

numbered upon this earth, and soon my heart's faint pulsations will be stilled."

As Fitzgerald proceeded, a deep groan burst from the bosom of O'Donnel, and he flung himself upon his knees by the bed of Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald knew not the agonising feelings which tortured O'Donnel at this moment, but he said:

"Let not emotion overcome thee, Charles, but listen to that which I have to say. I am dying; I cannot leave my child without a protector, without one to whom she can look for support and consolation, for, to her sensitive nature, love is as essential as light is to the world. It has long been the desire of my heart to see the only two beings to whom my affections cling, united. But if you love not Constance, Charles, do not wed her, for the chill of unkindness would wither her young heart and lay her in an early grave. Doubt not her love for thee in return. In thy absence I have watched her cheek turn pale and wan when she has thought thou wert untrue, and that slender form has bowed with sorrow when she thought she was forgotten. Her love for thee has become a part of her very nature, and deprived of it she could not exist. Answer me truly, Charles, do you love Constance?"

"Yes, my father!" replied O'Donnell, in hoarse and tremulous accents; "since my boyhood Constance has ever held the first place in my affections, and her happiness shall be my first care should you leave her. But hear me, Fitzgerald—one word let me say—I must reveal—. Oh, Heavens!"

"Enough, Charles, say no more," replied Fitzgerald; "I will now die happy. But for this assurance of yours my spirit could not have departed in peace. This avowal of thine has also saved the life of my child, for her very existence is bound up in thine. Be kind to her when I am gone."

Then raising himself with a strength which appeared almost supernatural, in a distinct voice Fitzgerald desired the clergyman to approach, and at the same time motioned to his child to draw near.

Constance approached her father, and supported his head; but he motioned her to retire a few paces, while he desired the clergyman to proceed with his duty.

At this moment the door of the chamber opened, and two medical attendants entered; but unmindful of their interruption, in deep and solemn tones the clergyman began the marriage ceremony. Onwards he proceeded, and each word fell as a drop of molten lead upon the burning brain of O'Donnel. Mechanically he went through the ceremony, scarcely conscious whether

he was asleep or awake. At one moment fancying that Ellen Douglas stood by his side, and the next moment conscious of the crime into which he had plunged. And truly it was a strange and ominous bridal! The large and lofty chamber, of which only a small portion was rendered visible, the rest shrouded in darkness, the antique massy furniture, which gave it a quaint and solemn aspect—the dying man, as he sat unsupported in his bed, his dim and glassy eyes fixed intently upon the youthful pair who stood side by side before him,—the low, impressive tones of the clergyman's voice, which sounded as if the funeral and not the marriage ceremony was issuing from his lips,—the two figures which stood in the distance, looking upon the strange scene before them, and the dim rays of the lamp which threw an uncertain light over all, lent an unearthly aspect to the scene.

The concluding words were pronounced, and at that instant Fitzgerald, who had appeared to have received some supernatural support, fell backwards upon his bed; Constance sprang forward, but she only received the inanimate clay within her arms. A low, suppressed scream burst from her, as the dreadful truth entered her mind; but from the lips of O'Donnel there came a wild, unearthly laugh, which startled every one, and staggering backwards he would have fallen, had not one of the attendants caught him in his arms. He was immediately borne from the chamber and conveyed to bed, where he soon lay in all the delirium of fever.

Constance bent over the body of her father, and with her own hands closed the eyes which had never looked upon her but with love. This last sad duty over, her long sustained fortitude gave way, and she became for a time happily insensible to what was passing round her.

CHAPTER XVII.

Alas!
How loath'd and irksome must my presence be.
JOANNA BALLIE.

The funeral was over, and Fitzgerald rested among his ancestors. But, like Constance, we must cease to mourn for the dead when the living demand our care.

Stretched upon a bed of sickness, his eyes wild and restless, and his words incoherent and unintelligible, lay Charles O'Donnel. Not the handsome youth whom we formerly beheld, but pale,