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ELLEN AHERN; OR, THE POOR COUSIN. CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

'Beautiful Portia!' answered his lordship, over whose visage flushes of wrath and shame swiftly succeeded each other, and in whose eyes—the family mark—a cold scintillating light glittered, 'I plead guilty to the charge of having some worthless, idle people turned out of houses which they neither kept in repair or paid rent for, for the purpose of placing others in who will do both. And, as it is my own lawful right to do so, being on my own estate, I hope that I am not to be hung and quartered for the exercise thereof.'

'My Lord, you are either grossly mistaken and misled, or you are unworthy of the name you bear!' exclaimed Ellen Ahern, whose flashing eyes showed now her spirit was up. 'Nor do I crave pardon for daring to tell you the truth.'

'Cousin Ellen,' he said with a cold and derisive smile, 'you remind me of a beautifully plumaged bird, which beats the wire of its cage in impotent fury, expending its strength in vain effort, and spoiling its song-notes with discordant utterances. You cannot, single-handed, remodel or reform the world, therefore be content. As to these tenants of mine, they have lived so long their own masters, and presumed so much on their hereditary privileges, that there is no help for it but to act just as I have done. In short, I cannot afford—for I am deucedly in debt—to let the resources of my estate lie idle through sentimentality or an Erin go bragh feeling. Come, let us be friends.'

'We cannot be friends I fear, my Lord,' said Ellen Ahern, feeling how hopeless it was to argue with one who deliberately and fixedly predestined all that he executed—who, devoid of all religious responsibility, ignored charity—and who, having always been an alien from his country and its Faith, acknowledged no sympathy or fraternity with its suffering people. The basis he stood on was narrow, but his policy was narrower.—It was simply the right of might, which is in all cases, sheer tyranny.

'Then let us be something nearer than friends, beautiful Ellen!' he said with cool audacity, as he attempted to take her hand; but snatching it indignantly away, she gathered up her cloak and left the room. With the glow of outraged feeling on her cheeks, and a fuller sense than she had ever known before, of her loneliness and dependence, wounding her sensitive and proud nature, she flew to her apartments, and turning the lock of her door, she flung herself in a perfect abandon of anguish, on her knees before her oratory, from whence the crucifix, eloquent in its mute history of wondrous suffering, preached to her of patience. The shadow of life's passion and pain, fell dark around her—her lofty aspirations, her high resolves, her hitherto unclouded faith, seemed to be brought to naught—she felt like a sparrow in the snare of the fowler, bereft of strength and power to extricate herself, nor did she know whither on earth to turn for help or deliverance. And thus, when all things seemed to fail her, and her spirit faltered and stumbled in its own impotent effort to triumph unaided in its first conflict, she learned how entirely the soul who seeks strength and yearns after the right, must first abandon itself to God and His mercy. Gradually this truth stole into her heart, and unfolded there its blossoms of consolation, and there came with it a sense of the protection of Him who is the Father of the fatherless, and the Friend of those who place their trust in Him.

All that she had told Lord Hugh Maguire had really occurred—but the story is hundreds of years old in that beautiful and down-trodden land, of how wrong and injustice go hand in hand together, passing like a devastating fire over the pleasant valleys and verdant plains, leaving ruin and destruction in their track! We shall not, therefore, dwell on such scenes, except as it may be necessary to develop the plan and characters of our narrative. The same thing is daily occurring, and the Irish papers teem with recitals of cruelty and wrong, which sicken the heart, and make those who are close observers of things and events, think that the woes of Ireland and arrogance of her oppressor are near their culminating point.

Father McMahon strove, but in vain, to mitigate the misery that had fallen on his little fold—he went to Lord Hugh Maguire and pleaded with him—he set forth in simple, eloquent terms, all the good that he might accomplish by a proper course, and all the evil that would inevitably ensue from the one he was pursuing; and full of the sorrow of his people, and moved to tenderness by their helplessness, he did not attempt to restrain the tears that flowed over his aged cheeks while he talked; but he might as well have gone out and exhorted the crabs that overhung the sea, to fall, as to have endeavored to make an impression on the worldly, egotistical and obdurate nature of Lord Hugh Maguire, whose cold, sarcastic manner added insult to the refusal he gave, to redress a single wrong that he or his agent had done. 'He was involved,' he said, 'and must have money. If these people cannot or will not pay up, I must put others in their places who will.' Father McMahon returned home discouraged and disheartened. The people had hoped much from his interference, for he was himself descended from one of the ancient princely houses of Ulster, and had grown old in the bonds of friendship with the Maguire; and they thought, and so did he, in their simplicity, that his word should have some weight, but in this as in all else they had looked forward to, they were doomed to disappointment. Fahey now carried things with a higher hand than ever. Sanctioned by his chief, his devices for obtaining a settlement of arrears from the tenants were numerous, and characterized by a malevolent pertinacity which left them no resource but submission to his decrees. Want, disease, and ruin were the natural results of such policy; and some of the most respectable of the inhabitants of that poor hamlet were deprived of their all, and driven to beggary on the high road, or the dreaded shelter of a neighboring workhouse with their little ones.

The stranger, Don Enrique Giron, who was much with Father McMahon, observed the workings of this strange system, with wonder and disgust on one hand, and the deepest commiseration on the other. His sympathy with the miserable victims of blind oppression, which he was at no pains to conceal, rendered him not only an object of suspicion to Lord Hugh Maguire and his agent, but absolutely made of no avail, his efforts for their relief. Fahey plainly intimated to him that, 'his lordship would tolerate no interference on his estate—that he had his own ends to serve in acting as he did, and no earthly power could change his determination or his plans.' Thus repulsed, he could do nothing better than to dispense alms, through Father McMahon's agency, and with his heart full of the human suffering around him, pursued his archaeological researches in the neighborhood. He also had a purpose in lingering at Fermanagh, but the means by which he hoped to attain its accomplishment were wrapped in mystery, and he sometimes feared, quite lost; but, placing his trust in Divine Providence and the righteousness of his cause, he worked, and sought, and hoped patiently, believing that all would be made clear eventually. He frequently met Ellen Ahern, speeding hither and thither on her errands of mercy, or in Father McMahon's little parlor; where, interested by her intelligent conversation, and admiring the warm, generous spirit that added such a charm to her beauty, he always remained listening and fascinated beside her, soothed by the congeniality of their sentiments, and losing the sense of his own isolated and lonely position by thinking of and pitying her's. Having met incidentally here one day, they found Father McMahon walking the narrow limits of his parlor in deep agitation.—He held out his hands to them, and invited them to be seated, saying, 'You are welcome, my children—very welcome—but I am sorrowful almost unto death. Alas! I foresaw it all—I tried to avert it. But, sit down—sit down.'

'What new calamity has fallen on us, my Father?' asked Ellen Ahern in trembling tones. 'Human nature is not perfect, my dear child, and can be driven by certain causes to desperation. There are some of our people engaged in a secret and unlawful plot. I cannot find out who they are, or where they meet; they keep it all concealed from me, and are running their heads into the halter, without the slightest hope that the sacrifice will be available to the good of others.'

'Some concessions from Lord Maguire might dispel this threatened evil, I think,' replied Ellen Ahern; 'and I have come to consult with you this very day about the possibility of getting one from him.'

'Drowning men catch at straws—let us hear your plan, Aileen my child.'

'I was thinking, Father—cousin Eadhna and I—that as there is to be a Scotch and English colony planted here, that perhaps Lord Hugh Maguire would, for a consideration, either lease or sell some of the waste land beyond Cathnaguira, where our people could settle themselves, after it was divided into equal portions, and by dint of labor and perseverance, at least do well—better, I really think, than they ever did before.'

'I never thought of that, Aileen—that is a bright idea—but how in the world is it to be accomplished? Where shall we get the money for such a purpose?' asked Father McMahon eagerly.

'I will be the banker on this occasion,' said Don Enrique, 'and you, my Father, shall be my almoner. It seems to be a feasible as well as an excellent plan.'

'I must think about it—I must think about it,' said Father McMahon, who, although approving

of the plan itself, did not feel at liberty to incur such an obligation to one who had no interests, and who was a stranger in the country; besides which, he had strong doubts as to Lord Hugh Maguire's making any such grant to his Catholic tenants. The factory was nearly completed—the rafters were already laid for the roof, and some ten or fifteen Scotch families were quartered at Fermanagh, to commence operations as soon as everything would be completed. And as events culminated, the difficulties of the old tenantry increased; some among them driven, less by hunger and want themselves, than the sight of their wives and children, sick and perishing before their eyes, became desperate; and, forgetting all the precepts of religion—'hinking only of their galling wrongs—determined in some signal manner to avenge their woes, and rid the country of those who had been a curse to it.—They kept their own secret—it being only known to one or two others that some plan of the kind was afoot, and they having learned it by accident, unparted it to Father McMahon.—Hence his agitation when Ellen Ahern and Don Enrique entered his house that day. They soon left him, by his own request, that he might consider the proposed plan, and come to some decision in relation to it. Ellen Ahern went her usual rounds amongst the suffering and poverty-stricken, and Don Enrique to his lodging, to write letters to Spain; while the good old priest, after sending his housekeeper with a message to Patrick McGinness, retired to the Sanctuary, to ponder and pray for the good of his people.

That evening, to Bridget's surprise, Father McMahon moved about with an elastic step, and jested once or twice with her, as she poured out his tea: all of which—as she could perceive no cause for such unwonted cheerfulness—she noticed without relaxing a line of her hard visage and had a few indistinct doubts as to the good man's sanity. Later, he called Bridget up into his library, and throwing open a closet door, desired her to help him to lift out an old black chest, that had been standing there for years, and which had not only been the mystery of her life, but the torment of her curiosity, which, however, she had quite resigned herself to being never gratified. With difficulty they dragged it out from its nook, and Father McMahon, taking a key from his cabinet, first wiped the perspiration from his face, then stooping over, unlocked it, and lifted the lid; revealing to Bridget who stood with mouth and eyes dilated, a rich antique silver tea service, lined with gold.

'St. Michael defend us! and where did it come from?' exclaimed the amazed woman.

'Silence,' said Father McMahon, again wiping his face, after which he examined, piece by piece, his long concealed treasures; not hoarded because they were fashioned out of precious metals, but because they were the workmanship of one who had glorified the country in which he lived, by his transcendent excellence in art.

'And whose did your Rivrence say it was?' exclaimed Mrs. Housekeeper, rustling her black silk apron, while she peered through her spectacles.

'It was fashioned in a far off land, hundreds of years before you or I were born, by one Benvenuto Cellini, a famous master of the art of moulding and carving metals. It is more precious to me on that account than because it is mine by inheritance. It is worth its weight in gold,' said the excellent man, looking with a fond eye on the exquisite carving and tracery that the hand of Cellini had wrought. 'Yes,' he mused, 'precious in truth are these to me.—I would not part with any one of them to satisfy any need of my own, if I wanted bread—but my poor little flock—my suffering children—perhaps that bought my will accept my treasures in payment for those lands—'

'Musha, thin, your Rivrence won't be after doing any such foolish nonsense!' put in Bridget who felt responsible for Father McMahon's temporal prosperity, and often took it upon herself to lecture him roundly for what she called his extravagance, i.e., alms giving. 'It 'ud be of no use, and he'd only step you for your pains, without helping anybody, by troth; for he's got bad blood in him, and I wouldn't trust him from here to the church door, bedad!'

'Be silent, Bridget, you silly woman; it's not the silver, but because it is the work of the great Benvenuto Cellini, that I value it. I don't care a whistle for the silver and gold that's in it.'

'And will your Rivrence please to tell me if you can separate the Benvenuto Silly part from the real silver, or will they be after going together?' asked Bridget, who could not bear the idea of parting with their newly discovered treasure, which, she thought, with true worldly wisdom, would not only keep Father McMahon in comfort for the rest of his life, but leave a surplus to reward her long and faithful services, at his death, it he would only dispose of it for his own use, and invest the funds in a profitable way

'You won't get the worth of it from the badagh (churl) you're taking it to, I'm thinking,' she added.

'Stat magni nominis umbra!' (he stands, the shadow of a mighty name) murmured Father McMahon, polishing one of the pieces with his coat sleeve; 'but notwithstanding, he may be willing to concede everything for the sake of such an antique treasure as this. It would bring its weight in gold in London.'

'And wouldn't it be a better plan to take it there, your Rivrence?' asked Bridget in an insinuating tone, for the Latin had acted as a sort of quietus to the ferment she was in.

'Woman!' said Father McMahon, in a severe tone, 'did I not bid you keep silence? How could I approach you Tabernacle, and receive into my hands Him, who stripped Himself of all things, even life, for me, if through greed or selfish motives, I kept back that which would save my brethren? Go down, I hear McGinness on the porch. Open the door, and invite him in, then say a "Hail Mary" for my intention.'

Bridget, rebuked but not convinced, went down as she was bid, and with rather a stately greeting, invited McGinness in. Father McMahon came down, and with a hearty 'God bless you!' grasped the bony, rough hand of his visitor, and took his seat in the old leather chair, which he had used for half a century. McGinness looked downcast and bowed by the weight of the burden that had been laid upon him, and received the good man's benediction with a numb, quiet feeling of acquiescence, which implied some doubt of its efficacy. He was a representative of those of whom Saint James speaks in his catholic epistle, and whom he warns his brethren not to mock with the semblance and words of charity, but to profit them by supplying their needs; and practice the precept instead of arguing with want, and displaying their own righteousness to the miserable.

'And how are you getting along since I saw you McGinness?' asked this good priest.

'Bad enough, your Rivrence. My wife got the fever, and the shelter I've up over her and the child don't keep out the weather.—And poor Mary Duffy lost her baby last night; it died in her arms on the roadside, poor little lamb.'

'On the roadside!' said Father McMahon, lifting his hands.

'Didn't your Rivrence know they was burnt out yesterday? She was comin' to us, and she had the baby and Shabeneo, when it took a fit and died,' he said, in a calm, strong way.

'Oa, the poor heart, the poor heart! why did she not come to me?' exclaimed Father McMahon, whose eyes overflowed with tears.

'McGinness,' he said, after a pause of several minutes, 'I have been informed that some of our people are putting their necks into danger. Is it true?'

'They don't talk to me, your Rivrence. I believe, though, it's true,' said the man.

'Tell them to come to me—that I have a hope—mind you, a hope that I can do something for them. Find them out, and tell them to spare their souls the crime they contemplate; tell them to come and confess, and be shrieve, lest the malediction of God finishes the work of woe, that the severity of man begun; then I will perhaps be able to assist them in a manner they do not dream of. If my plan is successful, there is not one amongst you but will be thankful for what has happened, because, although it's been a sharp stepping stone, it will lead to better things than could be hoped for.' Strange alternations of hope and fear passed over the face of McGinness; he knew that Father McMahon's words were never idle ones, and already the leaden weight seemed to be lifted away from his heart. 'I cannot explain further what I mean,' he went on to say, 'but rest assured, that if my present project fails, I have still another in view, which must be successful. Be patient, then, one and all of you; do nothing illegal, and win the blessing of God by a peaceable life: let not your oppressors tempt you to crime by the evils with which they afflict your bodies.'

'It's hard agin human nature,' said McGinness, 'but we'll do what your Rivrence advises. You are our best friend, and know what's for our good.'

'With God's help—with God's help,' said the priest fervently. 'All things will work straight. Go now to Bridget, who has a basket in the pantry for you, that Miss Ahern sent here for you an hour or two ago; and may the blessing of Almighty God attend you.' McGinness bowed his head reverently while the blessing fell from the lips of the holy man, and, as he left the room, softened and tranquilized, he passed his coat sleeve over his eyes, to wipe off the great tears that had gathered there.

The events of the last month or two had filled the hearts of the inhabitants of the Barony of Fermanagh with vague and terrible forebodings. The natural order of things seemed to be re-

versed. They were turned out of their house; their places were filled up by strangers; the *nil gelsiga*, (the language of the stranger,) harsh and discordant to their ears, was heard on every side; their dead had been turned out of their graves, and the busy sound of plane, hammer and saw had been echoing from dawn till night, for weeks past among the holy ruins of Cathnaguira, where, for hundreds of years, nought but the chaunt of bees and trilling of song birds, mingling with the dash of the torrent, had broken the stillness; the gray, moss-grown arches of the ancient Abbey were half hidden by a staring pile of framework, without symmetry or finish; and last, though not least, that shrill, portentous cry that had rung out like a clarion on the night, startling every living thing in the hamlet with its unearthly note, had left them with a sort of terrible expectancy of something more direful to come.

Twilight had been cleared away by darkness. Neither moon or stars were visible, but gloomy, low-hanging clouds brooded sullenly over the scene. A low sighing wind whistled at intervals, shrilly and mournfully through the ravine, and fled whispering and trembling away on its viewless pinions. Everything in the hamlet and its neighborhood was hushed, and all who could find repose were wrapped to slumber, when suddenly a red lurid glare flashed over the scene and lit up the dark clouds above with fitful brilliance.—Brighter and redder grew the light until every object was illuminated with the splendid glare.—Men and women started shrieking from their beds—the watch dogs howled with affright, and in a few moments the narrow, rugged street of Fermanagh, and its by-ways, were thronged with terrified people, who thought that nothing less than the judgment was at hand. Presently there arose a cry from the Scotch workmen that the new factory at Cathnaguira was on fire, and thither every one directed their steps, urged onward by motives which, in general, would not have borne any higher test than nature. It was even so; the whole pile was a blaze, and on the topmost rafters, leaping to and fro, with a lighted brand in her hand, which she waved at intervals over her head, the elf-like form of old Nora was seen, making it apparent to all who was the originator of the mischief. Many fell on their knees with a devout 'Christ be good to us,' as the appalling sight met their gaze, while others, forgetting their own griefs and wrongs, rushed thither with the sole intention of risking their lives to save hers, and to do all they could to retard the flames; but ere they reached the spot the rafters fell in with a lumbering, crashing noise, burying the maniac beneath the flaming ruins; another victim to the uncharitableness and obduracy of man.

CHAPTER VIII.—DON ENRIQUE GIRON.

A fresh occasion of trouble had arisen for Ellen Ahern, and so unforeseen and annoying to her, circumstanced as she was, that she was at a loss what to do. It was the undisguised admiration of Lord Hugh, whose patronizing and assured manner towards her, while it inspired her with indignation and disgust, indicated that he thought the honor of his attentions ought to be an equivalent for any repugnance she might feel in receiving them. Neither an open outbreak between himself and mother, in consequence of these manifestations; nor cold reserve, keen retort, nor the most decided expressions of dislike on the part of Ellen Ahern, were sufficient to repulse him, or prevent his taking advantage of her position under his roof on every occasion that presented itself, to declare his sentiments. And in proportion as his sentiments became more obvious, Lady Fermanagh became more haughty and neglectful, until finally she would barely acknowledge Ellen's quiet salutations with a slight inclination of her head. So several days had passed—days of grief and perplexity to Ellen Ahern, who, having no friend except Sir Eadhna in whom she could confide, felt constrained through a tender feeling of compassion for his age and sorrows, to withhold from him a recital which would only raise his ire, and increase the unpleasantness of his own position in regard to Lord Hugh. Thus she was thrown back on her own thoughts and sorrows, which in this case were impotent to save her from the annoyances which surrounded her, and she determined to remain as much as possible in the seclusion of her own room, under the plea of indisposition, until the family returned to England.

The night of the fire, Ellen excused herself to Lady Fermanagh as soon as she had swallowed a cup of tea, and went up to spend the evening with Sir Eadhna Ahern, who was 'not well,' where, trying to forget her own peculiar sorrow in the heartfelt endeavor to solace his, she hours glided by, until his drooping eyelids and over-wearied expression warned her that it was time for him to retire. She closed the book from which she had been reading aloud, lit his night lamp, and wishing him 'good night,' kissed his withered cheek, and flitted away to her own