

The True Witness,

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPT. 22, 1871.

NO. 6.

FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

Tom Naddy began to doze. The sound of a latch-key turning in the door of the house, fully restored him to his powers of observation. It was either Father Connell or Mrs. Molloy who was about to enter. If Mrs. Molloy he did not care very much; if his master, he did fear a remonstrance against sloth and idleness, accompanied perhaps by some hard pulling at his ears; so without absolutely disturbing himself, he prudently bent his faculties of hearing, to interpret to his own mind the sound of the footstep which must follow the other sound he had just heard. Be it remarked, that Mrs. Molloy had, as well as Father Connell, a latch-key to the house-door.

In one instant he became convinced that it was the priest who had come in; upon which discovery Tom Naddy had no resource but to cringe himself up along with his cat, into the corner of the hob he occupied, that fortunately being the one thrown into deep shadow by the side of the chimney opposed to the small taper on Mrs. Molloy's kitchen-table. The priest crept on tiptoe into Tom's presence, and for the reasons given, as well indeed as because his mind's eye had prepared itself for discerning solely the figure of his housekeeper, his "boy" remained quite unnoticed by him. But that boy did not, therefore, continue ignorant of Father Connell's larceny in Mrs. Molloy's bedroom.

Before going farther, there is a slight reason why you should be loosely sketched, Tom Naddy. You were, at this time, about sixteen or seventeen, though no one could venture to say as much by looking at you. You were very significantly described, by your homely neighbors, as a "hard-grown brat;" short for your years, and not making up in bulk what you wanted in height. You had a jaedaw-colored eye, of which it was not easy to define the expression. It did not, we hope, mean dishonesty; for according to Lavater's rule, you looked straight into one's face; yet there was something in your glance, which made the philosophical observer curious to find out what that something was. Again, according to the sage mentioned, your nose had no hypocritical droop in it, but was on the contrary—a goodly broad snub; and a further and a greater puzzle about you was, that nobody could ever say, whether it was a smile or a grin, which always played around your fleshless lips. And moreover, Tom Naddy, there appeared no boyishness about you. To be sure you had a certain easy slowness in your whole manner; not *laziness*, as your poor master would have called it, but a peculiar self-possession, often broken up by an unexpected briskness; and you were not a person of many words, although you whistled a great deal—not, however, it is conjectured, for want of thought; because your queer face never looked vacant; and even while seemingly given up, mind and soul, to produce the full pathos of "Molly Asthore," there used to be occasionally an abstract meaning in your eye, foreign from your harmony, and you would wink, or grin, or smile, or wag your white-haired head, in the very middle of the tune.

So, no sooner had Father Connell ascended to his own bedroom, than Tom Naddy, starting into one of his unusual instants of energy, very unceremoniously removed puss from his lap, darted through the open doorway of the house, and through that of the little yard also, and almost the next minute was shouldering into the cabin where he guessed Mrs. Molloy to be stationed, his assumption of briskness being, however, now forgotten; just as suddenly as it had seized upon him, while he moved very leisurely, and whistled slowly and beautifully.

When he confronted her, Mrs. Molloy paused in the midst of a holding forth, her hand suspended in mid air, and her tongue, for a novelty, between her open lips.

"Didn't I have you, well latched in, to mind the house?" she asked in stern astonishment.

"There's some latch-keys that opens what other latch-keys shots in," answered Tom.

"What's that you say?"

"Fhu!" (shivering) "it's a cowl'd bitter night to sleep widout blankets," was Tom's far-off answer, and he resumed his interrupted whistling.

"Didn't you hear me, Tom Naddy?—didn't I have you in charge of the place?"

"Yes ma—ma'am; but mostha, I couldn't stop his hand, if 'twas his liking to schrip the house from the kitchen to the tatch on the roof in it, what I b'lieve he'll do afore he laves off."

"It's the masher at his work agin, neighbors," cried Mrs. Molloy, starting up and seizing her cloak, "jist as I was telling you! He won't lave himself, poor fool iv a man, a blanket to cover his bed—no, nor a shirt to cover his ould skin! I'll tell ye something he done that-o-way, for the hundredth time, a little while ago—"

Tom Naddy deemed that she was staying too long from home, and interrupted her—"there's other blankets in the house as well as his own, and other things like shirts, too."

She started back, asking in her guttural tones, with utter surprise—"Is it my blankets, or any of my things you'd spake of?"

Tom broke up his whistling only with a sedate nod of assent.

Mrs. Molloy bounded, as well as she could, out of the cabin. She encountered Father Connell and Neddy Fennell in the middle of the yard, each heavily laden, and just about to escape with their spoil. She whisked the tails of her cloak over each arm, thus having her hands at liberty to stretch themselves out, while her voice croaked more than usual, and the beard on her two chins might be said to stir and bristle.

"Well to be sure! Isn't this a poor case! I'm down-right ashamed o' you, sir! It's a burning scandal, sir—an' will you never give up these doings?—an' I'll not stand this, sir—an' I'll not put up with it, sir—an' I'll have you to know that I won't, sir!"

Father Connell, thus detected, after all his precautions, only smiled inwardly, however, as he said in a temporising voice, "Peggy, Peggy, anger is a deadly sin!"

"An' what kind of a sin do you call thievin', sir? Yes, thievin'—I can call it by no other name, sir."

"Let me pass out, good woman," said the priest sternly, although he was now more disposed to laugh heartily; "and be patient, Peggy, be patient."

"Patient, in troth! patient! I can't be patient—and to ould Nick I pitch patience!—Look at that big hape undther your arm—my own things rowled up along wid yours!—patient! why, if a holy saint was sent o' purpose down to keep house for you, and to look after herself and yourself, you'd torment the very life and soul out iv her in a week, so you would; here I am, from Sunday morning to Saturday night, striving, an' scraping, an' piecing, an' patching, for the two or us—an' all to no purpose—no, but worse an' worse for all I can do; an' now to make up the matter, you come ov sich an evening as this, and ov sich a night as this will be, to make me an' you get our death o' cowl'd in our beds."

"There is no fear of that, Peggy; we can still manage to rest comfortably for one short night, in a good, warm house; but I must go with these things to the help of two poor, naked women, who might really perish before morning on the damp earth, and without covering of any kind; so you had better let us go on our way peaceably, Peggy."

Mrs. Molloy darted quickly at Neddy Fennell, making a grasp at his burden, as she vociferated—"go on your way!—the long and the short ov it is, since you put me to it, there is no blanket to lave this to-night—no, nor the thread ov a blanket."

Her master now became really severe and determined. He removed her arm from the boy's fardel, put her to one side, and saying, "Be silent, my good woman, be silent, and stand out of my way;—more than once since you came in here, you have uttered sin with your lips, and offended me—of that we will speak another time;—now, go out of my way, I say—I command you;—come, Neddy Fennell, come;" and without further opposition from Mrs. Molloy, who became perfectly stumped at this sudden and most unexpected annihilation of her authority—the priest and his follower cleared the premises.

A moment after their departure, Tom Naddy lounged to her side from the corner of an end wall of the stable, round which all along he had been listening and peeping; and while Mrs. Molloy still stood silent and utterly confounded, remarked—"Ho! ho!—so, the priest is to do whatever he likes in the house for the future."

"Get out, you kiln-dried brat!" was the housekeeper's only reply, as she stamped, in much dignity, into her kitchen; while on his part Tom only sauntered after her, and resumed his place and his cat upon the hob.

Father Connell, closely followed by Neddy Fennell, bent his steps, by the least observable route, back again to the shower of houses. On his way thither, however, he stopped at more than one suburb shop to purchase, with the shillings he had almost thieved from his own curious escrutoire, additional articles of comfort for the Widow Fennell and her aged aunt.

He has been observed re-entering the abode of the potato-beggars. A moment after, the two poor, shivering, half-dead women in the inner dungeon, saw, with feelings and sensations which only those who for a long time have been very, very poor, and neglected, can at all understand, the unloading from the shoulders, and the arms, and the hands of the old man and the boy, the nice, clean, fresh straw, the gracious roll of blankets, a basketful of bread, a little crock of salt butter, a whole pound of halfpenny candles, and two or three black bottles, with old corks in them, containing huxter's ale and porter.

Standing quite erect, a disencumbered man, after getting rid of his burdens, Father Connell passed a moment, to wipe his brow with his handkerchief; then silently went to the miserable couches of the two forlorn sufferers; squeezed their hands in turn, and passed into the comparatively aristocratic abode of Nelly Carty and Bridget Mulrooney; and just after

doing so, he thought he caught whisperings between Mrs. Fennell and her young son, as if in explanation of what had come about, and almost immediately following, sounds of suppressed crying, though not in unhappy cadence.

No matter how our hero, Father Connell, arranged with the two good ladies of the mansion, they quickly went in to their lodgers, to all appearance most benevolently, and, of course, fassily active. The priest sat down before their impudent little fire, calling Neddy Fennell to him. The little lad slowly though immediately obeyed his old friend's summons, reclining on the floor, and gently leaning the side of his head upon one of the priest's knees. He did not speak a word, but knowing that he was weeping plentifully in his silence, his patron just slid down his hand, fumbled for one of Neddy's, and squeezed it.

The pair rose up, as the two potato-beggars approached the fire, each with one of their poor inmates, carried like weak, burthenless infants, in her arms; and, be it added, both the hitherto destitute women well wrapped up in blankets, with intimations here and there about their necks of inside personal comforters, previously the property of Mrs. Molloy.

Father Connell then went back to their bedroom—with Neddy's help bore out portions of the bread and butter and a bottle of the small porter; mull'd some of the latter with his own hands, and leaving his proteges to enjoy so far, under the still bustling attentions of their landladies, unwonted luxuries, again took Neddy into the inner chamber, which he and his young assistant did not quit until they had heaped, breast high, their stolen straw into two palmy couches, and scientifically pressed each down, and covered each with a yet unappropriated blanket, torn asunder by them according to their best skill. In fact, that blessed night, our old fairy friend, poor little Fanny Fennell, and her infirm old aunt, went to sleep, the first time for many months, in downy comfort, and with a happy sense of animal warmth and refreshment, and a still, still happier moral sense of yet having a single friend left to them in the wide, cold world. Before they quite closed their eyes, as they laughed and cried at one and the same time, how often did their prayers and their blessings ascend, not unheard, we do reverently hope, to the foot-stool of The Throne, for the earthly and eternal welfare of their simple-hearted, unostentatious, humble Samaritan!

It was still necessary, for the second time this evening, that Neddy Fennell should guide his priest through the mazes of the shower of houses. They arrived at the spot where they were finally to part for the night. The priest here stopped for an instant to bid Neddy good-night, and give him his blessing. As he was turning homewards, the boy spoke in low, broken accents:—

"Wait a minute, sir, if you please—I want to say a word to you. It may be on your mind, sir, from the way that I helped you, and spoke to you, this evening, in the stable, with other things, that I'm a cold-hearted boy, with no thought or feeling in me, for my mother's and my aunt's distress, and for your kindness; but indeed I'm not, sir;—I'm not that, sir, indeed;—I—I—"

And here the giddy-pated little fellow could get no further, but breaking out into sobbing and crying, turned his back on the priest, and ran home as fast as he could. In a very short time afterwards, Father Connell, and Mrs. Molloy, and Tom Naddy, were as good friends as ever they had been in their lives. The housekeeper placed before him the little measure of ale, with a foaming head on it, which he emptied every night before he got to bed, and which, with a crust to eke it out, was his beau-ideal of luxurious indulgence. A good fire, renewed by cinders, heated his outstretched limbs, and glittered in the large silver buckles of his shoes. To his left hand was his allowance of ale; to his right, pen and ink; and while he sipped his beverage, and munched his crust, we may transcribe—peeping over his shoulders, as well as the protuberance of the great wig above his ears will allow—the following entries, made by him in a curiously-covered book, which he called his journal, and, in which, for very many years, he had made some daily notes.

"I got up at three o'clock this morning to say my usual matins: it threatened to be a bitter day, and a bitter day it has been. I went to bed at four, and slept very well until seven; attended the chapel at eight: the snow was pelting in my face. God help the poor! Will the disbeliever persuade the poor man that there is no heaven?—he would then make the lot of the poor man a hard one indeed. Those who sleep on beds of the softest down, and need but to wish for everything in order to have it, are they as good Christians as the Widow Fennell and her aunt have been? God bless the good friends whose bounty enabled me to put warm clothing on so many naked children and boys this day. Mick Dempsey would cover the shivering body of only a good boy—Mick does not remember that the blast is as bitter to the bad boy as to the good boy; and that the Lord does not send the sunshine to the good only. It is not wise to drive even the most wicked to despair; it they have no hope of be-

ing better they will not try to be so; and Mick Dempsey was not right when he gave me to understand that I was encouraging idleness. I humbly hope that I was doing something that may help to change it into industry. Neglected my middle of the day prayers. *Misere mei Domine!* Our prayers should never be overlooked, especially by a priest; a priest is bound to give good example; he cannot hope to do this without grace; and grace is chiefly to be obtained by prayer. Reprehended Peggy Molloy for her tongue and bad language—not too severely, I think—and she seems the better of it; she is faithful and honest; a faithful and honest servant is a treasure; but Peggy must be taught not to fall into a passion; violent anger is like drunkenness—for the drunken and the angry man both forget their wisdom; almost as many crimes spring from the one as from the other. The first fair day I have I must beg all through the town, and then in the country, for the Widow Fennell, her poor aunt, and young Neddy. God help them all. I love that little boy in my very heart, and with God's help will be an earthly father to him." And so ended our priest's entries in his journal for one day.

CHAPTER IX.

Active charity, like all other active things, when once put into motion, soon gains its goal. Father Connell had been saying and doing, and going backwards and forwards a good deal, to say nothing of contriving and suffering a good deal, since he first left his school-house for the shower of houses this evening; and yet though all his contemplated work is now over, and he is luxuriantly preparing for bed at home, it is still early in the night. Neddy Fennell arrived at the door of his lodgings, after his final parting with his priest, while the nine o'clock bell—the curfew—or, as it was locally and elegantly termed, the "blackguards' bell" rang out a quick peal from the curious wooden structure, very like an opera glass pulled out—surmounting the market-house of his native city.

His knock and request for re-admission were soon attended to, his small boy's voice outside being sufficient warrant to his landladies, of his identity. Passing into their house, a glance towards the fire showed him that the honest dames had contrived, during his short absence, to replace, as originally arranged, all the materials for their feast, which Father Connell's unexpected return caused them to push aside here and there and hide as well as they could, and the cook for the evening had the "tay" again nearly hot enough.

Without making further observations, however, the boy passed into the apartment occupied by his mother and her aunt, to observe how they were disposed of for the night. Under the influence of all the comforts they had just experienced, the poor women already began to doze. One of his mother's hands hung by the side of her couch. He went on his knees and gently stole it back again—but not before his lips had touched it—under the blankets; and then, bestowing a little thought on himself, Neddy took a goodly lump of bread from the basket on the floor; at the repeated invitations of Nelly Carty and Bridget Mulrooney, stole out on tiptoe, to their fire, accepted a proffered seat on one of the yellow clay hobs; and while industriously mulling way through his supper, he could not avoid becoming greatly interested in the resumed conversation of his hostesses.

"Well, Nelly," said Bridget, "here we are on the hunkers before our little fire again, and what is left of the tay and the cake a most as good as ever; and it's mad intirely I am, yis indeed, to hear the rest that you have to tell about that Robin Costigan."

"Well, an' sure, lanna machree, Nelly Carty won't be long till she satisfies you. Well, Bridget, sure, as I gave you to understand afore the ould priest kem in, Robin and myself were great cronies, and faix, I'll never deny that I liked the boy well. Bud, Bridget, sure it happened one of a time, that my poor Robin borry'd the loan iv a horse, widout axin' lave, an' sure over again, he was eotch on the back of that horse at a fair in the Queen's County; and they brought the poor boy to his trial afore the judge, an' I thought my heart would break, they found him guilty, an' sentenced him to die. An' sure enough, the ugly lookin' gallowas was put up for Robin on the Green abroad, and sure enough he was walked to the gallowas, and it was the same Father Connell that quitted us a little while ago, that stepped out by his side to the gallowas' fut. Well asthore. The day that was in it was a winter's day. I'll never forget it, one o' the dark, bleak days afore Christmas; and the evenin' began to fall a most before he turned off; and when the time came to cut the rope, cut it was; and sure mecess was the very girl that caught him in my arms."

"Yourself, Nelly?" half shrieked Bridget. As for Neddy Fennell, his jaws stopped grinding his loaf, while he stared in startled surprise at the narrator.

"Meecself, Bridget. Well, *alanna machree*, sure I thought I felt a stir in my poor Robin, Neddy Fennell had taken another bite at his loaf, but again stopp'd short in his preparations to masticate it.

"An' you couldn't count twenty afore I had him in a good warm bed, and Darby Croak the bleether there by his side; an' surely, the stir in poor Robin got more life in it from time to time; an' surely, surely, over agin, many hours didn't go by till we had my poor fellow alive, an' as well as ever—ay, an' laughing heartily too at the brave escape he had—theo' that, after all, might be a little bit iv a secret be-tuxt himself an' the *shibbooth*—(hangman)—an' faix we spent as pleasant a night as kem from that to this—in wakiv' the poor corpse, as we called it."

"Are you telling the truth, Nelly Carty?" gaped Neddy Fennell quite aghast.

"Wait, Neddy, my pet—sure there's a little more to come. It was about an hour afore daybreak, when my poor Robin strolled out, jist to see how his legs would go on along some iv the roads convenient after the dance upon nothin' they had the day afore. In the course iv the night, sure he swore a big oath to us, that he'd never borry a horse agin, because they war unlooky cattle; but he made no oath agin cows, and it's as thrue as that I'm sitting here tellin' it, afore the mornin' quite broke, Robin borry'd a nice fat cow out of a field by the roadside. Well, *alanna machree*, the cow did not turn out a looker baste for Robin nor the horse."

"What's that you're going to say now," again interrupted Neddy Fennell; "was he hanged over again, Nelly?"

"Faix, an' if he wasn't, Neddy, my honey, he had very little to spare that he wasn't; for the man that thought he had a better right to the cow than Robin, soon missed her, an' ran thro' the town clappin' his hands, an' got all the help he could; an' sure they all kem up with the poor boy, on the road to the fair ov Bennet's-bridge, an' he in the cow's company; an' so they laid hault on him, an' he made him turn back, widout the cow, and they rammed him into their gaol agin."

"Well," whistled Neddy. "Well," *acushla-gal-machree*, there he was, shure enough—only not for a long time, for well became Robin, he found names ov breakin' out ov their gaol, an' from that blessed hour to this no livin' creature but myself ever set eyes on him in the town. But now, listen tell me, Bridget, and you, Neddy Fennell; after five-unt-thirty years is past an' gone, an' I an ould woman, I seen Robin Costigan, this day, as sure as I now see ye both forement me."

"Many were the ejaculations of surprise, and, indeed, almost of terror, uttered by the listeners. "And to-day, Nelly?—when? where? how?" they asked together.

"Whist! spake lower, none ov us spoke very loud yet, but now we are to spake lower than ever—and for a good reason. I said that Father Connell had a sharp eye, and that he ought to remember Robin Costigan, for wasn't it he that made his soul for him at the gallowas' fut? But the ould priest couldn't know him now, Bridget, for Robin is changed by years, and he is changed by contrivances, but I know him well, Bridget, from the minute I saw him. I can't say that he had the same knowledge of me when he looked me in the face—but I used to be too fond iv him long ago, ever, ever to forget him. And I tell you I saw him this very day, and I tell you more than that, I saw him in the very next house—in Joan Flaherty's house."

Bridget Mulrooney thumped her breast, crossed herself, and turned up her eyes. Neddy Fennell jumped off the hob, breathing hard, and frowning abhorringly, and it would seem indignantly, at the quote end wall of the hobel, which divided him from Joan Flaherty's house. This wall, however, did not rise higher than the point at which the wattles of the roof commenced, so that an inmate of either abode could, by standing on a chair, or even upon a stool, peep into the other.

After a few moments, Nelly Carty resumed slowly, and in whispers, and Neddy again opening himself on the hob, changed his wide opened, glowing eyes from the end wall to her face.

"An' he is a beggarman, now, iv you please; and he has a poor, withered limb, *morya*, an' I seen childer wid him that he takes into the street, when he goes a-begging."

"Tell me this, Nelly," asked Neddy Fennell suddenly, and as if wishing for an answer in the affirmative, "if the judge heard he was alive, wouldn't he have him hung over again?"

"Faix, an' I'm thinking he would, my lanna; sure they owe him the last hanging, at any rate; an' I'd go bail if they had a hault iv him now, they'd—but be asy wid your tricks, ye young limb."

A handful of small pebbles, as it seemed, clattering and jingling among Nelly's "tay-things" caused her thus suddenly to interrupt herself.

"It wasn't I that did it, Nelly, though I often played you a trick before now," answered Neddy Fennell very slowly, and in the least possible whisper—"it wasn't I that did it; but just turn your head behind you, and look towards the far end of the room."

"Don't Bridget! Don't for the world wide," admonished Nelly—"it's himself is in it—I know it is; for there is no male creature living,