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FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER XVI.

A good, long stride, in seven-league boots, over some years.

The corporate authorities of Father Connell's city, had, in common-council assembled, decreed and ordered, that, within the bounds of their jurisdiction, it should be summer, or the "summer half-year" from the month of March to the month of September, and that, in consequence no lamps need be lighted during that time; in fact, that no lamps should be lighted. They had also come to a decision that, upon each and every night when the almanac foretold ever so thin a gleam of moonshine, it was to be, to all intents and purposes, a moonlight night, over the whole space they governed, and hence, they again commanded, that even during their "winter half-year," when moonlight nights of this description occurred, the streets of their good city should not be indebted to human art for a single additional ray of illumination. That these orders in council for the regulation of the heavenly bodies were deduced from very nice scientific calculations, is not quite averred; but that they suited, indifferently well, the peculiar economy of the little, crafty, corporation, is positively asserted.

It is November. It is a November evening too; the town clock has just struck seven.—Furthermore, it is a moonlight night—in the almanac; that is, supposing the moon to be really "made of green cheese," no more than a segment of the edge of her crust can possibly be yet visible to her mistress the earth, and even of that mother earth, or at least as many of her children as dot the surface of the small locality we have now to do with, are unable to discern a glint, so heavy and substantial is the canopy of blue-black clouds, interfering between the satellite and her primary. But no matter for all that, the corporate sages of the city had decided that a moonlight night it was to be; and so not a single one of their paltry, half-starved little lamps is winking itself asleep, through the thick, the almost material darkness.

And on this pleasant evening there is a low, fat, little, old man, leaning on his fat, little elbows and arms over the uncouth half-door of his shop, and by his low whistle, and his glances up and down the street, he does not seem at all inconvenienced by the state of the weather, or the want of lamp-light. He is the owner of a small tenement, with small windows in it, and yet these windows having sashes so heavy, that it was very difficult to raise them up, that is any of them that could at all be raised up. But in truth, the greater number of them had not been stirred for many years; and the dust and dirt had not been brushed off them, one might suppose, since the first day of their construction; and almost every piece of glass in them had been so often pitted and patched, that it became essentially doubtful whether any of their original glazery existed. And the little, fat old man's little shop had an inflation, called a bow-window, projecting into the path-way of the street, and so dingy, that the sharpest eye could not penetrate past its surface.

What in the world he did there, peeping over his half-door, and whistling confidential music to himself, no rational passer-by could, for the life of him, imagine. There was nothing in the clouds in any wise attractive; neither moon, nor stars, nor Aurora Borealis, nor a comet, not even color, nor motion, nor change, nor variety of any kind, nor even a promise of its little light. The milliner's shop opposite to him was shut up, so that he could see no thing in its windows, no fine people within it—nay, he couldn't read, through the dense gloom, even the milliner's name upon her sign-board across the street. The cloth-shop next to the milliner's at one side was also closed; the grocer's at its other side had very, very little custom. To be sure a few people, forced from their fireside by some grievous necessity, on such a chilly and doleful evening, now and then passed him, plashing through the little water-pools, or sliding over, or else sticking in the glutinous puddle of the streets; but if these visions interested him, he could enjoy them but for a few seconds at a time, as they quickly vanished at his either hand, into the wide open "jaws of darkness."

So no one could possibly tell what he was doing, and now for nearly two hours had been doing, in his own mind, as he leaned over his little half-door, emitting his almost inaudible little whistle, and rolling his heavy fat eyes in every direction. Could he tell himself? Indeed he could not.

A soft, lumpy, invisible substance, suddenly smote him on the cheek. He started, shuddered, said some prayers, but did not otherwise change his attitude. A second time, he was hit on the other cheek, in the same way, and a second time he only did what he had done before. A third, and a fourth time, a fifth and a sixth time, nay, a twentieth time, the mysterious assaults were repeated; and

yet, though evidently suffering great fear and terror, he would only pray the more volubly without finching a step from his unlucky position. And could he now tell you what was the matter? He was very sure he could. He was suffering under some deserved chastisement, from the "good people." They were fairly blows he felt, he would solemnly assure you.

"A-rodge, a-rodge, come out o' that, a-rodge," exclaimed an almost naked, full limbed, gigantic figure, close to him, without head-covering, bare-footed, and bare-legged: the voice that spoke was half discordant, half mirthful, and the speaker, or rather gibberer, bent his large face close to our friend's and grimaced idiotically at him. He held one of the skirts of the indescribable clothing round his loins tucked over his left arm, and in the skirt was some outmeal, and he would constantly dart his right hand among the provender, snatch up some of it, and dash it towards his mouth; but he as often hit with it different parts of his countenance as he succeeded in lodging any of it within the receptacle for which it was intended; and this constant powdering of his features gave a very ghastly expression to them.

"A-rodge, a-rodge, come out o' that, a-rodge," "Is that you, Mickle?" placidly questioned the little, fat man, as he immediately obeyed the command, to "come out o' that," by at last altering his attitude, and opening his half-door.

The monster bent himself half double, and galloped into the little dingy shop, a fourth part lighted by the very smallest taper, and through it into the interior of the house.

"You've got nothin', ye beggin' 'bullyg,'" was the next salutation which the little shop-keeper received from a thin, sharp-featured man, whose eyes were like that of a vicious, half-intelligent pig, and so small that his very large nose, high cheek-bones and beetling eyebrows, nearly hid it. He was inveterately yellow. He wore a suit of rusty black, begrimed and tattered; his black locks hung in matted cords about his cheeks and shoulders; and he carried under his arm something rolled up in a shoemaker's leathern apron.

"Here, George, here," was the only answer of the person addressed, as he again undid his hatchway.

George entered, but did not race off as Mickle had done; he paused in the shop.

"You've got nothin', I say, nor none of your cursed breed?" he again questioned, as he blinked his eyes, with spiteful eagerness, at the little, old, fat man.

"No, George, no."

"There's no demand, you beggin' 'buckach'?"

"No demand, George, none."

"There's no demand on the man with the pepper-and-salt coat?"

"No demand, in life, George," and George's friend was closing his half-door, when the caustic idiot ran hastily to him, seized him by both arms, and while his sharp features took nearly a crying expression, shook him violently.

"By Horns I'd run you through, you beggin' thief! We're free, we're free—free of the city—there is no one dare confine us, or shut doors on us—I'd run you through; or any o' your cursed breed. We're free, I say?" he held his fore-finger close to the shop-keeper's eye, as if about to dart it full into the orb.

"Oh, yes, you're free, George; there's no doubt of it."

"No doors to be shut on us?"

"No, no, George."

"Ho! ho! ho! yellow George! yellow George!" was screamed over the half-door, by a low-sized, disjointed looking fellow, with a round face deeply pitted from the small-pox, one of his eyes, a sightless mass, projecting from its lids; and the other, as well as the rest of his features, expressive, notwithstanding his frequent laughter, of much idiotic ferocity. He was clothed in a cast-off suit, much too large for him; his shoes were particularly so. He bent his face constantly towards the ground. His arms were very long, and he moved by occasionally hopping on his right leg, and then jerking forward the other side of his person.

"Go long, ye blackamoors, breed that lived on horses' flesh," cried George, running towards him, in return for his salutation.

"Yellow George, the fool!" shouted Paddy Moran, avoiding the rencontre, and slinging himself forward in the same direction which Mickle had taken.

"I say, Budy Donally, we're free, and there's no demand?" reiterated yellow George.

"Oh! no, George, no."

"Well, we'll recompense you for that. I'll put you in my uncle's, the alderman's house; an' I'll throw you fish an' a bag of bran." was George's promise—one often made, by the way, as he followed his two predecessors.

Budy Donally, as George had called him, resumed his place at the half-door, and he had scarcely fixed himself in his old position when a repetition of the fairy blows (they certainly were inflicted by some unseen agency) occurred; and again he started, half shouted in terror, and rapidly muttered his prayers, but still he would not wince under the infliction, nor even turn away his head from it.

"A poor boy that's burned wid the frost," whiningly appealed a fresh visitant, a man clothed in shreds and patches, and different

portions of his attire kept on him by the aid of small hay-ropes. As he announced himself, he leaned lazily on a long, thick wattle.

As on the former occasion, the little half-door quickly opened to him; and as he, too, very leisurely plodded his way into the inside of the house—he continued his egotistical account of himself.

"My fut is complainin' agin the road, an' my bones is grumblin' agin the weather: an' I can't stop anywhere at all—an' I'm always goin' about over an' hether—an' I don't see any business I have goin' about anywhere—no, no more business nor a starved bee in a fallow-field." And at these words his voice died away in the distance.

"They're pursuin' me over an' hether, an' here an' there, an' through the bogs, an' across the hills, an' over the river, an' into the thick woods—they're pursuin' me ever an' ever."

These words were volubly uttered by a newcomer. He was a middle-sized, and more than middle-aged person, wearing a battered and broken straw hat, of which the very wide brim flapped far down his face; a flaming old plush scarlet-colored waist-coat, hanging half off his person, in ribbons; and small-clothes to match; a tattered soldier's coat, of the bygone taste, when long, full skirts, and abundance of tape flourishing over cuffs, lapels, and collar, were excellent military fashion. Stockings he had none; and when he moved, his brogues slipped up and down.

Once more the hatchway unclosed, and this gentleman entered, and also passed away through the shop, walking very hastily, bending his head and eyes downwards, and still declaring, how much and how deviously he was "pursu'd."

And there was yet another visitor: one clad coarsely, but not in tatters or patches: for his dress—although very old, appeared to have been kept together with the greatest diligence of needle and thread, and seemed the relic of former respectability: his pale, spare face, was solemn and serious, as if his mind were always absorbed in deep calculation; and he entered with his arms closely folded across his breast.

He did not greet our hospitable friend, as ingress was afforded to him; but was silently pacing after the other visitors, when the little proprietor of the house addressed him.

"Three barrels, seventeen stones, at two-pence farthing half-farthing a stone?" the man stopped suddenly, looked straight before him only for a few seconds, compressing his lips into a mere line, and then answered, "fifteen and two-pence half-penny," and onward he pursued his way.

The last arrival on this particular evening was a creature of very low stature, having a soldier's stock under his neck, a boy's jacket on his body, and such a mass of rags tied with twine round his nether limbs, that he was obliged to labor hard whenever he chose to put them in motion.

This curiosity made many hideous grimaces and gesticulations to the door-keeper, who, for the last time opening the hatchway, and pointing inwardly allowed the deaf and dumb fool to pass out of his shop.

He was scarcely gone, when a tall, well-limbed, and very handsome youth, vaulted over the half-door and stood, half laughing, before our benevolent friend.

"Ah, Ned, I'm glad you're come back; go behind the counter now, and look over the day's accounts." The lad cheerfully obeyed, his master following him.

"What red spots are those on your cheeks, sir?" questioned Ned, before they engaged in their task.

"Oh! Ned, what would they be but fairy blows? for two long hours and more that I was looking over the door, the 'good people' never stopped striking me—just like as if big bullets were hitting me all over the face and shoulders—look, Ned—here's the way they went on at me—"

He shut his little plump fist, protruded the knuckle of its middle finger, and as a practical illustration of how the fairy blows had been inflicted, began to punch away at his apprentice as fast as he could with that particular knuckle. "Hugh, hugh, hugh—here's the way they went at me—" accompanying every punch with a "hugh; and he did punch so quickly and so resolutely into Ned's face and forehead, that the latter was obliged laughingly to cry out for quarter.

"Oh, sir, that's enough: I now comprehend right well how they went on at you," and he endeavored to avoid what natural philosophers would call a demonstration by experiment. But his master, suddenly seizing him by the collar with his disengaged hand, continued to punch, on until he lost his breath from the real fatigue of his occupation.

And a light here begins to break in upon us. Notwithstanding the arbitrary title conferred on him by yellow George, the little personage before us was indeed no other than Nick M'Grath—poor Atty Fennell's "buffalo-man," who exhibited some of the manners of that animal at the *Charitable Society*, upon the evening when, most fatally for himself, Atty presided over the assembly.

"Yes, that's the way they went on at me,

Ned," he resumed at last, getting quiet from mere lack of breath and strength.

"And on my word, they must have smarted you pretty well, sir."

"Oh! I'm black and blue from them, Ned."

"And no wonder sir, if they worked so hard," and he rubbed his own face over and over with his extended hand, "but why didn't you go away from the door, and so escape?"

"No, no, Ned, no: 'tis always the best to let the 'good people' have their own way; if you thry to stop 'em they'll wither you up some time or other. 'Tis the right plan not to stir hand or foot agin them; and whenever they come across you, Ned, take care not to vex 'em by doing anything else."

"I'll be as civil as smooth water to them, sir."

"Do, Ned, do, or the Heavens only knows what might happen," and with this business-like advice, Nick M'Grath retired to his little "parlor, kitchen, and all," to warm himself, take his glass of punch, sweetened with molasses from his own little oil and color shop; and when that had been imbibed, to say his prayers preparatory to going to bed, with his back to the fire.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ned, left in the shop to regulate the day's accounts, see that his cash was all right, and everything in order, could not help soliloquizing—

"And on my word, Master Neddy, you richly deserve, after all, the knuckling you have just got;—'twas something like what is called, in fine English, retributive justice: what a simple, poor man!—We well knew he would leave all the blame to the fairies, and never suppose that his own hopeful apprentice, and one or two scapegraces like him, were his tormentors: kind-hearted little creature! 'tis a pity to play tricks on you—and yet you tempt a body to it."

In fact, the fairy blows had been given by soft clay balls, impelled through an old gun-barrel, a sport at which Ned and his friends alluded to, took great delight, and in which they had, from constant practice, become excellent marksmen; an assertion that recent evidence will doubtless render very credible.

He was busily engaged finishing his day's tot, his face bent intently towards his account-book, when a low gentle voice murmured very near to him: "Master Neddy Fennell."

He suddenly looked up. A tall female, enveloped in the usual dark blue cloak, stood immediately opposite to him, on the other side of the counter. One hand and arm of this figure, quite bare, were visible outside the cloak, in order that its wearer might hold its hood closely gathered over her face; and no arm could be rounder, and more beautifully proportioned than was that one; while the hand, though red, was small, plump, and with tapering fingers.—They both hinted, however, that their owner must be a very young girl.

"Well, my dear?" questioned Ned.

"I have some words to spake to you, young man," answered a sad, musical voice, still in a very low tone, and indeed only half heard within the folds of the impervious hood.

"Out with them, my pet; and let a body see your face, won't you?"

He moved his hand towards the hood.

"The person stepped back out of his reach.

"That's not the way to make me tell you anything, sir," she said.

"Why so? You say you want to speak with me, and yet won't let me see your face?—Come, come, my dear, I can carry on no such mysterious conversation in an honest man's house; that face I must see, or—" he was about to vault across the counter, when an earnestly whispered caution stopped him.

"Hould yer hand, young man! I will let you see my face and welcome; but not here, nor at the present time. It might be a sore thing for both of us, if I let go the hood or my cloak in this place. I have words to spake with you, I say; over again, ay, and there's as much as life and death in them words; but I won't spake them to you now, no more than I will let you see my face now."

"Life and death, good girl! Poo! you must be a fool, whatever kind of a face you have on you. What do you mean?" He was again putting himself in motion; she went on rapidly in sharp whispers.

"For the Lord's sake, don't come next or nigh me!" Her head hastily turned in the direction of the half-door. "Och, och! there is eyes upon me! I see one abroad, dark as it is, watching me close! don't stir, I bid you—nor speak a word to me—nor seem to take notice of me at all—but listen, listea! I'm in possession of a knowledge that concerns your life—and I am here, at the risk of my own life, to try and save yours—so meet me this very night, and as soon as you can, for both our sakes. You know Joan Flaherty's house in the *gruel*!—(a scattered handful of anything)—of houses on Gallows Green—meet me there, and be sure you take a roundabout and a crooked road to it, that no living soul may guess you'll be on the road to it. Meet me in Joan Flaherty's house, I say, and it's there I'll tell you my words—and it's there I'll take the hood from my face too, for I don't

want to hide the face from you; och, no! nor the heart neither—now God be with you—and for this wide world's wealth don't fail me!"

Before Ned Fennell could reply, she had bounded like a fawn into the street. He now really vaulted across the counter, and, with as much agility, as herself, followed her. But the almanac moonlight out of doors, completely baffled his attempts to catch a glimpse of her in any direction; and a moment's thought curbed his fleet foot, in its instinctive start—like the pawing of a spirited horse eager for his journey—to race after the unknown visitor. A wholesome recollection of duties to be yet gone through at home, also helped to keep him for the present quiet.

So he returned into the dingy little shop, quite finished his accounts, and then fell to barring, bolting, and locking, for the night.

"You're done there, Ned, my good boy, ain't you?" questioned his master's kind, little, cracked voice, from his unseen back-parlor.

"Quite, sir," answered Ned, as he shot the last bolt.

"Come in here then, and take a lantern, and go and count the fools."

Ned obeyed. "Counting the fools," was one of his nightly occupations, to be attended to as strictly as any other of his responsibilities.

To the rear of the small house was a small yard, and to one side of this yard was a hay-loft, gained by a step-ladder: other buildings around it, serving as store-houses, for the large stock of oil, pitch, tar, turpentine, and other combustible materials, having to do with Nick M'Grath's thriving business, as an oil and color merchant. In the hay-loft all the fools, idiots, and deranged persons, whom we have seen enter the little man's shop, were now beginning to nestle down until morning, and Nick M'Grath, for a particular purpose, though a usual one, wished to ascertain distinctly of how many such lodgers he could call himself the host and landlord.

Ned Fennell accordingly stepped in among them. With all of them, except one, he had previously been well acquainted—this one, however, had been but twice in the caravanary; and was the individual who complained so much, and so ceaselessly of being "pursu'd." As Ned now passed through the assembly of miserable beings, addressing or replying to them, each in his own dialect, he was much struck with the quantity of witless words strung together by the new-comer; and once, as the man glanced up at him, from under the broad, flapping brim of his old straw hat, Ned's mind suddenly started, and a most disagreeable feeling came over him, which he could neither account for nor define. It was, however, a true feeling, although not warranted by any process of ratiocination—will grounded instinct far beyond, at that moment, all the pretensions of reason.

"Seven of them to-night, sir," said Ned to his master, as he returned from the inspection.

"All the better, Ned, the more the better; the more fools in the house, the more luck to the house—here, Nelly Brechan—bring the bread and the milk; seven half-loaves in the basket, and seven pints of milk in the can.—'There's seven of them to-night, Nelly—so, get their supper quick!"

Nelly Brechan soon obeyed her master's orders; and Nick M'Grath, having put on his exceedingly low-crowned hat over his brown scratch wig, and after having buttoned up to his chin the snuff-colored surtout, which reached from that chin to his very heels, took the lantern in his hand, and went, followed by Ned with the provisions, up and into the hay-loft.

Its tenants were quickly astir. The gigantic, half-naked figure, who had first entered the house, was now also the first person to scramble for his supper. He had quite burrowed into the hay, and came galloping forward on all-fours.

"A-rodge, a-rodge," he bellowed out—"give me—give—give—" and he snatched half a loaf, made a nearly successful grasp at another, and then fiercely attacked the milk-can, the contents of which he would most likely have dashed about the loft, had not yellow George, the caustic idiot, charged forward to the rescue.

"Go-long, you *omadhawn*," he said, approaching the point of his fore-finger to Mickle's very eyelashes, while his red, little eyes glowed—"I'll run you through, you beggin' *bochach*—by the virtue of our oath, I'll run you through, you big nothin'!"

His fierce glance, and terrible threat, seemed to produce an instantaneous effect on the ravenous giant, who, twisting round still on all-fours, and crying out—"oh ah! oh ah!—a-rodge, a-rodge—oh! ah! oh!" darted back into his den of day.

"There's no demand, Budy Donally? George then inquired, ere he would receive his own proffered portion of supper—meaning thereby, that he was under no obligation for the food—and it may be noticed here, by the way, that poor George used to give a new name, out of his own head, to every person of his acquaintance, the moment such person first met his eye, and never afterwards did he forget that name, nor cease, to apply it to its object. Heaven only knows from what partial remem-