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MARTIN O'REILLY.

(From the Lamp.)

CHAPTER I.

In a retired locality in an English densely-populated town, there stood a tenement, in no way remarkable, either as regards construction or position, and only interesting to us as being the residence of the worthy man figuring as the hero of this sketch. It is plainly the home of a working man; but it must be allowed that there is often as much that is interesting associated with such buildings as with those of much greater pretensions. Often there are dramas enacted within their walls which might shame the creations of the wildest fancy. But these are hidden from public scrutiny; for the poor man lives and dies unknown and unnoticed, unlike the titled and wealthy, whose every action is noted, every wish anticipated, by the sycophants who surround them.

From the door of the house to which we have just alluded there issued a man, clad in working clothes, but working clothes though they be, still they might be a good deal cleaner. In fact, there was that about the man and his clothes which would lead you to suppose him deficient in, not merely taste, but even cleanliness, a thing of far greater importance. There was here and there a mark which would seem to warrant a nearer acquaintance with the street mud than was at all necessary; and moreover there were, in several places slight rents, such as might have been caused by a scuffle of some kind; still they might be the result of the legitimate 'wear and tear' of his usual avocation. He wore a kind of hat, new at some time, no doubt, but now defaced and distorted by sundry dings. Beneath this but there protruded a quantity of shaggy hair, which said, as plainly as any words could, that the owner was not in the habit of using the comb. Then, as to his nasal organ, why, we do not wish to insinuate; but we must say that it had rather a rosy appearance. However, we must allow that there are some persons who never taste spirituous liquors—at least, so they say—who are afflicted with a red nose; and some, like Paddy, who, when rallied on the subject, observed, 'I always blush when I see a gentleman.' But no matter; we shall say nothing further at present, trusting that Martin O'Reilly's conduct, the only tangible guide to character, will vindicate him.

Strange to think of the vicissitudes of the world! Here is an O'Reilly of Breyffoy O'Reilly seeking for bread in an English manufacturing town, while the descendants of some sturdy Cromwellian, perhaps, are luxuriating on his fair patrimony.

Our friend Martin passes down the street at a quick pace, like a man intent on some business, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead.

'Well, Martin's old boy, how goes it?' said a voice at his elbow.

Early as it was the speaker smelt of something 'stronger than water.'

Martin bestowed a glance of recognition on his interlocutor, and kindly returned the salutation by asking how he and his family were. The pair passed on, engaged in conversation on the usual topics,—the weather, the affairs of their neighbors, &c. Presently they came opposite a gin-palace.

'What do you say to a treat? Have a glass of gin?' asked Martin's friend.

'Don't care if I do,' was the answer, after a little hesitation.

They pass inside. The gin is ordered, paid for, and drunk. His companion rises, and prepares for going, when Martin exclaims,—

'Why, hang it, John, this will never do; we must have another drop.' And he prevails on his obliging friend,—that is, after a certain amount of persuasion, and with great reluctance, as it were,—to sit down; at the same time he hopes he is not inconveniencing his friend, Mr. O'Reilly.

'Oh, not at all,' says Martin. And they are again pleasantly discussing the quality of the liquor placed before them by the smiling and very obliging attendant.

Now, they find it so pleasant to sit in the cool parlor on this very sultry day, that they linger something longer than is exactly necessary over the last 'drop' brought in; and, insensibly, as it were, they are led into a conversation on their household affairs.

It is wonderful how communicative, how obliging, how magnanimous,—in fine, how heroic, people get, when invigorated by the 'blood of John Barleycorn.' They are willing to do this, that, or anything for their noble pot companions; there is not in the whole world a thing they are not willing to perform. And, of course, no one would feel offended by any remark, advice or caution, tendered under such circumstances; taken in fact, it is as coming from the very best friend in the world. What a subject for the satirist is a group of men, when what is called

'half-seas over.' The madlin sentimentalism, the wonderful charity, the splendid professions, the promises of everlasting friendship, would draw peals of laughter from the sober looker-on, did he not feel how much the common humanity is degraded by the exhibition of intellectual beings making brutes of themselves.

However, Martin and his companion found time pass very pleasantly; one drop brought another, and still they sat, all the outer world forgotten.

'By the way, Martin, is it true that you are going to become a total abstainer?'

'What?' exclaimed Martin; 'who dared to say so? It would be a nice job indeed.'

'Oh, I don't like to tell,' said the other; 'and then, perhaps, it was only a joke after all. I just wanted to see whether the thing had any foundation or not. I could not think you would have so little independence as to yield to any woman on such a point.'

'A woman, John Cranston. What do you mean?'

'Well,' said the other, 'I'm sorry I mentioned it; but really you need not take on so.—Perhaps the thing was not true. If you promise not to mention it, I'll tell you who reported it.'

'Out with it, man,' said the enraged drinker of alcohol.

'Well, then, my wife had been to Charles O'Connor's, and Mrs. O'Connor said that she had been informed by Mrs. O'Reilly that you were going to take the pledge.'

Now the fact was, Martin O'Reilly had promised to his wife, at her solicitation, that he would reform his habits, and shun the society of his drinking acquaintances; but his resolution was not very strong, and, as we have seen, he was not able to abstain from drink when invited by his evil genius John Cranston. To be sure, he had left his own house that very morning with the intention of taking nothing intoxicating during the day, and it had been agreed upon that he should take the pledge at the first opportunity; but, alas! for human resolution, how miserably did he deceive himself.

Of course, when he met his companion in the street, his first impulse was to run away; but, on second thoughts, he considered this a rather rude way of repulsing his 'friend'; besides he was not sure that he was going to be led into breaking his resolution. Then he thought to himself, 'I may stay here, and still not go into the public-house.' Quite true, indeed; but no sooner did he hear himself addressed on the subject, than his caution, in a great measure, vanished. It would be a great shame, so he thought, thus to break with his comrade at once; why, he might go in, and, oh, he was sure he would not exceed.—But we need not follow out the man's reasoning; it was such reasoning as had led many a man to ruin.

Martin O'Reilly had been crossed,—crossed by his wife; worse,—his wife had betrayed his confidence, and exposed him to ridicule; and, as there is nothing implanted more deeply in human nature than the spirit of contradiction, he was determined, in very spite, to drink to his heart's content, for at least one day.

Alas! how many there are who, out of spite, and in order to show that they are masters of their own actions ruin themselves for time and eternity.

'Oh, for that warning voice, which he who saw The Apocalypse, heard cry in heaven aloud.'

to wake us from this trance into which we have fallen, and make us stand upright in faith and boldness.

CHAPTER II.

While our friends are regaling, that is debasing themselves, in that public house, let us take a glance at some of the other personages who figure in our tale. In a neat little parlor, in one of the houses in the vicinity of O'Reilly's, the reader may picture to himself a very comfortable little party gathered around the plentifully furnished breakfast table. We have said plentifully furnished, yet at the same time there was nothing extravagant—an abundance of good wholesome food, but everything in the arrangement denoted economy and neatness. First there is the father, with his little children grouped around him, radiant with pleasure and joy, their persons clean, and habited in clean and suitable clothing. The mother is busied in preparing the morning meal.

While she is so engaged, let us take a glance at the apartment. Although the furniture is of the simplest kind, there is evidence of refinement and taste in the most trivial things, on which we cast our eyes. In a little compartment there is a pretty good supply of books, betokening that the inmates are not unmindful of the intellectual faculties wherewith they are endowed.

But there is no black bottle filled with a pungent and repulsive fluid, called whiskey; there is no furniture broken by the imbibor of the said fluid: neither is the room redolent of fumes, drawn from the tobacco pipe. Well, well, but

it does seem strange to see men and boys, ay, children, puffing forth clouds of suffocating smoke.

After disposing of his breakfast, Charles O'Connor (for it is to him and his family we have introduced the reader), began preparing himself for attending to his business. Mrs. O'Connor bustled about, arranging things after the meal, now addressing herself to the children, and anon, to her husband.

'Well, Charles, I'm really glad that Martin O'Reilly is about to give up the drink; it will be such a boon for his poor wife,' she said.

'And so am I,' said her husband, but it will be just as well not to say much about the matter until it is completed by his taking the pledge at the next meeting. Once that is done, I don't fear for him; but there is no telling what obstacles may be thrown in the way by his tipping 'friends,' did they know of his intention.'

'I am sure you are perfectly right, as you always are. How stupid I was not to see it. I am certain they would do all in their power to prevent his taking the pledge.'

'Yes, Mary, no doubt of that. For instance, there is John Cranston, who has been his evil genius for years, who, if he knew of it, would do his utmost to keep him a drunkard still. And good reason the fellow has, for many a penny of poor Martin's money he and his companions have drunk.'

Mary looked blank at this remark of her husband's.

'How sorry I am,' she said, 'but Mrs. Cranston called in yesterday, and some how or other she said something which introduced the O'Reillys, and quite unthinkingly, I mentioned that Martin was going to take the pledge.'

'It was very wrong, Mary, but, perhaps, we may be able to save him yet. I dread his meeting with Cranston, as I know he will endeavour to spear him out of it. I won't lose a moment in seeing him.'

'Oh, make haste, dear, and I hope you will succeed.'

'I'll do my best,' said Charles, as he left the house.

'Good morning, Mrs. O'Reilly,' said Charles O'Connor, as he entered the abode of that person. 'Martin's not out, I hope, as I wish to see him.'

'He's just gone, sir. I am very sorry you did not see him. I so wished you to talk with him about the pledge. I know if he had taken it he would remain firm, but I am always afraid whenever he goes out that some of his drinking companions may persuade him out of his intention.'

'Well, that was just my errand this morning. I intended to get him to attend the next meeting which will be to-morrow evening.'

'God bless you, sir, we can never be thankful enough to you for your kindness in befriending my poor misled husband. If you will try this once and endeavor to get him to attend to-morrow evening. I think we might succeed.'

'I'll do my best,' said he, as he prepared to go. 'I'll come again to-morrow, and with God's help, we will succeed.' And he left, hurrying off to his own business having already lost considerable time.

We must now return to our friends in the public house. We left them 'enjoying themselves' at the expense of Martin's pocket. It was now far advanced in the day, and hard drinkers as they were, the liquor was fast telling on them, but more especially on Martin. He was fairly drunk. The landlord seeing that they were rather in the way than anything else, gave them some not very gentle hints to change their quarters. Men in their state are not very prompt in obeying orders, and so Martin and his friend did not evince any great wish to remove at present. They swore heartily they would do no such thing as go. Were they not men? And would they be bullied in any such way? No, they were free to come and go as they pleased, and stay they would. The landlord threatened to give them in charge—he would call a policeman; but they were 'nae that fou,' but that they had sense enough left not to encounter the preserver of the peace.

'Give them in charge?' yes, these are the words of the man who, a short time since, was all smiles and politeness, and ready to attend to their every wish—that is, remember, while they were putting their money in his hands in exchange for poison. There is no person so mean as the drunkard. How often is he treated in this manner, and yet how soon he forgets it.

Mrs. O'Reilly felt very sad during the morning. And who would not feel sad in her position? Her husband, who should have been her best friend, had been the cause of many miseries to her—had made her and her little ones feel the pangs of hunger,—and all this at a time when he was earning more than sufficient to support them in comfort. This very morning he had gone out to provide for the ensuing week, and had promised to return very quickly; for the little ones were still without breakfast. As hour after hour

wore on without any sign of his return, and the hungry children clamored for the accustomed meal, which she was unable to afford them, her vertigo gave way, and she sank down weeping bitterly.

'And this is the man to whom I have plighted my vows, who swore to love and cherish me; and thus he returns my love! I who would have died for him.'

Much more she said in this strain, but we need not record it: it was but the outpouring of a loving heart, which had become embittered by constant neglect and wrong. She felt deeply for her hungry children; and yet through all there would come a thought of happier days. He was not always so: once he was all love and kindness, manly, sensitive, and noble. Then there flitted before her mind's eye the shadows of those false friends who had drawn him from the path of virtue. In the absence of all human consolation her thoughts turned towards heaven, and she knelt down and prayed, and in her prayer found hope and consolation. She prayed fervently that the eyes of her husband might be opened, and that he might be brought once more into the right path.

And well might she pray, for with intemperance cometh a train of evils fearful to contemplate.—Man is no longer man, but becomes assimilated to the brute. Religion is cast to the winds—is made the jest of the drunkard, till at last he is laid on the bed of sickness, or of death. Then come hasty thoughts of amendment when too late,—when his days, perhaps hours, are numbered. And how often, alas! is the drunkard hurried into the presence of his maker, blaspheming, and in despair. When shall the world be rid of this horrible monster, the fertile and prolific source of sin, shame, and eternal death?

CHAPTER III.

Night had already fallen on the smoky town, ere Martin O'Reilly reached his own door.

When he left the public house, he was deserted by his fellow tippler, who, having become aware that Martin was not likely to be a very beneficial companion, dodged round a corner and decamped. Martin passed on without any very clear perception of where he was going, until at length he stumbled into the door of a wretched and dilapidated tenement, in as wretched a street. He remained there till he began to show signs of returning consciousness, when he was rather rudely ejected by a couple of nondescript fellows. Staggering onwards, after many mishaps, he at length entered his own home, head foremost, measuring his length upon the floor, where he lay snoring in a beasty state of intoxication.

The reader may imagine the state of that poor family. We need not endeavour to describe the anguish of the unhappy wife. She was glad, however (if a feeling of gladness could exist in her heart at the time), that he had arrived in safety; for she feared she would never see him alive again. During the day she had pawned a portion of her very scanty wardrobe, in order to preserve her children from starvation. Reader, 'twas her worn out, faded shawl, the poor woman had parted with—a relic of better days.

It was a weary, weary watch by the side of her unconscious husband, through that long winter night: and yet she bore it without murmuring, in the hope that her prayers might be heard. What thoughts there came in the silent midnight hour!—what shadows there flitted before her eyes! No wonder, poor woman, worn out, hungry, and feverish—no wonder thy tears fell hot and binding—no wonder thou turnedst thy thoughts to thy heavenly 'Father who dwelleth on high, and looketh on all that is humble in heaven and on earth.'

Morning came, and the daylight shone around, yet Martin O'Reilly still lay sleeping heavily.—The thick, hurried, and almost convulsive breathing, told plainly he was now reaping the fruits of his day's drinking in an aching head and disordered body—in utter prostration of body and mind.

At length he opened his eyes and looked around, as if he did not comprehend where he was. In a few moments, however, he recalled some of the events of the preceding day. He remembered, though rather vaguely, that he had been drinking with some one or other—ah, yes! with John Cranston. He remembered leaving the public house, and going into the street; but, after that, all was a blank. Where he had been subsequently, how he got home, seemed all a misty haze. He had certain undefined recollections of a villainous face bending over him as he lay prostrate, but the remainder of the scene melted into chaos. He closed his eyes again as if to shut out the scene before him, in order to conjure up the lost link in the chain. But all his efforts were vain; every trace of the impressions made on his mind, from the time he left the public house, had become entirely obliterated.

All at once, and with painful distinctness, came the remembrance of the errand on which he went the preceding morning. With horror

he recollected that he had gone to buy food for his children. Then his money—ah!—he jumped out of bed in a moment, he sought out the pocket in which he had put his money going out. It was not there. Perhaps he had removed it into some of the other pockets? It was but the work of a moment to search every possible spot in which it could have been. In vain: no trace of it could be seen; but still unwilling to think it gone, he was going to call his wife, thinking that she might have taken it to procure food. But how could he think of speaking to her or looking her in the face? He knew that she had always been peculiarly meek and forgiving, but this last crime had been of more than usual atrocity.

He dressed himself and sat down, the perfect personification of misery and despair. His wife entered the apartment. Her first words were, 'Thank God, Martin, you are home in safety; I was afraid you would never come.'

He was astonished—so different from what he expected and deserved. He covered his face with his hands, and sobbed like a child: 'Oh, Kate, I don't deserve this. Can you ever forgive me?'

Her tears were her only answer. In a few moments she said, 'Oh, Martin, let us kneel down, and thank the great God for his mercy and protection. Oh, if you had died in that state?'

And they did kneel down, and, when they arose again, Martin was a changed man.

Soon after Charles O'Connor entered. Martin felt ashamed, but Charles was not the man to humiliate his friend; on the contrary, though he knew all about the preceding day, he never spoke a word on the subject. He saw plainly that it was unnecessary, for it was evident the man was truly penitent. He made some observations on common-place subjects when Martin interrupted him by saying he wished to have some private conversation with him.

They went into another room, when Martin made a full confession of his delinquencies, and promised to reform at once. He said he was ready to take the pledge, the only thing wanting now being the opportunity. Charles was very happy to inform him that on that very day there was a meeting to be held, when there would be an opportunity of taking the pledge. He took his leave, promising to call for Martin when he went to the temperance meeting.

In due time, Martin and his friend were wending their way to hear the addresses of the advocates of temperance.

Arrived at the place, Martin was surprised to see so many well-dressed, respectable persons in attendance, who were, as his friend assured him, almost entirely total abstainers. He listened attentively to several thrilling discourses from the clergymen and others who were present. They painted the drunkard to the life, and Martin perceived how faithfully his own habits were delineated. He shuddered at the dread denunciations of the Church, from the mouths of her priests, against the drunkard. At the conclusion of the meeting, one of the zealous priests in attendance came forward to administer pledges. A great number of people became total abstainers, and among them Martin.

When he returned there was joy in his home, such as had not been there for many a day.—There was joy, because of the repentance and reformation of the husband and the father.

What a change there was in the home of Martin O'Reilly! When he went out to his work, there was no longer the dread anxiety that had formerly existed. His little children could run and welcome him home, not fearing the savage anger of a maniac—for what is the drunkard but a maniac? He is certainly a maniac when under the influence of drink, and how many there are who are scarcely ever free from its dire influence.

Since Martin had become an abstainer, everything went on well with him. The money which had formerly found its way into the coffer of the spirit dealer, now purchased many little conveniences. A very small amount, daily, is of very great moment to the working man. Small in itself, a glass of whisky is a mere trifle; but this indulged in daily, would rise to a considerable sum in a year; and continued for two years, or twenty years, would certainly make up something astonishing, to those who are not in the habit of attending to the financial bearing of the matter.

So Martin O'Reilly and his family prospered daily under the new system: thus affording another example of the good effects resulting from temperance. And though he may have afforded a sad spectacle to our readers when first we introduced him to them, we beg to assure them that he is now happy, contented, and respectable. He has never forgotten the exertions of Charles O'Connor in his behalf; and though at first inclined to consider him somewhat officious, he now reckons him as his best friend.

JAMES BREEN.