

Our Prize Story of the Week.

WHEN THE BEACON FIRES BURNED.

The Prize of Two Guineas has been awarded to Eoghan MacDiarmada
45 Lr. St. Brigid's Road, Drumcondra, Dublin, for the following Story.

CHAPTER I.

"The hill-tops with glory were glowing,
'Twas the eve of a bright harvest day."



It was a glorious harvest evening. Turlough Mulrooney's heart gave a bound. His eyes had for long hungered for the signal—for the glad light that would burn on Kesh Corran.

"At last! At last!" he cried. But disappointment was his lot.

"'Tis a glorious full moon to-night, Turlough. How beautifully she sits on the mountain-top!" said Nuala, his wife, as she stood beside him in the dooway.

"Agh!" exclaimed Turlough, impatiently, smarting under the set-back he had had. "It's right enough, but it's not that light I want to see there; that may do for poets."

"O, Turlough! why are you so anxious for that bonfire that will take you from me and from Emer—for ever, perhaps!"

"Hush now—don't plead. I am as unalterable in this as the very mountain yonder. Would you love me if I stayed behind whilst my neighbours went out against the red-coats?"

"Oh, but, Turlough, when you are gone who will save Emer and myself from molestation—from the brutality of the English soldiery?"

Turlough was silent for a moment, watching absentmindedly the "queen-moon seated upon her throne." Then in a far-off, abstracted, sublime way he made reply:

"The maiden and the wife must suffer

for her—for Caithleen Nee Houlihan. The child must go without its mother for her; the lover must forsake his sweetheart for her. She is an imperious, irresistible queen. The fascination of her looks has lured innumerable of her children to death."

"I think you only just now referred rather slightly to poets: surely, you are a bit contradictory, Turlough."

He laughed playfully, and after gently kissing his wife, walked up the slope of the hill, behind the house, saying, as he went: "I'll be a little late to-night, perhaps."

Nuala turned inside, and busying herself about household affairs tried to put away the poignant thought of the impending separation from her husband.

Meanwhile Emer had not returned from the milking-field where she had gone with Nannie, who was general help in the family.

"That is Randal M'Donagh coming towards us," said Nannie as both girls were about to cross the Owenkee by the plank which served as a bridge.

Emer blushed a little and muttered that she thought so.

Randal coming up gave a cheery salute, and then Emer, as Nannie passed on, said—

"You haven't heard the news?"

"What news, Randal?"

"French ships bringing men and arms have landed at Killala. My father had the news a while ago. He is preparing to join his corps, the Balderg Yeomanry. Look!" cried he, breaking off and pointing towards

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Kesh Corran. "That is the—the—Irish signal!"

"It is," said Emer proudly, "but why, Randal, didn't you say the words that first came to your tongue: That is the rebel signal."

Randal looked full into the flashing eyes of the slim girl beside him. He noted the erect carriage of the haughty little head and the heightened blush on the delicate cheek. He did not speak, for he did not quite know in what way he had offended.

"My father is watching for that light," continued Emer. "It is the light that will shine again if extinguished to-morrow; it is the light that will burn whilst one man is found worthy the soil he treads!"

"You are not more a 'rebel' at heart than I am, Emer. I hope you will forgive the use of the word which seems to give offence. I see now that no man can be a rebel against an authority, an usurpation, he has never acknowledged. However, you and I can only play at being soldiers; and, strange though it may appear, my father, although a yeoman, is as loyal to Ireland, according to his lights, as Turlough Mulrooney. Who knows but he may yet find himself on the right side."

"Oh, I pray he may, Randal; that would only be as it should be."

"And then, Emer," rejoined the embryo 'rebel,' as he lowered his voice to a sweet whisper, 'Maybe you wouldn't be so cold and haughty towards me?'

"Ah, I'm sorry if what you call my haughtiness"—and Emer smiled pleasantly—"has pained you."

"You might impersonate the spirit of Con-nacht. You flash like steel, but—but can be gentler than the dove!"

"Randal, beware! Flattery, you know, is a vice that grows imperceptibly. Now, have I ever been the dove?" The accents in which the question was asked were sweet and low, as Randal looked into the thoughtful, calm face, he failed to see how he could be called a flatterer.

But, wishing to avoid any further reference to the imminent clash of steel, he said—

"As I came along I saw a beautiful water-lily growing by the river bank. I will procure it for you if you come with me a little way. It will be some time yet before Nan-re has the milking done."

Emer silently acquiesced, and together the yeoman's son and "rebel's" daughter walked side by side, by the edge of the cinging Owen-kee, whilst the beacon-fires burned brightly here and there along the fading horizon—the signals that called their fathers to opposing forces!

Randal plucked the lily, and placed it in Emer's breast. He sat beside her, on the sweet-scented river-brink, and placing his hand on hers, said, in a quick whisper, "Emer, I love you! Oh, do not tell me it is impossible. What may not happen within the next few days. You and I may lie cold on the naked earth, our homes burned to the ground; for the English soldiers, I have heard, stop not to discriminate between those who are with them and those who are against them. I am not going from home; the yeomen, my father says, do not want striplings. Oh, Emer, I would face the worst if I knew you loved me in return for my love."

Emer was silent and looked into the golden heart of the lily for words to speak. How could she say that she gave her love to one the traditions of whose house were not in sympathy with hers? How dare she say that her heart was given to the son of her father's bitterest enemy—that enmity that had been transmitted from generation to generation, increasing as it went, for no apparent reason? She did not know well what to answer. Her heart would have gladly said: "Your love is reciprocated, Randal." But her head kept its mastery and urged evasiveness for the present, however.

The noise of a hurried step caught her ear. She stood up; Randal also. Her father came towards her, a joyful brightness in his eye; but on seeing Randal M'Donagh he asked a little angrily: "Emer, how's this?" Turning towards Randal, he said in stinging bitterness: "Your place, sir, is by your father with the English redcoats. You will require all your strength; to-morrow or next day we may meet again."

Randal would have spoken but his pride and love of Emer forbade. He walked silently away.

"You know the hatred between his father and me, Emer. You should not countenance his speech. What has he been saying to you?"

"Ugh! not much," answered Emer, greatly annoyed. "He says he is a rebel himself, and that, if the truth was known, his father is as sound at heart in our cause as you are."

Turlough laughed harshly before rejoicing. "Yes, indeed, girl; and he shows his loyalty to our cause by fighting with the enemy. Ha! ha! ha! Come, come; you were wont to be a sensible little woman. Be up early to-morrow morning—at daybreak—to see the proudest moment of your father's life, when he shoulders a pike in the march for Ireland!"

"With pike in hand for Ireland we battled
near and far,
From old Collooney's mountains to glorious
Castlebar."

—John O'Dowd.



EXT day saw Turlough
Mulrooney march at the
head of his command to
join the oncoming vic-
torious Irish army and
their French allies under
the masterly Humbert.

News had come that
everywhere the Irish and
French were victorious—at Killala, Ballina,
Castlebar, Newport, Westport, and Foxford,
to mention a few important points taken from
the fleeing English.

It was daybreak of a calm September morn-
ing, a few days after the departure of Tur-
lough Mulrooney, when a body of flying Eng-
lish soldiers, militia and yeomanry, came to-
wards Farnaleen, the home of Turlough, burn-
ing, murdering and pillaging as they went.
Along the route by which they came for miles
could be seen the smoke or lurid glare from
the rooftrees of what were once happy homes.
The Mulrooney homestead, standing close by
the main road, was soon the object of attack.
The infuriated, half-drunken soldiers—drunk
with the contents of a rifled publichouse that
stood at the cross road and which belonged to
a "loyalist"—raised a yell as they came
within view of the house.

"What is that?" asked Geoffrey McDo-
nagh wildly, as he sat up in bed.

He and his corps were awaiting orders from
headquarters and had not as yet moved afield.

Randal, who was sleeping in an adjoining
room, jumped up, and going to the window,
cried:—

"The soldiers! They are carrying torches.
We are not safe. Oh! they are going towards
Turlough Mulrooney's, and no one there to
defend Mrs. Mulrooney and Emer.
I will go down." And hastily pulling on
part of his clothes and seizing his father's
rifle, the impetuous boy was out and away
before his father fully realised what was
happening.

"Come back!" he shouted, "come back!
You will be shot like a dog if you interfere.
Soldiers do not make war on defenceless
women."

Geoffrey McDonagh, in his simple faith,
was soon to be undeceived.

The soldiers were banging the door of the
house just as Randal arrived. One was put-
ting a torch to the thatch whilst some few
lolling about joined in a low obscene song in
a drunken inharmonious manner.

"Stand back, you cowards!" shouted
Randal. Then observing the ruffian who was
firing the house he came down on the arm
that applied the torch with a smashing blow
of the rifle he had in his hand. The others
stood aghast—interference was the last thing
they expected. The noisy singers stopped in
the middle of the chorus, one shouting pro-
vocatively: "Now, Noll, man to man."
Noll, the torch-bearer, looked at Randal con-
temptuously and fiercely. Next moment he
made a sudden bayonet lunge which would
have put an end to any further interference
from young McDonagh had it been well
directed. As it was, the impetus of the
thrust sent the infuriated Noll toppling head
foremost. From the cheers and laughter
that immediately followed, it was evident
that Noll was not a favourite with his
chums, which circumstance probably saved
Randal from being shot instantaneously. His an-
tagonist resuming his feet rushed at him
again, but Randal lightly stepping
aside evaded the point, delivering
an ugly stab to the bully as he
stumbled. The contest was, however, an
unequal one. Randal went down before
superior strength and training, and as he lay
there, expecting every moment to receive a
final stab, he could see that the torch had
done its work. The house was on fire. Mrs.
Mulrooney and Emer appeared at a window
and begged for mercy, but obscene jests were
hurled at them in reply.

"Oh I sigh, 'ad we not better 'ave the
young un. I'll fetch that nice gal for
myself," said a large, red-eyed soldier.
Randal turned over in his own red-hot blood
that lay in a pool around him. He shut his
eyes—now almost closed in death—that he
might not see, and prayed to God that his
ears might be sealed. He uttered a heart-
rending groan and inwardly cried, "O God!
that this should be Emer's fate!"

"Noll, you didn't finish that young Irish
dog," said the red-eyed one as he proceeded
to possess himself of Emer. But old Geoffrey
McDonagh intervened like a stone out of a
catapult, furiously demanding an explanation
of the unseemly conduct.

"I have a command here," said he, "and
will immediately report this outrage to your
commanding officer. Good heavens! do you
call this warfare?"

"Steady now, steady," said one of the
soldiers who seemed to have some control,
however slight, over the unruly band. "I
am the commanding officer, sir. This is a
rebel's house—I know it; and you, too, my
good Captain, or General, or whatever you
are, are little better than a rebel."

Before Geoffrey could reply a groan from the doorstep arrested his attention, and there he beheld his one and only son lying prostrate. He was petrified. His face turned an ashy grey; then the fire of the old man shot up like a rocket.

"This is your work!" he said; and, stepping over to the prostrate form of his son, he stooped down and took up the rifle that lay by his outstretched hand. "Now I'm a rebel!" said he defiantly. "Now I'm what I should have always been, and by this hand"—and he shook his clenched fist in the ruffians' face—"I'll compensate for lost time!"

His son's assailant and the "commanding officer" both closed in on him threateningly. But at that moment a cry was raised—"The French are on us! the French are on us!" Geoffrey, not wishing to sell his life cheaply, during the momentary consternation that prevailed shot quickly up a few steps that led towards a barn, but not before three or four rifle shots were sent after him. Like sheep before a dog, away pell-mell went the red-coated warriors and their allies. The French soldiers—a small, well-disciplined body of men—came up under the lead of the redoubtable Humbert in person. The patrician, polished Bartholomew Teeling, commanded the Irish army, and was first to note the conflagration and dangerous plight of the two women. He ordered some of his men to their rescue, which was soon effected. Emer ran towards the proud young officer, who, although in French dress, she instinctively knew to be an Irishman. She hurriedly thanked him for her deliverance and that of her mother, and in heartfelt passionate words prayed that God would give him strength to smite the English enemy to the dust. Teeling smiled gently, and, patting the noble girl on the head, rode off.

Geoffrey M'Donagh lifted up the lifeless form of Randal, and, carrying it to his own house, asked Emer and Mrs. Mulrooney to accompany him.

"You have no home now," said he. "You must make yourselves as comfortable as you can at mine. And I will leave Randal to your care, that is if he is not beyond caring."

How glad Emer was of the charge committed to them! How anxiously she would watch the returning life of her hero-lover! And then, best of all, to see Geoffrey M'Donagh, the erstwhile yeoman, on Ireland's side!

The Balderg Yeomanry, with the exception of three, who remained neutral, marched within the hour to overtake the Irish and French troops. They were now on the patriotic side,

and with Geoffrey M'Donagh at their head, and that morning's happenings—ringing in their ears, determined to strike hard.

They had not far to go, for at Carricknagat, close by Collooney, an English force, under Colonel Vereker, gave battle to the French and Irish. It was a well-contested encounter, and Humbert afterwards attested that Vereker was the only British general in Ireland who could command a hundred men. It was gratifying to the veteran Republican Commander to have a masterly opponent against him at last, for during his whole almost unimpeded march of a fortnight's duration across Connaught from Killala he had not met such another. But, if this was pleasing to the old soldier of a hundred fights, it was more gratifying to find that even such a brave, capable man and his well-disciplined soldiers had to give way before the onrush of Teeling and his irresistible, though badly trained and badly armed, Irish Command. Farnaleen and Balderg were well represented, and the parish within a ten mile radius that was not there has since had ample reason to hang its head. The English were routed—the Irish and their French allies victors of the field.

III.

"We drink the memory of the brave, the faithful, and the few."



IN the field of Ballinamuck Geoffrey McDonagh and Turlough Mulrooney fought side by side, and when the day was lost and after the French had surrendered, knowing that no quarter whatever would be shown to the Irish sol-

diers, they, with their comrades, fought for two long hours against the concentrated army of England. No mercy would be shown them if they gave up their arms: that was the order of the day.

Evening was closing in; escape was almost impossible. Death would come sooner or later to these brave men.

Geoffrey and Turlough thought of home and the loved ones there. The thought was an incentive to make one desperate dash for life. The English were closing up on them. Geoffrey came to Turlough, and, having sug-



OCCASIONALLY HE COULD HEAR A COARSE
LAUGH OR SONG,

gested a quick, fierce onrush against the enemy at a point that seemed vulnerable, the order was given. It was a memorable charge; it was the last remaining hope of escape. It proved successful, but not for all those who participated. Out of over fifty men scarcely a dozen got away.

Geoffrey had become separated from his comrade, and as he lay hid in a deep glen, closely concealed by thick underwood, he wondered had Turlough too made good his escape. He felt the loss of his companionship acutely. He who had so bravely come through that splendid fight at Carricknagat, and who had marched and fought for freedom and fatherland till overcome by overwhelming numbers at Ballinamuck; who had sacrificed a gentle wife and daughter, and whose home had been reduced to ashes in his absence, was now, perhaps, lying cold with his face upturned to Heaven. Geoffrey would have liked to have taken him by the hand and said that at last they were friends, although that seemed quite unnecessary.

The imperious queen—the irresistible Cathleen Nee Houlihan—had lured many to their death to-day, and since the beacon-fires first burned on the Wexford and Ulster hills. From the four winds her lovers had jubilantly rushed to her aid. What if to-day victory was not hers—she had had too many Ballinamucks, and had survived them, to think this more than a passing set back—another day would come, another Clontarf!

Geoffrey M'Donagh after his providential escape, instead of giving way to unmanly despair, mused rather rhapsodically. He was a brave man, and had believed at first that insurrection was inadvisable. He was a landed proprietor, though in a small way. He had inherited aristocratic tendencies. But a proud man he was now that something—even the loss of his only son—should have turned his heart and mind and hand to the defence of his Motherland.

For long that night of an eventful day he lay closely concealed from the inhuman redcoats. Occasionally he could hear a hoarse laugh or song, or the piercing scream of some "rebel" as he was being done to death.

At last the bugle sounded to call up the sleuth-hounds. Geoffrey determined to emerge when all was quiet and try to find Turlough Mulrooney. But was he incautious—had he stirred the briars and bracken? For next moment a volley of shots was discharged into his hiding place by a party of soldiers returning to camp. A loud cry of anguish greatly delighted the marksmen, as one of them cried aloud: "Another Irish rat! By G—, that's a bloomin' grain o' salt on 'is tail! Ha! ha! ha!"

Next day the news of the disastrous field of Ballinamuck had reached Tarnallen. And neither Turlough Mulrooney nor Geoffrey M'Donagh had returned. A few of those under their command had crept back, but for the present kept carefully in hiding. These gave all the vivid details of that well-fought day. It was not, in the light of these narrations, a sad, but a proud day for Ireland. And one of the survivors told of the rush for life that was planned and led by Turlough and Geoffrey.

"If they had escaped alive they would have returned," said Emer.

"Perhaps they are better away from here for a while, till matters quiet somewhat," said her mother.

"But surely Geoffrey M'Donagh would be anxious to return if he were alive, knowing how dangerously near death Fergus was when he left. Oh, mother, I think God's Hand was in the work, though I'm ashamed to say it. I hope it isn't an impious thought. Think how Geoffrey came to fight on our side! That is worth all. It is worth the little blood Fergus has lost; it is worth the burning of our house."

And although Emer spoke so much she had not even to her mother openly revealed the thought that was uppermost in her mind. The pride she felt that her lover—her hero—was the son of such a man—that he, too, had imminently risked his life for her and for her mother, that the true, manly, open chivalry was there; that was the thought that added sweetness and unspeakable joy to her whole life.

Her mother stirred the big fire that burned on the hearth, and asked Nannie, whose services had been transferred to the household of Geoffrey M'Donagh, to prepare tea. Emer stole noiselessly to the sick room of Fergus.

Had ever patient more gentle nurse? With such care and tenderness Fergus, it would seem, should have been up and about long since, for his injuries were not serious; but may be he was not too anxious to put away that half-sad, appealing look those sweet-whispering words of concern and love.

He was brighter this evening, and as Emer sat by his bedside he jocosely said:

"So the fight is over, nurse?"

"It is, Fergus—for the present!"

"Oh, my unconquerable little heroine! But your splendid Teeling is a prisoner."

"He is; but, being a French officer, will be given his freedom."

"Ah! do you think so?"

Without waiting for an answer, Fergus turned away and composed himself to sleep. He was reluctant to give voice to the thought that came to his mind at the moment that

despite the French uniform, the gallant Teeling would have to die now that the merciless enemy had him in her talons. The presentiment was a true one. The hero of Carricknagat gave his life for Ireland on the scaffold.

Fergus was weak from loss of blood, but, as has been already observed, unwearied love and careful, gentle nursing in time brought back a little of the glow to the cheek and the brightness to the eye. And oh, with what glad looks Emer watched his convalescence!

Her joy at seeing him moving about again was unconcealed. There was, however, the uncertainty of the fate of her father ever present in her mind. Fergus, too, thought of his father with poignant sorrow. How often they sat—Fergus and Emer—mingling, so to speak, their tears. And in their mutual grief and exchange of comforting words they felt their love grow for one another, with ineffable sweetness. Mrs. Mulrooney was resigned to the worst; but, withal, her hope was strong that Turlough would return, and Geoffrey, too.

The dusk of evening was deepening into night as Fergus and Emer stood by the doorway. The big collie barked in the farmyard. It was a friendly, short bark. Emer and Fergus looked joyfully into each other's eyes. Next moment towards them came Geoffrey M'Donagh, leaning heavily on the arm of Turlough Mulrooney!

Seated round the table in the big parlour of Balderg House that night a happy party of five recounted their varied experiences.

Geoffrey M'Donagh had been shot in the leg as he lay hiding, but the cry he gave was the means of saving him. Turlough Mulrooney, not far off (lying concealed, too, with two of his comrades), heard the scream, and after some time located Geoffrey. They were long in returning to Farnaleen owing to Geoffrey's wound, and to the fact that they could only travel by night, and then by unfrequented bye-ways. The glasses were filled and emptied; filled again and Ireland toasted. And proud were these men—proud were all—that Ireland had not found them wanting in the hour of need. And it now seemed but a minor matter that the animosity of the two families, which had subsisted for generations, was turned to friendship and love.

"So the invalid is all right again, Emer?" said old Geoffrey slyly as he looked towards Fergus, who, boylike, blushed!

"Has he been ill?" said Turlough, remembering the harsh words he had uttered against Fergus some weeks previously.

Emer recounted simply Fergus's encounter with the soldiers.

"Your hand!" exclaimed Turlough, jumping up. "And I ask your forgiveness for whatever I said to you that evening as the signal fires burned on the hills."

"Oh, I never thought of it," answered Fergus in a trembling voice, as Emer quietly (the little rogue!) placed her hand in his unseen by any.

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