

# Confessions of a Reformed Ribbonman

By William Carleton

I had read the anonymous summons, but from its general import, I believed it to be one of those special meetings convened for some purpose affecting the general objects and proceedings of the body. At least the terms in which it was conveyed to me, had nothing extraordinary or mysterious in them, beyond the simple fact that it was not to be a general, but a select meeting; this mark of confidence flattered me, and I determined to attend punctually. I was, it is true, desired to keep the circumstance entirely to myself, but there was nothing startling in this, for I had often received summonses of a similar import. I therefore resolved to attend, according to the letter of my instructions, 'on the next night, at the solemn hour of midnight, to deliberate and act upon such matters as should, then and there, be submitted to my consideration.' The morning after I received this message, I arose and resumed my usual occupations; but from whatever cause it may have proceeded, I felt a sense of approaching evil hang heavily upon me; the beats of my pulse were languid, and an undefinable feeling of anxiety pervaded my whole spirit; even my face was pale, and my eye so heavy, that my father and brothers concluded me to be ill; an opinion which I thought at the time to be correct; for I felt exactly that kind of depression which precedes a severe fever. I could not understand what I experienced, nor can I yet, except by supposing that there is in human nature some mysterious faculty, by which, in coming calamities, the approach throws forward the shadow of some fearful evil, and that it is possible to catch a dark anticipation of the sensations which they subsequently produce. For my part I can neither analyze nor define it; but on that day I knew it by painful experience, and so have a thousand others in similar circumstances.

It was about the middle of winter. The day was gloomy and tempestuous almost beyond any other I remember; dark clouds rolled over the hills about me, and a close sleet-like rain fell in slanting drifts that chased each other rapidly to the earth on the course of the blast. The out-lying cattle sought the closest and calmest corners of the fields for shelter; the trees and young groves were tossed about, for the wind was so unusually high that it swept its hollow gusts through them, with that hoarse murmur which deepens so powerfully on the mind the sense of dreariness and desolation.

As the shades of night fell, the storm if possible increased. The moon was half gone, and only a few stars were visible by glimpses, as a rush of wind left a temporary opening in the sky. I had determined, if the storm should not abate, to incur any penalty rather than attend the meeting; but the appointed hour was distant, and I resolved to be decided by the future state of the night.

Ten o'Clock came, but still there was no change; eleven passed, and on opening the door to observe if there were any likelihood of it clearing up, a blast of wind mingled with rain, nearly blew me off my feet; at length it was approaching to the hour of midnight, and on examining a third time, I found it had calmed a little, and no longer rained.

I instantly got my oak stick, muffled myself in my great coat, strapped my hat about my ears, and as the place of meeting was only a quarter of a mile distant, I presently set out.

The appearance of the heavens was towering and angry, particularly in that point where the light of the moon fell against the clouds from a seeming chasm in them, through which alone she was visible. The edges of this were faintly bronzed, but the dense body of the masses that hung piled on each side of her, was black and impenetrable to sight. In no other point of the heavens was

there any part of the sky visible; for a deep veil of clouds overhung the horizon, yet was the light sufficient to give occasional glimpses of the rapid shifting which took place in this dark canopy, and of the tempestuous agitation with which the midnight storm swept to and fro beneath.

At length I arrived at a long slated house, situated in a solitary part of the neighbourhood; a little below it ran a small stream, which was now swollen above its banks, and rushing with mimic roar over the flat meadows beside it. The appearance of the bare slated building in such a night was particularly sombre, and to those like me who knew the purpose to which it was then usually devoted, it was, or ought to have been, peculiarly so. There it stood, silent and gloomy, without any appearance of human life or enjoyment about, or within it: as I approached, the moon once more had broken out of the clouds, and shone dimly upon the glittering of the wet slates and window, with a death-like lustre, that gradually faded away as I left the point of observation, and entered the folding door. It was the parish chapel.

The scene which presented itself here, was in keeping not only with the external appearance of the house, but with the darkness, the storm, and the hour,—which was now a little after midnight. About eighty persons were sitting in dead silence upon the circular steps of the altar; they did not seem to move, and as I entered and advanced, the echo of my footsteps rang through the building with a lonely distinctness, which added to the solemnity and mystery of the circumstances about me. The windows were secured with shutters on the inside, and on the altar a candle was lighting, which burned dimly amid the surrounding darkness, and lengthened the shadow of the altar itself, and of six or seven persons who stood on its upper steps, until they mingled in the obscurity which shrouded the lower end of the chapel. The faces of those who sat on the altar steps were not distinctly visible, yet the prominent and more characteristic features were in sufficient relief, and I observed, that some of the most malignant and reckless spirits in the parish, were assembled. In the eyes of those who stood at the altar, and whom I knew to be invested with authority over the others, I could perceive gleams of some latent and ferocious purpose, kindled, as I soon observed, into a fiercer expression of vengeance, by the additional excitement of ardent spirits, with which they had stimulated themselves to a point of determination that mocked at the apprehension of all future responsibility, either in this world or the next.

The welcome which I received on joining them, was far different from the boisterous good humour which used to mark our greetings on other occasions; just a nod of the head from this or that person, on the part of those *who sat*, with a *ghud dhemur tha thu*,<sup>1</sup> in a suppressed voice, even below a common whisper; but, from the standing group, who were evidently the projectors of the enterprise, I received a convulsive grasp of the hand, accompanied by a fierce and desperate look, that seemed to search my eye and countenance, to try if I was a person not likely to shrink from whatever they had resolved to execute. It is surprising to think of the powerful expression which a moment of intense interest or great danger is capable of giving to the eye, the features, and slightest actions, especially in those whose station in society does not require them to constrain nature, by the force of social courtesies, into habits of concealment of their natural emotions. None of the standing group spoke, but as each of them wrung my hand in silence, his eye was fixed on mine, with an expression of drunken confidence and secrecy, and an insolent determination not to be gainsayed without peril. If looks could be translated with certainty, they seemed to say, ‘we are bound upon a project of vengeance, and if you do not join us, remember that we *can* revenge.’ Along with this grasp, they did not forget to remind me of the common

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<sup>1</sup> How are you?

bond by which we were united, for each man gave me the secret grip of Ribbonism in a manner that made the joints of my fingers ache for some minutes after.

There was one present, however—the highest in authority—whose actions and demeanour were calm and unexcited; he seemed to labour under no unusual influence whatever, but evinced a serenity so placid and philosophical, that I attributed the silence of the sitting group, and the restraint which curbed in the out-breaking passions of those who *stood*, entirely to his presence. He was a school-master, who taught his daily school in that chapel, and acted also, on Sunday, in the capacity of clerk to the priest—an excellent and amiable old man, who knew little of his illegal connection, and atrocious conduct.

When the ceremonies of brotherly recognition and friendship were past, the Captain, by which title I will designate the last-mentioned person, stooped, and raising a jar of whiskey on the corner of the altar, held a wine glass to its neck, which he filled, and with a calm nod handed it to me to drink. I shrunk back, with an instinctive horror, at the profaneness of such an act, in the house, and on the altar of God, and peremptorily refused to taste the proffered draught. He smiled, mildly, at what he considered my superstition, and added quietly, and in a low voice, ‘You’ll be vantin’ it, I’m thinkin’, afther the wettin’ you got.’—‘Wet or dry,’ said I—‘Stop, man’ he replied in the same tone—‘spake lower; but why would’nt you take the whiskey? Sure there’s as holy people to the fore as you—did’nt they all take it?—an’ I wish we may never do worse than dhrink a harmless glass of whiskey, to keep the could out, any way.’ ‘Well,’ said I, ‘I’ll just trust to God, and the consequences, for the could, Padly, ma bouchal; but a blessed dhrop ov it wo’nt be crossin my lips, avick; so no more goster<sup>2</sup> about it—dhrink it yerself, if you like; maybe you want it as much as I do—wherein I’ve the pATTERN of a good big-coat upon me, so thick, yer sowl, that if it was rainin’ buttocks, a dhrop would’nt get undher the nap ov it.’ He gave me a calm, but keen glance, as I spoke. ‘Well, Jim,’ said he, ‘it’s a good comrade you’ve got for the weather that’s in it—but in the mane time, to set yw a dacent pATTERN, I’ll just take this myself,’—saying which, with the jar still upon its side, and the fore-finger of his let hand in its neck, he swallowed the spirits. ‘It’s the first I dhrank to-night,’ he added, ‘nor would I dhrink it now, only to shew you that I’ve heart and sperrit to do a thing that we’re all bound and sworn to, when the proper time cones’—saying which, he laid down the glass, and turned up the jar, with much coolness, upon the altar.

During this conversation, those who had been summoned to this mysterious meeting were pouring in fast; and as each person approached the altar, he received from one to two or three large glasses of whiskey, according as he chose to limit himself—and, to do them justice, there were not a few of those present, who, in despite of their own desire, and the Captain’s express invitation, refused to taste it in the house of God’s worship. Such, however, as were scrupulous, he afterwards recommended to take it on the outside of the chapel door, which they did—as by that means, the sacrilege of the act was supposed to be evaded.

About one o’clock they were all assembled except six—at least so the Captain, on looking at a written paper, asserted. ‘Now, boys,’ said he, in the same low voice, ‘we are all present except the thraitors whose names I am goin’ to read to you; not that we are to count thim as thraitors, till we know whether or not it was in their power to come; any how, the night is terrible—but, boys, you’re to know, that neither fire nor wather is to prevint yees, when duly summonsed to attend a meeting—particularly whin the summons is widout a name, as you have been tould that there is always something of consequence to be done *thin*.’ He then read out the names of those who were absent, in order that the real cause of their absence might be ascertained—declaring, that

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<sup>2</sup> Chatter.

they would be dealt with accordingly. After this he went, and with his usual caution shut and bolted the door, and having put the key in his pocket, he ascended the steps of the altar, and for some time traversed the little platform from which the priest usually addresses the congregation.

Until this night I never contemplated the man's countenance with any particular interest, but as he walked the platform, I had an opportunity of observing him more closely. He was a little man, apparently not thirty; and on a first view seemed to have nothing remarkable either in his dress or features. I, however, was not the only person whose eye was rivetted upon him at that moment; in fact every one present observed him with equal interest, for hitherto he had kept the object of the meeting perfectly secret, and of course we all felt anxious to know it. It was while he traversed this platform that I scrutinized his features with a hope, if possible, to glean from them some indication of what was passing within; I could, however, mark but little, and that little was at first rather from the intelligence which seemed to subsist between him and those whom I have already mentioned as *standing* against the altar, than from any indications of his own; their gleaming eyes were fixed upon him with an intensity of savage and demon-like hope, which blazed out in flashes of malignant triumph, as upon turning, he threw a cool but rapid glance at them, to intimate the progress he was making in the subject to which he devoted the undivided energies of his mind. But in the course of this meditation, I could observe on one or two occasions a dark shade come over his countenance that contracted his brow into a deep furrow, and it was then, for the first time, that I saw the satanic expression of which his face, by a very slight motion of its muscles, was capable; his hands, during this silence, closed and opened convulsively; his eyes shot out two or three baleful glances, first to his confederates, and afterwards vacantly into the deep gloom of the lower part of the chapel; his teeth ground against each other, like those of a man whose revenge burns to reach a distant enemy, and finally, after having wound himself up to a certain determination, his features relaxed into their original calm and undisturbed expression.

At this moment a loud laugh, having something supernatural in it, rang out wildly from the darkness of the chapel; he stopped, and putting his open hand over his brows, peered down into the gloom, and said calmly in Irish, *bee dhu hust ne wulh anam inh*—‘hold your tongue, it is not yet the time.’—Every eye was now directed to the same spot, but, in consequence of its distance from the dim light on the altar, none could perceive the object from which the laugh proceeded. It was by this time, near two o'clock in the morning.

He now stood for a few moments on the platform, and his chest heaved with a depth of anxiety equal to the difficulty of the design he wished to accomplish; ‘brothers,’ said he, ‘for we are all brothers—sworn upon all that's sacred an' holy, to obey whatever them that's over us, maning among ourselves, wishes us to do—are you now ready, in the name of God, upon whose althar I stand, to fulfil yer oath?’

The words were scarcely uttered, when those who had *stood* beside the altar during the night, sprung from their places, and descending its steps rapidly, turned round, and raising their arms exclaimed, ‘By all that's sacred an' holy we're willin’.’

In the mean time, those who *sat* upon the steps of the altar, instantly rose, and following the example of those who had just spoken, exclaimed after them, ‘to be sure—by all that's sacred an' holy we're willin’.’

‘Now boys,’ said the Captain, ‘ar'nt yees big fools for your pains? an' *one* of yee's does'nt know what I mane.’

‘You're our Captain,’ said one of those who had stood at the altar—‘an' has yer ordhers from higher qarthers, of coorse whatever ye command upon us we're bound to obey you in.’

‘Well,’ said he, smiling, ‘I only wanted to thry yees an’ by the oath yees tuck, there’s not a Captain in the county has as good a right to be proud of his mm as I have—well yees won’t rue it, may be when the right time comes; and for that same rason every one of yees must have a glass from the jar; thim that won’t dhrink it *in* the chapel can dhrink it *widout*; an here goes to open the door for them’—he then distributed another large glass to every man who would accept it, and brought the jar afterwards to the chapel door, to satisfy the scruples of those who would not drink within. When this was performed, and all duly excited, he proceeded:

‘Now, brothers, you are solemnly sworn to obey me, an I’m sure there’s no thraithur here that ’id parjure himself for a trifle, any how, but *I’m* sworn to obey them that’s above me—manin’ still among ourselves—an’ to shew you that I don’t scruple to do it, here goes’—he then turned round, and taking the Missal between his hands, placed it upon the holy altar. Hitherto, every word was uttered in a low precautionary tone; but on grasping the book, he again turned round, and looking upon his confederates with the same satanic expression which marked his countenance before, exclaimed in a voice of deep determination;—

‘By this sacred an’ holy book of God, I will perform the action which we have met this night to accomplish, be that what it may—an’ this I swear upon God’s book, an’ God’s altar!’ At this moment the candle which burned before him went suddenly out, and the chapel was wrapped in pitchy darkness; the sound as if of rushing wings fell upon our ears, and fifty voices dwelt upon the last words of his oath, with wild and supernatural tones that seemed to echo and to mock what he had sworn. There was a pause, and an exclamation of horror from all present, but the Captain was too cool and steady to be disconcerted; he immediately groped about until he got the candle, and proceeding calmly to a remote corner of the chapel, took up a half-burned turf which lay there, and after some trouble, succeeded in lighting it again. He then explained what had taken place; which indeed was easily done, as the candle happened to be extinguished by a pigeon which sat exactly above it. The chapel, I should have observed, was at this time, like many country chapels, unfinished inside, and the pigeons of a neighbouring dove-cote, had built nests among the rafters of the unceiled roof, which circumstance also explained the rushing of the wings, for the birds had been affrighted by the sudden loudness of the noise. The mocking voices were nothing but the echoes, rendered naturally more awful by the scene, the mysterious object of the meeting, and the solemn hour of the night.

When the candle was again lighted, and these startling circumstances accounted for, the persons whose vengeance had been deepening more and more during the night, rushed to the altar in a body, where each in a voice trembling with passionate eagerness, repeated the oath, and as every word was pronounced, the same echoes heightened the wildness of the horrible ceremony, by their long and unearthly tones. The countenances of these human tigers were livid with suppressed rage—their knit brows, compressed lips, and kindled eyes, fell under the dim light of the taper, with an expression calculated to sicken any heart not absolutely diabolical.

As soon as this dreadful rite was completed, we were again startled by several loud bursts of laughter, which proceeded from the lower darkness of the chapel, and the captain on hearing them, turned to the place, and reflecting for a moment, said in Irish, *gutsho nish, avoh elhee*—‘come hither now, boys’. A rush immediately took place from the corner in which they had secreted themselves all the night—and seven men appeared, whom we instantly recognized as brothers and cousins of certain persons who had been convicted some time before, for breaking into the house of an honest poor man in the neighbourhood, from whom, after having treated him with barbarous violence, they took away such fire arms as he kept for his own protection.

It was evidently not the captain's intention to have produced these persons until the oath should have been generally taken, but the exulting mirth with which they enjoyed the success of his scheme betrayed them, and put him to the necessity of bringing them forward somewhat before the concerted moment.

The scene which now took place was beyond all power of description; peals of wild fiend-like yells rang through the chapel, as the party which *stood* on the altar, and that which had crouched in the darkness met; wringing of hands, leaping in triumph, striking of sticks and fire arms against the ground and the altar itself, dancing and cracking of fingers, marked the triumph of some hellish propensity. Even the captain for a time was unable to restrain their fury; but at length he mounted the platform before the altar once more, and with a stamp of his foot, recalled their attention to himself and the matter in hand.

'Boys,' said he, 'enough of this, and too much; an' well for us it is that the chapel is in a lonely place, or our foolish noise might do us no good—let thim that swore so manfully jist now, stand a one side, till the rest kiss the book one by one.'

The proceedings, however, had by this time taken too alarming a shape, for even the captain to compel them to a blindfold oath; the first man he called flatly refused to swear, until he should first hear the nature of the service that was required. This was echoed by the remainder, who taking courage from the firmness of this person, declared generally, that until they first knew the business they were to execute, none of them should take the oath. The captain's lip quivered slightly, and his brow once more knit with the same hellish expression, which I have remarked gave him so much the appearance of an embodied fiend; but this speedily passed away, and was succeeded by a malignant sneer, in which lurked, if there ever did in a sneer, 'a laughing devil,' calmly, determinedly, atrocious.

'It was'nt worth yer whiles to refuse the oath,' said he, mildly, 'for the thruth is, I had next to nothing for ye's to do—not a hand, maybe, would have to *rise*, only jist to look on, an', if any resistance would be made, to shew yerselves; yer numbers would soon make them see that resistance would be no use whatever in the present case. At all evints the oath of *secrecy must* be taken, or woe be to him that will refuse *that*, he wont know the day, the hour, nor the minute, when he'll be made a spatch-cock ov.' He then turned round, and placing his right hand on the Missal, swore 'in the presence of God, and before his holy altar, that whatever might take place that night he would keep secret, from man or mortal, except it was the holy priest on his dying day, and that neither bribery, nor imprisonment, nor death, would wring it from his heart'; having done this, he struck the book violently, as if to confirm the energy with which he swore, and then calmly descending the steps, stood with a serene countenance, like a man conscious of having performed a good action. As this oath did not pledge those who refused to take the other to the perpetration of any specific crime, it was readily taken by all present; preparations were then made to execute what was intended; the half burned turf was placed in a little pot—another glass of whiskey was distributed, and the door being locked by the captain, who kept the key as parish master and clerk, the crowd departed silently from the chapel.

The moment that those who lay in the darkness during the night, made their appearance at the altar, we knew at once the persons we were to visit; for, as I said before, these were related to the miscreants whom one of these persons had convicted, in consequence of their midnight attack upon himself and his family. The Captain's object in keeping them unseen was, that those present, not being aware of the duty about to be imposed on them, might have less hesitation

against swearing to its fulfilment. Our conjectures were correct, for on leaving the chapel we directed our steps to the house in which this man (the only Protestant in the parish) resided.

The night was still stormy, but without rain; it was rather dark too, though not so as to prevent us from seeing the clouds careering swiftly through the air. The dense curtain which had overhung and obscured the horizon, was now broken, and large sections of the sky were clear, and thinly studded with stars that looked dim and watery, as did indeed the whole firmament, for in some places large clouds were still visible threatening a continuance of severe tempestuous weather. The road appeared washed and gravelly, every dike was full of yellow water, and each little rivulet and larger stream dashed its hoarse music in our ears; the blast, too, was cold, fierce, and wintry, sometimes driving us back to a stand still, and again, when a turn in the road would bring it in our backs, whirling us along for a few steps, with involuntary rapidity. At length the fated dwelling became visible, and a short consultation was held in a sheltered place, between the Captain and the two parties who seemed so eager for its destruction. Their fire arms were now charged, and their bayonets and short pikes, the latter shod and pointed with iron, were also got ready: the live coal which was brought in the small pot, had become extinguished, but to remedy this, two or three persons from the remote parts of the parish, entered a cabin on the wayside, and under pretence of lighting their own and their comrade's pipes, procured a coal of fire, for so they called a lighted turf. From the time we left the chapel until this moment, a most profound silence had been maintained, a circumstance, which, when I considered the number of persons present, and the mysterious and dreaded object of their journey, had a most appalling effect upon my spirits.

At length we arrived within fifty perches of the house, walking in a compact body, and with as little noise as possible; but it seemed as if the very elements had conspired to frustrate our design, for on advancing within the shade of the farm-hedge, two or three persons found themselves up to the middle in water, and on stooping to ascertain more accurately the state of the place, we could see nothing but one immense sheet of it spread like a lake over the meadows which surrounded the spot we wished to reach.

Fatal night! the very recollection of it, when associated with the fearful tempest of the elements, grows, if that were possible, yet more wild and revolting. Had we been engaged in any innocent or benevolent enterprize, there was something in our situation, just now, that had a touch of interest in it to a mind imbued with a relish for the savage beauties of nature. There we stood, about a hundred and thirty in number, our dark forms bent forwards peering into the dusky expanse of water, with its dim gleams of reflected light, broken by the weltering of the mimic waves into ten thousand fragments, whilst the few stars that overhung it in the firmament, appeared to shoot through it in broken lines, and to be multiplied fifty-fold in the many-faced mirror on which we gazed.

Over this was a stormy sky, and around us a darkness through which we could only distinguish, in outline, the nearest objects, whilst the wild wind swept strongly and dismally upon us. When it was discovered that the common pathway to the house was inundated, we were about to abandon our object, and return home; the Captain, however, stooped down low for a moment, and almost closing his eyes, looked along the surface of the waters, and then raising himself very calmly, said, in his usual quiet tone, 'yees need'nt go back, boys, Iv'e found a path, jist follow me.' He immediately took a more circuitous direction, by which we reached a causeway that had been raised for the purpose of giving a free passage to and from the house, during such inundations as the present. Along this we had advanced more than half way, when we discovered a break in it, which, as afterwards appeared, had that night been made by the

strength of the flood. This, by means of our sticks and pikes, we found to be about three feet deep, and eight yards broad. Again we were at a loss how to proceed, when the fertile brain of the Captain devised a method of crossing it: 'boys,' said he, 'of course you've all played at leap-frog—very well, strip and go in a dozen of you,—lean one upon the shoulders of another from this to the opposite bank, where one must stand facing the outside man, both their shoulders agin one another, that the outside man may be supported— then *we* can creep over you, an' a decent bridge you'll be, any way.' This was the work of only a few minutes, and in less than ten we were all safely over.

Merciful heaven! how I sicken at the recollection of what is to follow—on reaching the dry bank, we proceeded instantly, and in profound silence, to the house; the Captain divided us into companies, and then assigned to each division its proper station. The two parties who had been so vindictive all the night, he kept about himself, for of those who were present they only were in his confidence, and knew his nefarious purpose; their number was about fifteen. Having made these dispositions, he, at the head of about five of them, approached the house on the windy side, for the fiend possessed a coolness which enabled him to seize upon every possible advantage; that he had combustibles about him was evident, for in less than fifteen minutes nearly one half of the house was enveloped in flames. On seeing this, the others rushed over to the spot where he and his gang were standing, and remonstrated earnestly, but in vain; the flames now burst forth with renewed violence, and as they flung their strong light upon the faces of the foremost group, I do think hell itself could hardly present any thing more satanic than their countenances, now worked up into a paroxysm of infernal triumph, at their own revenge. The Captain's look had lost all its calmness, every feature started out into distinct malignity, the curve in his brow was deep, and ran up to the root of the hair, dividing his face into two sections, that did not seem to have been designed for each other. His lips were half open, and the corners of his mouth a little brought back on each side, like those of a man expressing intense hatred and triumph over an enemy, who is in the death-struggle under his grasp. His eyes blazed from beneath his knit eyebrows, with a fire that seemed to have been lighted up in the infernal pit itself. It is unnecessary and only painful to describe the rest of his gang; demons might have been proud of such horrible visages as they exhibited; for they worked under all the power of hatred, revenge, and joy; and these passions blended into one terrific scowl, enough almost to blast any human eye that would venture to look upon it.

When the others attempted to intercede for the lives of the inmates, there were at least fifteen loaded guns and pistols levelled at them; 'another word,' said the Captain, 'an' you're a corpse where you stand, or the first man who will dare to speak for them: no, no, it was'nt to spare them we came here—"No Mercy" is the pass word for the night, an' by the sacred oath I swore beyant in the chapel, any one among yees that will attimpt to shew it, will find none at my hand. Surround the house boys, I tell ye, I hear them stirring—*No Mercy*—no quarter—is the ordher of the night.'

Such was his command over these misguided creatures, that in an instant there was a ring round the house to prevent the escape of the unhappy inmates, should the raging element give them time to attempt it; for none present dare withdraw themselves from the scene, not only from an apprehension of the Captain's present vengeance, or that of his gang, but because they knew that even had they then escaped, an early and certain death awaited them from a quarter against which they had no means of defence. The hour now was about half past two o'clock. Scarcely had the last words escaped from the Captain's lips, when one of the windows of the house was broken, and a human head having the hair in a blaze, was descried, apparently a woman's, if one

might judge by the profusion of burning tresses, and the softness of the tones, notwithstanding that it called, or rather shrieked aloud, for help and mercy. The only reply to this was the whoop from the Captain and his gang of no mercy—'No mercy,' and that instant the former, and one of the latter rushed to the spot, and ere the action could be perceived, the head was transfixed with a bayonet and a pike, both having entered it together. The word mercy was divided in her mouth; a short silence ensued, the head hung down on the window, but was instantly tossed back into the flames.

This action occasioned a cry of horror from all present, except the *gang* and their leader, which startled and enraged the latter so much, that he ran towards one of them, and had his bayonet, now reeking with the blood of its innocent victim, raised to plunge it in his body, when dropping the point, he said in a piercing whisper that hissed in the ears of all: 'Its no use *now*, you know, if one's to hang, all will hang; so our safest way, you persave, is to lave none of them to tell the story: ye *may* go now if you wish; but it wont save a hair of your heads. You cowardly set! I knew if I had tould yees the sport, that none of ye except my *own* boys would come, so i jist played a thrick upon you; but remember what you are sworn to, and stand to the oath ye tuck.'

Unhappily, notwithstanding the wetness of the preceding weather, the materials of the house were extremely combustible; the whole dwelling was now one body of glowing flame, yet the shouts and shrieks within, rose awfully above its crackling and the voice of the storm, for the wind once more blew in gusts, and with great violence. The doors and windows were all torn open, and such of those within, as had escaped the flames rushed towards them, for the purpose of further escape, and of claiming mercy at the hands of their destroyers—but whenever they appeared, the unearthly cry of no mercy rung upon their ears for a moment, and for a moment only, for they were flung back at the points of the weapons which the demons had brought with them to make the work of vengeance more certain.

As yet there were many persons in the house, whose cry for life was strong as despair, and who clung to it with all the awakened powers of reason and instinct; the ear of man could hear nothing so strongly calculated to stifle the demon of cruelty and revenge within him, as the long and wailing shrieks which rose beyond the element, in tones that were carried off rapidly upon the blast, until they died away in the darkness that lay behind the surrounding hills. Had not the house been in a solitary situation, and the hour the dead of night, any persons sleeping within a moderate distance must have heard them, for such a cry of sorrow deepening into a yell of despair, was almost sufficient to have awakened the dead. It was lost however upon the hearts and ears that heard it: to them, though in justice be it said, to only comparatively a few of them, it was as delightful as the tones of soft and entrancing music.

The claims of the poor sufferers were now modified; they supplicated merely to suffer death *at the hands of their enemies*; they were willing to bear that, provided they should be allowed to escape from the flames; but no, the horrors of the conflagration were calmly and malignantly gloried in by their merciless assassins, who deliberately flung them back into all their tortures. In the course of a few minutes a man appeared upon the side-wall of the house, nearly naked; his figure, as he stood against the sky in horrible relief, was so finished a picture of woe-begone agony and supplication, that it is yet as distinct in my memory as if I were again present at the scene. Every muscle, now in motion by the powerful agitation of his sufferings, stood out upon his limbs and neck, giving him an appearance of desperate strength, to which by this time he must have been wrought; the perspiration poured from his frame, and the veins and arteries of his neck were inflated to a surprising thickness. Every moment he looked down into the thick flames which were rising to where he stood; and as he looked, the indescribable horror which flitted

over his features might have worked upon the devil himself to relent. His words were few; 'my child,' said he, 'is still safe, she is an infant, a young creature that never harmed you nor any one—she is still safe. Your mothers, your wives have young innocent children like it—Oh, spare her, think for a moment that its one of your own, spare it, as you hope to meet a just God, or if you dont, in mercy shoot me first, put an end to me, before I see her burned.'

The Captain approached him coolly and deliberately. 'You will prosecute no one now, you bloody informer,' said he; you will convict no more boys for taking an ould rusty gun an' pistol from you, or for givin' you a neighbourly knock or two into the bargain.' Just then from a window opposite him, proceeded the shrieks of a woman who appeared at it with the infant in her arms. She herself was almost scorched to death; but with the presence of mind and humanity of her sex, she was about to thrust the little babe out of the window. The Captain noticed this, and with characteristic atrocity, thrust, with a sharp bayonet, the little innocent, along with the person who endeavoured to rescue it, into the red flames, where they both perished. This was the work of an instant. Again he approached the man; 'your child is a coal now,' said he, with deliberate mockery, 'I pitched it in myself on the point of this,' showing the weapon, 'and now is your turn,' saying which he clambered up by the assistance of his gang, who stood with a front of pikes and bayonets bristling to receive the wretched man, should he attempt in his despair to throw himself from the wall. The Captain got up, and placing the point of his bayonet against his shoulder, flung him into the fiery element that raged behind him. He uttered one wild and piercing cry, as he fell back, and no more; after this nothing was heard but the crackling of the fire, and the rushing of the blast; all that had possessed life within were consumed, amounting either to eleven or fifteen persons.

When this was accomplished, those who took an active part in the murder, stood for some time about the conflagration, and as it threw its red light upon their fierce faces and rough persons, soiled as they now were with smoke and black streaks of ashes, the scene seemed to be changed to hell, and the murderers to spirits of the damned, rejoicing over the arrival and the torture of a guilty soul. The faces of those who kept aloof from the slaughter, were blanched to the whiteness of death; some of them fainted—and others were in such agitation that they were compelled to leave their comrades. They became actually stiff and powerless with horror; yet to such a scene were they brought by the pernicious influence of Ribbonism.

It was only when the last victim went down, that the conflagration shot up into the air with most unbounded fury. The house was large, deeply thatched, and well furnished; and the broad red pyramid rose up with fearful magnificence towards the sky. Abstractedly it had sublimity, but now it was associated with nothing in my mind but blood and terror. It was not, however, without a purpose that the Captain and his guard stood to contemplate its effect. 'Boys,' said he, 'we had better be sartin' that all's safe; who knows but there might be some of the sarpen's crouchin' under a hape of rubbish, to come out and gibbet us to-morrow or next day; we had betther wait a while, any how, if it was only to see the blaze.'

Just then the flames rose majestically to a surprising height; our eyes followed their direction, and we perceived for the first time, that the dark clouds above, together with the intermediate air, appeared to reflect back, or rather to have caught the red hue of the fire; the hills and country about us appeared with an alarming distinctness; but the most picturesque part of it, was the effect or reflection of the blaze on the floods that spread over the surrounding plains. These, in fact, appeared to be one broad mass of liquid copper, for the motion of the breaking waters, caught from the blaze of the high waving column, as reflected in them, a glaring light, which eddied and rose, and fluctuated, as if the flood itself had been a lake of molten fire.

Fire, however, destroys rapidly; in a short time the flames sank—became weak and flickering—by and bye, they only shot out in fits—the crackling of the timbers died away—the surrounding darkness deepened; and ere long, the faint light was overpowered by the thick volumes of smoke, that rose from the ruins of the house, and its murdered inhabitants.

‘Now, boys,’ said the Captain, ‘all is safe, we may go. Remember, every man of you, what you’ve sworn this night on the book and altar of God—not on a heretic Bible. If you perjure yourselves, you may hang us; but let me tell you for your comfort, that if you do, there is them livin’ that will take care the lase of your own lives will be but short.’ After this we dispersed, every man to his own home.

Reader, not many months elapsed ere I saw the bodies of this Captain, whose name was Paddy Devan, and all those who were actively concerned in the perpetration of this deed of horror, withering in the wind, where they hung gibbeted, near the scene of their nefarious villainy; and while I inwardly thanked heaven for my own narrow and almost undeserved escape, I thought in my heart how seldom, even in this world, justice fails to overtake the murderer, and to enforce the righteous judgment of God, ‘that whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed’.