most daring blows ever struck during the whole era of the struggle in Ireland.



During the night of September the fourteenth Slane, with fifty picked men, crossed the Blackwater at Daly's Bridge, passed through Moynalty and Castletown, and concealed himself in the Glens of Slieve Brehg, where he lay hidden for two days. On the night of the sixteenth, Slane entered his own castle, disguised as a laborer, and managed to interview his wife, from whom he learned the disposition and numbers of the enemy. Cromwell and his staff occupied the west wing of the castle, facing the old Abbey. The deserted Chapel was just to the south of their quarters, and the news of its ruin brought tears of rage to the eyes of the Baron.

"By the Book of Kells," he cried "the cursed Brewer of Huntingdon will pay dearly for this."

"For Heaven's sake, be quiet, Charles—you will be heard. And remember Uncle Thomas. Don't be rash, my dear, for his sake," replied the Lady Mary.

But Slane only continued to swear grim vengeance on the miscreants, who dared to desecrate the tombs of his ancestors. A fleeting embrace, and then—

"Rest in safety, my love—no harm shall come to thee or Uncle Thomas. An' it please God, we will drive these ranting rogues into the sea before Spring."

"God keep thee, sweet. And be not rash," sighed his Lady, and the Baron was gone.

In the court yard he found some seven or eight score troopers, most of them preparing for rest, though some were singing outlandish hymns, and one—called Obediah of the Wine Press of the Lord—holding forth to a silent circle.

He slipped quietly out by a postern, and, before morning light, had rejoined his companions in the glens. Calling to his side his two chief lieutenants, Sir John Spens, and the young Lord Moyfenrath, he took counsel with them, and unfolded his daring plan, which was none other than the capturing of Cromwell himself.

"We must work quickly," he continued. "The bird may fly at any moment. By the sword of Archenbald, we will have the Regicide before another night passes over our heads. And then we will consider what to do."

"Ormond and Hugh O'Neil will surely want a say in that," cried Spens.

"They may have what's left," ferociously purred Moyfenrath.

"No violence to his person." Slane drew back before the suggestion in Moyfenrath's voice. "I'll see that he pays for his deeds, but no torture, my friend."

"I swear he will never escape my vengeance," doggedly returned the other. "If he falls into my hand, may God have mercy on him, for I shall not."

"Now, now, Moyfenrath. I know your father fell at Naseby, a murdered prisoner. But we are no executioners. Anyway, I know the hypocrite would rather die than be taken like a limed bird, and made the laughing stock of all the King's men in Ireland."

"He can't go unpunished," put in Spens, uncertainly.

"No, by the Rood, Sir John. He shall have proper trial when the time comes, and methinks in Ormond's Court he will meet his just reward," answered the Baron.

"I shall assuredly be there," said Moyfenrath, who had recovered his usually smiling, devil-may-care self, as he flicked the point of his rapier. "But Ormond is tender hearted—yet there was the king. Ormond loved the king—" and the young lord smiled.

"I have heard," said Spens, "that Inchiquin has declared for the king. I never trusted him much, though. He may be playing a traitor's game."

"No, he is with us now for certain," said Slane, "though loyalty may not be his main reason."

"I doubt that he can hold his men faithful," quoth Moyfenrath.

"Not alone his," returned the Baron, "but the Munster garrisons. They are wavering, I am told—God aid us all. Yet I trust we will do such a stroke tonight, my friends, as will confirm the doubtful, and silence the discontented. Gentlemen, the fate of Ireland and the King is in our hands—" and silence fell upon the group.

The day passed slowly for these men, faced with a desperate enterprise—a forlorn hope, which, if successful, would surely shatter the Roundhead power, not only in Ireland, but throughout the three Kingdoms. Ludlow, Lambert, Lenthal, Ireton and the others could be trusted to fall out, as soon as the iron hand of Oliver was removed from the helm. It was a day on which the fate of a nation and a dynasty hung in the balance, and nature, by an ominous stillness, seemed to reflect the anxiety of this little, desperate band of heroes. At last darkness came, and the devoted troop rode out on a quest that might



startle the world. About midnight of that same night, the seventeenth of September, 1649, they quietly assembled in the old chapel of the Castle; and quietly each man stole to his appointed place to await the word.

About two hours previously, had you been in Thomastown, three miles away, you would have seen a little cavalcade of some ten or twelve horsemen, heavily muffled and heavily armed, ride through on the great road to Dublin. In those days village dwellers did not enquire closely into the affairs of wandering horsemen, so these passed unchallenged, but not unobserved—and, could malediction cause misfortune, none of that troop would ever have reached his destination.

At approximately one o'clock, when all was quiet, the Roundhead guards dozing on the walls and over the guard fire at the gate, from seemingly all quarters arose the wild cry, "Bhear na Righ gan," "Strike for the King—for the King."

It was short and bloody work, for even the guards were half asleep, though some, indeed, of the Roundheads, with their backs to the walls, disputed the way for a short minute. In twenty minutes everything was over, and some three score dead Parliamentarians gave evidence of the surprise.

The remainder were safely secured, and immediately marched west towards the main body of Slane's followers. The Cavaliers had not lost a man, though some half dozen showed sword and pike wounds.

Slane was in high spirits over his success, and so, indeed, were Spens and Moyfenrath. Yet they had to move warily forward, and were compelled to detour at Kells, for they found it strongly held by the Cromwellians. Moyfenrath was picturing the consternation in Dublin on the morrow, when the news would arrive. Then the sun arose, and at eight o'clock they reached Sleive na Calliagh.

After breakfast they proceeded to interrogate their important prisoners. There were four general officers captured, but none bore any resemblance to the Protector.

"Where is the Archregicide?" harshly demanded Slane of one of these.

There was no answer.

"Speak, knave, or, if you don't, I know a most excel-

lent way to set refractory tongues awagging," fiercely interjected Moyfenrath.

"In Dublin I believe," sullenly returned one—Coate, it turned out to be.

It was with difficulty that Slane restrained a general slaughter there and then, so chagrined were the Royalists.

"In Dublin?" queried Slane again.

"Yea, Dublin," shouted the other.

"Verily, he is the Devil incarnate," said Spens to himself.

Coate noted the looks of dejection on the faces of the captors, and took courage accordingly.

"The Sword of the Lord has been preserved," he said.

"Surely it was the spirit warned him."

"The devil you mean," wrathfully cut in Moyfenrath.

"Man of Belial," returned another of the Puritans, "Speak not lightly of him to whom the Lord delivered the man for punishment."

"Enough," cried Slane, "The archfiend has flown. Away with them to Ormond, and let him have his will."

"Should they not pay for the brave blood of Drogheda rather,—think of Ashton," Moyfenrath returned, frowning fiercely, "and besides, we can ill spare the escorts."

"No, my Lord, no. We are not murderers, though they may be. We must keep unstained the cause of King Charles and Ireland," replied the Baron. So some hours later the prisoners under guard of Spens set off to meet Ormond and O'Neil in the West country. Spens learned from the prisoners that Cromwell had sensed some impending danger. He became anxious concerning the South, and about nine o'clock of that fateful night he suddenly decided to hurry to Dublin. He took Venables and Ireton, and some ten troopers, with him. The remainder were to follow the following day, having first burned Slane Castle.

This event had very little effect on the course of the war, but it often caused Cromwell to shiver when he thought on the narrow margin of his escape.

Slane remained Cromwell's most persistent foe, for he never forgot the defacement of his chapel, and he was the last man in arms against the Protector in Ireland. He lived to see the collapse of the Commonwealth, and



the return of the rightful King, for whom he had suffered and bled. Thomas, the Archbishop, came out of his hiding place none the worse, but he gave up his life shortly after—in 1655, to be exact,—in his sixty-second year, worn out for the cause of Ireland and the Church.

The motto of the house of Slane is still the same “Bhear na Righ gan,” In English “May the King live for ever;” and its scattered descendants look proudly back on Charles, the twentieth Baron, the most daring and implacable foe of Ireland’s ablest and most deadly enemy.

—J.R.H.F.



The brave man is not who feels no fear,  
For that were stupid and irrational;  
But he, whose noble soul its fears subdues,  
And bravely dares the danger nature shrinks from.

—*Joanna Baillie.*

Oh, fear not in a world like this,  
And thou shalt know ere long,  
Know how sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and be strong.—*Longfellow.*

It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say that he is one who never inflicts pain—*Cardinal Newman.*

’Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,  
And robes the mountain in its azure hue.—*Campbell.*

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

—*Tennyson.*

He that respects himself is safe from all others;  
He wears a coat of mail that none can pierce.

—*Longfellow.*

The secret of progress lies in knowing how to make use, not of what we have chosen, but of what is forced upon us.—*Spalding.*