

SHEMUS DHU, THE BLACK PEDLAR OF GALWAY. A TALE OF THE PENAL TIMES.

CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED.

"Your daughter, I suppose?" asked O'Halloran, in a low voice, of Connel. "Yes—yes," said Connel with a hurried, undecided voice; and my son Fergus, who has guided you hither. "I knew him to be your son, my good friend," replied the young man. "He has acted bravely and generously by me. But that beautiful girl, it is a pity that you keep her in this secluded spot. "She is the daughter of a poor suffering man; would to heaven it were otherwise for her sake, said Connel, with a melancholy tone. "But, Master Harry, it is better for her—much better," he continued with more cheerfulness. If she must suffer privations, I know that she will endure them with contentment, because she understands that it is the will of heaven. Here, too, she will have an advantage; she will see little of the evils that exist in a wicked city. Here she can be free from many temptations, and have peace and happiness, if she be contented with a little means and an humble life; yet would to heaven her lot could be different!" O'Halloran did not answer, neither did he notice the warm feeling with which Connel spoke the last words. His eyes followed the graceful movements of Eveleen, as she assisted Norah to remove the fragments of their supper. O'Halloran was not in love—we say it lest it be deceived—but he felt incipient interest very near akin to it, agitating him at the moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

The bench, from which they had eaten, was removed, and they again, at Connel's wish, gathered around the fire. Connel could not resist the desire of learning the young man's adventures, though the night was far advanced, and the stranger's fatigued appearance argued the necessity of rest. Drawing his seat near to the young man's, he inquired about the fortunes of his father and of himself. O'Halloran's replies were measured and sometimes vague; for though he saw enough of Connel to believe him sincere, and a friend, still he wanted more knowledge of him to be induced to disclose all his secrets. Fergus perceived O'Halloran's caution. He arose, knelt for his father's blessing, kissed his sister and his nurse, and wishing the stranger a good night, left the cabin to sleep—for the first time of his life, with an uneasy mind—on the loft of an out-house. Connel felt actually the reserved manner of his guest. He could not reconcile the coldness of the young man—restored to his friends and to his country—with his own warm feelings of friendship. "Perhaps," thought Connel, and he rejoiced at the idea of finding an excuse for the appearance of ingratitude in his dear master's son—perhaps the poor boy does not know who I am. Ah! it must be so; he has need to be cautious. I will tell him before we part for the night."

Judith told Connel that "the young man's bed was prepared." She ceased to call him Master Harry; for a change was wrought in her first warm feelings towards him by his coldness, and even she did not conceal this; for she told Fergus that, in her opinion, "the stranger was not his father's son." Connel, with a rush-light in his hand, preceded O'Halloran to the little room, where he was to pass the night. The neatness of the apartment struck O'Halloran. It told of a taste which could not be learned among that rude society. The room was ceiled and covered on every side with rush matting. The walls were ornamented with rude paintings of sacred subjects; and here and there between a portrait or landscape attested the effort of a better artist. The earthen floor—in the parts which were not covered by matting—was dark, and smooth as glass. A small round oak table, highly polished and carved at the rim, occupied the centre of the room. On it were laid, with a careless order, books of different coloured binding, in silk and leather, and of different sizes and dates. There were also carved oak shelves, suspended by a cord from the wall, which held several manuscripts and books. An oak chest of drawers, with brass handles, occupied one corner of the room and in the corresponding corner four low but well carved posts supported the feather bed and its furniture—the latter equalling in whiteness the driven snow. A small table stood near the bed, and in the corner, on the same side with the door, a harp and furnished music stand rested. O'Halloran saw all this by the light of a wax taper, which Connel had ignited at his entrance, and he was quickly aware that he occupied the apartment of the maiden, who had so suddenly interested him. For a time he stood mute with admiration.

Accustomed to foreign magnificence, he should not have wondered at the finest display of English wealth in the decoration of an apartment. Why then did he look again and again with wonder at the simple neatness of this room? He did not expect to find it here, he wondered that all things about him told of a taste chaste and educated; and then he thought of the peasant's daughter with more ardent feelings of friendship.

Connel enjoyed the astonishment of the stranger. He felt pleased at his silent wonder, because, perhaps, he secretly construed it into an admission favorable to his own importance. Why should not Connel feel thus? The pleasure was innocent, though self contributed largely to it. Self-interest necessarily mixed up in the composition of the most generous dispositions—else whence the humanity of our thoughts and actions. To few is it given, to be utterly devoid of self, and these are the blessed. What we condemn in self, is its abuse—we find it in the most noble minded—we find it—but with its abuse, among the mean.

Other feelings, than those which occupied Connel, disturbed O'Halloran. He concluded from the furniture, and the elegance and taste of the arrangement of the room, that it was Eveleen's; and he resolved not to occupy it. With this delicate feeling, he spoke to Connel. "My good friend, I must trouble you to give me, if possible, some other sleeping place. My unexpected visit, may, perchance, have disturbed the occupant of this room." Connel looked at the young man, whilst his honest countenance was flushed with displeasure, as he answered: "Whose is this house, but mine! And to whom would I give its best room, but to the son of my oldest and best friend, Ah! I see Master Harry, what you desire to say; your foreign education taught you—with some worse customs—a cold politeness, which we, thank God!—don't understand. You think from the trinkets around it that this room is Eveleen's. So it is; by day; but make yourself easy, it is mine by night. She made me use it as the most comfortable—God bless her!" "Admirable girl!" thought O'Halloran, too fervently for his short acquaintance. O'Halloran remained silent, though it was evident that Connel expected him to speak. The latter approached the door; and bade his guest a good night; he received no answer, and he muttered, "I would wish," then stopped. O'Halloran did not speak or look at him, but he saw the light of the candlestick before him. Connel removed it some inches from its place and looked again in

his face. There was no change there; all was silent and cold. Connel had resolved to disclose his thoughts, and he said: "Do you know, Master Harry, under whose roof you are?" O'Halloran started, and said, "Under a friend's believe—I hope so." "A friend's! to be sure," replied Connel; "but under what friend's think you?—Why have you not the confidence in me?" continued Connel, with more earnestness, to trust me, with your hopes, and your fears and your entire history. I have told you that I knew your father; my word was never pledged for that which was not true. I have joined his boyish sports; I have seen him powerful, because virtuous and rich, and I have witnessed and shared his misfortunes. Ah! Master Harry, I have had a part in them, and were he here he would know me for his faithful servant—I could say his dearest friend."

The young man's assumed coldness was instantly destroyed by Connel's earnestness, and he burst forth with the words: "For God's sake, say who you are and I then—"

"You are Henry O'Halloran, the son of Godfrey O'Halloran and I am Dermot O'Grady," answered Connel, solemnly.

"Enough," cried O'Halloran; "you are my father's best and dearest friend," and he rushed upon Connel and clasped him in his embrace.

When the feelings of both had somewhat subsided Connel asked why he doubted his faith, or why he was so reserved?

"Because," answered O'Halloran, "I did not expect to find Dermot O'Grady in Connel O'Keane. Shemus Dhu bid me see you in a hamlet within half a mile of the city. But, thank heaven, we are rid of the villain. He suffers now for his deceit."

"What! Shemus Dhu to deceive you?" cried Connel. "This cannot be, Master Harry. He would be the last man living to do so. There must be some mistake."

"There was no mistake, Dermot; no mistake to excuse him," said the young man, pacing with a hurried step up and down the room. "Thanks to my faithful servant and my good sword, I escaped the villain; else I might have shared the prison with the traitor."

"Do you know Dermot?" said he, stopping suddenly, and seating himself at the table, he drew from a bosom pocket some papers to which he called Connel's attention. Their conference was hushed and long, it appeared that the subject deeply interested both; and now and then the stranger listened with his face turned towards the door, and these caught the slightest stir in the outer room, and remarked upon it.

"Fear not," said Connel, audibly, my family are at rest. "None of them would be spies upon us."

"I wish," said O'Halloran, "that this suspense were broken. I cannot rest until I hear from him." And he pushed the papers away from him in the vehemence of his feelings.

"I will make some enquiries this very night," said Connel, arising; "but recollect I must still be called O'Keane in the presence of others. Ha! what noise is that? Fergus cannot be still up?"

"It is the sighing of the wind among the trees," replied his companion, starting, despite his composure of voice.

"No, no; Master Harry," returned Connel; "I have better ears than yours;—it is a human voice, and a strange one, or I am not a living man."

"Thank heaven!" cried O'Halloran, rising quickly, "I shall now be certain.—It is my servant, Randal."

They both attentively listened. The sounds of a human voice came fuller and more distinct upon their ears. It was evident that the voice was not one of caution or of fear. It approached the cabin, and they could recognise the boisterous merriment of some drunken villager or stranger.

"Remain here you," said Connel, as the demand for admittance was loudly repeated at the door. "Caution is necessary. It can be none of our people. If there be danger you can put out the light. Leave the rest to me. You may be certain that you are safe."

CHAPTER IX.

"Who is there?" was often asked by Connel, without receiving any answer. The attack upon the door had ceased, but it was evident the intruder's attention was directed to something else. Connel listened, and he could hear his son's voice raised threateningly. He could not distinguish the words, owing to the loud barking of the wolf-hounds, which Fergus always kept as his companions by night, and which it appeared he had unloosed upon the stranger. Had not Connel been more than usually interested in the safety of the inmates of his house he would have gone forth at the first alarm. He felt now the responsibility of a great charge. If there was danger, he depended upon the prudence and resolution of his son to warn him of it. He listened, therefore, with breathless attention, and he could hear that Fergus endeavoured to silence the dogs. This was effected, and he then distinctly heard the words of a strange voice—

"bogs and woods, and lakes, and rivers, and the devil knows what. 'Till he hanged when I am caught on a fool's errand," an old hermit once said to me, and then he wild-gledding the mist the next I have sworn it by Jove before I swear now again."

These reflections, though made audibly, were only intended for himself. He was the while, to the astonishment of all endeavouring with the most perfect ease, to give warmth to his hands over the embers which remained upon the hearth. Norah, at a sign from Connel, kindled a cheerful blaze, with some dried wood, and Frank was then more at home.

"Some of your strong brewing, my good fellow," said he. "A bundle of straw in the corner, and I will be as happy as a prince."

It was not in Connel's nature to bid the stranger from his roof, and he liked, too, the merry candour of his new guest's manner. Not so Fergus; he looked with more suspicion than his father upon O'Reilly. He had heard that persons of O'Reilly's character cared little for the inconvenience of others, so as it contributed to their own pleasure, and like many inexperienced in the world, he committed the sophism of arguing from particulars to universals. He spoke apart to his father on the subject, and then said to the stranger, who was yet busy in chafing his hands over the blaze.

"We are sorry our poor cabin will not afford fitting accommodation to you; you must fain take your lodging with me for the night in an out-house."

"All's one to me, my dear fellow," said O'Reilly taking the large wooden measure of ale from Norah's hands, and emptying it in two draughts. "That's a good posset for the night," he continued, "by my faith, I have half a mind to promise to visit you again for its sake—come now, to bed with us." And as he arose he trolled forth a flash song of the revellers of the time.

O'Reilly staggered to his kennel, as he called it, but in passing to the door he recognized Judith. "Hal' old lady, are you here? shame on you for not giving welcome to your friend. But give us your hand. Was I not right about the deer? You want? Well, you stood fairly to me, and I will think of it, if it were only to spite the churl D'Arcy. I will toast your name at our next let-out, as the best shot in the country. By Jove, it will be glorious to have him put down by an old crone's opinions he can never boast after this."

And here the speaker rubbed his hands with delight, in anticipation of his power over D'Arcy's fame as a sportsman.

"As I live, another acquaintance! By my honour as an unworthy member of the chase, the same wild girl who put us to our wind yesterday. Away again! Ah! you don't like to show us your fair neck now; but you showed us your light heels before. For honour's sake, we must have an explanation in the morning good night, young damsel—good night old lady—remember, I will set you up. To—all—good night. The way—the way."

And he staggered after Fergus to a better bed than he could have expected had he sense to think on his comforts; for Fergus, at his father's wish, showed him to his own.

CHAPTER X.

Judith and Eveleen retired to their rooms without giving to each other or to Connel, any explanation of their acquaintance with the stranger. At any other time, Connel would have questioned them concerning it, but he was now too anxious about his guest's safety to think of any inquiry. The door was again made fast, and he rejoined O'Halloran. Their conversation was at this time short. Connel soon returned to the outer room, and left his guest to his own reflections. After Connel's departure, the young man walked across the room with measured tread. For some time he continued thus, his eyes bent upon the matting, then he stopped suddenly, and throwing himself upon a rush seat, he exclaimed: "After all, I am a fool for my trouble."

He leaned back upon his seat, and his thoughts might be construed thus—

"Well, I have achieved what my youngest wish doated upon. I am in my native land—a country which I loved from my earliest thought with more than a child's love—yet I am not happy. But before I left France did I not expect difficulties in my attempt? Ah! yes, but I foolishly looked forward to pleasure in the daring, and I foolishly thought that the feelings of others would be like my own; I thought that I alone, without other help, should be able to convince my townsmen of my rights—should be able to break the chain which binds them to prejudice and to interest by my sole appearance. How vain! I deserve to be disappointed in my first attempt."

And here he arose and paced the room with a hurried step. He became calmer by degrees, and then he thought of his father, and thanked God that he had been spared being a witness of his son's griefs. But still he hoped for better things; he hoped ardently. This hope was balm to his troubled spirit, and he also hoped that his father would look down from heaven, and feel pleasure in the manly resolution of his son—the resolution of bearing his trials with firmness, and that he would rejoice at his success. His feeling rose with the joy of that hope, and under their influence he looked forward to a career of honour and happiness. And then he thought of Eveleen; how sweet the thought that she was not Connel's daughter! Could Connel mean to deceive him by saying this? No; no; he could not think that Connel wished to deceive him. Such a thought would destroy the hope and happiness of his present feelings. He rejected it as soon as it arose in his mind. Eveleen's bright image came there to dispel the gloomy thought. O'Reilly's intrusion did not occur to him, nor Shemus Dhu's treachery, nor the mystery of the silence of some others, nor any of his difficulties. He commended himself to God and slept a happier sleep than he had done since his father's death.

When O'Reilly gave some signs of being in a deep sleep Fergus threw himself without undressing upon a straw mat in another corner of the loft, too much engaged with the occurrences of the day to think of rest. He had more than the reader is aware of to make him sad and joyful by turns. That day's knowledge was a succession of wonders to him. How could his foster brother, Eugene, Judith's son (who lived constantly in the town, but whom he met that morning in the wood), have such a certain knowledge that a young stranger would be a guest in Portaragh that night? Why did Eugene conceal the motives of the stranger's visit? or why did he engage him in the mystery without giving a satisfactory reason—only begging of him in the most solemn manner, by his love and his friendship, to await a signal from Knockbane after nightfall, and then to conduct this stranger in safety to his father's cabin. These were questions he put to himself, and he sought in vain for the answers. That the stranger was known to his father he was certain; but he could not think why his father would conceal his interest in him from his son. He passed from these thoughts suddenly to dwell on others more annoying. In waiting in the wood during the evening, he had observed two hunters of rather a suspicious character. In one he recognized from description D'Arcy—the greatest enemy of his family. Unseen he had followed them far in their pursuit of his sister, whom by accident they had met. He had watched closely their interview. It was short and respectful to his sister; and when she took a path different from theirs, with the same tripping and buoyant step, he felt that the interview was casual, and without danger to her. But then, why did his sister tell him that night, that she knew D'Arcy, and that he had told her, that she was something more than a peasant's daughter; and to beware of those who appeared to be her friends, to mistrust even Fergus?

"To mistrust me!" said Fergus, and his thoughts took the following turn. "Ah! I can now well see my father's motives in our superior education. Land, Eveleen were reared with thoughts, though not with hopes, above those around us. We were not allowed to visit the city, with the other boys and girls of our village, and even the amusements prescribed to us, differed often from theirs. And then my father told us sometimes of his patron—O'Halloran as he called him—and how rich and respected he was once; but nothing more, except that man by his station, but more by his education, can benefit his friends and country; with which he always ended his remarks. There must be something in all this. Shemus Dhu let many hints fall which I could not then understand, but which I do now. Thank heaven for the visit of this stranger, it has opened my eyes. And Shemus told me once—I recollect well—that my father had another name, O'Grady, I think, and that it belonged to more persons than I thought of. What, if my father be more than a peasant's children. Ah, no; I would not wish it, I would then lose my joys and sports, my loves and friendships among my companions. But, could I not be more valuable to them? Yes, I could," and here, in the riot of his first ambition, he gloated on the idea of being great, but with the wish of being good—of being more powerful to help his former companions. Again, he thought that Eveleen might not be his sister—that he might remain the peasant's son, and she be estranged by birth and fortune from him. Oh, the idea was terrible! he could not dwell upon it. And yet it returned; and again it returned; and there were some secret feelings within, excited by the thought of Eveleen's change of birth, which he could not well understand, but which gave him alternate pain and pleasure, and he wished to destroy them by some exertion. He sprang from his pallet, and with wild feeling, said aloud:—

"I will be watchful! I am changed." "Hush," said a voice at the trap door of the loft. "Does the fellow yonder sleep?" It was the voice of his father.

"I am glad you are come, father," said Fergus, earnestly. "You will satisfy my doubts." "It is for that purpose I come, my son," said Connel, in a lowered voice. "Does the man yonder sleep?" "He does father," said Fergus, "You hear him even from this."

"It is well," replied Connel. "But do you know him Fergus?" "I have no knowledge of him or of his character," said Fergus, in a pettish tone, vexed that his father had changed the subject; "save what his father has told me of his character with D'Arcy tells me." "Ha, then, I am right. He is D'Arcy's instrument! We must watch him." "You need not fear him now," replied his son "even if he were willing, he has too little sense to be a spy, and is too impotent to do evil. But why this precaution and these fears, father? It is short since you showed them. I was once a partner of your thoughts. I feel I am not now. Tell me in the name of everything sacred; tell me, who are we? or is Eveleen my sister?" Connel seemed to expect the question, he was not surprised, but said with a solemn voice:—

"My son!" and stopped. The endearment with which the words are pronounced would have destroyed the doubt in Fergus' mind—that Connel might not be his father; if such a thought had arisen, and it was natural for it to arise.

"My son!" said Connel, "you owe me life, and I owe you gratitude for your affection and obedience. I will no longer be mysterious with you. The time is come when you shall act your part in a great scene, for which I destined you. You have often heard me tell of my patron, of my dearest friend on earth. His son is now in Ireland."

Fergus forgot all his other feelings in the new interest which his father's words excited; he continued deeply attentive, while Connel proceeded.

"He is now come to the home of his father—himself bereaved of home and of friends! Stand upon the hill of Gartloghlin, you have been often there, and look at the lake, and to the town, and to the mountains which rise behind you; all were once his ancestor's; now many strange names divide his property. A traitor possesses the part in the city which should be his—a villain; who owes his rank and means to his family. Why do I suddenly tell you this now? Why have I before often hinted it to you? It was to prepare you for his coming. It is to interest you for him, and for many who have shared his evil fate. You have heard of our religion being trampled upon—thank God persecution has only partially reached us. You have heard of common justice being refused to some, on the ground of their faith. You have shown a just indignation on hearing these things. With satisfaction, oh! with what satisfaction I have witnessed your young feelings of anger! I have rejoiced over this budding of your spirit! Hear me then; you may one day be the means—the attempt is in your power—of destroying the persecution of your faith; and if you fail, you shall have the consolation of leaving behind a noble name, a generous example, which will, and must, in some short time, be followed and succeed."

"Tell me, father," interrupted Fergus, with more vehemence than Connel thought prudent.

"Tell me how," he said, "and I will venture my life in the attempt."

"Speak lower," said Connel, "yonder fellow is a dangerous neighbour in this affair. Well then, my son, I grieve that there is no deed at present worthy of your zeal; it will yet come. But, by being faithful to that which I now command, you shall fit yourself for higher deeds; and remember, the lowliest becomes the next stone to the higher. Upon these papers depend the life and fortune of the son of my dearest friend. His agent, who is this young stranger, has given them to me. After nightfall, to-morrow, you go to Galway. You shall have a guide in whom you may trust. He will direct you. I will speak to you again; and for the rest, I confide in your proved discretion and resolution."

"And is this all?" said Fergus with emotion.

"All! do you say in a tone of scorn," said Connel. "Ungrateful boy! you would prefer your own judgment of an action to the fondest which I might build upon it."

"No! not so, father," said Fergus; "I am willing to do everything which is not evil and which you command, without asking a reason. But tell me—I must ask it again—is Eveleen your daughter?"

"And who has put these thoughts into your head?" interrupted Connel, in a tone of bitterness. "May—God help me, I will not curse her; she was, up to this, faithful to me."

"Indeed, father, it was not Judith," said Fergus, now hearing the rising passion of Connel. "Eveleen herself saw D'Arcy; she spoke to him—it was by accident; but from this, and other circumstances of which I was aware, I thought I might put the question."

"Eveleen! she spoke to D'Arcy! What said she to her?"

"Nothing; Eveleen has told me nothing."

"Oh! the fiend will have his hand in everything connected with me, but I will be his victor in this game; his power will soon cease. Fergus, listen, if it make you wiser and happier, of which I doubt, Eveleen is not my daughter. Good night—remember, what I have said—farewell."

(To be continued in our next.)

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