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FATHER CONNELL; A TALK.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It has been hinted that Miss Beasy Lanigan had achieved her present height of little, genteel popularity, in a great degree, by her amazing capacity for acquiring a knowledge of other people's affairs, and by her obliging readiness, in communicating that knowledge. She was a daily periodical of private anecdote, and her publication commenced about twenty minutes past seven in the morning, and did not quite end until about ten minutes to eleven every evening. How she acquired matter to fill herself with diurnal novelty, was wondrous. But she left no resource untried for the purpose. As her own editor and compiler, she was indeed individually a host; still, her contributors were almost beyond calculation, embracing every rank within her reach, down to the humblest servant, nay, to the very old beggarwoman or beggarman at her door, who came to get something from her, but were sent away, on the contrary, after giving to Miss Lanigan all they were worth in the world—their malice and their lies—without receiving in return, as much as a potato-peel, a crumb, or an empty marrow-bone.

And yet did they consider themselves repaid, starving though they might be. One of the quality had condescended to listen to their wretched gossip; and so they felt themselves of importance to society, and went on their way rejoicing.

With condescension indeed, nay, with familiarity, the little lady was necessarily obliged to reward all her humbler contributors, since stipends, alms, or bribes, she had not to give. And Tom Naddy, ever since he had become translated into Gaby M'Neary's service, cannot he supposed to have escaped Miss Lanigan's constant claims for contributions.

This day, having knocked at her little green hall-door, and sent up word that he was the bearer of a letter to Miss Lanigan, he was admitted to her presence without delay. The letter, he said, came from Miss M'Neary, through the medium of her own maid, and he was charged to use the greatest secrecy and punctuality in delivering it.

Miss Lanigan proceeded to read it. Poor Helen was in a terrible state of affliction. She had not stopped crying, nor slept a wink, since the evening of the fearful contention with her father. She felt greatly indignant at the tyrannical restraint set upon her; she did not know what to do—but trebly resolved she was, that no earthly power should ever make her wed Mr. Stanton; yet, how to avoid the calamity without incurring her father's utmost displeasure—perhaps his abandonment and his curse—she could not determine. She looked round on every side, but all was black and hopeless.—Would not her dear Miss Lanigan assist her?—And again Helen asked for advice (while perhaps she despised the source from which it was to come).

Helen went on to say, that she had been startled that morning by a letter from—Miss Lanigan knew whom—written by him in the same town with her, and she had been more than startled by its purport. It proposed to her to take a step which it was impossible she ever could take. But would Miss Lanigan come to her father's house, and, as she was a favorite of his, would she try to gain his permission to see Helen, and then Miss Lanigan should know more?

Miss Lanigan paused in great perplexity over this epistle. She was aroused by a sort of groaning ejaculation, as if of utter despair, from Tom Naddy, who occupied the chair, which, as usual, his little editor had pointed out to him; and Tom looked, and had twisted his limbs, into an exceedingly woe-begone expression.

Miss Lanigan addressed him.

"Why, I protest and vow, my good boy, affairs seem to go on worse and worse with you at home."

"Worse an' worse, sure enough, Miss—an' worse nor that agin, if I'd say id. But what signifies the way things is now to the way they'll be in a little time, if matthers doesn't mend, Miss?"

"How so?"

"Why, Miss, there'll be slaughter an' destruction to no end, if Miss Helen marries Mither Stanton."

"Good gracious! Do you really think so, Tom?"

"Faix, Miss I'm right down sure ov it. I know Masther Neddy well, ever since he was a weeny chap, an' look, Miss, I wouldn't give that for Stanton's life, if id is a thing that he sets on taking Miss Helen from him."

"Tom Naddy touched the tip of his tongue with the tip of his finger, and held out on the latter, for Miss Lanigan's insidious, the smallest possible portion of transparent saliva.

"I protest you frighten me, my good boy."

"An' no wonder—it frightens myself to think ov id. First an' foremost Masther Neddy will take Mither Stanton, an' he'll think no more of knockin' the daylight out ov him than I would ov puttin' my feet on a spider; fur

the poor crature ov a young man is crazy mad this moment. Well, that's one life gone.—Then surely he must get a blunderbuss an' shoot his own skull off, or else they'll take him up and hang him on the gallows for Mither Stanton's murder; and don't you think, Miss, that it 'ud be better fur him, an' more genteeler, to kill his ownself than to have id to the hangman to do? Don't you, Miss?"

"Oh, for gracious' sake, good boy, don't put such a shocking question to me. I protest and vow, I'm all in a trouble at the thought of such horrid doings."

"Well, that's two lives gone, without any doubt on the face of the earth. Then let Miss Helen get over id all if she can. I'll bet any sum she'll never see a happy day agin, an' that she'll d'rop into an airy grave. And as for th'ould masther, I'll go bail, with all his oaths, he'll be sorry enough when he sees nothing but murder and misfortune on every side of him. I'm only a poor boy, Miss, and I'd go five hundred miles on my bare knees to stop that unlooky weddin' if I could. An' if there was any good crature that would be the manes ov stoppin' id, they might be sartin sure that a blessing 'ud fall on 'em, every day they'd see the sun—oh, it 'ud be a crown o' glory for any one that 'ud do id!"

"But if old Mr. M'Neary is so very determined, I cannot see how the marriage is to be stopped."

"Very asy intirely, Miss. very asy intirely. It 'ud only be fur Miss Helen to give her consent to marry wid Masther Neddy, afore the day fur th' other unfortunate weddin' 'ud come round, an' then, sure all the mischief 'ud be hindered at once."

"Miss Helen will never consent to any such thing. I know well she will not. Besides, you don't think of old Mr. M'Neary, young man—no person could withstand his fury."

"Bud what could his fury do afther all, Miss? Maybe he'd part wid Miss Helen fur a start—but sure Masther Neddy has plenty to keep her like any lady in the land. Why, a body might say, to be sure, that id wasn't a right way to have the young lady married—but wouldn't it be better nor murder an' slaughter? An' th' ould masther 'ud cotten to both ov 'em afther a while, an' thin there 'ud be nothin' bud blessins an' happiness every day in the year—an' thin, wouldn't the looky body that brought it all about be made much of—oh, wouldn't she?"

"I protest and vow—" began Miss Lanigan, and she paused.

"An' do you know what, Miss?"

"Well, Tom, what?"

"Mither Stanton wouldn't fret very long. I can tell you."

"What! Is he not most tenderly attached to Miss M'Neary, poor man?"

"By my faix, Miss, he'd be more vexed to have his queue made crooked, than to lose two Miss M'Nearys. I have id from his own mouth, Miss."

"Gracious goodness me? Do you tell me so, Tom?"

"Tom," says he to me, tother day, "Tom, my honest lad," says he—I was puttin' the queue straight fur him at the same time—

"Tom," says he, "your young mistress is a very nice, genteel young lady; bud, Tom," says he agin, "I wouldn't care much, even if she broke wid me; fur I think I can get another young lady as nice, an' as genteel as she is, I'm not lookin' afther money, fur I've plenty of that; a nice, genteel, young lady is all I want; an' don't you think, Tom," says poor Mither Stanton to me, "don't you think, Tom, I'd be able to get another nice, genteel, young lady, if anything happened to prevent the match wid Miss Helen?" "Be my faix, and sure you could, sir," says I; "sure you're a match fur the best among 'em—an' so he is, Miss; a quiet, peaceable gentleman, an' very well to look at, an' I don't think he'd say *hooome* or *hawn* to vex a lady fur his whole life long—what do you think, Miss?"

"Indeed, Tom, I do think Mr. Stanton very likely to meet a favorable reception from a great many ladies."

"See now! Didn't I know that?"

"Well, and what else did he say to you, Tom?"

"He's no way proud, Miss; proud gentlemen or ladies, that wouldn't talk free wid a poor body, they're not the right sort afther all; 'tis upstarts, an' cratures ov the kind, that snubs us poor people; real gentlemen an' ladies are civil an' conversible, an' don't turn a snout on them that's below 'em—is not that your opinion, Miss?"

"Yes, indeed, Tom: and you may see that I am chatting very freely with you."

"Blessins on your purty face, Miss, sure enough you are; well thin, an' Mither Stanton isn't a bit prouder nor you are; an' he made as free wid me, as if I was one of his own sort, afther a manner—" Tom, says he, "I like Miss Helen very well intirely, an' I'm in a chokin' hurry to be married to her; bud," says he, "the ould gentleman is an oddity. If he holds on, I'll hold on too, bud he may turn short on me, Tom,—I'd give a purse o' gold that he did, Miss, bud there's no chance o' that—'he might turn short on me, Tom; an' if he

did, I think I'd get as nice, and as genteel a young lady as ever she was—particularly whin 'tisn't the money I want." "Tis you that would, sir," says I;—"Tom," says he, over agin, "I think you're not a bad judge of young ladies, wasn't that very free of him to say to me, Miss?"

"He paid you a very high compliment, I vow and protest, Tom."

"You're not a bad judge of young ladies," says he. "Why, sir," says I, "I'd make a guess that way."

"My goodness, gracious! And pray, Tom, by what rule would you form your judgment of young ladies?"

"Did you ever hear of the rule of thumb, Miss?"

"Never, I protest."

"'Tis by that rule that botches ov carpenters work, Miss; but that's not my rule. Miss; 'tis by the eyes I go, like a fellow that sarded his time: I think 'tis a gift to me some way; an' I'll tell you, Miss, the two hand-somest young ladies to be met, from the Butt's cross to Ballyvough, an' thin you'll know, Miss, if I'm to be depeided on."

"Do, then, Tom—let me hear, for goodness gracious' sake."

"The young mistress, Miss Helen M'Neary, is one ov them, Miss; an' sure I needn't only turn my eyes across the room to find another young lady who could walk by Miss Helen's side every day in the year."

"Oh, Tom Naddy, my good lad; you can flatter, I see."

"That I may never rise from the site I'm on, Miss, if what I'm afther sayin' isn't the very thing I'd swear on the book, this moment." (Mental reservation on Tom's part.)

"Indeed, Tom, I cannot but be obliged to you," said Miss Lanigan, as she fixed her smug features into the most amiable expression, bobbed her little head, and "bridled," as it was then termed, "I do declare, Tom, you know how to be gallant."

"Och, it's little I know about that fine work, Miss; bud sure, I have an eye in my head. Well, Miss, as we war sayin'—poor Mither Stanton, as nate a gentleman as ever come across me—says he to myself, 'I think you're not a bad judge ov young ladies.' 'I'd make a guess that way, sir,' says I; 'then, Tom,' says he, an' he sluck me bee the first—savin' manners—" Tom, says he 'if anything happens to break the match between myself and Miss Helen M'Neary, you'll be on the lookout fur me, Tom; I know you're a judge, Tom, an' I think, Tom, that I'd agree in your choice, Tom; wasn't that makin' very free intirely, Miss?"

"Ha, ha! dear me," and Miss Lanigan again hesitated.

Tom examined her face, and was not slow to perceive that he had produced an effect.—She was measuring at once Tom's opinion of her attractions, and Tom's power and authority of selection for Mr. Stanton, while a fitting vision of escaping from her state of little gentility, and wretched singleness, into the wide expanse of wealth, and of married importance, plainly irradiated it.

"The greatest fault, or may be 'tis his misfortune, Miss, that Mither Stanton has—"

Miss Beasy Lanigan started from her reverie. She had just dressed Mr. Stanton with all the amenities that could adorn his sex, and Tom Naddy hinted at a fault.

"Mr. Stanton's fault, my good boy?" she asked, feelingly.

"Be my faix, Miss, I don't see a fault, to call id a fault, about the good gentleman, only he's not—*an*—when—he's not—" and Tom polished the crown of his hat with the sleeve of his coat—"he's not over-handy at courtin', Miss; an' so, he'd lave id to another, you know, to manage points for him."

"Is that all, Tom? And he has no other faults, you think?"

"Avoek, not he, the nice young gentleman—an' a lady might turn him round her little finger, Miss."

"That's no fault, indeed, Tom; your very-presuming, forward young men, Tom, make too free; and afther all, when the novel charms of Hymen wear away, they cease to study what will please."

"Oh, likely enough, faix, Miss, fur what I know ov the matter; but if I was a nice, handsome young lady, like you, Miss, I'd never go beyond Mither Stanton—that is, supposin' I was in the marryin' way, Miss—which they say you are not, Miss."

The interview and conversation might be prolonged considerably, but it will be enough to say that Tom Naddy and Miss Beasy Lanigan parted upon the understanding, expressed or implied, that he was to use all his powers of intrigue and authority, to promote her to the station of Mistress Richard Stanton, provided she would, beforehand, prevail on Miss Helen M'Neary, to agree to marry Edmund Fennell privately—first of all, going at once to Gaby M'Neary's house, and gaining an interview with Helen, in furtherance of the project.

Tom kept his appointment with Edmund. His success with Miss Beasy Lanigan, astonished, though it delighted the young man.—

The next question was, what priest could be got to celebrate the private marriage?

"Father Connell, surely," said Tom, "an' you must go at once to him yourself, Masther Neddy."

Edmund was disinclined to go. He almost feared to approach his old protector, and still, his most respected and beloved old friend, on such a mission, particularly, as he had, without consulting him, come down from Dublin, to the interruption of his studies there; and remained so long in his native town, without calling upon his old priest.

But Tom Naddy insisted upon his going instantly. He would again meet Edmund, in a more convenient place, to learn the result.—Tom now seemed quietly to claim, from all parties concerned, full obedience to his commands, and by none was he eventually contradicted.

Edmund accordingly proceeded to speed his ungracious task. He returned to Tom Naddy, and informed him that there was no hope.—Father Connell had been more displeased with him than even he had anticipated. As Edmund foresaw, he had severely chided his return from Dublin without consulting him, and the want of confidence is not immediately referring to himself for advice, especially offended the old priest. As to his officiating in the private marriage, he altogether repudiated the idea.

"Well," said Tom Naddy, very thoughtfully, "I'll thry his poor Rivorance fur you too, Masther Neddy, tho' faix I'm more, more afther nor yourself was, a little while ago."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"This is a world of sin, O Lord! And your patience is great with the sinners of it! Your mercy exceeds your justice, O Lord!"

Thus ejaculated Father Connell, as with his hands clasped within each other, and his eyes reverently, and most sorrowfully turned upwards, he walked quickly about his little parlor.

Suddenly he stopped, and looked on our friend, Tom Naddy, whose effrontery, thorough as it was, could scarcely withstand the effects produced upon his old master, by the atrocious lie he had just uttered to him.

"And he told you this, Tom, of his own accord, and with his own lips?" questioned the priest.

"He did, your Reverence," Tom swallowed half of this repetition of the monstrous falsehood: "he was afraid of sayin' id to your own face, whin he came here a little while ago; bud he told id to me, that I might tell id to you—that is, I believe, an' I'm sure, that he wanted me to tell id to you, tho' he didn't lay his commands on me, out an' out."

"Oh! oh! Lord have mercy on us, and guard us from evil!" moaned Father Connell, resuming his hasty walk up and down the apartment.

"I have hope, sir, that you won't be angry wid me for comin' to tell you?" questioned Tom, now shedding some real tears: for every moment he grew more and more afraid of the desperate course he had taken.

"No, Tom, no, I am not angry with you; on the contrary, I consider when you do not publish your neighbor's fault, for the purpose of exposing him to the world, but rather, with the intention of curbing him in his sinful career, you perform an act of praiseworthy Christian charity."

The hardened diplomatist winced to the very quick under this most unmerited praise.

"I have been a father to that boy, Tom," and here the old man's voice gave way; he clasped his hands more earnestly than before, and tears stole down his cheeks—"if he had been my own son, I could not have more truly loved him; and now, to repay me in this way—to repay me by outraging, in the most serious manner, the laws of that God whom I thought I had taught him to obey—oh, it is very sorrowful for my grey hairs: very, very sorrowful."

If ever liar was punished for his lie, almost in the very utterance of it, Tom Naddy was now that liar. All the acquired crookedness of his mind, and all the pleasures resulting from an indulgence in it, yielded to a momentary exercise of his natural straightness of heart. The grief, which he had wantonly inflicted on the reverend and aged man before him, became inflicted on himself; and he mentally resolved, never to tell another lie during his life.

"And," continued Father Connell, after another pause of abstraction—"not to talk of Edmund Fennell, I had a love for that unfortunate young lady, too. When Neddy was a poor, deserted, small boy, and when I went out to beg for him, she was a beautiful and a delightful little creature; I give you my word, Tom Naddy, she bestowed on me her Christmas-box—half a golden guinea—her little hoard, that she had reserved for buying toys—to relieve him and his poor mother; yes, I loved Neddy Fennell, and I loved that beautiful little child; but both of them, Tom Naddy, my good boy, have taught me that the purest affections of this sinful, ugly world, are good for nothing—are good for nothing—nothing; the Lord be praised! And the Lord grant me strength to bear it, as I ought!" but, notwithstanding his endeavors at Christian resig-

nation, Father Connell's affliction of spirit increased, and he wept plentifully.

As soon as he could speak, he resumed.

"But God help them; God help them, poor, sinful children; they have not, by their sinfulness, brought happiness to themselves, no more than to me; God help them!"

There was another pause, and he spoke again.

"Tom Naddy, my very good boy, it is not my opinion that Neddy Fennell will oppose himself to his old priest, and—as I may call myself, without much boasting—to his old benefactor. No, Tom, I do not think he will oppose himself to me, when I warn him, and caution him, and beg of him, with tears in my eyes, to abandon his great sin—will he, Tom? Do you think he will?"

"In truth, sir, I am very sure he won't."

"Well then, Tom, send him to me; perhaps he will be afraid of both to come; but toll him from me, that if he is only very sorry, I will not be hard or stern with him; tell him that the Lord of heaven and earth is never harsh with repenting sinners; and that I, the Lord's poor priest, and lowliest servant, will not be more severe than his Master and mine. Send him to me, Tom, send him to me."

"I will, sir. But, sir—"

"Well, Tom, my good boy?"

"I may be speakin' wrong, sir; but what is to become of poor Miss Helen?"

The old man started.

"That is true, Tom, and very true. Edmund Fennell is bound before God and man, to repair the misfortune he has caused. And that dear, tender-hearted child, is she to be abandoned to the world's scorn, and to the danger of continued offences, towards her Almighty maker? Sit you there, Tom, my good boy, till I come back to you, I will go up-stair to my own room for a while."

He left the little parlor, and Tom Naddy could hear him ascend the creaking old stairs, and then fall suddenly on his knees in his bedroom.

Naddy remained very uncomfortable, during the considerable time he was absent. The solemnity of the priest's actions and manner, his deep sensibility, upon which the liar had not calculated, awed and dismayed him. The fear of detection, too, either by Edmund Fennell or Father Connell, broke suddenly, for the first time, upon him, and he began to be really terrified. And yet did Tom endeavor to regain his equilibrium, by assuring himself that he was "doing everything for the best," and that but for him very dire mishaps must certainly occur.

Father Connell reappeared before him; there was now a fixed seriousness and a determination on the old gentleman's face.

"I have thought over this unfortunate business, Tom Naddy," he said, as carefully and as diligently as I was capable of, with, I hope, sincere prayer to assist me; and it appears to me that there is nothing to save these two unhappy creatures, except a very extreme step.—And there is great danger to all parties in such a measure. But worldly considerations are not to be kept in mind when our duty to God and our neighbor is to be performed. He was here himself, a while ago, to ask me to marry him privately to Helen M'Neary. But he did not place before me the real grounds for his request, and thinking him only influenced by youthful inclination—and I feared, selfish inclination—and feeling that I had no authority, on such a plea, to outrage the feelings of the young girl's father, and his good friend, and mine, Tom—and at the same time to offend the law of the land, I refused his application.—But now the case is altered, terribly altered. Go to Edmund Fennell, and tell him, from me, to come here this evening, with his poor partner in error, and I will marry him to her."

"God bless your Reverence, an' I'll tell him so; bud he's very much in awe of you, an' no wonder—"

"If he had been in awe of me, Tom Naddy, he would not have risen up against me in the strength of this heavy sin; or, if he had loved me, he would not have wronged my old heart, by showing to me that all my care for him was sown in an ungrateful soil."

"Bud I know he'd be in awe ov you another way, sir."

"How so, my good boy, Tom?"

"I'll go, bud that when he comes he'd be denyin' everything, to save himself from your anger, sir."

"Well; and it is likely enough that he may endeavor to impose on me. One sin brings on many. But I will not, for the present, tempt him to add falsehood to his other transgressions. I will not, for the present, even listen to any of his denials. I will stop his speech the moment he attempts them. But he shall not, therefore, escape me without making the first atonement he can make for his offence against God and man. Go now, Tom, and deliver my message to him."

"An' I will, sir, an' wid all my heart. But sir, there is one other little thing you won't be angry wid me fur sayin'. If ever he comes to know who it was that told on him, sir, you know I couldn't stand the country agen him, sir."

"Have no fears on that head, Tom. He