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NEILL O'DONNELL; OR, THE MISER'S HEIR. (From the Irish-American.)

CHAPTER IV.

With something of the nervous flutter of heart, with which the blushing debutante arrays herself for her first ball, did Neill proceed to don his manly habiliments.

Nance put down her pitcher, on her entrance, and gazed with astonishment on the sprucely attired figure of her favorite. "Och that I mightn't sin," she exclaimed, "if I didn't think it was some grand gentleman that made his way into me in a mistake."

After undergoing various little improvements, which the feminine taste of Nance suggested, and having an old slipper thrown after him for 'luck,' Neill sallied out on his first tour of conquest. Nance followed him to the door.

Much speculation, and no little mirth, did Neill's jaunty array create amongst the town-folks that knew his history. All concurred in the supposition that the old miser would soon die, according to the popular belief, any extraordinary generosity in persons cursed with the mania of avarice, generally boded their speedy dissolution.

He was taking his usual walk one evening when he perceived an open chariot at Colonel Vernon's door. A fine, military-looking old gentleman, with a red face and powdered wig, was in the act of hobbling into it.

From that hour his fate was sealed, and all the hardships and miseries of his lonely childhood and neglected youth were forgotten in the new and delightful visions of his ambition. His dark eye beamed more brightly, his step became more light and agile, and his whole frame beamed with the elasticity of joyous and happy youth.

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Nance was delighted, and over a 'stinging cup of tay,' prophesied the speedy marriage of 'her darlin' wid the beautiful cratur that had picked him out before all the high-flovn swells and grand quality nobz that would be givin' their two eyes for her?

Neill had now no reason to complain, the lady was often seated at work in the balcony, and a bewitching smile, or a gentle wave of her lily hand, would often reward his tender glances, and send him to his miserable home in an ecstasy of bliss. Nance, too, brought him intelligence from Biddy Cogan, as 'how there had been great talkin' and laughin' at Vernon House the night her young master and missis came home.

With so warm and eloquent an advocate as Biddy, Neill made rapid progress in Miss Silly Vernon's good graces. His acquaintance, too, increased imperceptibly; he found she regularly took a morning walk in the old Park outside the town with only a beautiful spaniel to keep her company.

About this time Nance brought intelligence of a grand masquerade ball there was to be at Vernon House in honor of Miss Lilly's 'bein' come home for good and all? It was to take the ensuing week.

'Eh, ould yer ramarsh (nonsense) now, darlin'; id isn't cracked ye are to want to be gettin' yerself into trouble; be said by me, avourneen, and lave the quality and their balls and parties to themselves; shure the world knows they are as proud as ould Nick that way, inagh—the creturs—what reason they have for id after all, a handful of bones and dust like ourselves.

A 'grand quality ball,' and a masked one, too, was at that time an event of too rare occurrence in Galway, not to excite some commotion in the town.

One night, after having gloated his eyes until he could no longer see, Neill returned home more than usually hopeless and dispirited. The ball was to come off the ensuing evening, and for the first time the strange hope which he had all along cherished of being at it, began to desert him.

He threw himself on his bed, and tried in vain to sleep, but his thoughts were filled with the ball—sweet music rang in his ears, and the vision of his beautiful Lilly mingled with groups of masqued figures quaintly and gorgeously arrayed, flitted before his eyes.

that prevented him sleeping, he leaped out of bed to extinguish it. The crazy bedstead cracked with the sudden bound he gave, and something fell upon the clothes; he caught it up, and to his astonishment and delight found it was a piece of gold; half doubting his senses, he rubbed his eyes and gazed on it again and again.

The thought struck him that perhaps it had been companion; he caught up the light, and more carefully guarding its feeble rays, he took a minute survey of his bedstead; it was one of those antique ark-like affairs called testers, formerly in use in farm houses in Ireland—the roof was covered with broad boards, and it shut in on all sides like a house, except a small aperture sufficient to let the person into it; its antiquity must have been great, for though once formed of stout oak, the wood was so decayed and eaten through with the dry-rot that it crumbled beneath his touch.

After a while he listened, and hearing nothing, his natural courage returned. Ashamed of his strange panic, he got up, went to the door, and listened intently. A recurrence of the same dull, heavy sounds met his ear, mingled at intervals with a deep sigh, or rather groan.

The old man ceased—the convulsive twitching of his features subsided, he bent his head upon his clasped hands and seemed absorbed in mental prayer. When he raised it again, the gaunt worn face was wet with tears, and the short, thick sob that burst from his heaving breast, told the keen agony of his soul.

'What's this? what's this?' he muttered hurriedly, 'the gold, the gold! ha, I remember now, they were going to rob me, and I was hiding it from them. Let me see it all safe; well, the night is waning, I must go to work and cover it; ugh, ugh, ugh, how the cold clay sets the cough going; well, well, it will never leave me until we're down together in the churchyard—ugh, ugh; but the gold is safe now, and I don't care how soon death comes—ugh, ugh; all safe now, not a con left above ground—no, no, ha, ha!—What black looks and bitter curses when I'm gone! Ha, they can't dream that there is a secret vault beneath this solid wall—ugh, ugh—not bright eye is ever on me. I know him a wanton,

graceless spendthrift; he doesn't think that I have marked his gay plumes, and watched him poring over gloves and ribbons and glittering gauds; the base spawn, he longs for my death, that he may ruffe it like a painted jay, and lavish my hard-won savings on his worthless companions; ugh, ugh, the thought kills me, but I knew it—I knew it; he was too like that curse upon his face, 'Black Hugh,' 'Him of the open hand'—forsooth, the silly fool that wasted the remnant of his once rich inheritance upon leeches, blood-suckers, smooth-tongued wretches with hollow hearts and smirking faces, who would not in his direst need have lent one doit to save his soul from perishing. Ugh, ugh, ugh, but I'll cheat him, that he shall never say he scattered the gold that wrung the old man's heart's blood. I'll bury it deep, deep, where no mortal eye shall see it!

He started up, and casting a keen, suspicious glance around, crawled feebly to a large chest which stood in a corner of the room; he unlocked it, and Neill saw him take out several large heavy bags and lay them on the ground beside him. A fierce joy sparkled in the old man's eyes, and deliberately untying one of the larger ones, he took several handfuls of glittering coin and sifted them backwards in his hand.

'Gold, gold,' said he; 'precious metal! true and faithful to the thrifty—false and fickle to the prodigal—all my pangs are forgotten when I look upon thee; by hard saving and scraping and toiling I gathered ye all; but all, all was gained in honesty; and thou hast been father and mother, and friends and country, and kindred and home.'

He raised two of the bags, and with difficulty bore them to the cavity; again and again he returned; Neill, still spell-bound, remained an unseen witness of his proceedings. The last bag was deposited; the old man returned, raised the lid of the chest and groped about it, as if in search of more. He drew out a large bundle of parchments; he gazed at them a moment, then held them to the light; a sudden change came over his pallid visage; he looked eagerly at the parchments; his eye flashed, and drawing up his stately figure to its full height, while his gaze was fixed on vacancy, as if he beheld some unseen object, he murmured in a voice whose husky tones grew deep and impassioned as he proceeded—

'Father! mother! I have kept faith; I have returned and redeemed my inheritance; my birthright is free, and the home of our race is no longer profaned by the foot of the stranger.—Parents, sweet sister, loved one—I have not forgotten you; in the depths of the silent night, in the crowded city or poring over the dull desk, your memory has been present with me; for you I have bowed down the towering pride, the lofty hopes and bright anticipations of my youth, and meanly toiled and striven and heaped up wealth. Alas, how idly; but absorbed by one devouring thought, I took no count of time; I wildly thought that ye could linger out long years of hopeless misery. Rank and honors wooed me, and I might have wedded with the fairest in the land; but my home and the mountains and the valleys of my native country were ever present to my sight, and other ties, or lovelier spots on earth could not fill the void within my breast. I returned with wealth and rank fit to compete with the noblest in it, and with a spirit still fresh and ardent to fulfill the fond dream and proud visions which had wiled away my youth; but my brain was scored, my heart broken, for those I loved so well and strove so long and idly for, were mouldering in the tomb—and I could have saved them! God! thou hast poured the fiercest vial of thy wrath upon my head.'

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they, so let them search and scrape, and rummage not a penny will they find, ugh, ugh. They despised the poor old man; they spoke him fairly to his face, and cursed and called him niggard when his back was turned. Ha, let them be merry that win—ha, ha, ugh, ugh—the cough won't let me laugh. How I should like my ghost should haunt them and mock their fruitless search.'

Tickled by the odd fancy, the miser threw himself back upon the mound of clay and burst into peals of hysteric laughter. The strange wild mirth rang through the still silence of the night, until its shrill echoes startled even the half-maniac being that uttered it; cowering and shivering as if he had in truth summoned up some disembodied spirit, he glanced fearfully around him; then hastily and silently commenced closing up the cavity.

Awe-stricken and amazed, Neill stole off to bed. It was dark and he had to grope his way. He fell asleep almost immediately, and slept profoundly until dawn. With a confused recollection of the events of the night, he sought for his treasure which still lay scattered about the bed. A bundle of bank notes had fallen with them, but he could not ascertain the precise amount of the whole sum, most of the gold being in foreign coins, whose value he was ignorant of. He then replaced them in their original hiding place; reserving sufficient to supply Nance's necessities and to purchase the much coveted dress for the ball. The last of his toilet and arrangements were ended, when he heard his uncle's steps descending the stairs, for notwithstanding his having been up the greater part of the night, such was the influence of habit, that he had risen at his usual hour. The old man returned his salutation in his ordinary passionless manner. Neill offered to go for the morning's repast, which request having been complied with, he supplied some more substantial provisions than the few pence he had received for the purpose could procure. The miser's eyes sparkled with delight at the unusual quantity and profusion of the meal, but he manifested no curiosity to know how it had been got. Neill was too eager and excited to eat, and he left the table, with the excuse of going to take his usual walk.

Nance was in ecstasy of delight at her darlings good fortune.

'Allin! she shrieked, as he poured some of his glittering treasure into her lap, and is it all all our own, jewel, and yourself that found it, too, Arra, chora machree, didn't I often tell ye, ye wor born for luck. Shure there's people that, let them put their hand to what they will, and it'll thrive wid them; and others for the contrary. Look at O'Donnell now—I'm not going to say anything disrespectful of him, the Lord forbid; shure it's myself that pities him—one of the rare ould stock, too; when a child, he was overlooked, and that's the reason, he was always so proud and dark and sorrowful in himself; and though he had riches in plenty, did they ever bring light or gladness to his heart? No, darling astore, for it's little good this world's lucre'll do if the heart ain't right widin us. But maybe it's yourself, allanna, that doesn't know the meaning of id rightly; it's whin the good people fixes their eyes on a fine likely child, they send some wise woman to overlook id for them, and whin once she lays her eyes on id, and if there's no one by to make her bless id, it's done for, and sometimes it grows up, that the mother of id wouldn't know id in the ind; crooked and bandy and lame and them ways; mighty cute, pleasant creturs, always laughing and joking and saying queer things, but still for all they are bad and bitter in themselves, and shure the bitter drop was in The O'Donnell, for though by all accounts he made a power of money (and it rains to them kind of people,) it wouldn't lave him spend id nor put it to the uses the Lord intended. Aye, darling, what talks I have fretting ye, and ye after running wid the yellow goold to me this morning. God's blessing on yer hand-sel. Faix, it's a most cracked I am whin I look at it. Shure id ain't cowed nor hunger we'll feel for the rest of the winter, my darling, but the height of good aiting and drinking, and lashtins to give for God's sake to the poor cretur, that comes to the door.'

'To tell the truth, Nance,' said Neill, in a hesitating voice, 'I don't like to take it all, though I'm half inclined to think that my uncle would not put the money where I found it; still he used to sleep there before the window was broken by the storm, and he might have put it there, and have forgotten to take it out again, and the moment he misses it he will fix upon me as the only one that could take it; and, indeed,' continued he, bitterly, while his cheek reddened at the recollection of his uncle's soliloquy of the previous night, 'he thinks bad enough of me already.'

'Erra, whist, darling,' said Nance, somewhat frightened at Neill's scruples; 'aren't ye the foolish boy entirely. Yeh, didn't ye find the money, and what is The O'Donnell always saying but that he isn't worth a brass farthen; and