

CARROLL O'DONOGHUE

CHRISTINE FAHRE
 Author of "A Mother's Sacrifice," etc.
 CHAPTER LXVI.—CONTINUED

The young priest repaired to one of the inner apartments to which the attendant, summoned by Dennier, conducted him. Lord Heathcote met him; not sitting, as Father O'Connor had seen him on the two previous occasions, but standing, and nervously tapping the floor with a cane.

"Mr. O'Connor," he said, speaking rapidly, "I cannot convince myself of the truth of the strange tale you have told me; reflection but makes me think that this man, Sullivan, fabricated the whole to hide his own guilt; you see there are no proofs further than Sullivan's own statement, and though he has been imperatively summoned here, there is not even a reply from him."

"Pardon me, my lord, Father Meagher is here, and he can testify to the insanity of your dead wife; he can also bear evidence to the fact that Carter came to reside in Dhrummacool with a boy in his charge who answered to the description of one of your sons."

"Pshaw!" said his lordship impatiently, "the assertions you make are not proofs—my wife having died insane is no evidence that she was not guilty, and this boy whom Carter had in his charge—who is to prove that he was my son?"

"He paused, waiting some reply, but Father O'Connor was silent."

"No," resumed his lordship, "I am not convinced; and if Carter, who is here in the castle by my order, denies the charges brought against him, I shall refuse to credit what I have heard."

"The priest ventured to say: 'Even, my lord, in the face of the evidence given by the picture about your neck?'"

"No, no; I do not mean that; this young woman whom you brought to the castle, and whom I saw, I know to be my daughter"—his voice trembled—"but I mean regarding the guilt of Marie Dougherty."

"Well, my lord," Father O'Connor said again, "if you rely for your full conviction on a confession from this man, Carter, you will be disappointed—unless some influence can be exerted which will force him to confess; otherwise, if he finds there are no important proofs against him, he will have effrontery enough to perjure himself."

"And in that case," said Lord Heathcote sharply, "in the case of his refusal to confess, and my refusal to believe, and consequently to acknowledge my offspring, would you still keep my secret—would you retain from this young woman the story of her birth?"

"In justice to her, my lord, I could not do so; she has bitterly sacrificed herself for a man whom she still believes to be her father, as you are already aware from my recent tale, and so devoted is she, that she has not ceased to be anxious about this poor wretch since her arrival in Dublin. No inducement can make her leave him, can cause her to abate any of that self-immolation which she deems to be her duty; would it be just, my lord, to permit this to continue for the sake of sparing your pride?"

"You would then tell her," said the nobleman somewhat bitterly, "that she is the daughter of an English peer?"

"Yes, my lord; but when with that information must also tell her that the English peer, refusing to credit the testimony which has been given him, refusing to obey the promptings of his own heart, believes his wife, the mother of this girl, to have been a wretched, guilty woman, how much of sweetness will be left in my announcement?"

"Ah! my lord, your daughter would rather have an heirloom of virtue than all your titles and estates."

The nobleman bit his lip, and was silent for a moment; then he said with startling abruptness: "You have not yet told me the name of the boy whom Carter had in charge, nor where he can be at present be found."

"Pardon me, my lord, I think I told you at our first interview that he was leading an obscure life among the Irish poor, with no desire save that of performing well his humble duty; he will not trouble your lordship."

"But who is he—I would know—give me his name—speak!" And the stern eyes were bent upon the priest.

"Since you would know, my lord—I am he."

And Father O'Connor stood with folded arms and bowed head. He made no motion to approach Lord Heathcote—he did not even look at him, but kept his eyes turned to the floor.

"My God! my God!" came from the white lips of the peer; still neither did he make any motion to the clergyman; he only continued to look, his gaze growing more wild and thrilling as it traversed every part of the priest's person. "If I could only fully believe," he said, gaspingly; "but it may not have been my son whom Carter had in charge; and yet my heart misgives me that it was, and the resemblance comes out now as I did not notice it before—the profile of the face, the form, are like Walter's—yes, it must be my son!"

The thrill of that heart-cry pierced Father O'Connor—with one simultaneous movement the priest and

the peer were in each other's arms.

The delay seemed long to the little party which Father O'Connor had left—all the longer because every nerve was strained with hope and expectation; and the excitement and anticipation of the two girls were increased by Dennier's unusually joyous and animated manner. Even Father Meagher had caught the extraordinary eagerness, and watched with restless longing for one of the doors of the apartment to open and admit some one who would put an end to all this suspense.

At last his wish was gratified; a door opened, and Lord Heathcote, accompanied by Father O'Connor, entered. Both bore traces of recent agitation, but the nobleman had recovered his wonted manner sufficiently to bear himself with his accustomed dignified carriage, and to throw upon all sides of him his old piercing glance; the latter, however, was tempered by a smile which softened his countenance, and imparted to it a singular charm. Dennier immediately approached him.

Introduce me to these people, Walter," he said quietly; and Dennier, with his own courtly grace now enhanced by the joy which shone so unmistakably in his manner, offered his arm to the nobleman, and conducted him first to Father Meagher. The gray-haired priest returned the kind salutation in his simple, hearty manner, and Clara was next introduced, her heightened color and animated eyes forming a pretty picture as she responded to his lordship's greeting. Nora was next, and to her Lord Heathcote said, as he extended his hand: "We have met before, and I have not forgotten, young lady, the request which you asked of me then."

His manner, even more than his words, seemed to indicate that he had given her plea some favorable reflection; her heart beat high with hope and gratitude, and she could have fallen at his feet and embraced them in the excess of her joy. Her ardent feelings were portrayed in her beautiful face, never more beautiful than at that moment when she stood directly under the rays of the chandelier, and the nobleman, as if suddenly impressed, and struggling with feelings which he could not master, continued to hold her hand and to gaze into her eyes. But he conquered himself at last, and he turned away, saying to the other of the little party:

"I thank you, good people, for obeying so promptly my mysterious summons to you all. Your presence here was necessary to help to prove the innocence of a certain party, and I have adopted this means in order to attain my end—must crave your patience a little longer, and then all shall be explained to you."

He gave a signal to Dennier; the latter left the room, but returned in a moment, and in a few seconds more—seconds that were like hours to some of the mystified and anxious party—another door opened, and Mortimer Carter was ushered in. With his very first glance of the assemblage he comprehended its purpose, and he braced himself to meet it;—throwing about him an unflinching look, he advanced to the nobleman, and with startling firmness made his obeisance.

"Look about you, Mortimer Carter," said Lord Heathcote sternly, "and meet the evidences of your guilt—acknowledge the innocence of Marie Dougherty—confess the crime which despoiled me of my wife, and stigmatized my children!"

"I know not what you mean, my lord!" and Carter drew himself up undaunted, even defiantly.

Lord Heathcote, despite his efforts to be calm, was growing strangely agitated.

"Restore to me my son, whom you abducted from his home after you had caused his mother to leave him! here is a witness—with a sweep of his hand indicating Father Meagher—who can prove where you fled to on the disappearance of my family, and also that you carried with you a boy who corresponded in age to my son."

"Which does not prove, my lord, that it *was* your son," answered Carter, "and knowing my innocence in this matter, shall not take the trouble to show that the boy you speak of is the son of one who was an intimate and dear friend of my own—a Charles O'Connor; the baptismal certificate of the boy has proven his identity long ago. I perceive that you have him present, my lord,"—and he indicated with a most brazen bow Father O'Connor.

The nobleman, to Carter's secret triumph, was evidently disconcerted; a look of bitter disappointment came into his face, but he resumed after a moment's painful silence:

"Will you deny, also, that my daughter lived in your vicinity, within your sight, from her infancy to her womanhood?"

"No, my lord, for that would be a falsehood." The same effrontery marked Carter's manner.

"And you suffered this," resumed Lord Heathcote, "without acquainting me—you knew of her whereabouts and you did not tell me?"

"I forbore to tell you, my lord, for this reason: when I arrived in Dhrummacool with the child of my friend, intending to make my home there, I found that strange accident had brought me to the very spot where Marie Dougherty's child had found a home as comfortable as that from which her

mother had taken her; but her mother was dead—had died insane, I learned, and her reputed father had disappeared for the time. Your lordship, if you remember, had already told me at our final interview that you wished never to look upon the children of her who was so deeply disgraced you; that her infamy might shroud her and hers; of what use, then, would it be for me to acquaint you with the whereabouts of your child? she was well done for, and so long as a comfortable home was assured to her, it could make little difference to her who was her father; after, when chance threw me in the presence of him who had reported himself to be her father, and I saw the miserable vagabond-beggar he had become, and I knew also, that he did not seek any longer to claim the child, pity for the unhappy creature—for I saw that he was unhappy—deterred me from endeavoring to bring him to justice—beside, no justice could restore the innocence of her whom he had caused to fall."

Lord Heathcote groaned, and passed his hand wildly across his forehead; but again he quickly recovered himself. "When, in your business of informer," he said with bitter irony, "you met and recognized me in the garb of Tralee, why did you not speak of these things?"

"Your stern manner to me, my lord, forbade it—I felt that my revelations would but further anger you, since the guilt of your wife would still remain."

"There was a taunting emphasis on the last words, Lord Heathcote flushed angrily. "After," he said, "when you became courageous enough to brave my manner"—speaking with stinging sarcasm—"and you dropped hints of the past in my presence, why did you not speak of these things then?"

"You forget, my lord; you yourself closed my lips by commanding me to stop, and to continue to bury within my own breast all that I knew of your history."

"But again," said the nobleman, "when this child, claimed herself by this wretched man, sacrificed herself for him—leaving home, friends, and all that was dearest to her,—why did you not speak then to save her?"

"Because of my desire to save you, my lord."

"It is enough!" said the nobleman, and he waved him away.

Carter, with an unflinching look about him, walked triumphantly from the room. Lord Heathcote turned to Dennier, who had not left his side, and said faintly:

"Assist me to another room—I would see you alone; and ask these people to wait a few moments."

Dennier did as he was requested, and the little party were once more left to themselves.

Clara, so widely expecting to hear favorable tidings regarding her brother, felt her heart sick with disappointment; perhaps this was all they had been summoned for—to listen to some revelation which for her had no special interest; for so far, all that she had heard had not caused her a suspicion of the truth, further than to think from the conversation which passed relative to Father O'Connor that his might be a case of mistaken identity. Neither did Nora dream that she was the daughter spoken of, and while she too was disappointed that the nobleman had not as yet made good the promise he had seemed to imply by his remark to herself, hope did not leave her, and she sought to cheer Clara by whispering her own reasons for confidence.

Father Meagher was so bewildered and so agitated by all that he had heard that he could not keep his hands behind him and his head down—his whole appearance indicating troubled thought. One by one he was linking incidents of the past; going over in minute detail the death of Marie Dougherty, every circumstance that had attended that strange and sad demise; then his thoughts reverted to the arrival of Carter in Dhrummacool—Carter having in possession a noble looking little boy,—and succeeding these reflections came others, equally as agitating, on the remarks which had passed relative to Father O'Connor; and then with still more startling anxiety, his thoughts reverted to all that had been said of the poor dead mother. He looked at Nora; could it be that she was the daughter of whom Lord Heathcote had spoken. Unable to contain himself longer, he hurried to impart his startling conjecture to Father O'Connor, who, absorbed in his own melancholy thoughts, sat with his head so deeply bowed that his chin touched his breast. He never for an instant doubted Rick's story—the earnestness, the truthfulness of the poor creature had been too unmistakable; and he grieved now, not that his father's heart, which had but just opened to him, had closed again because of Carter's miserable falsehood, but because of the sorrow which Carter's wretched lies would bring to other hearts than his own. He looked up at Father Meagher's touch, but at that moment Dennier entered.

What had occurred to so change the young man? his joyful mien had entirely disappeared, and his mouth was compressed as if from intense inward suffering.

"I would see, Father O'Connor alone for a moment," he said;

"and you, my friends, be patient a little longer."

The two withdrew into one of the adjoining rooms, and there, when the door had closed upon them, Dennier turned abruptly, and faced his companion. All the mysterious longings which on the occasion of their first meeting, six months before, had shone in his eyes, came into them now, and the singular feeling by which he had been actuated then aroused again with renewed force; but now he understood its cause. He extended his arms, and cried:

"William! I have heard the whole story, and I feel that you are my brother."

The young priest needed no second invitation to clasp to his heart one whom he had already learned to esteem and to like, and long and tender was the embrace which they united at last the twin brothers.

"And you are the son of Lord Heathcote who was taken to England in your infancy?" said the priest, when each had released the other.

"Yes," and then followed from Dennier, or rather Walter Berkeley, brief accounts of the strange events in his life. "But I cannot linger," he said abruptly, "I am only here on Lord Heathcote's bidding. He desires you, Walter, to tell the others all, but only on proviso that they pledge themselves to keep it a profound secret. He intends to have another interview tonight with Carter, the result of which will determine our fate—whether we are to be acknowledged as the children of his lordship, or whether we are to lock within our own breasts the story of our birth; should Carter confess, it will be the former; should he persist in denying, Lord Heathcote's stern pride will not allow him to acknowledge to the world that we, the offspring of such a guilty mother, are also his children. Go, William,—how sweet the name was to the ears of Father O'Connor, or rather Father Berkeley!—take them back to the hotel and tell them all this—later, I shall join you with the result of the approaching interview with Carter. Now you understand why I kept away from you; I could not trust myself in your presence, and that of Nora, without betraying myself. Tell her so, William, and tell them all—how it was my proposition to bring Carter here and confront him with you all. I suggested to Lord Heathcote that, since we were denied direct proof of the truth's guilt, perchance a sudden accusation, before the eyes of the world, might extort from him an involuntary confession; and Lord Heathcote, who had already given me his entire confidence, revealing phases of his heart which could not but excite my pity, allowed me to manage everything as I would; but so far all has failed."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE TWELVE-INCH RULER

By Isabelle E. Keeler in Rosary Magazine

The outer office of V. J. Mackey was astir with the activities of a thriving lumber concern in a mid-western city of promise. Typewriters clicked to the accompaniment of flying fingers while the group of patient clients scattered about the room felt themselves fascinated by the swift action of those expert fingers. Occasionally their eyes would wander to the magic door which bore the sign that urged them duly in abeyance—

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Behind that door sat "the Boss" in deep absorption, studying maps of the lumber regions near his camps in Wisconsin. For weeks he had done little else, for the forest fires this year had taken a heavy toll of his timber, perhaps the heaviest he was on the alert to further schemes for the protection of the mills and camps that were the source of his mounting millions.

The height of his money pile interested Vincent Joseph Mackey far more than any other one phase of his narrow, well-cared-for, bachelor existence, and to know that the undaunted forces of nature were attacking his property, damaging his interests in spite of all his puny efforts to safeguard his camps from the fire-demons was, to the financier, mental anguish. His stenographer laid a stack of neatly typed letters by his side and then withdrew to the mirrored recess at the further end of the room and quietly began his preparations for departure. Disturbed on the surface, by her actions, the lumber king's mind leaped from maps to letters that must have his weighty signature before they would produce any results. Impatiently he glanced over the array and, coming upon one which began, "Dear Mr. Father," he paused to read it more carefully than he had the others. With an angry motion he turned in his revolving chair and glared at the back of pretty Miss Donovan who was just in the act of perching her hat at a becoming angle atop her auburn curls. His rage was at white heat but it cooled a little before he could summon the words to his lips fully to express his ire.

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