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AN ACT OF DISOBEDIENCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES. A NARRATIVE OF REAL LIFE.

CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

I cannot account for the fact, but the news of my arrival had preceded me; for, on entering the priest's little parlor, the good man got up from his slender-repast, and without waiting for the ceremony of an introduction, advanced to meet me, and said, with broken voice and streaming eye—

Welcome, Edward Cahill! Thrice welcome to my almost nerveless arms! and warmly embracing me, he pressed his marble lips affectionately to my cheek. 'May Divine Providence be praised for His countless mercies, but especially for permitting me to meet again on earth one of the nearest objects of my early love.—Yes, my son, a good priest loves his people with a tenderness that laymen cannot understand. Sit down—sit down beside me.'

I did sit down—my heart was too full for speech—I wept in silence. 'Edward,' said Father O'Donovan to my uncle, 'send for his sisters, their husbands, and their families. Let a jubilee be held in my house this day. But first, where is my curate?'

'He's coming, your reverence,' said my uncle, pointing to the window, while a look of triumph, which I did not understand, gave an added flush to his usually ruddy cheek. The curate entered—a tall, fine looking young man—in whom I recognized the priest who read the morning prayers. Father O'Donovan raised his fingers in warning to my uncle.

'Come hither my good son!' The curate approached his superior. 'Give me your hand; it has long been my support. There!' said he, placing the young priest's hand in mine—'embrace this gentleman, your namesake—your cousin, Edward Cahill, from America!'

'I need no picture, his surprise, my cousin flew into my ready embrace. I now understood the feelings which called up my uncle's look of triumph—he was his only son. 'Sit down, my children,' said the old priest. 'What a day of delight to my aged heart! But it has become young again, and garrulity, that silly weakness of old age, has come upon me in full current. Well, I can afford to run riot in joy, for have I not three Edward Cahills before me? But how shall I distinguish between you, all equally dear to me—all the objects of my respect and my esteem—the very pillars of my life—the chief promoters of virtue in my humble, but privileged district? My aged friend's liberality and example have done much, and in times when they were much needed. The zeal, and energy, and patient labors of his son, I will not speak of; his God is his approving witness. But to you,' said he, again grasping my hand, 'who, living in a distant land, so kindly and so generously remembered the poverty of your brethren, to you, myself and my congregation owe an everlasting debt of gratitude. That substantial and commodious temple—my own sweet little dwelling—our noble schools, and the provision for the priest's personal comforts, are your enduring monuments, and tell the tale of your surpassing benevolence—your princely munificence. The spirit of Joseph is within you; the blessing with which he was blessed, has also been poured upon you.'

'Oh! speak not thus, my over-partial father,' replied I; 'call the little I have been enabled to do, the work of restitution, an act of reparation, a sin offering, to atone for the scandal and the affliction my early disobedience occasioned; or let it be known by any other name, through which my ingratitude and my humiliations may be best transmitted to posterity. Believe me, sir, the very abundance that has been heaped upon me—yes, every fresh bounty that flowed in upon me, was received as a humiliation; would, I could say it was received in the spirit of true humility.'

'Well, my dear son, we will not discuss that point at present. Believe me; however, I am not the man to lay a flattering unction to your soul; though I do delight in applying a soothing balm to a wounded spirit. But we must give over, for I perceive we shall have carnal feelings to deal with presently, and feelings such as may be safely indulged without the dread of sin.—Look! Edward Cahill, senior,' said he, smiling, and pointing to the window, 'you have been a laggard; good news, as well as bad, travels rapidly, you perceive; you have lost the gratification and the éclat of the announcement—there they come by scores!'

The old man's finger directed our attention to the window, and there, crowding round the house, we saw not scores alone, but hundreds of the congregation, with pleasure beaming in every countenance; anxious, I could not doubt, to get a glance at the Returned Prodigal. I felt the surging of wounded pride for a moment, but it did not last. Other feelings came, and my soul sunk within me—my father was not there; my

mother!—my mother's mild and gentle presence did not grace the rejoicings. Father O'Donovan perceived my depression, and, laying his hand upon my shoulder, said, in a tone of assumed banter, but true sympathy:

'Come, come, my dear son! a truce to gloomy thoughts. I can read the workings of your spirit; they, whom your eyes seek in vain, may not be pleased spectators. It is not for blind humanity to pierce the inscrutable ways of Omniscience. But soon, very soon, it may be my privilege to carry them the tidings of this happy re-union. Cheer up, I say! Why, man, listen! That hearty, honest, generous, spontaneous 'Cead mille fáilte' might create a heart under the ribs of death.'

It was no doubt a hearty welcome, and no doubt perfectly sincere. The cheers were repeated and repeated, and the old priest and my good uncle shook with mingled feelings of sympathy and glee. My cousin seemed to watch the scene intently, but without apparent emotion. At length, starting abruptly from his seat, he sprung to the door, and exclaimed to the vociferous crowd:

'Make way there, boys! make way! see who are coming!'

In another minute I found myself encircled by the contending arms of my three sisters, while their husbands and two dozen of their descendants had to wait in patience till the earlier and the stronger claims of nature had been fully satisfied. What a moment of excitement was that! Every scene through which I had gone that day was oppressive. This was the climax. I was worn out: my nervous system completely shattered, and borne down by tender emotions. Father O'Donovan at length interposed, and procured a few minutes' relaxation for my wearied spirit, while a glass of wine and a crust somewhat braced me for further exertion. It may be easily conceived that I had many a question to answer, many an inquirer to satisfy, during my first half-hour among my dear sisters and their promising families. Our epistolary correspondence had given me much information respecting them all, but now I had the loved beings before me, and more than fancy had painted was realized by their presence. The young ones, undeterred by awkward shyness, affectionately clustered round me, and I perceived, with delight, that the countenances of my nephews and nieces, one and all, exhibited some trait, some expression, some little air or manner, that brought to my memory those of my deceased parents. I freely yielded myself up to the inquiry; my heart enjoyed a luxury in the investigation. Father O'Donovan, as every Catholic priest does, knew all the windings and turnings of the human heart. He could read mine perfectly; observing how I was engaged, and wishing to interrupt my train of thought, he broke in upon me with his usual fascinating smile, saying:

'Well, Edward, among all your studies I perceive you have not neglected that of physiognomy. You are familiar with Lavater, no doubt, and you have excellent subjects here for testing the correctness of his principles, or fancies, which you please. Are you speculating on the dispositions of your young friends?'

'Simply tracing likenesses, sir. But I have read the lubrications of that amiable man. He was an acute observer and a pleasing reasoner, yet I am not prepared to admit all his conclusions. I was, however, long before I had heard of his name, a student in that science, if science it be; I found it an amusing and not an unprofitable method of spending a leisure hour and latterly I have indulged my taste in tracing the lineaments of my own family, many of which I find strikingly reproduced (if I may use the expression) in these countenances around me. Formerly, the exercise of this bent, acting perhaps on a warm fancy, threw me upon early reminiscences. Now it casts me across the Atlantic once more, and surrounds me with later, and I may be permitted to say, still dearer associations!'

'My good son,' replied the priest, 'there is a tone of melancholy perceptible in your every word, which I do not like. At present it may have its origin in fatigue, in nervous excitement, or in those softer, conjugal and parental emotions which I cannot pretend to understand. The habitual indulgence of melancholy feelings would be, however, a great crime, and were I your confessor, I should take particular good care to stir you up, and drive that prowling, lurking, insidious, and most subtle tormentor from your mind. I would keep you in constant and energetic action, and deprive him of any, even the slightest peg, on which to hang his sombre cowl.'

'Well, I believe you would be right. Your opinion perfectly coincides with that of my own confessor. I believe, indeed, I am satisfied that my safety lies in action; you should, therefore, find me an obedient penitent. But, dear me, why do these people remain congregated here—and why do they keep vociferating in so uproarious a manner?—they must surely be of very idle habits.'

'Remember, this is a holiday, cousin Edward,' replied the young priest, 'and I can vouch for their habits of industry, sobriety, and, indeed, their practice of every social virtue.'

'Never mind them, my son,' said Father O'Donovan. 'Let them stay there and enjoy themselves—you seem to have forgotten the nature of your warm-hearted, grateful, and, perhaps, I may add with truth, your volatile countrymen. I say with Father Edward, they are not habitually idlers! Indeed, he takes good care that none of them are so. But they believe themselves in the discharge of a duty just now, and would not be easily turned aside from their purpose. They are not all gathered yet, so you must expect to hear a little more from them—rely upon it; continued he, with a droll expression; 'they will not part till they have seen you, till they have a speech from you; don't be shrugging your shoulders, and, (if I must out with it) till they have expressed their gratitude for your various bounties. Ah! look there, Reverend Edward Cahill—look there!—just as it should be, holiday though it is, the school-master and school-mistress have collected their pupils, and there they come, marshalling their army of innocents—there they come, with that true, ready, national feeling, so closely allied to virtue, (in their case the very offspring of virtue) to thank their generous benefactor for the blessings they enjoy from his liberality. Listen to that shout! How quickly do the people perceive, and how justly do they appreciate the grace, and the beauty, and the holiness of that offering, whose odoriferous incense pierces the heavens, and floats to the very throne of the Eternal.—My poor, pious, kind flock.'

The old man's tears stopped his utterance, nor was there one in the room unaffected by his fervor and love. I felt, however, that I was placed in an awkward position, and somehow, as if faith had been broken with me. In a tone of remonstrance, I said:

'Reverend Father—I did not expect this. You know it was my ardent wish that my name should never be connected with these circumstances. In doing these little acts of duty, I did not desire to deprive myself of whatever merit might attach to them; impressed with the sentiments of the poet, I feel that,

'Who builds a church to God, and not to fame, Will never mark the marble with his name' and here I find all my wishes thwarted.'

'Well, my son, I believe we must plead guilty—but in crying 'peccavi,' I have some little apology to offer. At times,' said he, with an expressive smile, 'I am affected with deafness; again, I have to complain of a treacherous memory; but whatever my weakness or failings may be, I pray that I may never be cursed with an ungrateful heart. Besides, my dear, how should I have been able to teach the poor children to pray for a shadowy patron? They couldn't understand the thing. But hush, do you understand that shout? Isn't that an Irish hurra?—Hush!—another! I'll translate that one if you please; prepare the heads of your discourse, Mr. Cahill; we all know that you can do the thing nate—we have read your speeches before now. There again—they are becoming impatient; they'll take the house by storm. Go, Father Edward—pacify them as best you may;—tell them your cousin and I will be with them immediately. No remonstrance, my son, you can't get over it.'

My cousin proceeded as directed, made the welcome announcement in due form, and received for his trouble another cheer.

'Come, my children,' said Father O'Donovan, rising, 'let us all go together, and get over this affair as soon as possible. Give me your arm, my old friend, and yours, my son. I go well supported, and I shall be well received. Now, my dear, Edward, give us none of your Yankee twaddle; let us have a genuine Irish speech, warm, boiling, gushing from the heart's deepest recesses. Believe me, rude though they may appear, you have an audience that understands what true eloquence means. Come now.'

And so we proceeded. Our appearance at the door elicited three long rounds of applause, and as many 'cead mille fáiltes.' During the continuance of this vociferous expression of feeling, I had time sufficient to survey the assembly;—dressed in their holiday attire, they presented an appearance suggestive of comfort and respectability. With a ready tact, better say good taste, they had arranged themselves in circles round the steps that led to the door; the children of the female schools, with their teachers, formed the inner circle: those of the male school, headed by their master, stood next in order; after that came the elder females, and behind, in strict regularity, stood the men.

When silence had become partially restored, Father O'Donovan raised his hand.—In a moment every head was uncovered—not a sound was to be heard, but all stood waiting like obedient children, anxious to catch the words of a kind and tender father. The good old priest

felt the compliment and proceeded—

'I thank you, my dear friends, for this mark of your kindness—you are ever considerate.—You know my physical energies are sadly on the decline; my voice is now weak, and cannot fill a great compass; so if you wish to catch the meaning of the few words I have to say, you will preserve the silence which now prevails, and do, I pray you, listen to me without either remark or applause. When younger speakers address you, why then give scope to your honest feelings. My friends, to say nothing of the battles that poor Ireland has had to fight for her religion, we ourselves have had many troubles; even in this humble and retired district, persecution sought and found us out—but she found us, though a very insignificant portion, yet a perfect emblem of God's Church. She found us a united body, that bribes could not tempt, nor poverty separate. Many a time and oft have the clouds of misfortune lowered upon us, but still Divine Providence always raised some means to extricate us from the threatened danger. We have not wanted our days of rejoicing, and we rejoiced together. The day on which our chapel was consecrated, was indeed a day of holy triumph. The first feast we held in my sweet little parochial dwelling was a feast of love, and a source of gratitude and thanksgiving. The day on which our splendid schools were opened, formed an era in our history, from which a succession of blessings may be dated. Then what must this day be to you, and to me, when the Author of all Good puts it in my power to present to you his worthy and unselfish agent who has wrought for you, and me, and our successors, those great and special blessings! Yes, the unostentatious author under God, of nameless benefits, both spiritual and temporal; the humble Christian, who lets not the left hand know what the right hand doeth, who would have concealed from you for ever the name of your benefactor, had it not been for my weak old heart, and garrulous old tongue, that could not keep such a secret.'

'Small blame to your Reverence,' exclaimed a loud voice, 'such a secret isn't given under the seal of confession!'

'Be quiet, Tim Dooley,' said the priest, smiling, 'you have broken the thread of my discourse. May be I have another and a greater secret yet; but *vido hocht* is the word—so you shan't hear it at present, and that is the punishment I inflict for your interruption: I have done. Here is your benefactor; receive him as you think he merits.'

A cheer, which continued for several seconds, followed the priest's sly hint; and when silence was obtained, I said:

'My good friends your kindness to-day has put me into rather an awkward position. Little fitted for addressing a popular at any time, I feel quite incapable for the task to-day. Fatigued with a long voyage, and oppressed by tender emotions, which, in part, you may understand, but which I pray none of you may ever experience, in all the acuteness which my cruel and unnatural act of disobedience entailed upon me—'

'*Bido hocht, awick!*' exclaimed an old man. 'Our God's no tyrant; if He's offended by sin, He's pacified by penance; and you, 'no seacht n'annam asthee tu,' (seven times as dear as the soul within me—)'

'Hould your whisht, Barney Farrell,' said another, 'the gentleman'll have forgot the Irish tongue afore now, an' small blame to him for that same.'

I felt obliged for this interruption. It gave me time to recall my fluttered spirits, and to correct the bad taste which permitted me to yield to my habitual tendency to melancholy. Assuming something like gaiety, I replied:

'My old friend is right; our good God does forgive, and more readily than we seek for pardon; but you, my friend, pointing to the last speaker, 'have fallen into a mistake; I have not forgotten my mother tongue—my beautiful and most expressive vernacular—but I have added to my early knowledge, have studied it grammatically, and have read many of the best books that have been written in that language; will that please you, boys?'

'Hurra! hurra! Augh, isn't he is a darlin'—Irish in heart and soul, by the powers.'

These and similar exclamations rung out from all points for some seconds; I continued:—

'Yes, you are right; I am Irish in heart and soul. Thirty years' absence from my native land has not been able to deaden even one particle of that Irish feeling given to me at my birth nurtured into a holy flame by my admirable parents, and cherished with a fond and yearning love as my chief enjoyment in the land of the stranger.—Anxiously did I trace the fortunes of my country, and sympathise with her in all her hopes and in all her disappointments. Oh, how I gloried in the proud, unyielding faithfulness of my Celtic brethren, who loved Ireland for her tears and sufferings; but who loved her imperishable faith still better. Yes, an unwavering and generous attachment to his 'creed' is the prevail-

ing trait in the character of an Irishman; every other feeling, passion, or emotion, every temporal interest, dwindles into insignificance before the one governing principle of his mind.

'Oh, yes, all patriotic though he is, an Irishman can be induced to leave the land of his birth he can bid adieu to the scenes of his infancy, however endeared to his heart, however hallowed by early recollections, or engraven on his soul by the tenderest of human passions. In pursuit of either liberty or fortune, he could wander houseless through the wilds of America, could brave the severest toils, and with patient and undaunted spirit, could deny himself rest, food and clothing. But there is one comfort, one solace, one blessing, he cannot bear to want; he cannot want his priest. He cannot live without religion. Earth has no sufficiency for his longings. He aspires to the joy of supernatural communion, to the fellowship of saints and angels. With them he must pour out, at the blessed sacrifice, his heart's warm, deep adoration. He must have the consolation and the sustaining grace of the holy sacraments, he must be permitted to shed tears of contrition at the foot of the cross, or life has no solid charm for him. Here are the principles which tied me to my people! How could I not admire and glory in the contemplation of the magnanimous, enduring, self-denying, devoted Catholic heart of Ireland, that neither persecution, nor bribery, nor famine, nor pestilence, nor death, can turn from the path of duty; whose firm adherence to the faith of Christ is heaven's own gift, and the world's great boast; whose allegiance to the Church is unconditional, whose obedience to her ministers is the strongest principle of the heard, and the warmest sentiment of the Celtic heart!'

'Augh, where would be the use of commissioned teachers, if we didn't obey them?' exclaimed a grey-haired sire.

'And, may be, we wouldn't know how to die for the *soagath*, (priest) if there was any sharp call, rejoined a burly, stout man, with rather a determined air.

'Well my friend,' replied I, 'that is an oblation which I trust you will never be called on to make. But there is another offering greater still—more gratifying to the priest, more pleasing at the throne of grace, and which you may present every hour of your life, with full assurance of a ready acceptance; I mean the sacrifice of your own will. Do that, and you shall know peace.'

'A nate hit, an' well deserved, Jerry!' exclaimed a third; 'by the powers, Father Edward, wid all his knowledge av ye, could hardly plant it wid more skill.'

Jerry hung his head in shame, and I continued:—

'But, my friends, while my spirit revelled with delight in national manifestations, which proudly told the story of my oppressed but unshrinking country, my heart's keenest emotions, my regrets, my hopes and wishes, still hovered round the scenes of my boyhood, which a faithful memory re-painted in all the glowing colors with which my spirit in the days of my innocence had depicted them; but my soul clung to them more tenaciously, because they were further hallowed by the cherished remembrance of those whose parental feelings I had engaged, but whose loved images have never been for a single day absent from my heart.'

'*Bido hocht awick!*' interrupted my former censor, who seemed the respected patriarch of the party, 'Did't I remind you already that our God was no tyrant?'

'Augh, I wish in my soul,' said a young man, 'we had fifty thousand sinners in all respects like yourself! Would't it be a glorious sight for old Ireland! An' then what a comfortable thought that not a man of them could be lost, as they have the promise, 'Blessed are the merciful.'

'Well, said I, 'we will not discuss that point of theology just now, nor shall I at present trespass further on your patience, so—'

'Augh, wait till we complain of your taidousness,' said an old and respectable looking woman, 'and in thrath you'll wait awhile, a *hiskey!*'

'True for you, Mrs. Maguire!' chimed in another speaker; 'it was well said of you; we could listen with delight to his mother's son till the hour av midnigh, an' niver weary!'

'Well, my friends, you will please excuse me at present; I am much fatigued, and require rest; I have some weeks to remain among you yet, and I purpose being a frequent visitor to you all. Father Edward, in his leisure hours, will make me acquainted with you. Accept my best thanks for the proofs you have given me of your kind feelings; carry home with you my sincere wishes for your temporal and eternal welfare, and remember that before I quit my native shore, I promise myself the pleasure of seeing you all at a public meeting of the Farewell for the present.'

I was greeted with three cheers, and after a few words of counsel from Father Edward, the