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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.

"Maid, matron, nay, the secrets of the grave This viperous slander enters."—Cymbeline.

CHAPTER XVIII.—IN MEMORIAM.

The day appointed for the funeral to take place proved wild and tempestuous; a heavy snow storm had fallen steadily during many hours, and a keen easterly wind drove it full in the faces of the unfortunate wayfarers.

Towards noon a modest and unpretending mourning cavalcade stopped at the gates of the cemetery of St. Croix, and from the single coach which followed the hearse stepped two mourners—these were Father Cleveland and Mr. Vernon. A large concourse of persons had, however, followed—some on foot, others in sledges—for, despite the inclemency of the weather, many had been attracted by the story they had heard; and those once the loudest in condemnation, the readiest to censure, were amongst the first to bewail the rash credulity with which they had received the slander, and the eagerness with which they themselves had circulated the report.

The deep tones of the bell now cast its sullen echoes on the gale, as the coffin was borne into the little mortuary chapel, and rested on a bier, whilst a venerable French Canadian Priest recited the prayers used by the Church before the corpse is carried to the grave; after which the coffin was once more raised, and the funeral procession again formed.

Not a sound was to be heard save the light patter of the snow and the moaning of the wind—a deathlike silence seemed to have awed the multitude around, and an irrepressible shudder passed through the frames of many, as the coffin was borne between them, for they had fallen aside into two ranks, and slowly wended their way to the grave. A narrow winding path shortly revealed the spot, the upturned earth of which showed the narrow home which was destined to receive the remains of Aileen Desmond.

For a few moments the coffin was placed beside the yawning grave, and the pall, now white with the thickly falling snow, removed. None of those who stood around, however, had noted a tall and slender form which, arrayed in robes of deepest mourning, long since white as the earth beneath, had leaned against a headstone some little distance off. Her face was closely covered by the folds of a thick crape veil, and from the moment the funeral had entered the cemetery, she had remained motionless as the stone against which she leaned for support.

She was perfectly silent, but had you seen the convulsive working of the pale, tearless, beautiful face, had you seen the small white hand as it clutched for support to that cold inanimate stone, you might almost have pitied that miserable Augusta, for you well know it is her of whom I am telling you. Not a movement escaped her notice on the part of those who stood around, when suddenly the crowd parted, as after drawing nigh the grave the coffin was lifted from the shoulders of the bearer, and placed on the earth.

Guided by a sudden impulse, she started from her reclining position, and to the horror of all the bystanders, more particularly to that of Father Cleveland, who immediately recognized her, she threw herself on the coffin, sobbing hysterically, accusing herself aloud as the cause of the death of Aileen, and exclaiming, 'God be merciful to me, it is I, it is I who have killed her,' she fell into a heavy swoon.

Father Cleveland alone was conscious, before the thick crape veil was raised, as to who was the unhappy being who had thus disturbed the solemnity of the scene, but there were many present to whom Augusta Seton was far from being a stranger: at first a murmur of indignation ran throughout the assembly, but two persons stepped forward, one was Bertha, the other Mr. Vernon, the former raising her veil, exclaimed, reproachfully, 'Have pity, for she is touched by remorse—remember that many who are here are not sinless in this matter, for if she first uttered the slander, they were credulous, and believed and spread the tale.'

Then she knelt down, and, unaided save by Vernon, would have removed the still unconscious Augusta, but stronger hands than hers assisted in the work of mercy, and, raising her from the coffin, bore her to a distant part of the cemetery; whilst persons of her own sex, actuated by somewhat of the spirit that had prompted Bertha to speak, volunteered their services in endeavoring to restore suspended animation.

Then, amidst profound silence, the coffin was lowered into the grave, and the sorrowful voice of the officiating Priest recited the last prayers; and thus, as the good Father truly expressed it, 'they laid her beneath the cold Canadian skies, far, far away from her own Emerald Isle, the land of her nativity; and, with humid eyes and a heavy heart, he turned him from the grave into which calumny had cast her, and shuddered as he passed the little throng of women, and heard the smothered sob which Augusta Seton now restored to consciousness, vainly strove to repress.

Returned to his little Presbytery, the good Father selected one of several designs which had been sent him, intending to raise a simple monument to the memory of Aileen Desmond; it was placed in the cemetery of St. Croix the following week—it bore only her name and age, with the date of her death, and the following touching words, intended by the good Father as a warning to the passer by:

HERE RESTETH, IN HUMBLE HOPE OF A BLESSED IMMORTALITY, THE INNOCENT VICTIM OF CALUMNY.

R. I. P.

Then, anxious as soon as possible to discharge a melancholy duty, he examined the papers of Aileen, placed in the writing desk amongst various other articles about to be taken to England; and perused with a most painful interest some verses in the album, the date they bore showing clearly that they were written some months previous, when she first became a prey to severe mental anxiety. They ran as follows:

"My sunny days are past Like dreams away. Like flowers in autumn blast, Like showers in May; Like rainbow tinted colors, O'er gloomy skies; Like storm lights gilding The landscape's dye; Like dear friends parting, Ne'er to return; Like tapers glowing, When last they burn, So have the happy hours Of girlhood fled. When all seemed beauty; Ere faith was dead. Faith I 'twas but faith in earth; Trust! 'twas but trust in dreams. The faith in Heaven remains, Eternal are its beams; But earth and earthly hopes, They shall return no more,— Visions of brighter things That were in store. But shall I mourn the light Faded from earth away; That love must know a blight, And friendship see decay; That trusted ones and true, E'en they should helpless prove? No; brighter is the view Of Heaven and rest above Darkness makes thee more bright, Home of my weary heart; Father! Thy glorious light Marks out my chosen part; To Thee, my God, I turn, I turn, alone; Thy Cross's dear decree Shall gain a throne."

With a heavy sigh the good Father replaced the verses, and was still turning over the leaves of the album when a knock at the door disturbed his melancholy occupation.

He was told that a lady awaited his attendance in the church. The scene of the morning recurred to his memory. The sorrow and remorse of Augusta Seton was excessive. Was the lost sheep returning to the fold? Was it the proud and imperious lady, who had sinned so deeply, who required his ministrations?

Yes, he was not mistaken. In the dimly-lighted chapel, one solitary lamp alone burned near the altar, on which the "resence of our Lord reposed, and prostrate before it was the veiled figure of a woman, a deep sob ever and again, breaking the silence that reigned around.

She heard, and knew well, the sound of that footstep, but still she knelt unmoved. One moment more and the mastery over self was complete; and, with the words, 'God be merciful to me a sinner' trembling on her lips, the miserable Augusta, who had hovered, as it were, on the brink of despair, arose from her knees, and, with a steady step, entered a confessional in the side aisle of the church.

The day following that of the interment of Aileen, Father Cleveland devoted to examining and answering the letters which had been forwarded from various parties, and which contained remittances of subscriptions for the destitute parents of the unfortunate Aileen. The collection had already reached a handsome sum, and he was congratulating himself that he had it in his power to take them this slight alleviation under the heartfelt sorrow they must necessarily suffer, when a slight tap at the door disturbed his reflections.

The visitor was none other than Augusta Seton.

The expression of intense pain which her features had worn when he beheld her on the day previous had passed away, and had given place to that old weary look which he had seen before. He observed her tremble, and noticed too that as she passed the table to reach the chair which he had drawn forwards for her use, that her hand rested one moment on it, as though for support; then, as if determining to conquer her emotion, she drew herself up to her full height, and with a strong effort to sustain, at least an air of outward composure, she took the seat he had placed for her use.

A painful pause ensued; she was herself the first to break the silence.

'You will accept this trifle for the subscription,' she said, and her voice slightly faltered as she spoke. 'I have come to bid you farewell, for it is not likely we shall ever meet again on earth. I wish to tell how much I thank you for your personal kindness to myself, who have ill deserved it; to beg you to pray for me; and when the vast ocean shall separate us, not to forget the unhappy Augusta Seton, for whose repentance you have labored. I leave Toronto in a few days for New York, and would not have intruded on you so suddenly but that I feared your prior departure from this place.—You go very soon, do you not?' she added.

'In one week,' was the brief reply.

'I am about to enter the novitiate in a convent of Poor Clares,' she replied. 'This is the life of seclusion and penance I meditated following from the moment I witnessed her death.'

'Time, and the novitiate itself will show whether a religious life be really the state you are called upon to choose, Miss Seton; rest assured I will not forget to pray for you.'

'Yes, that is all I ask,' she murmured, as she rose from her seat, 'I desire your prayers, Father, that I may remain steadfast in my present purpose; and as the one once proud and haughty Augusta stood before him, now so subdued, and penitent, and humble, the good priest sent up from the depths of his own heart a fervent thanksgiving, that she who had so greatly sinned had become so changed. But the farewell had to be spoken; and if the good Jesuit had been a stern monitor, for that very reason he was her true friend, and for a moment she stood with clasped hands and tearful eyes before him—he, the very personification of holiness and dignity combined—and the bitter unrecalled past welled up into her mind, and her assumed composure seemed about to desert her as the moment approached for the farewell to be pronounced.

Wishing to close the interview then, he himself took the initiative, and extending his hand exclaimed:

'Farewell, Miss Seton; may the blessing of Heaven rest upon those efforts you shall make to lead a good and virtuous life; may it accept and bring to a happy fulfilment the resolve you have made to atone for past errors by a life of self denial.'

And the good priest looked not sternly down, as when, on her last visit to his little Presbytery, the sin-laden, miserable Augusta implored his permission to attend her victim, but with eyes upraised to heaven, called down its blessing on the head of the penitent, who for one brief moment knelt before him.

Still one moment more, and then the words 'Farewell, forget not to pray for me,' sounded in his ears; and she, the sorrow-stricken woman, pale, tearless, and composed, met his pitying gaze. A world of anguish, of subdued grief, of remorse, was in that face; one moment, and the repentant sinner had vanished forever from his sight.

CHAPTER XIX.—STILL IN TROUBLE.

A very few weeks after the death of Aileen, Father Cleveland, but just returned from Canada, left home early one morning, in order to break to the Desmonds the mournful intelligence he had to communicate respecting the death of their unfortunate child.

A letter he had received from Maud, on the very day that he was summoned to attend upon Aileen, had informed him of the meeting of his sister with the Desmonds, of the state of poverty in which they were plunged, and that she had offered them a home in her own house until they should receive a remittance from their daughter. With a something of nervous agitation he lifted the knocker; and, after waiting a few moments, again knocked, at this time more loudly than before; he listened attentively, and was convinced he heard footsteps and the murmur of voices within; but still the door was not opened; and then, becoming impatient, he gave a third and louder summons for admittance.

To this more imperative demand, an answer was vouchsafed from the area door; and the following colloquy then took place between himself and the Irish servant:

'Who is it you'd be ather wanting, sir; there's not a soul at home barring myself.'

Father Cleveland did not at all relish this new mode of announcing himself, and replied:

'I wish to see Mr. and Mrs. Vivian; I am Mrs. Vivian's brother.'

'Och, now, and you don't think I was born yesterday, do you?' said Pat; 'This is another thrick got up by the limbs of the law.'

A faint and very painful suspicion of the real state of the case shot across the mind of the good Father, and he replied:

'My good man, I wish you would come up to the door; I am a Catholic priest, and must see your mistress on most urgent business, immediately.'

'Och, yez are a wolf in sheep's clothing, that's what I takes yez to be,' replied the provoking Pat; 'for, shure, isn't Mrs. Vivian's brother, his reverence, Father Cleveland, far away in Ameriky? Now, yez can't take in Pat Magrath at his time of life at all, at all; so, if ye'll be ather calling about seven o'clock in the evening, it's myself who'll be telling Mrs. Vivian that yez called at the house, and then she can see yez or not as she pleases.'

Annoyed as he was at the cool indifference of the man, Father Cleveland felt that there was nothing to do but submit; and he therefore turned away from the house, suspecting what was really the case, that the tiresome fellow was some faithful servant of the Desmonds, and who, it appeared, could serve Maud's turn no less faithfully if occasion required.

He determined, however, not to trust merely to calling at the house, suspecting, as he did, that circumstances were such as to lead them to turn their home into a species of fortress; therefore, immediately on his return, he penned a note to Maud, requesting her to be at home at eleven on the following morning, and not to consign him to the tender mercies of Pat Magrath.

Accordingly the next day, at the appointed time, he again presented himself at Maud's residence; no question of a ready answer now; there was Maud, and Vivian too, with faces anxious and troubled enough, at the parlor window, awaiting his coming.

'The Desmonds—where are those poor old people?' was his inquiry, after the first words of congratulation had passed between them.

'They are in the drawing-room,' replied Maud. 'They do not know that you were to be here this morning. She is dead. We felt certain of this from the black seal on your letter; and now, your very looks tell us we are correct.'

'Yes, poor Aileen is indeed no more,' answered Father Cleveland. 'At some future time, Maud, I will communicate to you her sad story—a story that cannot be too widely known or circulated. Now let me, at once, to my most painful duty; the sooner it is discharged the better for all parties.'

'Poor Mrs. Desmond is very ill,' said Maud rising to lead the way; she is breaking up fast, between poverty and trouble. You are, of course, aware, from the letter I sent you when in Canada, that they have no means of their own. We took them with a view of securing shelter and food for them to the best of our power, but we are so miserably poor ourselves, Vivian having been some time out of employment.'

'Yes, we have had hard times lately,' exclaimed her husband; 'no doubt you guessed as much from the uncourteous reception Pat gave you yesterday. We were very sorry we were not at home.'

'Pat quite convinced me that he took me for a lawyer's clerk in disguise,' rejoined the priest; 'and showed me, without a doubt, that he can serve your turn quite as faithfully as that of his old master. I am much grieved, Vivian, that you are in such terrible straits.'

'I hope, however, that there is a silver lining to the cloud,' said Vivian. 'I have some interest with an influential friend, who gives me hopes of eventually obtaining me a situation in one of the government offices, so that we may, after all our trials, hope for better times.'

'I shall, indeed, be rejoiced to hear of such an end to your troubles. Now, Maud, lead the way,' said Father Cleveland, sighing heavily as he followed his sister from the room.

Poor Mrs. Desmond was reclining on the couch, her aged husband sitting beside her, with his hands on his knees, bending over the small bit of fire which the grate contained. The room bore a very seedy appearance, every article not strictly necessary having long since found its way to the pawnbroker's shop, to meet the wants of the increased household of the Vivians.

Altogether it was a depressing scene. Years had passed since Father Cleveland had seen the Desmonds; and, therefore, did not remember him; but as the words of introduction fell hesitatingly from Maud's lips, the old man started from his seat, and Mrs. Desmond, clasping her hands together, looked as if her life depended upon what he should tell them.

'You are from Canada, Father?' exclaimed Mr. Desmond. 'Can you give me tidings of

my daughter? Have you seen or heard of her during your short residence there?'

'I have seen her, and—'

'She is dead? tell us the worst at once,' interrupted the poor old lady, suddenly starting from the couch. 'My child, my Aileen, shall I never—never see you more?'

'Be comforted, my good old friends,' said the Jesuit; 'your Aileen has, indeed, passed to a better world. Will it not be a source of consolation to you to know that I was with her in her last moments; that I am the bearer of a message to you; that for you she offered her last prayers; that she died perfectly happy and resigned.'

But for a while the poor old people were as the Rachel of Holy Writ, 'for they wept for their child, and would not be comforted, because she was not; and some time passed before they could listen to the soothing words of consolation which fell from the good priest's lips; and when, at last, he could obtain a hearing, and the sorrow-stricken parents could calmly listen, it was his painful task briefly to sketch forth, softening the horrors of his tale as far as in his power, the sad events which had led to the death of Aileen. Then, too, came the announcement of the by no means insignificant sum which had been raised for their use, it being upwards of a thousand pounds, five hundred having been presented by the unhappy Miss Seton. Here was a great difficulty, for poor Mr. Desmond was proud, and proud people are always sensitive. With what care must he not mention the subscription.—Might it not look to the bereaved parents as if those who had inflicted the injury had thought to make reparation by their gold?

Very delicately then, did Father Cleveland touch upon this subject; very much did he dwell upon the bitter remorse of her who had dealt the wound, and upon the deep sympathy and hearty concurrence of those who had never injured their child in word or deed—it was, he said, but a kindly tribute to departed worth; and they must not forget that the last hours of Aileen had been soothed by the remembrance of what had been done for her parents.

Poor Father Cleveland—it was some time before he could smooth down their jarred feeling, so as to lead them to think calmly of accepting the sum he had in his possession; the only soothing reflection by which it was accompanied was the remembrance that they would be able, they said, to help dear Maud, instead of being a burden to herself and her kind-hearted husband any longer.

Before he left them, then, he placed in their hands the sum of money he had brought from Canada, and promising to come again very shortly, and to send them the various articles which had belonged to the lost one, and which he had brought to England, he bade them adieu.

In the hall he met Pat, who, with a very rueful expression of countenance, besought his Reverence's pardon for having mistaken him for one of those spalpeens of the law in disguise, adding, 'It's a shame that the likes of me didn't know Madam's brother at a glance—I can never forgive myself at all, at all, for laying your River-ance out on the door steps, instead of shewing yez in till the Mistress returned.'

At last the good Father satisfied Pat that he need not trouble himself any more about the matter; but we think that, on a future occasion, should he have the chance, he will be too careful to mistake the Jesuit Priest for a lawyer's clerk.

'It is an atmosphere of distress which pervades my poor sister's household,' thought the good Father to himself, as he turned sadly away; 'well, I am glad of one thing, and that is, that the two eldest children are being well looked after; and as to other matters, Maud and Vivian do seem changed a little for the better; any way, they will have a reward for the good action they performed in sheltering those poor old people.'

Yes, as time passed on, for his stay in England was of some months' duration, Father Cleveland had reason to be better satisfied with his wayward sister; you see, she was a compound of folly and good nature; and thoughtless and hitherto imprudent, was it not the providence, in some degree, of those whose means are of that fluctuating and precarious nature, as to present them with a ready excuse, when occasionally they choose to indulge in acts of extravagance.

CHAPTER XX.—A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

Five years have passed since Aileen Desmond was laid in her Canadian grave. Let us see, as faithful chroniclers are bound to do, how time hath tarred with those of whom we have been telling you.

Father Cleveland is once again in this modern Babylon, this London of ours; he is about to visit Maud; let us accompany him, and see if the once reckless, thoughtless Maud has changed.

The good Father has altered somewhat—his step is less buoyant, his chestnut hair is wreathed here and there with a silvery thread, yet he is