

THE PEARL

DEVOTED TO POLITE LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION.

Vol. I.

HALIFAX, N. S. SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1897.

No. 24

TRUTH BY MISTAKE.

A romantic adventure of Captain O'Neil.

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"Which is the proper man,
And which the spirit? Who decipher them?"

COMEDY OF ERRORS.

If the trite and malicious remark, that "it requires a wish child to know his own father," may be construed as implying a want of wisdom in those who cannot best that species of knowledge, we fear our hero (like most of the heroes and demi-gods of antiquity,) will not be held as an intellectual prodigy by the judicious public. A cloud, as dark as the grave, hung over the story of his birth, and the only authentic record which bore any relation to that interesting event, was a line or two in the parish register, stating that "a male infant child, having the name of Shadrach O'Neil pinned to his cap, had on such a day, at six o'clock in the morning, been picked up at the gate of a public square, in the town of Drogheda.

Not having any materials to fill up the chasm, we are obliged to leap over the space of twenty-five years, and we now discover Mr. Shadrach O'Neil, a good-looking young exile of Erin, just arrived in the land of freedom and jolly cakes, and indulging freely in those dreams of wealth and advancement which it is the happiness of many of his countrymen to realize. But every man must have a beginning, and Mr. Shady O'Neil's, by some short-sighted persons, would be thought rather unpromising. He had "shipped," as he termed it, on board of one of those vessels which traverse the majestic Chesapeake, for the purpose of transporting oysters and other marine delicacies to the luxurious tables of Baltimore and Philadelphia. The crew of one of these "fairy frigates," generally consists of three persons, viz: the captain, mate and cook. Now, the reader who has a common share of sagacity will perceive that this kind of sea-service, if we may so call it, offers great inducements to the adventurer. In the navy an individual, if he rises at all, must rise by very slow gradations; and even in mercantile vessels of the larger class, there are a great many steps to preferment, so that there is a very considerable distance between the mast head or the caboose, and the quarter deck; but in those vessels engaged in the oyster trade, there is often a rapidity of promotion which cannot fail to satisfy the most inordinate ambition. We have heard of several instances wherein young men of more than usual cleverness have been elevated to the rank of captain on their third or fourth voyage. This was the case with Shadrach O'Neil, who, commencing in the humble capacity of cook, became a commander, and as our informant says, a very able one, when his bark (the "Gullinipper,") on her homeward-bound passage, had thrice hailed the triple capitation of North Point; a promontory which, like another Cerberus, guards the entrance of our river.

In the enjoyment of this honorable distinction we must leave Shadrach O'Neil for a time, while we introduce several other characters who are to figure in this scrap of history. As a wheelwright forms his spokes, fellers, and hubs separately, ere he unites them in a complete article, so the several portions of our narrative, though seemingly disjointed at first, shall be clapped together hereafter, and then roll onward, as we hope to the entire satisfaction of the reader.

Mr. Thomas Passmore was a merchant of respectability; that is, he kept a commission store, and had tolerable credit at the bank of Maryland, (before the great tragedy.) Mr. Passmore was a very old gentleman, a widower, and childless. To relieve the solitude of his mansion, he had a niece, (a bouncing girl of eighteen,) under his guardianship.

This young lady had been the daughter of an Irish gentleman, named M'Allister, who married the sister of Mr. Passmore, and, dying, left this only child and some 15 or 20 thousand dollars for her use, in the charge of her maternal uncle aforesaid. Mr. M'Allister (before his death, of course,) had entered into a contract with a friend and countryman of his, who had an only son, the object of which contract was a matrimonial alliance between the son and daughter of the contracting parties. Well, thus stood matters at the time of Mr. M'Allister's death, and thus matters stood at the date of the transactions we are about to recite.

Miss Nancy M'Allister (for her name was Nancy—not a very romantic name, it is true; but that was the fault of her sponsors in baptism,) Miss Nancy M'Allister was not remarkably pretty, though far from ugly. She was passably intelligent, exceedingly volatile, and, if we may subscribe to what counsellor Phillips says respecting the Irish females, instinctively virtuous. But Miss Nancy, very naturally, had conceived a dislike for the person whose fate was to be united with her own; for which dislike she had something more of justification than the mere fact of being compelled to marry him. Old Mr. O'Neil, the father of Nancy's betrothed, had resided in Boston for some eight or ten years, and his son had grown up to manhood during that period. Miss Nancy had not seen him since he was a boy, but her recollections of his person and manners were not such as young ladies generally love to cherish. She made no allowance for any improvement which might possibly have taken place, but determined to hold him in as little esteem as conjugal duty could liberally be construed to admit of. As for avoiding the engagement, it seemed to be out of the question, as matters had been so arranged that, at the option and to the benefit of Mr. Passmore, a loss of fortune on her part would have been the consequence.

But the time had now arrived when the marriage contract was to be consummated. The younger O'Neil was daily expected in Baltimore to claim his bride, and a letter from the old gentleman informed Mr. Passmore that the youth would take lodgings at the city hotel. Mr. Passmore was to receive a handsome bonus on the wedding day, and he had no particular wish to delay the celebration of the nuptials. Every afternoon he sent his man, Bob Doughty, to inquire at the hotel if the expected bridegroom had arrived. We should have mentioned that this expected bridegroom, from having the command of a volunteer corps in Boston was entitled captain O'Neil; by which title he was mentioned in his father's letter to Mr. Passmore, and inquired for at the hotel, by Bob Doughty.

We hope the reader has not lost sight of our friend Shadrach, to whom we must now return. He had been so lucky as to secure the custom of the city hotel, and supplied that establishment with some of the best shell-fish that ever reposed on the oozy bottom of Chesapeake Bay. He had just received the cash for a whole load of them, and on walking out of the bar-room he encountered Bob Doughty, who had come to make his accustomed inquiry. Taking Shadrach for some person belonging to the "concern," Bob politely desired to know if captain O'Neil had arrived, and was answered by the skipper, with equal politeness, in the affirmative.

"Can I spake to him?" said Bob.
"Sure and you can;" was the reply.
"Then I'll see him, if you please."
"Then jist plase to open your eyes;" said captain Shadrach O'Neil.

Bob, not doubting that the object of his search was before him, delivered Mr. Passmore's invitation to dinner,

which caused some little amazement on the part of the captain.

"The ould jntleman wishes to see you as soon as convenient;" continued Bob.

"And I am always ready to wait on any ould jntleman, barrin ould nick;" answered captain O'Neil, "but may be you could be afther tellin me what your master might hap-pent to want wid me."

"Arra, git out now," said Bob, with a look of some displeasure, "ye have clane forgot the business ye've come after, I suppose, and ye've not got to marry our young leddy, at all."

"Not a bit," said the captain, "is it marrying you mane? Why, then, by the mother of Moses, Shady O'Neil will niver marry the best quane in creation, without his own advice and consint; and so you may tell your mashter from me, you blackguard."

"Now for shane on the mother's son, you, Shady O'Neil, if that is your name," answered Bob; "I would 'nt blave the like iv you. What, to trate a handsome young leddy in this scurvy fashion, and she got such a power of cash in the bargain; and all afther that ould fadher iv you had put down his knuckles on paper, (and that's all the same as making a promise by word of mouth,) to go and knock it all in the head like a brute baste, as ye are, and bad luck to ye!"

Whether it was the honest indignation expressed in this speech which operated on captain O'Neil, or whether it was some of the facts, such as the beauty and wealth of the young lady, which the speech had developed, we will not pretend to say; however, the eloquence of Bob seemed to produce the desired effect; for the captain, apparently ashamed of his opposition, quietly asked the messenger to conduct him to the dwelling of Mr. Passmore. This was speedily accomplished, and in silence, for the captain seemed to be lost in thought, and Bob was satisfied with the specimen of rhetoric he had so lately exhibited.

Mr. Passmore and his niece were in the parlor when captain O'Neil entered, and his name was announced by the trusty Bob Doughty. The appearance of the captain, considering all things, was better than might be expected. He was quite a handsome young Irishman, and happening to have on his best clothes, his figure was not ungenteel, though somewhat maritime. Miss Nancy, after a glance or two, found herself agreeably disappointed, and began to relieve her father's contract from some of the execrations with which she had previously loaded it. Mr. Passmore examined his visitor attentively through his spectacles, for some minutes, and then said:

"Your name is captain O'Neil."
"That is a fact, if you niver spake another;" answered Shadrach.

Nancy and her uncle both started. The voice was probably somewhat richer in brogue than they had anticipated. A short silence ensued, during which Shady endeavored to collect himself for the trial which he perceived drew near. He saw that there was some mistake, and he resolved to humor it; for the charms of the young lady had made some impression on his heart, and the account he had received of her fiscal concerns had made a corresponding impression on his understanding.

"Your father writes me he will be here within the week;" remarked Mr. Passmore.

"Och, and may be he will then."

"But he intimates that if we are desirous of bringing this business to a close before he comes, he has no objection."

"That's me own fadher exactly;" cried Shady.
"But, captain O'Neil, there is one thing which strikes