

THE COLLEGIANS.

A TALE
OF
GARRYOWEN.

BY
Gerald Griffin.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THE TEMPTATION OF HARDRESS PROCEEDED.

During the few weeks that followed the conversation just detailed, Eilly perceived a rapid and fearful change in the temper and appearance of her husband. His visits were fewer and shorter than before, and when he did come, his manner was restrained and cautious, his voice was deep and broken, his cheek grew pale and fleshless, and a gloomy air, which might be supposed the mingled result of discontent and dissipation, appeared in all his person. He no longer conversed with that noisy frankness and gaiety in which he was accustomed to indulge in all societies where he felt perfectly at ease. To Eilly he spoke sometimes with coldness and impatience, and very often with a wild affection that had in it as much of grief as of tenderness. To the other inmates of the cottage he was altogether reserved and haughty, and even his own boatman seldom cared to tempt him into a conversation. Sometimes Eilly was inclined to think that he had escaped from some unpleasant scenes at home, his demeanor during the evening was so abstracted and so full of care. On other occasions, when he came to her cottage late at night, she was shocked to discover about him the appearance of a riotous indulgence. Born and educated as she was in Ireland of the eighteenth century, this circumstance would not have much disturbed the mind of our heroine, but that it became gradually more frequent of occurrence, and seemed rather to indicate a voluntary habit, than that necessity to which even sober people were often subjected, when they mingled in the society of Irish country gentlemen of that period. Eilly thus experienced, for the first time, and with an aching spirit, one of the keenest anxieties of married life.

"Hardress," she said to him one morning when he was preparing to depart, after an interval of gloomy silence long unbroken, "I won't let you go among those fine ladies any more, if you are thinking of them always when you come to see me again."

Her husband started like one conscience-struck, and looked sharply round upon her.

"What do you mean?" he said, with a slight contraction of the brows.

"Just what I say, then," said Eilly, smiling and nodding her head with a pretty affectation of authority. "Those fine ladies mustn't take you from Eilly. And I'll tell you another thing, Hardress. Whisper." She laid her hand on his shoulder, raised herself on tiptoe and murmured in his ear: "I'll not let you among the fine gentlemen either, if that's the teaching they give you."

"What teaching?"

"Oh, you know yourself," Eilly continued, nodding and smiling; "it is teaching that you would never learn from Eilly, if you spent the evenings with her as you used to do in the beginning. Do you know is there ever a priest living in this neighborhood?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I have something to tell him that lies upon my conscience."

"And would you not confess your failings to an affectionate friend, Eilly, as well as to a holier director?"

"I would," said Eilly, bending on him a look of piercing sweetness, "if I thought he would forgive me afterwards as readily."

"Provided always that you are a true penitent," returned Hardress, reaching her his hand.

"There is little fear for that," said Eilly. "It would be well for me, Hardress, if I could as easily be penitent for heavier sins."

After a moment's deep thought, Eilly resumed her playful manner, and placing both her hands in the

subject of your mirth? Day after day my brain is verging nearer and nearer to utter madness, and do you jest on that? Do you see this cheek? You count more hollows there than when I met you first, and does that make you merry? Give me your hand! Do you feel how that heart beats? Is that a subject, Eilly, for joke or jest? Do you think this face turns thin and yellow for nothing? There are a thousand and a thousand horrid thoughts and temptations burning within me daily, and eating my flesh away by inches. The Devil is laughing at me, and Eilly joins him."

"Oh, Hardress—Hardress!"

"Yes!—you have the best right to laugh, for you are the gainer. Curse on you! Curse on your beauty—curse on my own folly—for I have been undone by both! Let go my knees! Let go my arm—I hate you! Take the truth, I'll not be poisoned with it. I am sick of you, you have disgusted me! I will ease my heart by telling you the whole. If I seek the society of other women, it is because I find not among them your meanness and vulgarity. If I get drunk and make myself the beast as you say, it is in the hope to forget the iron chain that binds me to you."

"Oh, Hardress," shrieked the affrighted girl, "you are not in earnest now?"

"I am! I do not joke!" her husband exclaimed with a hoarse vehemence. "Let go my knees! you are sure enough of me. I am bound to you too firmly."

"Oh, my dear Hardress! Oh, my own husband, listen to me! hear your own Eilly for one moment! Oh, my poor father!"

"Ha!"

"It slipped from me! Forgive me! O know I am to blame, I am greatly to blame, dear Hardress, but forgive me! I left my home and all for you—oh, do not cast me off—I will do anything to please you—I never will open my lips again—only say you did not mean all that! Oh, Heaven!" she continued, throwing her head back, and looking upward with expanded mouth and eyes, while she maintained her kneeling posture and clasped her husband's feet. "Merciful Heaven, direct him! Oh, Hardress, think how far I am from home! Think of all you promised me, and how I believed you! Stay with me for a while at any rate! Do not—"

On a sudden, while Hardress was still struggling to free himself from her arms, without doing her violence, Eilly felt a swimming in her head, and a cloud upon her sight. The next instant she was motionless.

The first face she beheld on recovering from her insensibility was that of Poll Naughten, who was seated in a low chair, and supporting Eilly's head against her knees, while she was striking her in the open palm with a prodigious violence.

"Ah, there she draws the breath," said Fighting Poll. "Oh, wirra, missiz, what brought you out on your face and hands on the middle of the floor, that way?"

Eilly muttered some unmeaning answer, and remained for some minutes struggling with the consciousness of some undefined horror. Looking around at length, and missing the figure of Hardress, she lay back once more, and burst into a fit of hysterical weeping. Phil Naughten, who was smoking a short pipe by the fire-side, said something in Irish to his wife, to which the latter replied in the same language, and then turning to Eilly, said: "Will you take a drop of anything, a chree?"

Eilly raised her hand in dissent.

"Will you come in, and take a stretch on the bed, then?"

To this Eilly assented in the affirmative, and walked, with the assistance of her hostess, into her sleeping chamber. Here she lay during the remainder of the day, the curtain suffered to fall so as to keep the broad sunshine from her aching eyes and head. Her reflections, however, on the frightful and sudden alteration which had taken place in her condition were cut short, ere long, by a sleep of that sound and dreamless nature which usually supervenes after an excess of passionate excitement or anxiety.

In the meantime Hardress hurried along the Gap Road with the speed of one who desires to counteract, by extreme bodily exertion, the turbulence of an uneasy spirit. As he passed the lonely little bridge, which crosses the stream above the Black

Lake, his attention was suddenly arrested by the sound of a familiar voice which appeared to reach him from the clouds. Looking over his shoulder to the summit of the Purple Mountain, he beheld Danny Mann, nearly a thousand feet above him, moving towards the immense pile of loose stones (from the hue of which the mountain has derived its name), and driving before him a small herd of goats, the property of his brother-in-law. Turning off the road, Hardress commenced the ascent of this toilsome eminence—partly because the difficulty afforded a relief to his spirits, and partly because he wished to converse with his dependent.

Although the day was fine, and sometimes cheered with sunshine near the base of the mountain, the summit was wrapped in mist, and wet with incessant showers. The scenery around was solitary, gigantic, and eternally barren. The figure of some wonder-hunting tourist, with a guide-boy bearing his portfolio and umbrella, appeared at long intervals, among the lesser undulations of the mountain-side, and the long road which traversed the gloomy valley dwindled to the width of a meadow foot-path. On the opposite side of the enormous ravine, the gray and misty Reeks still raised their crumbling summits far above him. Masses of white mist gathered in sullen congress between their peaks, and, sometimes floating upward in large volumes, were borne majestically onward, catching a thousand tints of gold and purple from the declining sun. Sometimes a trailing shower of mingled mist and rain, would sweep across the intervening chasm, like the sheeted spectre of a giant, and present to the eye of the spectator that appearance which supplied the imagination of Ossian with its romantic images. The mighty gorge itself, at one end, appeared to be lost and divided amid a host of mountains tossed together in provoking gloom and misery. Lower down, it opened upon a wide and cultivated champaign, which at this altitude presented the resemblance of a rich mosaic of a thousand colors, and afforded a bright contrast to the barren shrubless gloom of the solitary vale itself. As Hardress approached the summit, this scene of grandeur and of beauty was shut out from his view by the intervening mist, which left nothing visible but the peak on which he stood, and which looked like a barren islet in a sea of vapour. Above him was a blue sky, broken up with masses of cloud, against which the rays of the sun were refracted, with various effects, according to their degrees of density and altitude. Occasionally, as Hardress pressed onward through the heath, a heavy grouse would spring up at his feet, challenge, and wheel to the other side of the mountain. Sometimes, also, as he looked downward, a passing gust of wind would draw aside the misty veil that lay between him and the world, and cause the picture once more to open on his sight.

His attendant now met and greeted him as usual. "It's well for you, Master Hardress, dat hasn't a flock o' goats to be huntin' after dis mornin'; my heart is broke from 'em, dat's what it is. We trun 'em out in de mornin', an' dough dey plenty to air below dere, dey never stop 'till dey go to de top o' de mountain, nothin' less would do for 'em: like many o' de Christians demselves, dey'll be mountin' always, even when 'tis no good for 'em."

"I have no remedy," said Hardress, musing, "and yet the thought of enduring such a fate is intolerable."

"What a fine day this would be for the water, master?" continued his servant. "You don't ever care to take a sail now, sir?"

"Oh, Kyrie, Kyrie Daly, what a prophetic truth was in your words! Giddy, headlong wretch that I have been! I wish that my feet had grown to my mother's hearth when I first thought of evading her control, and marrying without her sanction." He paused in a mood of bitter retrospection. "I'll not endure it," he again exclaimed, starting from his reverie; "it shall not be without recall. I will not, because I cannot. Monster! monster that I am! Wed one, and woo another! Both are now cheated! Which shall be the victim?"

The Devil was at his ear, and whispered, "Be not uneasy; hundreds have done the same before you."

"Firm as dat mountain stands, an' as it stood dis hundred, aye, dis thousand years, maybe," continued Danny Mann, "still an' all, to look up dat way at dem great loose stones, dat look as if dey were shoved up above us by some joyants or great people of ould, a body would tink it hardly safe to stand here, onder 'em, in dread dey'd come tumblin' down, maybe, an' make smiderens of him, bless the mark! Wouldn't he now, Master Hardress?"

The person so addressed turned his

eyes mechanically in the same direction. A kind of desperate satisfaction was visible on his features, as the idea of insecurity which his servant suggested became impressed upon his mind. The latter perceived and understood its expression on the instant.

"Dere's something troublin' you, Master Hardress; dat I see plain enough. An' 'tisn't now, nor to-day, nor 'tuesday, I seen it ailder. Is dere anything Danny Mann can do to sarve you? If dere be, say de word dis moment, an' I'll hail he'll do it before long."

"Danny," said Hardress after a pause, "I am troubled. I was a fool, Danny, when I refused to listen to your advice upon one occasion."

"An' dat was de time when I could you not to go again de missiz; an' to have no call to Eilly O'Connor."

"It was."

"I tought it would be dis way. I tought, all along dat Eilly was no wife for you, Master Hardress. It was not in nature she could be; a poor man's daughter, widout money, or manners, or book-larnin' or one ha'port." I told you dat, Master Hardress, but you wouldn't hear me by any means, an' dis is de way of it now."

"Well, well, 'tis done, 'tis done," said Hardress, with sullen impatience; "I was to blame, and I am suffering for it."

"Does she know herself de trouble she is to you?"

"I could not keep it from her. I did not know myself how utterly my dislike had prevailed within me, until the occasion arose for giving it utterance, and then it came forth at once like a torrent. I told her what I felt; that I hated, that I was sick of her. I could not stop my tongue. My heart struck me for the base unkindness, the ungrateful ruffianism of my speech, and yet I could not stop my tongue. I have made her miserable, and I am myself accursed. What is there to be done? Have you only skill to prevent mischief? Have you none to remedy?"

Danny took thought for a moment. "Sorrow trouble would I ever give myself about her," he said at last, "only send her packin' ta her fader, an' give her no tanks."

"And with what face should I appear before my honorable friends, when that old rope-maker should come to demand redress for his insulted child, and to claim her husband's promise? Should I send Eilly home to earn for myself the reputation of a faithless villain?"

"I never tought o' dat," said Danny, nodding his head. "Dat's a hance of anoder color. Why, then, I'll tell you what I'd do. Pay her passage out to Quebec, and put her aboard of a three-master, without ever sayin' a word to anybody. I'll tell you what it is, Master Hardress. Do by her as you do by dat glove you have on your hand. Make it come off as it come on, and if it fits too tight, take a knife to it."

"What do you mean?"

"Only gi' me the word, as I said before, an' I'll engage Eilly O'Connor will never trouble you any more. Don't ax me any questions at all, if you're agreeable, take off dat glove an' give it to me for a token. Dat'll be enough; lave de rest to Danny."

A doubtful, horrible sensation of fear and anxiety gathered upon the heart of the listener, and held him a minute fixed in breathless agitation. He gazed upon the face of his servant with an expression of gaping terror, as if he stood in the presence of the arch-tempter himself. At length, walking up to him, he laid his open hand upon his neck, and then drawing his fingers close, until the fellow's face was purple with blood, he shook him as if he would have shaken his joints out of their sockets.

"Villain!" he exclaimed, with a hoarseness and vehemence of tone which gave an appalling depth to his expressions. "Dangerous villain and tempter! If you ever dare again to utter a word, or meditate a thought of violence towards that unhappy creature, I will tear you limb from limb between my hands."

"Oh, murder, Master Hardress! Dat the hands may stick to me, sir, if I tought a ha'port o' harm!"

"Do you mark me well, now? I am quite in earnest. Respect her as you would the highest lady in the land. Do as she commands you without murmuring. If I hear her say (and I will question her upon it) that you have leered one glance of those blood-longing eyes upon her, it shall be their last look in this world."

"Oh, vo! Dat I may never die in sin, Master Hardress, if—"

"Begone! I am glad you have opened my eyes. I tread more safely now. My heart is lighter. Yet that I should have endured to be so tempted! Fellow, I doubt you for worse than you appear. We are here alone; the world, the busy world, is hid beneath us, and we stand here

alone in the eye of the open Heaven, and without roof or wall to screen us, even in fancy, from the downright reproach of the beholding angels. None but the haughty and insulting Lucifer himself could think of daring Providence upon the threshold of His own region. But be you fiend or mortal. I defy and dare you; I repel your bloody temptation. I tell you, fiend or mortal, that my soul abhors your speech and gesture both. I may be wretched and imploring; I may send up to Heaven a cry of discontent and murmuring the cry of blood shall never leave this earth for me. Blood! Whose blood? Her's? Great Heaven! Great Heaven defend me!" He covered his face with his hands and bent down for a moment in dreadful agitation; then suddenly starting up, and waving his hand rapidly, he continued: "Away, away at once, and quit my sight. I have chosen my doom. My heart may burn for years, within my breast, if I can find no other way to soothe it. I know how to endure. I am wholly ignorant of guilt like this. Once more," he added, clenching his first, and shaking it towards his startled dependent, "once more I warn you, mark my words and obey them."

So saying, he hurried down the hill, and was hid in the ascending mist, while his affrighted servant remained gaping after him, and muttering mechanically such assertions as "Dat I may never sin, Master Hardress! dat de head may go to de grave wid me! Dat I may be happy! Dat de hands may stick to me, if I tought any harm!"

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