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FATHER CLEVELAND; OR, THE JESUIT.

By the Authoress of "Life in the Cloister," "Grace O'Halloran," "The Two Marys," etc., etc.

From the Boston Pilot.

"Maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave This viperous slander enters."—Cymbeline.

(CHAPTER VI.—Continued.)

For a moment the good Father paused, for almost stoical as he was, he could scarce command himself so as to put a question to the boy which he dreaded, yet longed to ask—at last the words came out, and in tones, thick and tremulous, from excessive agitation, he said: "Can you tell me anything about Squire Cleveland, my boy?"

"The Squire, he's dead, Sir; he died in prison two year ago, last Michaelmas, that be the young Squire, Sir! the old Squire lives down the High-street, do you want to see him?"

"Yes, and I'll give you a shilling instead of sixpence, if you take me to him quickly," said the priest.

Much shocked, Father Cleveland followed the steps of his youthful guide. It was now certain that his family had been utterly ruined, and, he too truly surmised, by the reckless character of his brother.

After a few minutes' walk, the child conducted the Priest to the old quarter of the town in which was the High street, and which appeared to be almost deserted, doubtless its trade damaged by the unusually showy shops which had sprung up at Alverley, as in other neighborhoods, during the recent improvements.

"This is the house in which the old Squire lives," said the child, stopping at the door of a small shop of which the good father had a vague remembrance, as having belonged to a woman once a nurse in his father's family, and who, after engaging in a little business for herself, had eked out a living with what was allowed her by the Squire, in vending toys, kites, and such like articles for the young people of Alverley.

The shop was closed, for the winter evening had drawn quickly in, and having given the boy his promised guerdon, Father Cleveland knocked gently for admittance.

A woman, old and decrepid, answered the summons, and holding a candle in her hand, raised it to his face; as she opened the door, the dress of the ecclesiastic insured her veneration for the person of the new-comer, and dropping a profound curtsy, she asked, "what she could do for his Reverence?"

"Those already old, change but little as time wears on. Thus it was that Edward Cleveland knew on the moment the old nurse, but care was necessary. If his aged father was here, he must proceed cautiously with the work he had in hand, and herein lay his greatest difficulty, for he knew that old Martha had ever loved a long tale, and was quite certain that age had not diminished her garrulity.

"I want to say a few words to you," he said, "I am a Priest, and know you to be a good Catholic, Mrs. Loberts; but first let me have a seat, for I am both unwell and weary."

The good woman immediately conducted him into a small but neatly-furnished parlor, a cheerful fire burned in the stove, and a tea-kettle on the hob, together with a small equipage for that meal on the table, gave the room an air of comfort.

The table was laid for two persons. The heart of the Priest beat quicker than usual. Was one of those his father?

"Some years since you were nurse in the family of a Squire Cleveland, who lived at a place called the Grange; can you give me any information about them?"

"Why, yes, your Reverence, I know a great deal about them," she replied; "the young Squire was a wild gay man, a fast man, they used to call him, Sir. I don't much understand the odd expressions people use now-a-days; but I think last means gay; does it not, Sir?"

Father Cleveland saw plainly that Martha was inclined to be as garrulous as ever, and continued without answering her question. "Well, what has become of them all?"

find that I am just beating about the bush, as the saying is, and then I clean forget myself altogether; but, as I was saying, Miss Maud—(Father Cleveland made a gesture of impatience) Ah, poor Father Cleveland, you may as well take it quietly, for old women like Martha, and young ones, too, sometimes will wander from the point; better let Martha tell her story her own way, or you will extort from her only disjointed phrases.

"Well, your Reverence, Miss Maud was the belle of Alverley, and my dear old master thought she would make a good match, but instead of that she gets a liking to a Mr. Vivian, and the end of it all is that my master gives his consent, so Mrs. Maud, or rather Mrs. Vivian, to call people by their right names, went up to London; it's a very large place that, isn't it, Sir?"—(here Father Cleveland replied in the affirmative), groaning in impatience of spirit, Jesuit though he was, at Martha's loquacity.

"Well, as I was saying, Miss Maud goes up to London, and had a very fine time of it there, and before two years were over her head she comes down to Alverley with a little girl, her first child it was, Sir, and it was only to get money from her father, for Mr. Vivian had squandered away the bit of money he had. And I heard the servants tell that they were in great distress; and so her brother the Priest said it would turn out; a fine good young man was that Master Edward. I mind me that if he had staid at home, instead of remping into far away countries after black people and such like, that the old Grange would be the old Grange still; that's to say, you know, Sir, supposing he had been the eldest son instead of the youngest."

"Very true," replied Father Cleveland, for he saw that the old woman would have an answer; and somewhat amused at her description of himself, he allowed her to continue her story in her own way, from very fear lest she should digress still more out of very vexation at not being permitted to do so, should he again interrupt her.

"Well, there was a pretty skirmish, you know, Sir, because the poor old Squire gave his daughter a little money, fifty pounds or thereabouts; and I'm told by those who know something of money matters that that sum wouldn't go very far. However, to make my story short, for I can see you are in a hurry, Sir, young Squire Cleveland went on with his scamping ways, from bad to worse. The whole of the property was mortgaged, Sir, (I think that's what they call it,) and the end of it was, it passed clean out of the old gentleman's hands, only a very short time before the young Squire was put in prison."

"And what became of the poor old Squire?" asked Father Cleveland, with much emotion; "what money was left for his support?"

"Just nothing at all, Sir, but a poor bit of money, about forty pounds a year, or thereabouts, which he got left of his wife's property."

"And where is the old gentleman? I wish to see him as soon as possible," said Father Cleveland.

"What's your Reverence's name? I will go and fetch him; though I must tell you, Sir, for he lives here with me, his old servant, that it's not at all times he's quite clear in his intellect, poor old gentleman! trouble, they say, has done it, Sir; but he rambles on so sometimes that one scarce understands him. He often talks of his younger son, Sir, and wonders he never writes; thinking, perhaps, he is dead since he went to them foreign parts."

Edward Cleveland now felt that it was necessary to discover himself; for if this were the state his father was in, a sudden recognition might be fatal. Therefore, holding the light before his own face, he exclaimed—

"Look at me well, Martha Roberts, and say if you remember your foster-son, Edward Cleveland?"

"The Lord be good unto me! what is it your Reverence says?" said Martha, doing as he requested. She paused a moment, attentively scanned his features, and then passed her hand over her eyes, as if she would call up some vision of the past, then seized his hand in hers, exclaiming—

"Is it true, your Reverence? Were you really the bonny child I used to love so much?" Then sinking on her knees, she added, as she took one of his hands within her own and laid it on her head—

"Bless me, then; bless, my own Mister Edward. Let me say that my old eyes have lived to see the day when you are a Priest, that you have blessed your old nurse before she died."

now, dear Master Edward, I will go out at once to your father."

The Priest, so long used to the appellation of 'Father,' could not forbear a smile, as the familiar old words, 'Master Edward,' now so long disused, fell upon his ears; and he endeavored to make Martha understand that she must on no account tell his father, in any hurried manner, of his arrival.

"Well, do you know, I think the best way would be to let him come in to his tea as usual, and then you can tell him who you are yourself, you know," replied Martha: "see, I will ring that hand bell," and Martha sounded one as she spoke; "There, he will come soon. Hark! you may hear his step now. Your Reverence had best not sit in the full glare of the light. It might surprise him like, for they do tell of nature speaking to people's hearts, and it might startle him too much, as your Reverence was saying."

As Martha said these words, the old Squire, bent down with age, and leaning for support upon a stick, hobbled into the little sitting-room. He started on perceiving that he was in the presence of a third party, and bowing, as some gentleman of the old school would have done, he said:

"I beg you a thousand pardons, Reverend Sir, for I see am speaking to a priest, but I really did not know we had the pleasure of company to-night. Martha," he continued, turning reproachfully to the nurse, "how often have I told you to let me know when visitors are coming to the Grange; you see, Sir, our establishment is but small now; I have given up my carriages, and nearly all my servants."

Here the poor old Squire paused, and for a moment Father Cleveland was so overcome by his emotions that he could not reply; added to which he was trying to nerve himself for the disclosure he was about to make, but for which his father speedily led the way.

"You are a priest; may I ask if you are a secular priest, or if you belong to one of the religious orders?"

"I am a member of the Society of Jesus," replied Edward, rising, and drawing his chair beside that of his father.

"A Jesuit; aye, a fine order that,—fine orders those in the Catholic Church, Sir. How much do we not owe to those sons of St. Ignatius, of the great St. Benedict, St. Dominick, and others?" Then he paused, wandered on to other topics, desired the old woman to order a sumptuous dinner for their guest, and then, returning again to the point nearest his heart, continued—

"I had a son once, Sir, a favorite son; he became, like you, a Jesuit; entered upon a mission in America, then, I believe, held one in India; I wonder if you know him?"

"It is not unlikely that I may have heard of him, if he be a member of our order," said Edward.

His name is Edward—Edward Cleveland, repeated the old man. "I wonder he has never written to me."

"I have met your son. He has written to you, but his letters must have miscarried. He has returned to England, but will shortly go to Canada. It is his earnest wish to see you again."

For a few moments Father Cleveland felt almost alarmed at the effect this announcement, carefully as it was made, had upon the poor old gentleman. He sprang upon his feet, rested both his hands upon his stick, and raising his face to Edward, exclaimed—

"I beg you, Sir, to take me to my son. My hat, nurse, quick! make no delay; let me see once again him who will be the staff of my old age. Let me bless him before I die!"

It was a sight worthy of the limner's art.—The fine countenance of the old man was shaded over by locks of silvery whiteness, which fell upon his shoulders; his eyes were fixed upon those of his son, whose outstretched arms now supported his sinking form: nature spoke to his heart, and the words 'My son!' 'My father!' burst simultaneously from the lips of each. There was a pause for a moment, then the old Squire, lifting up his eyes and clasping his hands, exclaimed, in the language of the Patriarch in Holy Writ, 'Now shall I die with joy, because I have seen thy face, and leave thee alive.'

How much was there to talk over after the first emotion had subsided, though from his father the priest scarcely gathered so much as from Martha, whose intellects were yet unimpaired, but still the enfeebled mind was unobscured, on some points, particularly those affecting the death of his son and the loss of the Grange, whilst the next moment he would wonder back into some new phase of imbecility, which was terribly painful to listen to. And thus the night waned on, and still they talked of the past and the present, the good priest humoring him in those hallucinations of the mind, which ever and anon returned, followed, perhaps, by some lingering spark of intelligence, which, like a meteor, flashed for a moment, and then would as suddenly disappear.

Of one thing Father Cleveland was resolved, and that was to seek out Maud, and ascertain if he could not place his father with her, rather than with the aged woman with whom he had found him located.

Two days later, Father Cleveland had fixed for his return to London; the next would necessarily be a broken one, as he must take rail for —, on a visit to the Superior of his Order; and it was not without some difficulty that he got away from his father, who could not be made to comprehend that in a very few hours he would return.

The business of his journey, however, was quickly over, for — was attainable by means of express, and railway travelling draws distant places near; so that he was able to return before night, firmly resolving, however, not to continue longer at Alverley, but take his father away with him on the morrow, and place him in furnished lodging, till he had effected an interview with his sister.

Alverley awakened too many unpleasant recollections to make it a desirable place, even for the shortest sojourn on his part. Sainly, austere as he was, Father Cleveland could not look unmoved on that garish edifice which once had been the pleasant home of his youth, on that changed spot, and on his father's altered condition.

Unlike the weather the previous day, a sharp frost had set in, and the snow crackled beneath his feet, as he wended his way to the High street—the sky was studded with stars, and the moon shed her cold pale light on the scene around. On such night as these, the mind is more prone to reflection, and is wont to carry us back to past times—it may be to look into the future. On such nights, he had often wandered beneath the cold Cæanian skies, far away from the scenes of his youth, and had returned for a short time to England, previously to entering upon a distant mission. His mind was still busily engaged when he reached the house in which the old Squire was located. He was yet awake, Martha told him. Restless, in one of those moods to which he was most difficult to manage; he had rambled all the day—appeared to have forgotten the visit of his son, talked of Herbert and Maud, and imagined himself again in the possession of wealth.

Father Cleveland entered his room, the light issuing from a small lamp standing on a side table, had been carefully shaded, so that it shed a subdued light on that part of the room in which his couch was placed. He was sitting upright, in that old attitude of his, with the withered hands clasped together. He was perfectly silent, so silent—for he neither looked nor moved on the entrance of his son—that the latter was startled by the supposition that all was over.

The bright rays of the cold frosty moon put to shame the feeble light of the lamp, and shed its beams full on the worn features of his father, ghastly as death could make them.

Father Cleveland approached near, yet nearer, and pressed his hand on his forehead. It was cold, but the gentle touch of the warm hand called him back from the state of lethargy into which he had fallen.

"Father," he said, taking his hand within his own, "why do you sit up so long in the cold, instead of trying to go to sleep?"

"Ah! is that you, Edward? How glad I am you have come back. I was thinking of the past," he replied, "of those who have trod before me the valley of death. I seem but now to have awakened from a long, long dream, in which the past has moved before my eyes in an indistinct manner, vaguely and confusedly. Trouble has weakened my brain, I think, and darkened this intellect of mine; but as a taper about to expire shoots up with unwonted brilliancy, so does it seem, my son, with myself; and that now, when on the verge of eternity, sparks of that brighter intelligence again flash forth, and restore me, as it were, to my former self."

"Dear Father," replied the Jesuit, "I hope better things, and trust there are yet many happy years in store for you."

"Do not wish anything of the kind," said the Squire, mournfully. "I am a useless old fellow, and have few to care for me. Maud has her own young family; and you, my boy, must leave me, for duty calls you from my side. No, no; it is better it should be thus. I feel I am very near my end, and God has dealt mercifully to me, in sending my own son, a Priest of God, to close my aged eyes. He has blessed me above my deserts. Now lead me to my bed," he continued, "and promise me not to leave the room to-night, as I may want your attendance."

He then relapsed into perfect silence till he sunk into sleep, and seated by his bedside, Father Cleveland kept a long and anxious watch. About one in the morning he awoke. Could there longer be doubt on the mind of the son that the old man's presage of approaching dissolution was correct? Few who have seen death can be mistaken when they a second time behold its approach, and no doubt now remained on his mind

that the end was rapidly drawing nigh. The Squire had led a blameless life, but there was much to be done. Who more fit to administer the last rites of the Church than the relative, whom one might well believe the Almighty had sent, indeed, in a special manner to soothe his passage from time to eternity?

In the dead of the long winter night, then, Father Cleveland prepared the soul of his earthly parent for its transit from time to eternity; consecrating the terrors of that last dread conflict between the material and immaterial essence, which ensues before death sets the imprisoned spirit free.

What a joy for both that they should have met once again! What a joy to the son that his should be the hand to administer those saving rites—his lips to breathe words of hope—his the arm to raise the weary head, to wipe away with his own hand the death-dews which gathered on the pallid face!

At last a faint light broke into the death chamber, and the first crow of the cock told the dawning of another day. It was a relief, for he had watched alone during many weary hours, fearing to disturb the rest of the old nurse.

"I will leave his side for one moment," he thought, and was advancing to the window, to draw aside the curtain and admit the first faint light of day, when a low sigh called him back.

All was, however, over; with that low sigh the spirit of the good old Squire had passed away. Need we add that his son's anointed hands fulfilled the last sad duties; that his lips sang the last requiem, and repeated the Church's prayers over his grave.

He rejoiced that his first thought had been to visit his father; but the knowledge of the utter ruin of his family, followed by the Squire's death, had preyed heavily upon his spirits. He felt change of scene was necessary; and on the morning after the funeral bade an eternal adieu to Alverley, having first handsomely indemnified Martha for the care she had taken of the Squire!

CHAPTER VII.—MAUD VIVIAN'S FAMILY.

After settling himself in a mission near London, which Father Cleveland was to occupy for some few months before his departure to America, his first thought was to seek out his sister, from whom he had been so long estranged, for Maud had carried out to the letter the threat she had made during her quarrel at the Grange—he had often written to her, but had never received an answer.

However, furnished with a very incorrect address, supplied him by Martha, he set out one morning in February on a voyage of discovery, and wended his way to a certain district in Lambeth—his errand was, however, fruitless. Mrs. Vivian had left the lodgings she had occupied, and removed, he was told to Vauxhall.

He had an insight already into the state of the exchequer, as far as regarded Maud and her family, and felt a little uneasiness as to how she would receive him, for were she badly off, as there was little doubt she really was, his reception would probably be an extremely ungracious one, for Maud was not likely to forget that he had bid her prepare for poverty in becoming Vivian's wife.

At length he reached the Harleyford Road, and paused at the door of a six roomed house, and could hear distinctly the sound of children's voices, as if their play was not of a very amiable character. He gave a double knock at the door, which was at first responded to by a perfect lull of the childish combatants within, and after patiently waiting a few minutes, and then repeating the knock, he distinctly heard a female voice, the tones of which he was not slow in recognising, call out from the depths of a lower kitchen, "Go to the door, Miss, directly, and let me know who is there."

The next moment the door was opened by a fine little girl, apparently about ten or eleven years old, who half bashfully took his message, and opening the door of a small parlor drew a chair for the stranger, and then hurried to her mother.

It is no difficult matter to guess the tastes and habits of others by an inspection of the appointments of their private apartments, for, however humble their circumstances may be, there will be some little thing about to guide you in your opinion, should you be curious enough to hazard one.

Music, books, paintings, articles of bijouterie, all will serve to indicate the taste of the resident, he who he may; but Father Cleveland vainly sought, during a lengthened scrutiny of fifteen minutes, for anything which could testify that the dwellers of Myrtle Cottage were intellectual accomplished, or of a literary turn of mind.

Every now and then, too, some little urchin, and there appeared to be five or six such, would poke its unkempt head through the half open door, and then run off laughing and whispering to the small tribe without; on one such occasion no less than three made their appearance, pushing in