

The Bridge at Athlone.

Randal William McDonnell

WHEN I arrived in Athlone I found that Ginkel had already captured the English portion of the town which lay on the far side of the river, and that our forces had retreated into the Irish town on the Connaught side and had cut the enemy off by destroying two arches of the bridge across the Shannon.

On the 22nd of June Ginkel opened fire on the Castle and the walls of the Irish town, and so fierce was the bombardment that he practically battered down the whole of the Castle which lay next the river, so that our men had to make a new entrance at the back to pass in and out by.

By the 26th of June the fire from the seven batteries of the enemy had driven us from our trenches by the river and had ruined most of the houses that were as yet left standing. The cannonade had been so continuous and so furious that a cat could scarce appear without being knocked on the head by a great or small shot.

Ginkel now resolved to storm the town by forcing a passage across the bridge.

His men had already repaired the broken arch on their side of the Shannon, and now that we had been driven from our breast-works they were able to repair the last broken arch by laying beams across, and then planks on top of these.

When the enemy were on the point of crossing the bridge, Sergeant Custume, of Maxwell's dragoons, stepped up to Saint Ruth and volunteered to smash down the plank bridge with any other men who would dare the risk.

In a few moments the gallant soldier collected ten brave comrades, who advanced across the bridge in the full face of the deadly fire poured in upon them by the enemy. Many of them fell, but the few left standing continued the noble task. All the newly-laid planks were torn up and cast into the river and then the huge beams were attacked with axe and saw. Before these could be severed and cast into the stream gallant Custume and his ten comrades had died.

Fresh volunteers were called for to complete the task, and catching up one of the axes I sprang towards the bridge, many other noble fellows following hard upon my heels.

Amidst that hail of death which Ginkel kept pouring in upon us we hacked and sawed and smashed. The great beams commenced to yield, but the volunteers were falling like corn before the sickle, and as the last beam began to quiver there were only three of us left upon the bridge.

As the last beam groaned and fell, a piece of falling timber struck me sideways and I was hurled over the side of the bridge down into the depths of the rushing Shannon.

I rose to the surface half choked with water and struck out boldly for the Irish bank of the river, but the current was too powerful for me, and I was whirled down along with masses of floating debris from the bridge and finally cast on shore far below the confines of the town.

I crawled out on the bank and lay down worn out with weakness and the shock of my immersion, and was discovered two hours afterwards by a kindly peasant, who conveyed me on his cart to Ballinasloe.

I lay there for three days in a state of complete collapse, and I was beginning to recover my old strength again when a messenger from Patrick Sarsfield (for we who loved him loved the old name best and seldom called him Earl of Lucan) came to tell me that Athlone had been captured by Ginkel, owing to the vanity and folly of Saint Ruth.

That night our retreating army came pouring into Ballinasloe, wounded and tired, and despondent at the loss of Athlone.

A week after that, when I was completely recovered and had left my bed, General Sarsfield, who had heard of my adventures, presented me to the Commander-in-chief in the following words, which, I think, represent my character pretty fairly :

“ Let me present to you,” says he, turning to Saint Ruth, “ Colonel Phelim O’Hara, of Sarsfield’s Horse a gallant soldier of King James, and a man of infinite resource.”

The Battle of Aughrim.

OUR entire army now retired from Ballinasloe and crossing the River Suck took up a position behind it. Saint Ruth, while waiting to see what move Ginkel would make next from Athlone, rode out with Sarsfield and others to inspect the surrounding country, and finding a strong position at Aughrim, some four miles south-west of Ballinasloe, he ordered us to move there and encamp.

General Ginkel marched from Athlone on Friday, the 10th, and during the next day reached Ballinasloe, and was facing us at Aughrim on the afternoon of the 12th of July.

During the great battle which followed I never drew my sword until the close of day, for I was stationed at the back of the Hill of Kilcommodon with the reserve cavalry under Sarsfield, who had been placed here owing to the bitter jealousy of Saint Ruth.

The position of our army had been admirably chosen on the side of the Hill of Kilcommodon, which sloped up from a boggy valley.

Our lines extended for a mile and a half along the slope of a hill, and the bogs in front made a cavalry charge impossible for the enemy and an infantry attack difficult. In front of our line a small river ran which increased the defensive character of the position.

Our right wing extended beyond the hill where there was firm ground on both sides of the river, while our left wing rested on the Castle of Aughrim, beyond which lay a vast bog.

Saint Ruth had entrenched his position and had made every possible use of the natural state of the ground. The two armies were equally matched, consisting each of about 20,000 men.

The battle commenced at five in the afternoon, and the enemy’s Foot advanced over the boggy land and tried to storm our works.

But again and again they were driven back with deadly loss. Once they were broken in pieces and our men chased them back across the morass, where they again rallied.

The fight had now lasted two hours and the shades of evening were closing in with all the advantage on our side.

Saint Ruth was firmly convinced that the day was won, for, waving his hat in the air, he cried out across the ranks, “ The day is ours, my boys, we will drive them before us to the gates of Dublin.”

It was at this point of battle, I remember, that General Sarsfield sent me forward with a message to Saint Ruth about the movement of our cavalry, and finding our Commander in a triumphant mood I ventured good-naturedly to express my opinion about his neglect of Sarsfield in making no use of his great services in the battle.

“ May a plain soldier, General,” said I (referring, of course, to the bluntness of my speech), “ tell you clearly that the back of Kilcommodon Hill is the last spot on God’s earth where you should have left the Earl of Lucan !”

Saint Ruth turned on me like a wild beast.

“ May I ask, Colonel O’Hara,” says he, “ do I command the Irish or do you ?” and then, I think (for my knowledge of the French tongue was still in the embryo stage), that he told me to go to a place which Cromwellians have often suggested as an alternative to Connaught.

But to whatever place he may have consigned me I knew that his answer was insolent, and I determined to show him how a Connaught gentleman could reply to a French barbarian.

I was in the act of giving him an answer that would have stiffened him in his saddle, when a cannon ball came suddenly and took off his head ; by which our army lost a very capable commander and I the chance of a powerful repartee.

The following story of that fatal shot was told to me afterwards in Limerick.

On the day before the battle an Irish squireen, called O’Kelly, had some sheep stolen from him by some of Saint Ruth’s soldiers.

This man and his shepherd came to the General to complain, but he told them that it was wrong to grumble at such a small loss when the soldiers were fighting for the cause of Ireland. The man then persisted in his complaint, and Saint Ruth threatened to hang him.

The enraged squireen then turning to his shepherd said in our Irish tongue, “ Mark the General !”

The two then departed, and crossing to the enemy’s camp gave themselves up to General Ginkel, who hearing their story sent them on to an artilleryman named Trench, saying that these men might show him a mark worth shooting at.

Just before Saint Ruth was killed Trench was in one of the batteries on the Aughrim side with the two men beside him.

As Saint Ruth was standing on the slope the shepherd cried out in Irish, “ Master I see the Frenchman !”

O’Kelly translated the words to the artillery-man, who asked, “ Where is he ?”

“ There,” answered the shepherd, “ as fine as a bandsman in front of those Horse.” (referring to the brilliancy of our General’s uniform and medals) .

Trench then laid the gun, sighted for Saint Ruth, and fired.

When the smoke cleared away the artillery-man cried out, “ Is the Frenchman hit ?”

“ He’s on his horse yet,” answered the shepherd. “ You’ve only blown the hat off him,” and then added, “No ! by God, but the head’s in it too, for I see them rolling down the hill !”

But at any rate, no matter how that shot may have been fired, it was from the time of Saint Ruth’s death that our disasters began.

Major-General Mackay now succeeded in turning our left flank by breaking through the pass at Aughrim Castle.

All our gallant fellows who had fought so bravely seemed to become paralysed and finally broke and fled.

The carnage which followed was something horrible, for the retreat developed into a *sauve qui pent*, and no quarter was given.

Sarsfield and I with the reserve Horse protected the Foot to the best of our ability, but scarcely a man would have escaped only for the darkness of the night.

Afterwards, on the field of battle alone, the dead bodies of four thousand of our men were counted, and from a hill near the battlefield over an extent of nearly four miles, the country could be seen white with the bodies of the slain.

All that night the retreat rolled on, and when the sun rose at last over Aughrim it shone down upon the shattered weapons, the trampled banners, and the dead heroes of King James’s lost cause.

Men call it Chance.

IN the darkness of the night during that terrible retreat I found myself separated from the main body of horse under Sarsfield.

When the dawn broke I found myself close to a place called Portumna, and some miles above this, where the Shannon narrows, I swam my tired horse across the river.

My sword for Sarsfield ; a story of the Jacobite war in Ireland. Edited from the memoirs of Phelim O’Hara, 1668-1750, a colonel in Sarsfield’s Horse (1920)

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Lieutenant-General De St. Ruth
Marches To Ballinasloe.

Lieutenant-General the Sieur de St. Ruth, on the 1st of July, the day the Irish Town of Athlone was stormed, marched to Miltown Pass, *en route* for Ballinasloe, where he intended taking up his quarters. Several of the soldiers, disgusted with his haughty conduct, like Lord Lucan was during the siege of Athlone, now deserted him, and were soon followed by others ; so that the Connaught regiments gradually grew thin, and it is believed that about 7,000 men either deserted, or were prevented from joining, on hearing of his quarrel with Sarsfield , who was the most popular of all the commanders with the army.

The Irish army consisted at this time of only 11,600 foot and 3,500 cavalry, making a total of 15,100 men. Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth now saw clearly that he should account to Louis XIV. for his unaccountable conduct in causing the loss of Athlone, and consequently made up his mind to risk a battle with Baron de Ginckell, and conquer or die. He abandoned the prudent plan he at first entertained of protracting the war, and waiting for succour from France ; threw aside all his former haughtiness and severity, treated the Irish officers with familiarity, and acted with kindness towards the privates. He determined on looking for a good position to make up in some measure for the disparity of his troops, compared with those of the Williamite forces. On viewing the neighbourhood of Ballinasloe, he was struck with the strong aspect of Aughrim, which is situated about three miles from that town, and, marching there with his army, pitched his camp between Kilcomedan Hill, and the church of Gortnapoury, and then commenced to arrange the defences and ditches of the old Castle of Aughrim.

The English, in the meantime, were making every needful preparation, for Baron de Ginckell felt confident that if he proved successful in the coming battle, the Kingdom of Ireland would be subdued, and would acknowledge the Prince of Orange as King William III.

The first order given by the Baron, after the fall of Athlone, was to have all the slain, including the Irish, interred. When this was accomplished, the entire English army formed in order, and to demonstrate the pleasure they felt at their success, fired three salvoes, which were followed by three consecutive discharges from forty-three field pieces. Bonfires were also kept lit during the night. On the 3rd of July, the Williamites began to repair the castle, the fortifications, the ruined houses, and the streets. This day, also, the Williamite army was paid, which added considerably to the spirits of the men. On the 4th, Baron de Ginckell sent a party of horse and grenadiers, under the command of a man named Thadeus O'Higgins, a wretch who was once a priest, but afterwards became an apostate, and joined the enemies of his country, to reconnoitre the Irish camp. When they had advanced within three miles of the Irish army, a body of cavalry, which was concealed in the Wood of Clanoult, fell on the Williamites, and drove them to an adjacent bridge. O'Higgins now rallied his party, who fought bravely for some time, but finding it impossible to keep the pass, they divided and fled, having fifteen of their party killed, four taken prisoners, and O'Higgins, their leader, desperately wounded. The 5th of the month still found the Williamites actively engaged repairing Athlone, the houses of which were used as stores to contain the vast supplies of ammunition and provisions which were being received from Mullingar and Dublin. Nothing of importance took place on the 6th, and the Williamite soldiers continued to persevere at their labour. Baron de Ginckell gave orders that at five o'clock on the morning of the 7th, the right wing of his army was to pass by the stone bridge into the Irish Town, and the left by the bridge of pontoons, and that each man was to be supplied with fifteen rounds of ammunition. The Williamite army accordingly crossed the Shannon on the following day, and a proclamation was published by the Lords Justices, which caused great excitement both in the Irish and English camp. Previous to his attack on Athlone, Baron de Ginokell received a document

from the Prince of Orange, offering liberal terms to the Irish, which he suppressed. He now, however, published this proclamation of the Lords Justices, which offered a free pardon to all who would surrender within three weeks, and security of person and property to all officers and governors of garrisons, with a promise of equal or superior rank in King William's army, and a free exercise of the Catholic religion, with such other advantages as that Prince and the Irish Parliament would devise. On the 8th, all the baggage crossed the Shannon, but it became evident, from a circumstance which transpired, that De Ginckell wished to avoid, if possible, giving the Irish battle, and preferred conquering them by the base method of endeavouring to bribe their officers, than by feats of arms. He granted an allowance of £11 10s. per month to all colonels of horse and dragoon regiments who submitted to him, and acknowledged the Prince and Princess of Orange as King and Queen of Ireland ; to colonels of foot £10 per month, and so forth in proportion to the rank held by the officers.

Baron de Ginckell, having put the town into a perfect state of defence, and placed militia regiments in all the passes of the Shannon lately in possession of the Irish, from Jamestown to Athlone, received reinforcements from England, and further increased his army by calling in numbers of men from the various Williamite garrisons, and additional regiments from Munster. On the 10th, he appointed Colonel Edward Lloyd governor, and, leaving the Governor's own and lieutenant-General Douglas's regiments under his command, marched to Kilcassel, where he encamped that night. On the 11th, the Williamite army marched to Ballinasloe and pitched their camp on the Roscommon side of the River Suck- Here lieutenant-General de St. Ruth intended giving the English battle, until he beheld the superior position of Aughrim, which he then chose for that purpose. The Irish videttes posted on the wood-crowned hills of Garbally, retired towards Aughrim on the approach of the allied forces, who, ascending the hills, had a full view of the Irish camp.

The neat little village of Anghrim, which was destined to be the Flodden Field of Ireland, is situated about three miles west of Ballinasloe, and above it gradually rises the verdant Hill of Kilcomedan, along the front of which, and on either side, flows a meandering stream, the occasional overflowing of which converted the land adjacent to its banks into a marsh or bog which could only be crossed at two points. One of these was at Urachree leading to the firm ground at the Hill of Kilcomedan, the other at Aughrim. The pass at Urachree, which was to the right of the Irish army, was the weaker of the two, as it would not admit of any army to move in great numbers, owing to its narrowness ; but the ground immediately in front of it was more open than at the pass at Aughrim. Its inner side was well defended by the adjoining bog of Kilcomedan and part of the marsh. Its outer side and rere were bounded by sloping hills and large bogs. Through the firm ground about and in front of Urachree flowed four separate streams, which were branches of the little river that ran into the marsh in front of Kilcomedan Hill. On its inner side, to the left, the pass at Aughrim was much nearer to Urachree than Kilcomedan. Its outer side and rere were protected by a large bog nearly a mile in breadth, which commencing considerably in advance of Kilcomedan and Aughrim, terminated at the foot of some high hills situated a considerable distance to the rere of both. The road to Aughrim lay between two adjacent bogs, and was intersected by the streamlet already mentioned, within a short distance of the ancient and ruined baronial castle of Aughrim. This intersection was known as the Pass of Aughrim, as the road here ran within thirty yards of the castle, and was so extremely narrow that only two horsemen could ride abreast. Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth at once saw that although the castle was in a ruinous state, it still could be turned to good account as a place of defence, and accordingly he resolved to garrison it.

The Irish camp was pitched between the old church of Kilcomedan, and the church of Gourtnapoury, and extended in length a distance of about two miles. Along the whole front of the Irish camp, and two strong Danish forts which stood on that side of the hill, towards the margin of the central marsh, were a great many small enclosures, formed by parallel rows of

whitethorn. In several places, openings were made in those hedges by order of the Commander-in-chief, in order that the Irish troops whom he intended to occupy them might thereby be enabled to assist each other, in passing from one to another of the enclosures, and also have an opportunity of taking a body of assailants advancing through these defences in flank on both sides. To the rear of this arena, Lieutenant-General de St. Ruth stationed the Irish foot, whom he treated rather contemptuously, as he believed they were but second-rate soldiers. By placing them here, he considered it would, in some measure, make up for their inferiority. Although all the other plans laid down by this able General were worthy of a Cæsar or a Hannibal, still, in placing the Irish foot in this position, he was lamentably mistaken, for they afterwards proved themselves, during this hard-fought battle, to be brave men, and worthy of their commander's greatest confidence. Having arranged his plan of battle, as far as the infantry were concerned, De St. Ruth next turned his attention to the cavalry, on whom he most relied. To ensure the foot regiments their support, he caused several openings to be made in the hedges that extended in front of the troops stationed on the Hill of Kilcomedan, in order that the cavalry might charge through them if required, to second the movements of the foot. On the right wing of the Irish army, parties of cavalry were stationed at the pass of Urachree, which was about 300 yards distant from the slope of Kilcomedan Hill, and adjoining a small eminence situated between two branches of the little river before mentioned. To the rear of those cavalry outposts the sloping ground extending towards Kilcomedan was divided by numerous ditches, and behind these was strengthened by entrenchments, which were made in front of the right extremity of the Irish camp. The ditches thrown up to the rear of the cavalry, on the intermediate ground between these outposts and the entrenchments, were strongly defended by infantry, were connected by flanked communications, and had numerous openings for the purpose of admitting a strong reserve line of horse to assist the foot of this wing, the reserve of which reached the base of Kilcomedan Hill. The Pass of Aughrim being defended by a guard from the right wing of his army, De St. Ruth next turned his attention to the old Castle of Aughrim already mentioned. Here he stationed the intrepid Colonel Burke, with his regiment, leaving him only two field-pieces to defend the pass, and an infantry and dragoon regiment to guard the dilapidated fortifications of the castle, and prevent the enemy from crossing the pass. To complete the defence, a large body of horse was stationed to the rear of the castle, whose duty it was to charge round to the left and attack any artillery brought to bear on that building. The ground which extended from the Castle of Aughrim along the interior line of march at the foot of Kilcomedan, as far as the Irish centre was lined with infantry, who were posted behind the hedges. De St. Ruth's motive in so placing them was to frustrate any attempt that might be made by De Ginckell to cross the marsh, and thereby prevent all communication between the Irish centre and its left wing. However, lest the infantry might not be able to prevent the enemy from crossing, De St. Ruth caused all the trees to be cut down, and had every other obstacle removed which was likely to prevent the advance of squadrons of horse and battalions of foot from coming to their assistance. The left wing of the Irish army extended in three lines as far as some houses and a small eminence which were situated a considerable distance behind Kilcomedan. The reason why the Commander-in-chief of the Irish stationed so many of his troops in this sequestered place was to have them as a reserve, to be called on when required to reinforce the troops at the Pass of Urachree, who would be more exposed to the fire of the enemy. The artillery next occupied the attention of the Commander-in-chief. Its arrangement was easily effected, there being only twelve pieces of cannon to dispose of. Two of these, as already stated, were mounted on Aughrim Castle, and the remainder on two batteries, one of which was on the right of Kilcomedan, and erected there for the purpose of counteracting the approach of the English on that side. The other battery was on the left of the hill, and directed towards Aughrim, in order to fire on any of the English or foreign troops that might occupy the curved portion of ground beyond the pass. Consequently, the centre of the Irish army was entirely unprotected by cannon; for even if De St. Ruth had had more ordnance, he would have placed it elsewhere, as it was not his intention to prevent the Williamites from crossing

the marsh, but rather to allow them to advance towards the reserved troops on the hill, who were to charge upon them. Lieutenant- General de St. Ruth felt confident that his reserve, which was composed of cavalry and infantry, would hurl the whole Williamite infantry into the marsh, and cut them to pieces before their cavalry could have time to come round the bog to their assistance. Having completed all his arrangements for the coming battle, he next assembled the Irish officers, and addressed them thus —

“ Gentlemen and Fellow-Soldiers,— I suppose it is not unknown to you, and the whole Christian world, what glory I have acquired, and how successful and fortunate I have been in suppressing heresy in France, and propagating the holy Catholic faith ; and I can, without vanity, boast myself the happy instrument of bringing over thousands of poor deluded souls from their errors, who owe their salvation to the pious care of my thrice illustrious master. King Louis XIV., and my own industry, assisted by some holy members of our unspotted Church, while great numbers of those incorrigible heretics have perished, both soul and body, by their obstinacy. It was for this reason that the most puissant King, my master, compassionating the miseries of this kingdom, hath chosen me, before so many worthy Generals, to come hither, not doubting but, by my wonted diligence, I should establish the Church in this nation on such a foundation as it should not be in the power of hell or heretics hereafter to disturb it. And, for the bringing about of this great and glorious work, next the assistance of Heaven, the irresistible puissance of the King, my master, and my own conduct, the great dependence of all good Catholics is on your courage. I must confess, since my coming amongst you, things have not answered my wishes, but they are still in a posture to be retrieved, if you will not betray your religion and country by an unreasonable pusillanimity. I am assured by my spies that the Prince of Orange’s heretical army are resolved to give us battle, and you see them, even now, before you, ready to perform it. It is now, therefore, if ever, that you must endeavour to recover your lost honour, privileges, and forefathers’ estates. You are not mercenary soldiers — you do not fight for your pay, but for your lives, your wives, your children, your liberties, your country, your estates, and to restore the most pious of Kings to his throne ; but, above all, for the propagation of our holy faith and the subversion of heresy. Stand to it, therefore, my dear and brave soldiers, and bear no longer the reproaches of the heretics, who brand you with cowardice ; and you may be assured that King James will love and reward you, Louis the Great will protect you, all good Catholics will applaud you, I myself will command you, the Church will pray for you, your posterity will bless you, saints and angels will caress you, God will make you all saints, and His Holy Mother will lay you in her bosom.”

When the Commander-in-chief concluded his address, with a low bow to the officers he retired, in order to give further directions as to the positions the troops were to occupy in the morning.

In some time after the officers began to gather in groups before their tents, and the soldiers collected about them. They communicated the import of De St. Ruth’s speech to the soldiers, who listened most attentively. Donal Bran, with Conor O’Shaughnessy, and all his Rapparees, were assembled there in martial array. Having heard of the approaching battle, they joined the Irish army the previous evening, and bivouacked near Captain Forster’s troop. The officers earnestly entreated them to stand their ground bravely in the morning, as was their custom ; to obey all orders with punctuality, and not allow their passions to overcome them, by committing any acts of rashness ; and also not to fight while their ranks were disorderly or broken, but boldly and determinedly to defend their ditches. They also requested them not to rashly persist in fighting, when called on by their officers to retire, and draw on the enemy towards the cavalry stationed at the foot of Kilcomedan Hill.

“The preparations for battle,” said Captain O’Brien, “are the best which could be adopted under existing circumstances. No doubt, we all still feel the unfortunate loss of Athlone, which was caused by De St. Ruth’s fatal error in not having kept a proper garrison in the Irish Town.”

“We cannot now,” said The O’Kelly of Mullaghmore, “remedy that sad disaster, but must try the chance of victory against far superior numbers, and stand stoutly, or fall bravely, in the defence of our religion and estates. Our soldiers are much fatigued, by working with the pickaxe and spade, in opening the numerous passages through the hedges and ditches, while their food consists only of a miserable allowance of oatmeal and water. My resources, like those of all the other officers, are, I may say, exhausted, in contributing to provide some additional food for my poor though hardy followers ; but Souvray, the treacherous son of Louvois, the Minister of War, could have prevented all this, by sending us a sufficient supply of money. The fall of Athlone caused nearly 7,000 of our troops to desert the conceited De St. Ruth, and all lament the death of the gallant Grace.”

“I have heard, sir,” said Donal Bran, “from some Rapparees who have just arrived from Mayo, under the command of my determined friend O’Gready, that Balldearg O’Donnell is now at Moylough, at the head of about 6,000 men, but has no appearance of moving.”

While he spoke the robust Earl of Lucan joined the company, who were rejoiced to see him. The officers asked him if he had received the plan of battle from the Commander-in-chief.

“No,” replied his Lordship ; “I regret to say that no plan has been given to me, or to Dorrington or Sheldon, or to any other General that I can hear of. All I know is, that I am to command the reserve of horse behind Kilcomedan Hill, and my orders are *not to move an inch* until I receive orders from De St. Ruth to do so. I need scarcely tell you, my friends, that I would never have obeyed him, after his unaccountable conduct at Athlone, but that I could not bear to stand by while you, my brave countrymen, fought for your homes and altars. I must now go and prepare my fellow-soldiers for to-morrow, and, therefore, must say good evening.”

The Earl of Lucan then strode on through the Irish camp, amidst the benedictions of the soldiers and Rapparees.

The officers now inspected their men, and examined their swords and fire-arms, and also their supply of powder and ball, and then dismissed them, in order that they might sit round their watch-fires, and prepare their scanty meal. After having partaken of it, the several chaplains of the army went through the camp, and heard the confessions of the men ; and later in the night, kneeling by their watch-fires, the soldiers repeated the Rosary with great devotion — some in English, others in French, but the majority in the Irish language. Donal Bran’s Rapparees were stationed as an outpost of the camp, and Captain Forster, accompanied by The O’Kelly of Mullaghmore, The O’Donnellan of Ballydonnellan, and Colonel Burke of Tyaquin, went over to see him at his quarters. They found the Rapparee and his men at their prayers, and the light of the watch-fire showed their robust and manly forms bent to the ground, in adoration of the Most High.

After a time they arose.

“Welcome, sir,” said Donal, addressing Captain Forster. “We are now ready for the fight, and have made arrangements for the next world with the good Father O’Reilly and Father O’Hogan. I am directed, sir, by the General of Division to move in whatever quarter I think

best on to-morrow, either in the front or on the flank of our army, and our long shots may be of service.”

“ Donal,” said the Captain, “ keep as near as you can to my troop during the battle. I am ordered to the centre. But, now, bring some sutlers, and I will provide your band with better refreshment than they have had since they left home.”

Donal had not to go far in quest of a sutler, as the Irish camp for some time past was well attended by vendors, who sold food, tobacco, and usquebaugh. A good supply of those articles was now purchased by the Captain, and Donal distributed them among his band, who then lit their pipes, and commenced to talk of the battles of old.

“ I tell you, my comrades,” said Donal, “ that this ‘ Breach of Aughrim’ will be the scene of a desperate battle to-morrow, and that we will win too. An old man who lives in Shanaglish, and who knows a great deal of Shanahas and Irish prophecies, told me that it was foretold there would be a great fight at Aughrim O’Kallagh, and that an ancient prophecy says that the Saxons, who are the hereditary enemies of Ireland, shall find their coats too heavy for them to cany when they are endeavouring to get up Kilcomedan Hill”.

The Rapparees all concluded that this would be in consequence of the fatigue the English would have to suffer, and it encouraged them very much, as they considered their enemies would be exhausted from the effects of their defeat.

After wishing the Rapparees good night, Captain Forster, accompanied by The O’Kelly, returned to his tent, where he found Lord Kilmallock, Lord Dillon, the Chieftains of Cratloe and Moyriesk, and many other officers, busily engaged in writing letters to their relatives at home, and others, who had property to dispose of, making their wills. After some time they had supper, and then went out and walked through the camp, for the purpose of passing away the time. The watch-fires blazed brightly in every direction, and in the distance those at the old castle shed a brilliant glare, while to the right were seen those of the Irish outpost at Urachree. Looking over the great bog of Aughrim, towards the height in front of Garbally, the watch-fires of the Williamite videttes were visible. A low and busy hum of voices arose from the camp, which was now and then broken by the challenge of the sentinels at their posts, as officers and messengers passed and repassed them. When it was after midnight, detachments of the Irish army assembled together, and some marched to the Castle of Aughrim, and others to reinforce the outpost at Urachree. In fact, nothing was left undone which an able General could devise on the eve of a battle on which depended the destiny of a great nation.

The Irish chieftains ; or, A struggle for the crown (1872)

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