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FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

And Father Connell's *sermon* almost ended. True, he topped the delight of all his juvenile guests by giving them each a silver sixpence, as a Christmas-box; and cordially gratified and made important in their own estimation, the seniors of "the choir" by very often shaking hands with them at parting, whilst every one received with bent heads and knees, their old pastor's blessing. But with little Neddy Fennell he lingered at his humble postern door when they were quite alone; again put his arms round him, again kissed him, while Neddy thought he felt a warm tear drop on his sunny cheek; and again, and again, besought him to promise to be good, sighs of apprehensive doubt for the future—as we know them to have been—now and then interrupted the voice of the monitor.

And since our hero, Father Connell, has now proved himself so interested about the present and future welfare of Neddy Fennell, we may be allowed to give one back chapter, to the past situation of little Neddy, embracing, necessarily, incidents concerning his father and mother, which we believe will not be found uninteresting.

CHAPTER III.

Neddy Fennell's father, Atty. or Arthur Fennell, had been a glover in the only respectable street of the town, forming the city portion of Father Connell's extensive country parish. Atty, in his early youth, was a comely looking lad, single-hearted, single-minded, yet wise and prudent; trustworthy, industrious, and skillful in his trade; sincerely punctual in his religious duties, and for all the reasons suggested by this short description of him, respected and esteemed by his master, "Simon Bergin, the glover."

When Arthur was about seventeen, the only child of his master and mistress became apprenticed to a mantuamaker—for, although her parents were well to do in the world, and loved to excess their beautiful little pet, they would not bring her up in idleness. And indeed little Fanny Bergin deserved her father and mother's love, as such an account of her rare beauty, as for her sweet disposition, shown in her constant soft smile, her gentle fairy voice, her obedience, and her general feminineness of character.

Fanny spent the day in the house of the person to whom she was apprenticed, returning, however, to her father's roof for the night. To guard her against all imaginable mishaps, whether from rude people, or from rude weather, Simon and Mrs. Bergin deemed that a competent escort was quite necessary on her return home in the evenings. To this office they appointed Atty Fennell, thus it would seem giving him beforehand a kind of intimation of a fuller confidence, as regarded their darling and only child, to be hereafter placed in him. Atty well discharged his task. He would whisk with his cudgel—that cudgel which was ready to encounter a giant in her defence—the very straws from her path, in fine weather; and, if it rained, his instructions entided him to bear Fanny home in his arms;—so that on wet and dark evenings, he used to enter, with his light burden, into the little parlor, where her father and mother sat to the fire, his lantern swinging from the middle finger of his left hand, and the ostentatious cudgel tucked under his right arm.

Time rolled on, and it is needless to say how all this ended. Every one will guess that in a few years after Arthur was out of his apprenticeship, and Fanny also unshackled from the bonds of her professional mistress, they were, after having been a long while before very sincerely in love with each other, married, to their own hearts' content, as also to the full gratification even of the parents of the almost over-cared-for little bride; as to the bridegroom's father and mother, no consent could have been asked of them, for they were dead, having left, however, in the hands of a careful trustee, a sum locally sufficient, and indeed considerable, to enable Atty to engage, when out of his apprenticeship, in any enterprise on his own account, with a befitting show of independence—a circumstance, by the way, which, highly and deservedly as Mr. and Mrs. Bergin valued the plain, honest, though rather simple character of Arthur, might have much assisted their final resolves for surrendering into his future protection the welfare and happiness of their little Fanny, with all her soft smiles, gentleness, clinging and dependent affection, and yet nearly weakness of disposition. Besides, their idol was not absolutely to be separated from them. Arthur Fennell and she were to continue to abide under their paternal roof; and thus, four people who loved each other better than they loved all the world besides, would for many a long year form a delightful family circle—with perhaps the addition, in a few of those many happy years, of some little strangers, whose feelings would soon be interwoven into its web of domestic felicity.

So, the sun of hope, the brightest and the most unclouded sun that ever shone, or ever can shine on mortal creatures, blazed in absolute brilliancy upon the coming nuptials of poor Atty and his dear little Fanny Bergin. Yet, alas, big a liar as hope is, she never told bigger lies in all her life—that is to say, since the beginning of the world, with which, we do think she was born, purely for the purpose of keeping it delusively twirling on—the old gratuitous cheat, never, we repeat, told a bigger lie than on the occasion of which we now speak. Her lies were not to be sure immediately found out; for years and years she "lied like truth,"—small praise to her, experienced practitioner in her art as she is; and—but let us not anticipate in this unskillful fashion.

Without a cloud, or the speck of one, in the sky of their seeming future lot, Atty and Fanny prepared for their marriage day; pure hearts, primitive minds, rational calculations, perfect love, and if it be possible to say so of human beings in such a state of ecstatic anticipation, religious duties, above all other observances, presiding over their arrangements. Atty, in particular, was swayed on the momentous occasion by his former pious habits. Regarding marriage as a sacrament, and a most solemn one, he disciplined himself fitly to receive it, by previously approaching other sacraments of his church; those, namely, of Penance and of the Eucharist. And if ever a man entered into the married state with devoted love for his wife, and at the same time with a holy sense of the sin of even slightly infringing upon the vow of fidelity to be pledged to her at the altar, that man was Arthur Fennell.

He was married. For about two years the juggling prophet, we have rather bitterly spoken of, proved true; all was indeed happiness in the united families; but now came Hope's lie the first. Old Simon Bergin died suddenly; his terrified and pining wife soon followed him to the grave; and thus ended the treacherous promise held out to them of the "many happy, happy long years" they were to enjoy with their children and with their children's children. Again, however, so far as regarded Arthur, every thing appeared perfectly to brighten up. His industry gained him great success in his trade; that success some little wealth of course, so that he grew into a respected citizen; and, unfortunately for his poor wife and only child, he at length deemed himself called on, that he might be enabled to supply the increasing demands made upon his shop to engage a confidential journeyman, who was also to have considerable control over his accounts and receipts. A confidential journeyman!—a tall, spare-limbed, thin-lipped, solemn-faced, smooth-tongued hypocrite;—a canting, precise, cruel scoundrel and robber. Arthur, however, did not know this—out of his very nature could not know it; in his own estimation, therefore, he was growing richer and richer every day; and over all his worldly thriving and enjoyment, the star of love still and still twinkled brilliantly on; indeed, as a little instance of the undiminished affection existing now for a considerable period between him and his ever-endearing Fanny, poor Arthur would often send for her, in the midst of his daily industry, to come a moment to speak with him; and when she had obeyed his summons, all he had to say was, "I only wanted to look at you, my darling;" and when, after mildly answering the fond glance of his eyes, Fanny withdrew, he would re-engage, with redoubled vigor, in his more important occupations.

Arthur became—and Hope's lie the second, and the most tremendous one of all she had ever uttered, at least to our unsuspecting friend, is now to be exposed—Arthur became a member of "the Charitable Society" of his native city. This was an association composed of the respectable portion of the middle classes of his fellow-townsmen, and established for the weekly relief of poor bed-ridden objects. To be elected a member of it, when three black beams could have excluded him, was a flattering proof of the rising estimation in which he was held; and Fanny and he often gloried over the circumstance in their fireside commentaries together; and they for some time wondered, and wondered upon what evening he might expect, according to the observances of the society, to be summoned as president at one of its weekly sittings. That proud evening came at last; and, after kissing his little wife again and again, Arthur Fennell issued forth, dressed in his best, to assume his new dignity.

He took the chair; the business of the evening was precisely and soberly gone through;—the solemn little secretary closed his books;—and neighborly enjoyment and good-fellowship became the order of the now merely social meeting. Hot tumblers of punch stood at the right hand of each member, and were now and then replenished; and the new president, although previously almost a "tee-totaler," conceived himself called upon to patronize the usages of those around him. And jests, and good things, were cracked and uttered on every side, and anon certain marked individuals were enjoined into repeating oft-repeated, and often laughed at egotistical stories; in listening to which, though not half comprehending the sup-

pressed ridicule chuckling in the breasts of the general company towards the narrators, Arthur Fennell laughed more vigorously than any one present.

For the secretary, a round little bundle of a man, wanting three inches of five feet, and a schoolmaster to boot, was decoyed into a description, which the wags of the society induced him to give, almost weekly, of several desperate naval engagements, in which he had performed wonders of valor. "Myself and another able-bodied seaman," he would very often say, "did so and so, or were engaged in such and such an achievement;" at which, glancing at the "ableness" of his body, or else commenting upon the small bravado style in which he delivered the history of his exploits, the clever ones winked in keen enjoyment upon each other. In fact, the mendacious little man had to their knowledge, never been to sea at all.

Another celebrated exaggerator, a shopkeeper, in "the main street," having once, upon a great urgency, absolutely journeyed to London, detailed in a very peculiar way some of the marvels he had there witnessed. Amongst other things, he was now coaxed into a repetition of his famous account of the manners of the buffalo, seen at a menagerie. After describing on a gigantic scale, the bodily proportions of this animal, he would proceed to imitate, fully to his own satisfaction, its various cries and howlings; and—having been purposely placed by the side of some very young member of the club—and therein lay the cream of the jest—he would finally illustrate some of the buffalo's actions, by suddenly seizing by the collar, with both his hands, his astounded neighbor, and butting with such ferocity into the breast and stomach of the man, while he still bellowed quite terrifically, that shouts of applause and laughter convulsed his audience.

There was a naturalist, too, who gave a minute account of how barnacles are engendered, out of pieces of old ship timber, found floating in the sea, to the sides of which any curious observer might find them clinging in myriads; and another close inspector of wonders, who insisted that the sheet-lead used by plumbers, was manufactured out of a "certain" kind of sand; and, in fact, many and many were the miraculous things which, intoxicated with the important novelty of his situation, as well as with a too frequent, though almost unconscious use of another stimulant, Arthur Fennell enjoyed, and sat out; until finally even the most inured "good fellows" of the society began to prepare for going home, and as he tried demurely to wish them good-night, and pass with a would-be-staid step out of the room, they did not fail to remark, still for their own amusement, how flushed was the face, how meaningless the eye, how thick the utterance, and how drunken were the limbs, of the hitherto most particular sober, and prudent, and respectable glover.

Although the club had dissolved at its very latest usual hour, it was still not late in the night, in fact, not eleven o'clock—and the night was a very beautiful one too. The moon shone bright and clear over one half of the streets, while it threw over the other half a broad shadow, terminating at its edges in grotesque and exaggerated likenesses of jutting roofs, gables, and old and new-fashioned chimneys and chimney tops. No shop was open, and scarcely a light to be seen in the windows even of private aristocratic houses of the little city; and not a human sound broke the stillness of the scene; for even at this early hour scarce a creature appeared abroad. But though human sounds were absent you could catch a few others; the fitting of the bat by your ears, the sharp bark of some stray or unhouse-dog, the crisp chirping of crickets, as you passed close by a baker's shop-door; with above all the rush and fall of the river, near at hand, over its weirs.

When Arthur Fennell, emerging from the lane in which were held the sittings of his club, gained the main street, it was, however, soon filled with human sounds, indeed—those, namely, of his own loud laughter, as, with his hat rakishly to one side of his hot head, he now staggered along, quite abandoning, in the confirmed intoxication caused by the open air, his late attempts to look sober, control his swollen tongue, and walk properly. "And oh!" he would cry—"Oh, that able-bodied slyman! and Nick Magrath, the buffalo man!" and he clapped his hands in very rapture, and still laughed out in roars. Turning the wrong way for going home, he arrived at the shambles of the town, before which stood some huge chopping-blocks, mounted on very long legs, and clambering up on one of these, he set his arms akimbo, and danced heartily upon it to his own whistling. Suddenly, however, he recollected that he really was not on the true road homewards; and so he clambered down from the chopping-block, and gained the street again; and now his drunkenness changed into another mode. And thereupon Arthur became observantly and slyly drunk. The bright, quiet, moonlight, and the quaint terminations of the shadows produced by it, were noticed; and though he felt half inclined again to laugh out at the fantastic shapes assumed by the edges of the latter, as they seemed to dance and intermingle before his eyes, still he was able to sup-

press the now unseemly impulse, and indulged on the whole in a grave contemplation of the wonders of nature and of art.

He arrived at the market-house or tholsel, and struck by its little pillars and arches, sat down a short time before it, fully to gratify his architectural tastes; and—"Yes," he cried, in his locally patriotic enthusiasm—"Yes, let them look at that!—they may talk of their Dublins, and their Londons, and their old Romes, and other foreign places—but let them look at that, I say—there it's for them—(hiccup)—there it's for them, before their eyes, to look at for a pattern—(hiccup)—!"

He arose from his sitting posture on the cold stones, and wending still homewards, gained the middle of the bridge, beyond which he had to proceed but a few yards to his own door. Here, in the moonlight views up and down the banks of the crystal stream, which the bridge spanned, Arthur had, indeed, subject for observation of the beautiful in nature; and though but vaguely responding to its calls upon his notice, he yet stopped short to admire and mutter his admiration to himself. The unusual novelty of footsteps sounding through the silence around him, startled our friend, and he looked backward and forward; two women approached him, advancing from the centre of the town in the direction he had himself come.

Drunk as he was, Arthur immediately recognised these persons. They were sisters, living in his own street; the elder a widow, who even during the lifetime of her husband, had, perhaps, more than indicated to Arthur, though to his utter disgust, approval of his well-proportioned figure and handsome face; and she had not been otherwise a woman of interesting character. But, upon this unfortunate night, Arthur forgot everything unpleasant in her past life, only recollecting, for the first time, with vanity, her former flattering attentions to him.

So, when the ladies stopped in a neighborly way, to bid him good-night, Arthur politely returned their salutation. They mentioned that they had been to a very pleasant evening party in the town, which was the cause of their being out so late. Arthur answered with a description of the happy evening he had himself passed, at the Charitable Society; and accounts of the respect shown to him there, and of the able-bodied seamen, and of the buffalo man, and then of the beautiful pillars and arches of the Tholsel, followed; and next came his reasons for suddenly stopping on the bridge, as he mentioned up and down the river, speaking fast and thick; at which his neighbor, the widow, replied in a poetical vein, her hand resting on his arm, and Arthur admiring that hand, and then its owner's face, in the moonlight, thought and said, that both were very handsome;—and finally, at the lady's pressing invitation, he agreed to see her home to her door; and when they arrived at it, Arthur further agreed to step in and take a little bit of supper—a proposition to which his drunken stomach immediately yeasted.

About four hours afterwards, he was rushing from that house, out of a fevered and hideous sleep! He ran wildly and still staggering, though now not with intoxication, up and down his peaceful little street. His hands and his teeth were clenched, and his lips apart and frothy; his eyes distended, bloodshot, and fixed, and all his other features haggard and rigid. His dress was disordered too, and he was bare-headed, and he often fell on his knees, groaning miserably, tossing his hands, and beating his breast. In fact, the heavy throes of remorse, shame, and despair, were upon him; consciousness of un pardonable sin, of a breach of his marriage vow, and towards his own beloved, fond, and chaste-hearted wife.—"Never, never can I again raise my face to her face," he resolved in his own heart and mind, "no, nor to the face of any human creature—I am a lost man—and something here," again striking his breast, "tells me that the life will not stay long in me, to be shameful to any one."

Becoming in the wretched quietness of despair a little calmer, he walked to his own door, stealthily looking to either side, and before him, to ascertain if any chance passenger might be at hand to observe him; but he was still alone. He stood at the door, and raised his hand to its knocker, but turned from it again. Over and over, he came back, and over and over walked away from that hitherto happy threshold. At length, now very feeble, and with a deadly heart-beat, and leaning against the walls of the houses for support as he came along, Arthur dared to knock; but so weakly, that those within could not have heard him. After a horrible pause he ventured to repeat the summons.

He heard a footstep inside, and bent down his head upon his outspread hands. The door opened, and his wife's old aunt appeared, holding a light. After one look at him, she started back. He staggered in, and without a word sank exhausted in a little parlor to one of the entrance passage. The old woman followed him, greatly terrified.

"The Lord preserve us, Atty, my darlings," she began, "what's the meaning of all this? and what has happened you? Why, your

very lips are as white as paper, and there is something like death in your face."

"Is there, aunt?—death!—I'm glad of that—and glad that you can see it so soon." He spoke hoarsely, and in gasps, while his hand was held tightly over his chest. "And there ought to be death in my face."

"The Lord be good to us! tell me, Atty, what has come over you?"

"Is—is Fanny—is my—is she in bed?" he asked.

"Och, yes, Arthur; in bed these four hours, and more; she was complaining a little, and I persuaded her to lie down."

"About four hours ago," he repeated, and a low shuddering moan escaped him. "Aunt Mary, will you make up the little bed in the back-garret for me? for I won't lie down, this night, or this morning rather, in any other bed—no, nor any other night, nor any other morning."

"Arthur Fennell! tell me, I bid you—as Fanny's nearest living relation, I bid you tell me all."

"Listen then," and in a hoarse, croaking whisper, he did tell her all; adding—

"And so, Aunt Mary, you now see that I can never again lay down my head on my pillow in my good wife's bed;—no, nor ever kiss her lips;—no, nor ever put shame even on her little hand, by taking it in mine, no;—I am a traitor to her and to my God; and the only thing I can hope to do, before the death, you saw in my face, relieves me, is to try and pray to Him to have mercy upon my sinful, sinful soul."

His old confidant heard the poor fellow's admissions at first, certainly in anger, but quickly after in full compassion. She stared at him, and the expression of his face, manner, and actions seemed ominously to confirm his heart-uttered forebodings of death. She trembled and wept profusely, and at length said—

"No, my poor Arthur, no; you must not quit your own old bed; you are very sorry for what has happened; and it is your first falling off; and the God you ask forgiveness of, will forgive you; and Fanny will forgive you too, and you are very ill; so come up with me, I say."

"Indeed, and I am sick, dear aunt, and want to lie down in a bed, but not in the bed you speak of; no, never, never; and as you may be, think it a trouble to make up that little garret bed for me, I will try and make it up for myself."

He half arose from the floor.

"Stop, Atty, dear—the garret is damp, and the bed is damp, and you will do yourself harm."

"Too good, too good, for one like me; give me the light, aunt." He scrambled up to his feet.

The old woman was obliged to follow him with the candle, still weeping and shaking.—At the bottom of the little stairs he slid of his shoes; and crept upwards, and particularly by the door of his wife's bed-room, with the caution of a thief. The garret bed was arranged for him, and he wearily fell into it, hiding his face and head in its covering.

The afflicted attendant withdrew, with still streaming eyes, to her own place of rest, not able to make up her mind, at such an hour, to awaken her niece, and tell her what had happened. Fanny, about to get up, at her usual morning time, missed her husband, and perceived that he had not the previous night been in bed. Greatly alarmed, she quickly sought an explanation from her aunt. Still, all the poor old creature could face herself to say, was, that Arthur, on his late return home, had found himself ill, and lain down in the garret bed.

Fanny flew up stairs. His head was still hidden under the bed-covering. She spoke to him, and was answered only by broken-hearted moans. She gently withdrew the covering. She saw his collapsed, and indeed death-stricken feature. His white lips moved rapidly, but his sunken eyes were closed hard—he dared not, fulfilling his fearful foreboding, look at her. She peered closer, and there was blood about his mouth, and large blotches of it stained the sheets. She screamed, and threw herself by his side, beseeching him to say what ailed him, and offering every endearment of affection, which, to her astonishment, were all refused; and then he muttered a few words: "No, no, no, my own darling—do not touch me—do not come near me—do not speak to me—I do not deserve it—but go down stairs and say to Aunt Mary that I bid her tell you everything that I told her."

His wife soon acquired the necessary information; again ran up to his bedside, "And is that all?" she said, smiling and crying together, "is that all, to make you turn your face from your wife and your God, and lie down to die in this unwholesome garret? Arthur, it was not your fault—it was not your fault, Arthur dear! you were not master of yourself—and you were tempted, Arthur—come, look up at me, Arthur—I forgive you from my heart—this very instant I forgive you—only look up and smile, Arthur!"

But he only could answer, "I cannot, Fanny; I have sinned terribly against God and