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## FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

### CHAPTER XI.

To one side of the principal street of Father Connell's little city, and nearly at the termination, was a low, long house, having quite the appearance of a private residence—except that its entrance door was always open, and yet it was an apothecary's establishment. It had no shop front—no huge bottles of tinted water, fit for not a single earthly purpose, ornamented its unbusiness-like window; nor in the apartment assigned to its owner's professional occupations, were there many of the usual indications of an apothecary's shop, nor indeed of a shop of any kind. And people said, that Dick Wresham, although depending exclusively on pestle and mortar for his support, was too much of a gentleman, to carry on his trade in anything like the common way.

In his—what shall it be called?—hall of audience perhaps, there were five or six old mahogany parlor chairs, with very broad, flat, black-leather bottoms, secured at the front and sides with large, round-headed brass nails; and the stone window-sills, on the outside of his long house, were worn into a peculiar smoothness and polish. And why are these two facts mentioned? It will appear why.

The proprietor of the medical mart was a thin-bodied, sharp-featured, active-minded, little man, with a malicious twinkle in his ferret eye, and a mischievous grin round his mouth. He wore black, except that his stockings were of grey worsted; a long slender queue, perked out between his shoulders; his hair was well pomaded and powdered; and abundance of powder also lay on the collar of his coat. And he must now put himself into action for us.

It is still a bitter December morning, not a great many removed from that with which we have last had to do. Dicky Wresham runs to his open door, peeps up and down the street; runs in again to his drugs, and out again in a few minutes, to take another peep. He evidently expects the arrival of some person or persons, and he is very anxious and fidgety on the point. And one by one the wished-for visitors arrive, and one by one, he greets them heartily.

Are they customers? No: they are individuals who, every day in the year, come to polish the bottoms of the old black-leather chairs, within doors, if it be inclement weather; or else the window-stools in the street, if it be fair weather; and they come each to empty his budget of small gossip, or to have a similar one emptied into him; or to join, open-mouthed, in scandal, not always of a harmless nature, or to make remarks on all passers-by in the streets; or, in a word, idly to spend their idle time, in the best way they can possibly devise. So Dick Wresham has them almost all about him for the day, at which he rubs his hands and looks fully happy—and he is so; for, doubtless, a stock of capital gossip, and scurrilous, and fun, is now laid in for him; and Dick's craving appetite for such mental food should be satisfied every morning as soon as ever he had powdered his head and coat collar.

And this assemblage, in Dick's laboratory, was familiarly known, through the town, as "Dick Wresham's school." They also styled themselves "gentlemen;" and Dick and many others admitted the title, though a good many people besides questioned whether the standard used by the little apothecary and his immediate friends, for measuring a "gentleman" agreed, in all respects, with that adopted for the same purpose by "Ulster King-at-Arms." But however this may be, the school has now assembled. All the scholars are, upon this particular morning, within doors, of course, the weather not permitting a meeting in the open air. Two of their number post themselves as sentinels of observation, face to face, against the jambs of the doorway, and their business is to look out for objects and subjects of commentary, among the simple people who pass by; or haply (for the videttes are great wags) to beckon some one of the simplest among the simple into Dick Wresham's school-room, and there exercise some practical joke—that smallest and most country-townish way of pretending to wit.

A few of Dick Wresham's school may just be pencilled in.

Gaby McNeary was one of them. He had begun life with, as he himself would beautifully express it, "a blue look-out;" that is with little to recommend him, except a handsome person, and a good flow of red Protestant blood in his veins. These two qualities, however slender they might prove in other countries, gained him a rich enough wife in Ireland; legacies from her relatives afterwards dropped in, so that he was now, at an advanced age, able to live "genteelly," that is, without doing any one earthly thing, except to eat, drink, and sleep, and have his own way, right or wrong; and Dicky Wresham accordingly wrote him down "gentleman."

Gaby was tall and bulky, but stooped in his shoulders. He could not be said to have an ill-tempered face; but it had a dominating

look, befitting a person of much importance in the world, both as to rank and religious creed; and this was one of the characteristics of what the papists of the time used to term a "Protestant face."

Jack McCarthy was another of the school; whilome a gauger, but now retired on a pension and some money to boot. He was a sturdy built, low sized "gentleman" of about sixty, with tremendous grey eyebrows, always knit together, and a huge projecting under lip. He seemed as if ever revolving some unpleasant subject; and Jack was said to have a "Protestant face" too; that is, he looked as if he did not like papists, and was therefore conscious that a papist could not like him.

And Kit Hunter was upon this morning at "school" also; and he possessed property sufficient, we will not stop to say exactly how obtained, to satisfy Dick Wresham of his pretensions to be admitted into his seminary. The wrinkles about Kit's mouth had formed themselves into a perpetual smile. He was known as the shadow of the great personage of the town, whether a Lord or a Baronet, shall not now be told. He constantly attended that great man's levee, was honored by being leant upon by him, whenever he flattered the streets by walking through them; he was always ready to run on his errands; and to crown all his glory, frequently invited to dine with, and drink the choice old wines of the high, and for the present, mysterious personage.

An easy-tempered, middle-aged man was Kit, with a great talent for picking up gossip of every kind, and for retailing it too; for it may be fairly conceded that the sack of a news-gatherer gapes almost equally at both ends. In person he was tall, slight, thin, almost emaciated, and bent and weak in the ham; and always dressed carefully and sleekly, in the best brushed clothes of the leading fashion of the day.

After the sages here particularly noticed, there were two or three others of less interest; the sentinels who filled the doorway were younger pupils, "gentlemen, bloods of the city," roystering, swaggering blades; and hoaxers or practical jokers by profession.

The "school" has repeated some of its lessons for its master, and for each other, connced since they last assembled before him. Dick Wresham, occasionally eyeing a prescription, continues:—

"Ah Kit, what about the old friar and his bell?"

"Ay, Kit, my worthy," echoed one of the sentinel wags, "tell us about the friar and his belle—ha, ha, ha!"

And the "ha! ha! ha!" ran through the whole "school"—for a sparkling and original witticism had been uttered.

"Ay, joke away on it," said Gaby McNeary—"but by Gog—" and he banged his stick across Dick Wresham's "gentle" and delicate subterfuge for a counter, "you'll soon have them friars devouring up the fat of the land again. Ha, 'tisin't ould times with them now; they're creeping out of their holes among us again—an honest man can't walk the street without being jostled by one of them."

"And how devilish sleek the rascals look," sputtered Jack McCarthy, knitting, wickedly, his awful, grey eyebrows.

"Well, but Kit Hunter, tell us about Father Murphy," commanded Dick Wresham impatiently.

"Why, you must know, he has built a kind of a little steeple on the gable of his chapel, and hung up a small bell in it; and this he rings out for his mass, as sturdily as if there was no law to prevent it."

"Ho!" gouted Gaby McNeary, "if that's not popish impudence, the devil's in the dice. Gog's blug!" he continued in a kind of soliloquy, puckering his lips into a fierce snarl, as he stumped about the school-room, and punched his stick downwards at every step.

"Well, Kit?" again asked Dick Wresham.

"Well; the dean was made acquainted with the matter, and requested to use his authority, in having the bell taken down, and so he called on Father Murphy for the purpose. The friar, you know is a big, bluff kind of an ould fellow—and hah! he said to the dean—'and can't I have a bell to call my coachman, and my groom, and my footmen, and all my other man servants, and ould Alley, the cook, to their dinners—ch?—ha!'"

Some laughed at Kit Hunter's anecdote; but Gaby McNeary, and Jack McCarthy, could only ejaculate their indignation at such a piece of audacious papistry. Kit Hunter went on.

"You must take it down, my good sir," said the dean.

"Take it down, is it, after all the trouble I had putting it up? Hah! hah! no, I won't take it down; but if you want it so much, there it is—and you may climb up, and take it down yourself—hah! hah!"

"And what did the dean say to this?" demanded Gaby McNeary.

"Why he could say nothing at all farther, for, after pointing up at the bell, the friar walked off as fast as he could."

Gaby and Jack now expressed a hunger indignation than ever. Gaby, in particular, though not feeling half of the real asperity experienced

by his friend Jack, burst forth in his might. He imprecated, he cursed, and he swore, he bellowed as he stumped about; and "the vagabonds!" he went on, "there isn't a friar, nor a priest of 'em, that I wouldn't hunt out of the country, over again! why they'll ride rough-shod over us, as they did before. They walk the very middle stone of the street already."

"And here is one of them walking the middle stone of the street, this very moment," reported one of the sentinels.

"Father Connell, no less—hat and wig, and all," added the other.

"Blug-a-bouns!" roared Gaby McNeary, becoming almost lachrymose in his wrath—"hunt them out of the country, did I say? no, but hang 'em all up, sky high, that is what I meant to say!"

"He is on one of his begging expeditions to-day," again reported the faithful vidette.—"Look there is Con Loughnan handing him a note, nothing less—"

Little Dicky Wresham raced to the door, thrust out his neck and head for a peep, and raced back again to his pestle and mortar. The sentinels at the doorway whispered together, and as Father Connell passed them, they saluted him very ceremoniously, and invited him to enter the school-room—he did so.

The persons among whom our parish priest now stood, seemed quite strangers to him. One of them, indeed, namely Gaby McNeary, he might have recognised in a different light, had he been able distinctly to observe him; but at his first appearance, Gaby had flung himself upon one of the black leather-bottom chairs; and twisted it and himself facewise towards the wall.

Some of the other persons of the circle acted as follows. Kit Hunter prudently moved backwards into the shade; Jack McCarthy tried to smile, but it was a hideous attempt—a vicious donkey might equal it; and Dick Wresham grinned most maliciously; while, for the purpose of disguising the venomous mirth, he pretended to use his teeth in assisting his fingers to tie up a paper of drugs.

It was surmised by one of the juvenile writings, that Father Connell was out on a mission of charity. The old priest assented.

Particulars of the case of distress which at present interested him, were politely demanded. In the simplest and the fewest words possible he told his little tale of woe. Again he was solicited to name the parties, and he named them.

"Ah, yes, sir," resumed the young "gentleman." "I might have guessed that it was for one of the fair portion of the creation your Reverence took so much trouble this cold day."

"And indeed it is to the credit of clergymen in general that they are such champions of the weaker sex," resumed his comrade.

"I remember the little Widow Fennell right well," quoth Dick Wresham, "and a plump little bit of flesh she was, and must be to the present hour."

At these words, to the surprise of all who caught the action, Gaby McNeary suddenly turned his head over the back of his chair, and scowled very angrily at the speaker.

"There certainly is some satisfaction, in bestowing charity on such a pretty little widow," continued the chief sentinel—"one of her smiles is good value for a guinea, any day"—and he took out of his waistcoat pocket a glittering coin, and with a face of much earnestness, placed it on the priest's palm and closed the old man's fingers upon it.

Father Connell glanced, however, at the offering, and then relosed his fingers upon it himself. The waggery and the sparkling wit went forward.

"By my oath and conscience," said the really spiteful Jack McCarthy, "I'd give a leg of mutton and 'thrimmins' to any one that 'ud tache me the knack of making friends among the women, as the priests do."

"Why, Father Connell might give you an insight," said another, "but nothing for nothing all the world over; no money, no pater-noster—oh, Father Connell?"

Gaby McNeary did not now look round, but he seemed to grow very uneasy or very hot on his chair.

"Father Connell is a spruce ould buck," cried little Dicky Wresham, "and there is no wonder that the women should be friendly to him."

"But how does he make the hat and wig go down with them?" resumed the brutal Jack McCarthy.

"Blug-an-ages-an-by-Gog!" exploded Gaby McNeary, jumping up at the same time, and jostling forward to where Father Connell stood, "if I can stand it any longer, or if I will stand it any longer!—give me your hand, Father Connell—how do you do, sir?"

Father Connell did as he was bid, standing somewhat aghast, however, at the roaring approach of such a forty-horse oath engine.

"Why, what are you at now, Gaby?" asked the principal hoaxer—"you that swore, as no other man can swear but you—a little while ago, that you'd hang every rascally priest of them, sky high."

"You lie, you whelp!" answered Gaby, "I

never swore, nor said any such thing, you young rascal! and you're all nothing but a pack of rascals—nothing else—to bring this good-hearted ould gentleman in here, to scoff at him, and to insult him."

"Well dove, Gaby," shouted the second hoaxer, and he slapped old Gaby on the shoulder.

"Do that again, ye hout, and I'll dust your puppy's jacket, while a dusting is good for it or you!" and he flourished his stick about him, at a rate that made his old friends jump out of his way; while the only object he hit was the hat of the very person whose champion he now was, and this, with the violence of his unintended blow, flew some distance off its accustomed resting-place. But Gaby soon picked it up, replaced it on the apex of the wig, and then slapped it down with a force that betokened, in his own fitting apprehension, much friendly energy, and a liberal promise of chivalrous protection towards the wearer.

"Come away, Father Connell, out of this blackguard place," he went on, passing the priest's arm through his, "come along, sir, come along, I tell you!"

"My dear," said Father Connell, laying his hand on the arm of his doctory defender, "do not get angry, do not curse or swear on my account; these gentlemen have done me no harm; I wish I could say they had done themselves any good; nor have they been as successful in ridiculing me as they think; neither my years, now nearly four-score, nor my hat and wig have made me so very stupid as they suppose. As for the witty young gentleman who gave me this," and he held out the counterfeit guinea on his open palm, and then allowed it to drop on the floor at his foot—"I won't say God reward him, no, no; the old man shook his head, touched the brim of his hat, and looked upward—"the reward, if my poor prayer were heard, might be in proportion to the gift; but I can, and I do say—God forgive him."

"Hah! take that, you dirty curs!" triumphed Gaby McNeary, as he and Father Connell turned into the street.

To the great surprise of the whole town, the pair were in a few minutes after seen parading the streets arm in arm, and begging of every one they mutually knew, a donation for the poor Fennells. Protestant and Catholic looked after them as they marched along; and, agreeing in opinion for at least once in their lives, sagely remarked, that "wonders would never cease."

In the heat of his charitable enthusiasm—as much one may venture to say, as in the heat of his wrath, against Dick Wresham's "dirty curs"—Gaby's own contribution to Father Connell's list was large, almost out of character. But this was not all. He led him to his own house, and there "made much of him;" and over a hearty luncheon, and a glass of good wine, Gaby McNeary requested and obtained a minute account of the former and the present situation of the poor family for whom he sought relief.

To every word the old priest uttered, Gaby's only daughter was an attentive listener. This little girl may be called very lovely—very, very lovely. Her age was not more than ten years. No description of her face or person is about to follow; but it is asserted over again that little Helen McNeary was very, very lovely, and bright, laughing, joyous—a very sunburst of beauty, flashing over the freshness of life's almost break of day.

During the priest's statements, however, little Helen showed none of her usual brilliant joyousness. Her features became gently sorrowful, and tears started from her eyes. Father Connell took leave of his new friend. At the door of the house he felt his jack pulled, and turning round he saw this beautiful little being looking up earnestly at him, and moving her fingers in a mute request that he might bend down to her. He laid his open palm upon her shining hair—of the same color, by the way, as that of the poor little beggar girl—gazed in smiles, for a space, upon her glowing upturned features; and muttered involuntarily—"may the Lord bless you, my little angel."

She beckoned to him again, and he bent his ear to her lips.

"I got this for a Christmas-box," she whispered, sliding half-a-guinea into his hand—"but will you give it, sir, along with the rest you have, to poor Mrs. Fennell, and her ould aunt, and to poor little Neddy?—Oh, you're hurting me, sir!" she suddenly cried out, pained by Father Connell's ardent pressure of both her tiny hands in his. He relaxed his unconscious clasp; but still held her tightly, and he still gazed at her, his lips working to keep in his emotion.

"Helen! Helen! where are you, girl?" bellowed out her father, descending the staircase.

"Good-bye to you, sir," she continued, again endeavoring to extricate her fingers.

"What's all this?" questioned her father, making his appearance.

"Your little daughter," answered Father Connell, "is a blessed child. She is beautiful to look upon; but her fresh young heart is

more beautiful still. See—she has given me, for the poor widow, what was bestowed upon her these happy Christmas times, to buy playthings and sweet things—and she is only a little girl still,"—he inclined his head and laid his cheek to Helen's—"I thought at first of giving back her little gift;—and I thought too of bestowing upon her a Christmas-box, and a good one, out of my own pocket; but I won't do either."

"Don't, don't," roared Gaby McNeary, half crying.

"No: I will not; no, my child, I will not, I'll leave it in the hands of your God to repay you for your charity. Here, sir—take your little daughter to you, and kiss her, and be proud of her." He took up the child, placed her in her father's arms, and left the house.

### CHAPTER XII.

Yet another school-house is to be visited, and it will make the third presented in these pages. But monotonous need not, therefore, be apprehended; for, if Dick Wresham's school has been found unlike Father Connell's school—and there is little doubt but it has—that which must now be described will prove unlike either.

And the "main street," is again to be recurred to. Jammed in between two more modern houses with shop windows, there was in it a curious old structure, or rather a succession of very curious old structures, situated to the rear of this introductory one. It had a high parapeted front, over which arose a gable, very sharp-angled at the top, and surmounted by a tall roundish stone chimney.

A semicircular archway, gained by a few steps, ran through it from the street, and led into a small quadrangle, one side of which was formed by its own back, and the other three sides by similar old buildings; that side to your left being partially dilapidated. A second semicircular archway passed under the pile confronting you, as you entered the enclosure from the street, and gave egress into a second, but large quadrangle. Of this, the far or top side was composed of one range of an old edifice, still; that behind you, in the lesser quadrangle, that to your right, of other ancient buildings entirely ruinous; and that to your left, partly of a dead wall, partly of a shed, before which was a bench of mason-work, and partly of a little nook, containing some evergreens, and remarkable for affording place to a queer sentry-box kind of structure, built of solid stone.

And now there was yet a third archway before you, but much narrower than the others, and very much darker, boring its way under the lower part of the structure facing you. In traversing it, your eye caught, to your right hand, doorways imperfectly filled up by old oak doors, half hanging off their old-times hinges, and leading into large, unoccupied, coal black chambers; and when you emerged from it, the cheery daylight was again around you, in a third enclosed space, of which the most remarkable feature was a long flight of wide stone steps, terminating in a sharply arched door, which led into an elevated garden.

Why dwell on the features of the odd old place? Has no one guessed? Here, Father Connell put his adopted son to school.—Here was the scene of years of that boy's pains and pleasures, sports and tasks, tears and laughter—likings and dislikes—friendships—nay, of a stronger and a higher passion, which though conceived in mere boyhood, passed into his youthful prime, and afterwards swayed and shaped the fate, not only of himself, but alas! of his aged protector.

All the nooks and corners of the odd, old place, were all, all the playgrounds of him and his school-fellows. He will stop to this day, before the streetward archway, and look into the two quadrangles, until recollected pleasure becomes present pain. For as he looks, his mind's eye sees, flitting and jumping through the sunshine and the shade, with which they are chequered, the features and forms of those early mates; and his ears seem to hear their shouts, and their shrill untirable gabble; until anon, he seems to distinguish the very accents of their voices, and even by that knows them from each other; and at last they pipe out his own name, and he is sure what boys from time to time utter it! And then, turning away from the old archway, he asks himself—what days have since been like the days which his passing vision has just given him back? What hour of satiated passion, what hour of worldly success, has been worth one minute of the passionless, thoughtless pleasures, experienced within the intricacies and the quaintnesses of the odd, old place?

And, as he plods along the streets of his native town, other questions and recollections came upon him. He calls to mind some of his fancies; for instance, of the kind of old people, who must originally have inhabited the jumble of old structures—who were they? What did they there? What did they look like? How were they dressed? He did not know a bit at that time; still he used to imagine them clad in long robes of black or dark grey, silently moving about their then silent little squares, or sitting stock still on the bench in the larger one; or gliding (not walking) up the long