

Meantime, Carrie Mordaunt, her heart beating so violently in her breast that it sometimes produced an attack of suffocation and stopped her breathing, hurried homewards, her heavy woollen cloak effectually disguising her and preventing recognition.

Arrived there, she had time to change her dress and proceed towards the drawing-room; but, coming near to the opened door, she heard voices inside, and a name—the name was that uppermost in her thoughts—falling on her ear, she paused to listen.

"The question is this," said one, whose voice she knew to be that of Sir Richard Borlase, one of the two lord's deputies then paramount in the government of Ireland—"Is it not better to hang him at once, and put forth the necessary statement required in England? There will then be no chance of contradiction."

"I differ in opinion, Sir Richard," said Sir Charles Cooté. "I should extract the information from him on the rack. Torture is the thing needful. What say you, Raymond?"

"I will not venture an opinion, or, if I did, it would be that he should be regularly tried for rebellion for having been found with arms in his hands. It would be a warning to all others, and would save appearances. The rigid carrying out of the law would have a better effect in England than more summary and drastic measures. Irish lords would see—"

"Irish lords will see, by the heaven above me, that there is no mercy for those who fall into our hands!" interrupted Cooté, in a burst of passion. "If I had my will I should stretch them on the rack until their joints burst and their bones came asunder—or, if not, I should break their limbs with the headsman's hammer!"

The listener shuddered as she heard these words. "Better not say that elsewhere," said Borlase. "Much has been said already of expressions that dropped at the council table. Words are sometimes more dangerous than acts. Kill and lay waste, but always deplore outwardly the hard necessity that makes it imperative. That is the policy now-a-days—the wisest policy. It does not mean to spare—"

"Spare!" cried Cooté. "Spare! There shall not be a hound of Irish birth left in the land, nor Papist dog to pollute the soil—not one!"

"They are a prolific race, and grow again rapidly," said Borlase, smiling. "If you mow the heads off the shoulders of their lords and secure their broad estates I fancy you will have done enough for the present. Extermination, if possible, were the wisest plan, but—is it possible?"

"Possible?" iterated the ferocious Cooté, "perfectly possible. I should, if I were allowed free will—"

The listener put her hands to her ears. A coarse and savage expression, indicative of how he would prevent further growth or existence of the Irish race, came on her hearing, and she turned aside in disgust and fright. It was a statement long to be remembered in Irish history, and nothing more demoralising, perhaps, ever passed from human lips.

Carrie Mordaunt was inexpressibly shocked, and sought to close her ears to the expression, but the issues of the conversation were too tremendous for even maidenly modesty to bar the way to hearing it.

"Well, gentlemen, said her brother, "to what conclusion do you come? Further discussion is waste of time, and there is much business to be done."

"I vote for the confession," said one who had not spoken yet: "the rack will bring it forth. It can be had before witnesses. With that, the king's power, if not his head, will surely fall."

"I vote similarly," said Cooté. "I do not forget that the scoundrel's hand placed this mark here," pointing to his forehead, which still bore the marks of the escaping prisoner's blow.

"You are not forgiving enough—you will not adopt the Scriptural plan of dealing with an enemy," said Borlase, in ironical rebuke, which set all a-laughing—"If thine enemy smite thee on one cheek—"

"How do you propose it shall be done?" asked the secretary of the council, who appeared to be noting down their resolutions.

"Send a guard of soldiers to bring him hither, let him be heavily ironed, and placed in dungeons until to-morrow. To prevent traitorous hand from setting him free, as before, see that trusty soldiers are placed in the cell with him—they will keep him agreeable company," replied Sir Richard Borlase, with a cynical smile, which meant a great deal. "Who shall see that he is brought safely hither—you, Cooté?"

"No, I have other work to perform. But it must be done by careful hand. There must be no mistake this time," said Cooté. "He is of more importance to our purposes than a dozen others of their chiefs. I think you had better go, Raymond. You have met him before."

"If you wish it," said the secretary with some reluctance. "Yes. You had better discharge the duty," said Borlase. "It is too important to be committed to other hands."

"And prithee, Raymond, do not let the soldiers—they love a Papist rebel, you know—show him too many marks of affection on the way," said Borlase, gaily.

"Nor let them press his march too fast with the points of their bayonets or the butt-ends of their muskets," added Cooté significantly.

It was but with indifferent humour that it struck the ears of the listening girl, as they concluded their discussion on the subject, and addressed themselves to other matters.

The necessity of hearing what they said kept her strength up during the discussion; but now that it was over and a result arrived at, she felt her strength going and the sight leaving her eyes. To prevent herself falling she stretched out her hands against the wall, and bending her forehead to the cold stones sought to keep up the continuity of her thoughts.

Maurice O'Connor to be tortured!—Maurice O'Connor to be put on the rack!—these were the thoughts that kept running through her disordered brain. It seemed for some brief period as if demon voices, around and beside her, were whispering these words into her ears. But there were no forms there, nor voices in her ears

—it was only the excitement of her thoughts burning these words in letters of fire into her brain.

Maurice O'Connor to be tortured—at once she pictured the form stretched in agony on the rack, the tortured joints, the dew-drops of pain exuding from the forehead, the froth from the mouth, the eyes glassy and stony, the lips blue, the—

The picture set her brain, heart, and blood afire: called back all her strength and more; called up indeed such strength of frame and force of will as had never moved her slender form before; and almost unconscious of what she was doing, she sped across the hall, opened the door, closed it softly after her, and wholly inattentive to the surroundings, unconscious that house or street, or castle or battlement were around her, sentient only to the one loved figure, a prisoner on ship-board, and the terrible fate that awaited him, flew through the streets, passed the armed guards at the gates, and was away through the bye-paths and lanes that existed where now Merriem square and that portion of the city extends, and through the swamps that covered it, wholly unaware that her thin dress was insufficient against the cold air blowing over the swampy low reaches that formed the mouth of the river and, indeed, not caring. Only one thing was present to her mind—the anchored ship; only one form therein—her lover; only one scene surrounded all—the torture room and its concomitant horrors.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

Manus the weaver, when he had shut up his loom, walked about disconsolately enough. The burden of other people's troubles seemed to come and rest on his shoulders, but he did not complain nor even think of that. He was under many obligations to the gentle girl who now sought aid and assistance at his hands, and the generous heart in his dwarfed body was too large to permit him to give a thought to the trouble it put upon him. On the contrary his first intention was to go straight to the ship, where it was anchored—but then came the question, what should he do when he got there?

This was a question to which no proper answer presented itself, and he walked around and around the silent streets pondering the matter over. But for a long time his fertile brain could evolve no project at all feasible likely to be successful.

Suddenly he thought for a moment, stopped, scratched his ear, walked again, again stopped, paused, and pondered, and finally ended by flinging his cap high in the air, caught it again, danced a few steps, and, after this series of impulsive movements, hurried off on some further movement, carefully counting the few gold coins in the bottom of his pocket, as he did so, with the tips of his fingers.

His first visit was to a druggist's, where he purchased a considerable quantity of powders of a certain kind; his next to a vintner's, where he secured a small cask of brandy. This latter he corded so that whilst the bung could be easily opened, it was next to impossible that, whilst strapped on his back, it could come out by accident.

Making one excuse or another for his purchase he hurried on his way through the gates of the city. He had little difficulty in passing, for he was well known to the guards—there was scarcely one in the city who was not cognizant of the appearance of the little Flemish bunch-back weaver and his singular dwelling place.

"Weil, Manus, where are you going this hour of the night, and what is that you are carrying?"

"Hush-sh-sh!" said Manus, with a manner which might be taken as half joke and whole earnest. "Don't spake too loud. Its flax I'm takin' down to the marshes to steep."

"Flax! Its a queer hour to go to do that, Manus, isn't it?" asked the officer somewhat incredulously.

"Quare hour. Avoch man, what are you thinkin' ov? There is no other time to go to the marshes in the swamp, forby the strollers from the barley fields 'ud see me an' saize 'em for 'em-selves. It must be well steeped in the Bunialough, 'an good bempen rope med out iv id. An' there's no time to be lost. Not a minit."

"Why, Manus? What's all the haste for, and why do you want such good material?" asked the officer, gaily. "You're not going to hang yourself, I hope."

"Tut, tut, gossoon. Don't speak of these things, but listen to me—bearnen to me! There's great news, and rope enough 'il be soon wantin'. Great news!"

"What—what news, Manus?" asked the officer with some interest.

"The siege of Tredath is raised!" said Manus, in solemn confidence, "an' Sir Phelim is dhraggin' his guns as fast as he can towards the North."

"What!—No!" cried the other, in great surprise.

"Thru as the arch ov the gate is over your head—thru as the marshes are afore you, An' the Leinster med 'il be comin' nigh this way afore mornin'. Oh! there'll be hangins all over the land, an' stout ropes 'il be wantin' for rebel necks!"

"More power to you, Manus! If that's true, it's the best news I heard for many a day. Away with you and steep the flax, the sooner the rope is ready the better. But stay a moment!"

"No, no, I can't," said Manus. "It's no time for talkin'. An' look here! May be 'twould be as well for you to keep the gates locked. There'll be quare parties marchin' by here in the dark afore mornin', an' foxes couldn't creep by as stealthy an' as soft; so there's no knowin' what might happen; an' keep the iron bars atude you an' the cold air outside."

With which injunction, falling on ears not too slow to believe or follow it, Manus hurried out with the night, passed down the scrubby commons, now known as Collexe Green, the only solitary occupants of which were two bulls chained to strong upright posts, to be worried and baited by three mastiffs on the morrow—a sport in which the citizens in less troublesome times hugely delighted, and which, even now, they could not wholly forego, the scene of operation being so free from danger and quite beside the city gates; thence afterwards along the marshes whereon Merriem square and its surroundings now stand to the mouth of the river, where the vessel was anchored,