

THE FIGHT OF HELL-KETTLE

BY TYRONE POWER, AUTHOR OF THE "LOST HEIR," "THE KING'S SECRET," &c.

NEVER let it be said the days of chivalry are fled! heralds may have ceased to record good blows stricken, to the tune of "a largesse, worthie knights"—pennon and banner, square and swallow-tailed sleeve and scarf, with all the trumpery of chivalry, are long since dead, 't is true; but the lofty, generous feeling with which that term has become identified, is yet burning clear and bright within ten thousand bosoms, not one of which ever throbbed at the recollections the word itself inspires in "gentil heartes," or could tell the difference between Or and Gules, or Vert and Sable, as the following narration of a combat between two "churles," or "villains," as the herald would term my worthies, will, I trust, go nigh to prove.

It was the fair night at Donard, a small village in the very heart of the mountains of Wicklow, when, at the turn of a corner leading out of the Dunlavin road, towards the middle of the fair, two ancient foemen abruptly encountered. They eyed one another for a moment without moving a step, when the youngest, a huge six-foot mountaineer, in a long top-coat, having his shirt opened from breast to ear, displaying, on the least movement, a brawny chest that was hairy enough for a trunk, growing rather impatient, said in a quick under-tone, that a listener would have set down for the extreme of politeness,

"You'll lave the wall, Johnny Evans!"

To which civil request came reply, in a tone equally bland,

"Not at your biddin', if you stand where you are till next fair-day, Mat Dolan."

"You know well I could fling you neck and heels into that gutter in one minute, Johnny, ma bouchil."

"You might, indeed, if you called up twenty of the Dunlavin faction at your back," coolly replied Evans.

"I mane, here's the two empty hands could do all that, and never ax help ather," retorted Dolan, thrusting forth two huge paws from under his coat.

"In the name o' heaven, then, thry it!" said Evans, flinging the alpeen* he had up to this time been balancing curiously over the roof of the cottage by which they stood, adding, "Here's a pair of fists with as little in thim as your own!"

"It's aisy to brag by your own barn, Johnny Evans," said Dolan, pointing with a sneer to the police guard-house on the opposite side of the way, a hundred yards lower down; "the peelers would be likely to look on and see a black orangeman like yourself quilted in his own town, under their noses, by one Mat Dolan, from Dunlavin all the way!"

"There's raison in that, any way, Matty," replied John, glancing in the direction indicated. "It's not likely thim that's paid by government to keep the peace would stand by and see it broke by Papist or Protestant. But I'll make a bargain wid you: if your

* Little stick.

blood's over hot for your skin, which I think, to say truth, it has long been,—come off at onest to Hell-kettle wid me, and in the light of this blessed moon I'll fight it out with you, toe to toe; and we'll both be the aisier after, which ever's bate."

"There's my hand to that at a word, Johnny," cried Dolan, suiting the action to the word, and the hands of the foes clasped freely and frankly together.

"But are we to be only ourselves, do ye mane?" inquired Matthew.

"And enuff too," answered Evans; "we couldn't pick a friend out of any tint above, without raisin' a hullabaloo the divil wouldn't quiet without blows. Here, now, I'll give you the wall; only you jump the hedge into Charles Faucett's meadow, and cut across the hill by Holy-well into the road, where you'll meet me; divil a soul else will you meet that way to-night; and I want to call at home for the tools."

"Keep the wall," cried Dolan, as Evans stepped aside, springing himself at the same time into the road, ankle-deep in mud; "I'll wait for you at the bridge on the Holy-wood glin road. Good b'ye."

A moment after, Dolan had cleared the hedge leading out of the lane into Mr. Faucett's paddock, and Evans was quietly plodding his way homeward. To reach his cottage, he had to run the gauntlet through the very throng of the fair, amidst crowded tents, whence resounded the ill-according sounds of the bagpipe and fiddle, and the loud whoo! of the jig-dancers, as they beat with active feet the temporary floor, that rattled with their tread. Johnny made short greeting with those of his friends he encountered, and, on entering his house, plucked a couple of black, business-like looking sticks from the chimney, hefted them carefully, and measured them together with an eye as strict as ever gallant paired rapier with, till, satisfied of their equality, he put his top-coat over his shoulders, and departing by the back-door, rapidly cleared two or three small gardens, and made at once for the fields. As Dolan dropped from the high bank into the lane near the bridge on one side, Evans leaped the gate opposite.

"You've lost no time, fegs!" observed Matthew, as they drew together shoulder to shoulder, stalking rapidly on.

"I'd bin vexed to keep you waitin' this time, any how," replied Johnny; and few other words passed.

Just beyond the bridge they left the road together, and mounting the course of the little stream, in a few minutes were shut out from the possibility of observance in a wild narrow glen, at whose head was a waterfall of some eighteen feet. The pool which received this little cascade was exceedingly deep, and having but one narrow outlet between two huge stones, the pent waters were forced round and round, boiling and chafing for release; and hence the not unpoetic name of Hell-kettle given to the spot. The ground immediately about it was wild, bare, and stony, and in no way derogated from this fearful title.

Near the fall is a little plafond or level of some twenty yards square, the place designed by Evans for the battle-ground. Arrived here, the parties halted; and as Dolan stooped to raise a little of the pure stream in his hand to his lips, Evans cast his coats and vest on the grey stone close by, and pulling his shirt over his head, stood

armed for the fight, not so heavy or so tall a man as his antagonist Dolan, but wiry as a terrier, and having, in agility and training, advantages that more than balanced the difference of weight and age.

"I've been thinkin', Johnny Evans," cried Dolan, as he leisurely stripped in turn, "we must have two thrys, after all, to show who's the best man. You've got your alpeens wid you, I see, and I'm not the boy to say no to thim; but I expect you'll ha' the best ind o' the stick, for it's well known there's not your match in Wicklow, if there is in Wexford itself."

"That day's past, Matty Dolan," replied Evans. "It's five years since you and me first had words at the Pattern o' the Seven-churches, and that was the last stroke I struck with a stick. There's eight years betune our ages, and you're the heavier man by two stone, or near it—what more 'ud yez have, man alive?"

"Oh, never fear me, Johnny; we'll never split about trifles," quietly replied Dolan; "but, see here, let's dress one another, as they do potatoes, both ways. Stand fairly up to me for half a dozen rounds, fist to fist, and I'll hould the alpeen till you're tired after id."

"Why, look ye here, Matty, you worked over long on George's Quay, and were over friendly with the great boxer, Mister Donalan, for me to be able for yez wid the fists," cried Evans. "But we'll split the difference: I'll give you a quarter of an hour out o' me wid the fists, and you'll give me the same time, if I'm able, with the alpeen after; and we'll toss head or harp, which comes first."

Evans turned a copper flat on the back of his hand as he ended his proposal, and in the same moment Dolan cried,

"Harp for ever."

"Harp it is," echoed Evans, holding the coin up in the moon's ray, which shone out but fitfully, as dark clouds kept slowly passing over her cold face.

In the next moment they were toe to toe in the centre of the little plain, both looking determined and confident; though an amateur would have at once decided in favour of Dolan's pose.

To describe the fight scientifically would be too long an affair; suffice it, that although Johnny's agility gave him the best of a couple of severe falls, yet his antagonist's straight hitting and superior weight left him the thing hollow, till five quick rounds left Evans deaf to time and tune, and as sick as though he had swallowed a glass of antimonial wine instead of poteen.

Dolan carried his senseless foe to the pool, and dashed water over him by the hatfull.

"Look at my watch," was Johnny's first word, on gaining breath.

"I can't tell the time by watch," cried Dolan, a little sheepish.

"Give it here, man," cried Johnny, adding, as he rubbed his left eye, the other being fast closed; "by the Boyne, this is the longest quarter of an hour I ever knew—it wants three minutes yet!" and as he spoke, again he rose up before his man.

"Sit still, Johnny," exclaimed Matthew; "I'll forgive you the three minutes, anyhow."

"Well, thank ye for that," says Johnny; "I wish I may be able to return the compliment presently; but, by St. Donagh, I've mighty little conceit left in myself just now."

Within five minutes, armed with the well-seasoned twigs Johnny had brought with him, those honest fellows again stood front to front; and although Evans had lost much of the elasticity of carriage which had ever been his characteristic when the alpeen was in his hand and the shamrock under his foot in times past; although his left eye was closed, and the whole of that side of his physiognomy was swollen and disfigured through the mauling he had received at the hands of Dolan, who opposed him, to all appearance, fresh as at first; yet was his confidence in himself unshaken, and in the twinkle of his right eye a close observer might have read a sure anticipation of the victory a contest of five minutes gave to him; for it was full that time before Johnny struck a good-will blow, and when it took effect, a second was uncalled for. The point of the stick had caught Dolan fairly on the right temple, and laying open the whole of the face down to the chin, as if done by a sabre stroke, felled him senseless.

After some attempts at recalling his antagonist to perception by the brook-side without success, Evans began to feel a little alarmed for his life, and hoisting him on his back, retraced his steps to the village, without ever halting by the way, and bore his insensible burthen into the first house he came to, where, as the devil would have it, a sister of Dolan's was sitting, having a goster with the owner, one widow Donovan, over a "rakin' pot o' tay."

"God save all here," said Johnny, crossing the floor without ceremony, and depositing Mat on the widow's bed. "Wid'y, by your lave, let Mat Dolan lie quiet here a bit, till I run down town for the doctor."

"Dolan!" screamed the sister and the widow in a breath: "Mat—is it Mat Dolan that's lying a corpse here, and I his own sister not to know he was in trouble!"

Loud and long were the lamentations that followed this unlucky discovery. The sister rushed frantically out to the middle of the road, screaming and calling on the friends of Dolan to revenge his murder on Evans and the orangemen that had decoyed and slain him. The words passed from lip to lip, soon reaching down to the heart of the fair, where most of the parties were about this time corned for anything.

"Johnny Evans," cried the widow Donovan, as he made in few words the story known to her, "true or not, this is no place for you now; the whole of his faction will be up here in a minute, and you'll be killed like a dog on the flure. Out wid you, and down to the guard-house, while the coast's clear!"

"I'd best, maybe," cried Evans; "and I'll send the doctor up the quicker; but mind, widow, if that boy ever spakes, he'll say a fairer fight was never fought. Get that out of him, for the love o' Heaven, Mrs. Donovan!"

"He hasn't a word in him, I fear," cried the widow, as Johnny left the door, and with the readiness of her sex, assisted by one or two elderly gossips, who were by this time called in, she bathed the wound with spirits, and used every device which much experience in cracked crowns, acquired during the lifetime of Willy Donovan, her departed lord, suggested to her. Meantime, Evans, whilst making his way down through the village, had been met, and recognised by the half frantic sister of Dolan and her infuriated friends,

who had been all for some time puzzled at the absence of him who was proverbial as

“Best foot on the flure,
First stick in the fight.”

“There’s the murderer of Mat Dolan, boys,” cried the woman, as some ten or twelve yards off she recognized Johnny, who was conspicuous enough, wearing his shirt like a herald’s tabard, as in his haste he had drawn it on at Hell-kettle. With a yell that might have scared the devil, thirty athletic fellows sprang forward at full speed after Evans, who wisely never stayed to remonstrate, but made one pair of heels serve, where the hands of Briareus, had he possessed as many, would not have availed him. He arrived at Mrs. Donovan’s door before his pursuers; he raised the latch, but it gave not way—the bar was drawn within; and, had his strength been equal to it, further flight was become impracticable. Turning with his back to the door, there stood Johnny like a lion at bay, uttering no word, since he well knew words would not prevail against the fury of his foes. Forward with wild cries and loud imprecations rushed the foremost of the pursuers, and Evans’ life was not worth one moment’s purchase. A dozen sticks already clattered like hail upon his guard and on the wall over his head, when the door suddenly opening inwards, back tumbled Johnny, and into the space he thus left vacant stepped a gaunt figure, naked to the waist, pale, and marked with a stream of blood yet flowing from the temple. With wild cries the mob pressed back.

“It’s a ghost!—it’s Dolan’s ghost!” shouted twenty voices, above all of which was heard that of the presumed spirit, crying in good Irish, “That’s a lie, boys; it’s Mat Dolan himself! able and willing to make a ghost of the first man that lifts a hand agin Johnny Evans, who bate me at Hell-kettle like a man, and brought me here after on his back, like a brother.”

“Was it a true fight, Mat?” demanded one or two of the foremost, recovering confidence enough to approach Dolan, who, faint from the exertion he had made, was now resting his head against the door-post.

A pause, and the silence of death followed. The brows of the men began to darken as they drew close to Dolan. Evans saw his life depended on the reply of his antagonist, who already seemed lapsed into insensibility.

“Answer, Mat Dolan!” he cried impressively, “for the love of Heaven answer me—was it a true fight?”

The voice appeared to rouse the fainting man. He raised himself in the doorway, and stretched his right hand towards Evans, exclaiming,

“True as the cross, by the blessed Virgin!” and as he spoke fell back into the arms of his friends.

Evans was now safe. Half a dozen of the soberest of the party escorted him down to the police station, where they knew he would be secure; and Dolan’s friends, bearing him with them on a car, departed, without an attempt at riot or retaliation.

This chance took place sixteen years ago; but since that day there never was a fair at Dunlavin that the orangeman Evans was not the guest of Dolan, nor is there a fair-night at Donard that Mat Dolan

does not pass under the humble roof of Johnny Evans. I give the tale as it occurred, having always looked upon it as an event creditable to the parties, both of whom are alive and well, or were a year ago; for it is little more since Evans, now nigh sixty years old, walked me off my legs on a day's grousing over Church-mountain, and through Oram's-hole, carrying my kit into the bargain. Adieu. It will be a long day ere I forget the pool of "Hell-kettle," or the angels in whose company I first stood by its bubbling brim.

THE DEW-DROP AND THE ROSE.

A DEW-DROP fell on a Rose's breast,—
 Deep in her cup he fell,
 And there he lay in tranquil rest
 And deem'd he 'd ever dwell.
 She hid him in her leaves so bright,
 Whilst he lay hush'd beneath,
 O'er him she watch'd till morning light,
 And fann'd him with her breath.
 The young Dew-drop enamour'd grew,
 And loved away the hours;
 Unheeded the soft zephyr flew,
 And blush'd the neighb'ring flowers.
 The Rose's treasured guest was there,
 Till sultry noon was high—
 She had no doubt, distrust, or care,
 Fear'd no inconstancy.
 And now the Drop said to his Rose,
 (And sparkled on the fair,)
 "Thy perfumed leaves, my love, uncloseth—
 I long to breathe the air."
 The Rose obey'd; domestic, kind,
 And full of tenderness,
 She deem'd none dearer he could find,
 Or e'er could love her less.
 A lovely Sunbeam, gay and warm,
 Came rambling down that way;
 She mark'd the glittering Dew-drop's form,
 And paused her court to pay.
 He saw the fair intruder glide,
 Array'd in splendour's gay attire,
 Look'd from his gentle blushing bride,
 And looking linger'd to admire.
 Pleased with the fair one's graceful air,
 The faithless lover gazed a while,
 When, lo! he was no longer there—
 He sunk, and perish'd 'neath her smile!
 The blooming Rose in sorrow droop'd,
 (As she who is forsaken grieves,)
 Breathed not her woes, but mildly stoop'd,
 And, silent, shed her beauteous leaves.
 Fondly and vainly, maidens bright,
 The faithless men ye kindly cherish;
 For, spite of love's most hallow'd plight,
 Their fleeting vows like "dew-drops" perish.