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The Rose Of Drimnagh

Dublin

our thoughts back to those turbulent days when lance and sword usually settled questions which are now adjudicated without disturbance, save an occasional battle of tongues, in our peaceful courts of law. Many of the ancient fortresses, which, like a crescent chain of watchful sentinels, towered beyond the city for the protection of the Pale, still remain and raise their hoary heads over valley and river shore, adown which, in bright array, plumed helmets, and steel-clad knights, and men-at-arms rode gallantly forth to battle—where the weary crested lord, after the foray in which they had been driven from some far-off fastness of Imayle, Leix, or Ossory; and where the minstrel, half-Irish and half-Norman, once twanged his ghittern, as he went from castle to castle, relating in rousing and voluble stanzas, the deeds of the knights of St. George.* Among the most remarkable and interesting of these ancient structures is the Castle of Drimnagh—the subject of many a legendary tale. Could the bearded old warriors who once thronged its halls awake, they would witness many a wonderful change since the half-forgotten days when they lived and loved, revelled and fought, conquered or sustained defeat. Where the "As la" or mounted courier, once spurred forth upon his hasty errand, the lightning of heaven now speeds by telegraphic wires to the farthest corners of the land; through

* This band of knights was instituted about the year 1170, for the protection of the English Pale. A troublesome time they must have led in those days, for there never passed a season over their heads that they did not cross swords with the neighbouring Irish clans.

the craggy passes and along the level plains, marked some centuries ago with scarcely a bridle path, the mighty steam-horse thunders over its iron track with its ponderous load, and instead of the small city which lay cooped up within its battlemented walls around the castle, a glittering panorama of streets and squares, docks, storehouses, towers, and splendid domes, now spreads outward to the capacious bay, where, in place of the crazy fleets of diminutive war galleys and merchant vessels, with their fantastic prows and carved mast-heads, the huge hull of the steam-propelled ship now rides at anchor beside the populous quays, or ploughs the blue waves beyond the hoary headlands of old Ben Hedar, like a miniature volcano, with its attendant cloud-volumes on the far horizon line.

Retaining still some of its ancient appurtenances, such as its moat, curtain walls, etc., the Castle of Drimnagh presents one of the best specimens in the neighbourhood of Dublin of the ancient feudal stronghold. It stands beside the way leading from Crumlin to the village of Clondalkin, and within a few short miles from the city. According to the most authentic accounts, it was founded in the time of King John, by a knight named De Bernival, who came to Ireland in the train of that prince, and received from him a grant of the surrounding lands. From this knight the different families of Barnwell in Ireland

claim their descent. His death occurred about the year 1221, and his descendants held possession of Drimnagh and the Teremire till the time of James the First, when their possessions, after a tedious lawsuit, fell to Sir Adam Loftus. During the great insurrection of 1611, it was garrisoned for the King by the Duke of Ormond, and had the rare fortune of escaping the destruction that followed after the arrival on these shores of Cromwell and his stern legions. It is still inhabited and in good preservation, and will well repay the tourist who leaves the dust, and toil, and din of the city, and saunters out along the quiet country roads, to pay it a visit. Should he linger there, and hold converse with the surrounding peasantry, he will hear many a story and romantic legend of days gone by, the particulars of which will prove no unpleasing accession to his note-book. One of these we will now proceed to relate, and hope it may prove as interesting to the readers of the "Dublin Journal" as it did to ourselves when we heard it told one quiet summer evening, beneath the shadow of the ivy-wreathed battlements of Drimnagh.

During the reign of a certain English monarch, whose name we need not particularly mention, Sir Hugh de Barnwell ruled with a high and lordly hand in his feudal stronghold of Drimnagh. He was a stout and stern knight, whose life had been spent amid the commotions of the war that year by year raged between the Palemen and the Irishmen. Many a tough battle he had fought, and many a wound he had received since he first donned the knightly spurs, and it will not be wondered at, therefore, when we mention that he looked upon the native races around with no small amount of hatred. Among those against whom his animosity burned most fiercely were the O'Byrnes, lords of Innylo, whose chief had once sacked his Castle of Drimnagh, and driven the herds pertaining to it over the southern mountain barrier into Wicklow. The chief was still living at the time our story commences, and had two sons, the youngest of whom, named Sir John O'Byrne, was a knight of unwonted bravery. To his great personal beauty was added every accomplishment fitted for one of his high station, and when, at the head of his bold horsemen, he rode down the mountains, on a foray into the Pale, it would be hard to find, in the whole wide campaign over which he cast his eagle eye, a man of more splendid appearance and gallant bearing. Sir Hugh de Barnwell had one son, who was renowned throughout the Pale for his prowess and for the ferocity with which he always fought against the neighbouring chief of Innylo. The following will explain his reasons for hating the O'Byrnes with such bitterness. Living in his father's house at the time was his cousin Eleanora de Barnwell, who, in consequence of her beauty, was called "The Rose of Drimnagh." To this young lady Sir Edmond de Barnwell had been betrothed, and matters went on smoothly and pleasantly enough for some time, till, during a truce entered into between the Palemen and the Wicklow clans, Eleanora met Sir John O'Byrne at a nobleman's house, on a festival day, in Dublin. Up to this "The Rose of Drimnagh" knew little of her heart, but she soon learned to love the young Wicklow chief, and, as a natural consequence, to look with coldness and indifference upon her cousin, who, after at length coming to the knowledge of the affair, swore to be avenged upon his rival. The truce was scarcely over when he was up and at work,

and many a rifled hamlet and burning dwelling marked his track through the glens of Wicklow, and many a desolate widow cursed his name and race as she sang the *keen* over

the bodies of her slaughtered ones, who had fallen beneath the spears of Sir Edmond de Barnwell and his ruthless followers.

But at last a time came when a triumphant light shone in Black Sir Edmond's eyes, for he thought upon the day, now near at hand, which was fixed upon for his marriage with the lovely "Rose of Drimnagh."

"Once more," he said, "I will seek the mountains, to find hLra before the marriage revel. By the soul of a knight, an' I lay my hands upon him, but he shall rue the hour. Yes, rue it, for I swear to bring liim in chains to look upon the bridal, and then to string him up, as I would one of his own mouuntain wolves, upon the gallows-tree, before the gate of Drimnagh!"

It was nightfall as he spoke thus. Little he knew that at that same moment Sir John O'Byrne was sitting quietly beneath the dark shadows of a tree outside the moat, looking up, cautiously, at the window of the little chamber in which Eleanora de Barnwell Wits sitting, weeping bitterly over the sad fate to which she knew but too well she would soon have to submit. As she sat thus, a low soft sound, like the cooing of a dove, fell upon her ears. She listened intently a moment, then stepped softly over to the single window of the apartment, and, opening the casement, looked out. Again the sound stole up from under the dense foliage that shaded the outer edga of the moat. Eleanora leant upon the sill, and peered down. into the gloom, but nothing met her gaze save the ghostly shadows of the trees upon the black belt of water beneath.

"It is Ids signal," she whispered to herself, as the sound was repeated once more. "Ah, me! I fear he will get himself into danger on account of those nightly visits. And yet, I cannot—I cannot bid him stay away!"

She muffled herself in a dark mantle, moved towards the door opened it cautiously and listened, ero she ventured to steal down and meet her lover.

"I must and will warn him to-night to stay away," continued she, as with a light and stealthy step she descended the winding stair—"all! to stay away, and leave me to my misery. It is hard, but it must bo done, otherwise he will assuredly be captured and slain."

After stealing down an infinite number of dark passages, corridors, and stairways, she at length emerged into the open air, and glided through a neglected postern out beneath a spreading beechtree, that shaded the inner edge of the moat opposite the spot whence the signal of her lover proceeded. Again she peered into the gloom at the other side, and saw there a tall dark figure standing beneath a treo on tho edge of th'3 water. Well she knew the graceful outlines of that figure, and fondly her heart throbbed at the sountl of the voice that now addressed her.

"Dearest," said the young mountain knight, in a low tone, "I thought thou wouldst never come. I have been standing liko a statue against the trunk of this tree behind me for the last half hour watching for a light in thy window pane. But it seems that dark-" ness

pleases thee better. Ah! Eleanora, I hope thou art not still indulging in those sorrowful forebodings."

"And wherefore not, John?" answered she sadly. "What thoughts but gloomy ones can fill my mind, when I am ever thinking of the danger thou incurrst by coming here so often—and thinking, too," she added, after a pause, "of the woeful fate to which we are destined?"

"Think no more on't," said her lover, in a cheerful tone. "We have hops yet, Eleanora; for, mark me, thy marriage with Sir Edmond do Barnwell will never take place."

"Alas ! there is no hope," resumed Eleanora. "Even to-day, my uncle, the Knight of Drimnagh, hath fixed the time for—tome-Uho woeful bridal. And thou, John—Let this be our last meeting— our last meeting, alas! in this world. Wert thou ta'en prisoner by my dark cousin, he hates thee so, that he would burn thee at a stake in the courtyard."

"Fear not for that, (barest," answered the young chief. "And this bridal that thou fearest. Listen, Eleanora. Before the hour comew, or perchance at the very hour when he is about to place the bridal ring upon thy lily finger, the gay gosshawk may swoop .down and bear thee away to his free mountains—amid their sunny glens and bosky woods, to love thee, darling, as no other mortal man could love thee !"

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"Ah me!" sighed poor Eleanora. "Would that it could be so. But I fear that we are fated to see each other for the last time tonight. I warn thee, John, to be wary henceforth, for I am well watched. Hush! was that a foot-fall amid the grove yonder?" and she pointed to a clump of trees some distance to the right of where her lover stood.

"By my faith, but it may be so," answered he; "and so thou hadst better return to thy chamber. In the meantime, I will wait here; till I see the light in thy window once more, and until thou biddest me farewell from the casement."

Again they listened and heard a slight rustling sound amid the trees to which Eleanora had pointed. It ceased, and then the fair Rose of Drinuiagh trembled at the thought of her fierce cousin, waved a fond farewell to her mountain lover, and then gliding once more through the postern, ascended the stairs to her chamber. But the bold knight of Imaile was not to be frightened away by the sound, whatever might have caused it. He moved in beneath the shadow of the tree, listened for a time, and hearing nothing further, advanced again and looked up to where the light was now burning brightly in Eleanora's window. Seating himself upon the side of the moat in the shadow, and still looking fondly upward, he commenced, in a voice low but distinct, a lay in praise of his mistress, of which the following paraphrase may convey some idea:—

"O! wilt thou come and be my bride,

O! wilt thou (ly with me,
Where wild streams glide by mountain side,

By glen and forest tree;
And thou'lt be lady of that land.

And like a queen shalt reign
O'er shore and strand, and mountain grand,

And many a sunny plain I

I've found a lone and lovely cave

Where gleams a little lake;
Where the wild rills tingle the silver wave,

And the birds sing in the brake—
The lake gleams clear, the rills dance bright,

Down gorge and rocky pile,
But the darkness of a starless night

Is in lny BOUI the while!

And nought can light it save a glanco,

A beam from thy jet-black-eye,
And nought can break my heart's cold trance

Save thy witching song or sigh.
Then come I—I've decked that cave for thee,

With Bummer's fairest flowers,
Away, away o'er the hills with me,

To the forest glens and bowers!"

The moment the song had ceased the fair form of the Rose of Driinnagh. appeared at the casement overhead. She waved a fond farewell to her young mountain minstrel, and closed the window, but the light that shone through its pane had now lost its charm for him, as he had no longer her fair face to look upon. He stood up, and after gazing once more at the easement that glimmered like a star amid the dark masses of masonry above, was turning to depart, when he felt the heavy grasp of a steel-clad hand upon his shoulder.

"Stay!" exclaimed the intruder in a deep stern voice, whose tone the young Knight of Inayle knew but too well. "Thou hast a small account to settle, fair sir, ere thou leavest this spot. I am Sir Edmond de Barnwell!"

"And I," answered the other, "am Sir John O'Byrne.of Imayle; wliat seekest thou from me?"

"That thou shalt soon know, skulking hill-cat!" answered de Barnwell, unbuckling his sword, undvathing it, and throwing belt and scabbard upon the ground. "There be a certain tide wliieh men call blood, coursing beneath that breast-plate of thine. I seek to discover its fount with this I" and he extended his weapon.

"There be a certain tide behind thee, which thou art more likely to explore presently!" retorted O'Bvrne, "Ha! ha! 'ware the hillcat's spring, de Barnwell!" and he gave a sudden bound that brought him inside the guard of his antagonist, whoso waist he instantly encircled with his sinewy arms. There was an ineffectual attempt to plutk forth their

daggers, and then Sir Edmond de Barnwell was hurled from the stahvarth arms of the brave Knight of Imayle, and sent plunging headlong into the black waters of the moat.

Leaving his foe to scramble as "best he could from his dangerous bath in the fosse, O'Byrne glided through the thickets and sought his steed, which he had left in a lonely grove hard by, and was soon riding in headlong haste across the plain towards the stem mountain barrier that lay between him ami his native glens. And now, de Barnwell, after extricating himself with groat difficulty from the treacherous waters, stood all dripping upon the firm bank, his burly frame quivering, not from the chill of his immersion, but from fury at his mishap. Pursuit of his late antagonist was, he knew, of little use now, so plucking up his sword which lay beside him, he raised the cold steel blade to his lip, kissed it, vowed astern vow of vengeance against O'Byrne and his race, root and branch, and then striding down by the water side, crossed the draw-bridge, and sought his chamber, where he ait till long after midnight brooding over various plans of merciless and bloody retribution.

The particulars of his subsequent cruel raid into the glens of Wicklow it is unnecessary to relate, and we shall now come to the day which his father had fixed upon for the marriage. It was early in the morning, and the fair Rose of Drimnagh, surrounded by her lovely maids, looked sadly upon the gorgeous white bridal dress which lay on a table beside her, and winch she was at last about to put on.

"Ah, me!" she sighed mournfully, "that it hath come to this. In vain have I watched for him to appear in his accustomed place by the moat, but his promise is broken, and what could have broken it but death?" and the tears gathered into her eyes as she thought thus of her lover.

"Cheer thee, Eleanora," said her cousin, a young and gay city dame, "I warrant thee that such a bridal as thine was never seen in Dublin; I only wish I were in thy place."

"Alas that thou art not," returned Eleanora. "Something tells me that what thou sayest is but too true—that such a bridal as mine was never seen !" and with the help of her maids she now began to don the dress.

The marriage was to take place in the city, and Sir Edmond de Barnwell had summoned his kinsmen of the Pale, with all their fierce retainers, in order to strengthen his escort for the bridal train, which at last in splendid array crossed the draw-bridge of Drimnagh, and moved along the winding road that led to the western gate of Dublin. This road was crossed by another midway between the castle and the city, and within a wood which stretched down from the mountains to the shores of the Liffey. About half the bridal train had passed the cross, and the remainder, with the bride and bridegroom before them, were moving gaily forward, when all at once the wild war-cry of the O'Byrnes resounded from the wood all around, and the next instant a large body of men hcadod by the young knight of Imayle sprang from their concealment, and fell upon the escort, front, rear, and flank. It is needless to go minutely into the details of the terrible fight that then to' k place at the Minstrel's cross, as the spot was called. The escort were at first put to flight and

pursued by the O'Byrnes, but returning again to the charge, the light kerne of the mountains were borne down by their heavy horses, though they fought it out bravely to the last. The knight of Imayle, after badly wounding the bridegroom, was shot through the heart by the old lord of Drimnagh, as he attempted to seize the bridle of Eleanora's palfrey. This ended the fray. The body of the young knight was borne away by his followers, and buried in the lonely graveyard that lay amid the mountains. The bridal train, instead of proceeding to Dublin, returned to the castle of Drimnagh, where Sir Edmond de Barnwell was laid upon a b^l from which he never rose.

Three days after the fatal battle at the Minstrel's cross, Eleanora disappeared from the castle of Drimnagh. Search was made for her throughout the surrounding country, and even in the neighbouring city, but it was of no avail; she was nowhere to be found. At length a party of the O'Byrnes, who were driving a creak of cattle across the mountains, halted beside the solitary churchyard to pay a visit to the last resting-place of their young chief, and upon the fresh sod that lay above his gallant breast, found the lifeless body of the ill-fated Rose of Drimnagh. They hollowed her a grave beside her lover, and there, in the words of the old ballad,

"These loving hearts by fortune blighted,

By sorrow tried full sore,
In life apart, in death united,

Sleep side by side for evermore 1"