

ILL-WON PEERAGES

AN UNHALLOWED UNION.

By M. L. O'Byrne.

CHAPTER XLV.—CONTINUED.

He arrived at Don Antonio's residence just as O'Driscoll had preceded him, anxious and miserable, with a new care weighing upon his heart. His mother, whose health had long been ailing, too hastily apprised of Alphonse's condition, had fallen into one of her swooning fits, and though better when he left her, had to retire to her room, to which he feared she would be some time confined; and then hastily he inquired of the servant about Miss Fitzpatrick. The mental replied that there was no perceptible improvement; that another doctor had been called in, and the two were then with Don Antonio in the drawing-room. Miles and O'Driscoll went up, to find Effie and Nelly hanging about the lobby to waylay the physicians as they came forth, for an opinion upon their own case; and as the two gentlemen entered the drawing-room, they followed without ceremony, eager to make known some nondescript symptoms that troubled them to the men of lore. Don Antonio's face, as Miles and O'Driscoll conceived, did not express an air of much satisfaction; nor did the physicians, when questioned as to their hopes of the patient, give very definite opinion. One shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"She has youth on her side and an unimpaired constitution. We hope the best." The other added: "Whatever the faculty has prescribed in such cases we have administered, but it was a serious mistake not to have called in advice immediately upon symptoms supervening the swallowing of the bonbons."

"Then you believe it was the bonbons caused her illness?" said Miles. "Undoubtedly; I have known many children poisoned by eating those noxious compounds of plaster, and arsenic, and other deleterious colors and ingredients." "Sir, do you think we'll die?" exclaimed Effie, whose terror broke loose and defied all control. "We ate a lot of them, Nelly and I."

"I see nothing to indicate such casualty, my dear; but if you wish, I'll order you emetics," smiled Doctor Adrien. "Meanwhile, sir"—he turned to Don Antonio as he left the room—"remember, above all things, the patient is to be kept quiet and free from excitement till the feverish symptoms are abated, and we can, after neutralizing the effects of the drug, get up her exhausted strength."

They departed; and for the rest of the day a pin might have been heard to fall in the house. Don Antonio, in his anxiety for Alphonse, merging solicitude for his nephew, deputed Miles and Maurice to find where he had been conveyed, and himself set down to write to various parties whose interest he hoped might be of avail in the young man's case. Early the following day O'Driscoll, accompanied by Miles, who met him by appointment, hastened to make inquiries about the invalid. Upon being told she passed a restless night, but was now a little more composed, as the doctors expected, they went up stairs, and met Effie on the landing, who whispered:

"Lady Alicia's just come; she's in the drawing-room, and wanted to go up to Alphonse, but I told her she couldn't, that Don Antonio said the nurse was with her, and the doctors coming."

"My dear Maurice," cried the lady, coming to the door as they entered, and her look expressed so much feeling that O'Driscoll, rescinding former impressions, thought: "Well, you are a generous, noble-hearted creature, and I was mistaken in my contrary opinion." "Poor darling Alphonse! Only this morning I heard she was so ill, and came off at once to see her. What do the doctors say? My poor fellow!"

"We must wait till we hear what they say to-day. She has had a bad night," said Maurice with a choking in his throat. "Of course we hope the best."

"Poor dear, of course you do. Sweet Alphonse!" "It was the bonbons you gave her, Lady Alicia," said Miles, "that sickened her."

"Sir, what do you mean to insinuate?" screamed Lady Alicia, with brow of thunder, and lightning in her eyes. "Do you dare to say the bonbons contained poison, and that I willfully conspired against Miss Fitzpatrick's life?"

"I did not use the words poison or life," calmly replied Miles. "I merely said the bonbons sickened her."

"Beware what you say, sir. I am not one to be assailed with impunity; and I have friends powerful and prompt to do my best and redress my grievance," retorted the lady, with the hissing tone and vindictive aspect of an envenomed snake about to dart its fangs. So terrible was the effect of her speech, and gesture of rage and alarm, that for the first time an awful suspicion, that was almost conviction, flashed into the soul of O'Driscoll, and shuddering he recoiled from the touch of her cold, fishy hand, as one electrified by contact with a torpedo; while, grasping his, she continued, in agitated strain: "Would you believe me capable of it—of anything so base? O'Byrne, you wicked wretch!"

"My dear Lady Alicia, compose yourself," cried Maurice, soothingly. "My friend Miles has said nothing absolutely that could be construed into the smallest offence. I might myself be open to the reproach, innocently of giving sweetmeats to some one that disagreed."

"But who said the bonbons were poisoned, and that I gave them to her?" said Lady Alicia, now weeping hysterically upon Maurice's shoulder.

"The doctor said they were poisoned. Where did you get them, and have you any more?" "Then the doctor is a liar, and he is in the plot against me. They came to me from France; I have eaten of them myself. Oh, cruel, cruel Maurice! to hear such a charge, and not knock down the traducer;—but I will deal with him."

"Suppose they were poisoned; you might not have known it," said Maurice. "You make too much of it."

"To be sure; I declare I feel so relieved. What gave her the bad night, do you think? Maybe some one innocently told her about her brother the priest, and that may have disquieted her, poor thing."

"No. What! do you know anything of him? We have been trying to make him out, Miles and I," said O'Driscoll, eagerly.

"Oh, don't you know?—If not, perhaps I should not tell you?" "Yes, yes, pray tell us; a murderous certainty is better than torturing suspenses."

"He is dead, unhappy man, refused to answer all questions put to him, and died in Beresford's Mews, at Drumcondra, last night;—so Claudius told my uncle. Don't say a word of it to poor Alphonse. Oh, by-the-by, Maurice, I want you to do me a favor; I am going on Monday next to Lady Adborough's rout, and you know I'd like to look my best. Would you coax dear Alphonse to lend me the pearl suit your mother gave her? I'd prefer a loan of her uncle's diamonds, and if I asked him myself I'm sure he'd oblige me; but his manner is so stiff and unpleasant it repels me; so I must be content with the pearls just for one night. Effie will take your message and run up and get them for me."

"Alphonse is to be kept quiet, the doctor says, and we couldn't tease her for them now," cried Effie, looking at Maurice, who replied:

"There's time enough yet between this and Monday, Lady Alicia; she cannot be disturbed now. And so they have murdered poor Fitzpatrick?"

"Oh, you know he was a United Irishman; they couldn't help it; the country must be pacified. Of course it is very sad, and we are all so sorry; but couldn't Effie run up and get the jewels quietly? Alphonse need know nothing of it, they'll be back before she wants them, and I'd like to see what dress would best suit them."

"I couldn't do it, Lady Alicia," returned Maurice, in tone more hard and firm than ever she had heard from him. "Excuse me if I go; I hear the doctor's carriage. Come, Miles."

"Then I may go," sighed Lady Alicia, "and as I drive through town on my return, I'll call to hear the news. Effie, would you like to drive in the carriage?"

"No, I would not," bluntly responded Effie, yet ruing the bitter memory of bonbons and emetics.

"Wouldn't you like, dear, to go to see your old friends, the Misses Hodgsones? I'll take you, if you wish, there."

"No, thank you, I don't care at all to see the Miss Hodgsones;" and Effie decamped from the saloon, while Lady Alicia made her way, unattended, to the hall-door.

"Maurice," said Miles, as they waited in the dining-room the return of the doctor, and saw her step into her chariot, "avoid that woman; there's a fiend in her eye; was beside the man that shall call her wife, and with a pang at his heart he dashed away a tear that had sprung to his eye, and turned to scan the backs of the books in a glass-case beside him.

Two hours later, Florence Esmond, yielding to the persuasion of her cousin, Ethel Courtney, ordered the jaunting-car, and mournfully apathetic, accompanied her to pay a visit to Alphonse, of whose illness they had not even heard. As they drew up before the house, Ethel uttered an exclamation, and Florence a moment abstracted from her sorrow, fixed a gaze of surprise upon the shrouded windows.

"Someone is dead; it must be Don Antonio, cried Ethel. They descended from the car and knocked at the door; a servant opened it, and bursting into tears murmured:

"She's just gone half an hour, Miss."

"Who?" cried Florence, pushing her way into the parlor, while Ethel ran upstairs.

"Poor Alphonse," said Miles, dejectedly, coming forward, leading her in by the hand and closing the door. "Poor Alphonse is dead; I'm glad you've come, Florence."

"Alphonse dead!" exclaimed Florence, forgetting every other thought, and fainted away.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE EMIGRANTS.

"I am glad you came, dear Florence," were the reiterated words addressed by Miles O'Byrne to Florence Esmond, as, recovered from her brief lapse of consciousness, she sat beside him on the sofa, her hand in his, her eyes bent downward, her countenance expressing contending emotions of dismay and pity for the fate of Alphonse, and reviving hope for her own destiny. "I am glad," he repeated, "to see you once more, for not such as the past would I that our parting were."

"But must we part, Miles?" she hastily interrupted. "I have given you my love, which shall never be recalled. I have pledged my faith which it is not in any power save yours to sever. Whatever may be your lot in life, for weal or woe, I am content and strong to share with you."

"Dear Florence," he returned, deeply moved, "urge no more. I appeal to that self-same love and devotion of yours, and ask would you, could you, noble in every sentiment as you are, as me to forsake my own self-respect to exhibit my own self-esteem by act so unworthy? You know the undisciplined opinions and prejudices of your family. What hope of domestic concord should bless our ill-starred union, could I brook, fiery as I am of soul, the insult, scorn, and contumely of your naughty brothers and their friends? I fear not a drawn sword, which not the voice of an angel of peace might bid be sheathed, would rule and ensnare our house. Yet more, granted I were magnanimous enough to rise superior to myself and pass by Marmion's hate and Percy's sneer, or portrion enough to sneak away and hide from their wrath, what manner of mind or heart should animate my nature, to behold, unmoved and unremorseful, Florence, beautiful and good, the star of her sphere, and the cythere of every eye, dragged down by my hand from the high estate, her birthright, disowned by her brothers, forsaken by her friends, plunged into obscurity, and all for no other guerdon than that of my fatal love, which, without dooming such indiction, may yet and for ever be hers?" He drew from his bosom the ring she had given him, and which was attached by a little chain to his crucifix. "You remember this token, dearest? I am not going to return it, for though while I release you, Florence, from your pledge to ally with my destiny, this little amulet shall ever rest upon my bosom, closing the door of my heart, and guarding, inaccessible to every other object, the empty niche consecrated to its sole idol, my lost Florence." He kissed her hand and rose quickly, warned by an approaching step that the door; it opened, and Ethel entered with streaming eyes, accompanied by Effie, sobbing as if her heart would break, and Don Antonio, looking like a statue of solemnity cast in bronze. Silently he shook hands with Florence, standing in awe-struck horror, a picture of speechless woe.

"Where's O'Driscoll?" said Miles, addressing M'Mahon, who answered, in hollow tone: "Gone home; just got word that his mother was found dead, sitting in her bedroom—disease of the heart. Poor fellow!"

"Any commands, sir?" cried a servant, noiselessly opening the door. "I'm going through town."

Commands were re-echoed Don Antonio, looking perplexed and preoccupied. "Yes; wait—stay, you are going to give directions to the undertaker; have you got my note? You might as well bid an auctioneer come up with a valuator to take the furniture, and call on Jefferies, the landlord, to come over this evening till I settle about the rent; that will do—go."

"What am I going to do?" mildly returned Don Antonio, but with firmness of look and tone that left no doubt of his perfect competency to govern his affairs. "I am going once again to fly with speed from this land of desolation, where I have suffered wreck and loss of all that was dear to my bosom—my brave boy Patrick, my murdered Alphonse, and my grandchild, sole offspring of my only daughter, whom in evil hour I beguiled from her widowed father's arms to accompany me on this ill-fated voyage to perish with our vessel on the coast." He wrung his hands and moaned aloud: "For your sake, Patrick and Alphonse, whose dubious love comforted my soul, and whom I had looked to be the staff of my declining years, I had consented to make again my home in my fatherland, having no other ties to bind me to my foreign associations, my son-in-law having formed for himself other connexions indifferent to me; and now, lo! behold the sequel."

"But Alphonse murdered, you said, Don Antonio?" exclaimed Ethel Courtney, with starting eyes. "What mean you?" "Though the last word my child spoke, with O'Driscoll's hand and mine locked in hers, was: 'Forgive her and let her live to repent,' I will lift my voice and let it resound to the ear of the murderers, whose name, for sake of the promise extorted by our lost one, shall not be spoken. Alphonse died of the poisoned sweets offered by her hand."

Florence and Ethel simultaneously uttered a cry and clasped their hands.

"Yes," said Miles, "in friendship's guise sweetmeats were given to the victim; some, we have now ascertained, were harmless; some slightly tainted with deleterious mixture. But one was prepared with distinct ingredient sufficient to accomplish the end, and that one the unsuspecting Alphonse ate."

"And threw up the Apostolic one," laugh ed Miles, scornfully. "Let me say on—Showed himself one day in church at Monkstown, where the event so notable you may see blazoned on marble—"

"Testifying to the edification of his example," sneered Miles. "To the triumph, sir, of our having made a convert of such notoriety; unlike his son Robert, who, shouldered up, no doubt, by his friends—Grattan, Conolly of Castle town, and his kinsmen, Blackney of Balleilwyn, Wyse of The Manor, and the Devereuxes—rather than consult his own interest, and vote for the Union. I can tell you, Government made him handsome offers through Castlereagh for his support of the measure."

"The destruction of his country." "No, sir, the good of the country. Well, he stubbornly refused, as you know, as the world knows, all terms."

"Was this why the pikes were hidden in his demesne of Cabintoe?" "I know nothing about that transaction. The Sham Squire, who knew of Byrne's disaffection to the Union, and that he was hence in no favor with the Government, very likely thought it a good opportunity to help the Government to get rid of him."

"Then we should have Higgins and Co., under Castlereagh's patronage, lording it in the last remnant left of our ancient heritage, but for the influential interposition of Judge Day, with the Viceroy, and his disclosure of the villainy."

"Well, to what end?" Bob Byrne, who might have defied them, and held his head higher than the best, by just giving the tips of his fingers to the Government's outstretched hand, dashed the whole thing, and flies like a hunted hare to pine an exiled man in Buenos Ayres, with his wife and three little girls. Come, Miles, my good fellow, have some common sense; change your tactics, steer with the wind that blows, for the Union will be carried with or without you. Dame Fortune is just now disposed to be amiable in your regard; catch her by the skirt, come in along with your friends to the Castle, where pensions and peerages are at discount for votes, and any amount of patronage you go in for. Why do you shake your head and laugh?"

"I can't help but laugh to think of the enclosure of patented nobility with which our ancient pedigree should be confounded—certainly not such as can boast in heraldic page to honor well won in field of chivalry. Some I could name, you know them yourself—peers and peeresses, save the mark!—with whom I would prefer to have no association."

"Fish—hang it, what a cynic you are. Then here's my hand, and the hand of Florence Esmond, together, and Percy smiling fair approval for himself and Marmion by proxy on the transaction. Come."

"Don't tempt me beyond my strength to a gulf I see yawning beneath my feet," said Miles, with a wrung bosom. "I am prepared to pay the cost at which the treasure may be mine. Oh! Florence, Florence. He broke down and sobbed."

"There was a loud knock at the front-door. "The Major, Sir, and an officer!" cried Effie in alarm, as she peered out under a corner of the blind. "What brings him now?" "Fly, Miles! Oh, fly!" cried Florence. They clasped in last farewell.

"Get out by the coach-house," said Don Antonio, hastening to warn the servants. "Go on board at once, and I'll follow by-and-by with the children."

"Take your berth, Miles, under an assumed name, as so shall I also," whispered O'Driscoll, as they made off together. "We are in a hunter's net, and it behooves us to move with caution."

So down to the quay they passed, unobstructed, while Major Sirr, seated at wine with Don Antonio and the visitors, blandly asking for Miles O'Byrne, of whom he wanted to make inquiries concerning a boy who had been in his employment, was gravely informed by Captain Courtney that he had just taken the coach to Wexford with a friend, but that he intended to ask him to dine on his return in a day or two, and that if the Major would join them he would confer much pleasure on all parties; to which proposal the Major graciously assented, nothing in doubt of killing two birds with one stone; then added: "I suppose he is gone to make inquiries about his insurgent brother, who was shot with his band of ninety pikemen the day before yesterday on the Hill of Tara by the troops. Desperate villains! We are cutting them down now pretty fast."

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"I can't help but laugh to think of the enclosure of patented nobility with which our ancient pedigree should be confounded—certainly not such as can boast in heraldic page to honor well won in field of chivalry. Some I could name, you know them yourself—peers and peeresses, save the mark!—with whom I would prefer to have no association."

mournfully upon the severed idol of his knightly devotion, with feelings that must expire unknown and be buried out of sight in his bosom. The red sunset glow is streaming upon the still, deep river, and emptying the shades of eve; as they fall upon the scene. Amid the songs of the mariners and the alternate hush and murmur of the surging multitude, the anchor is weighed; the vessel, with its heavy weight, aways from side to side; the sails swell to the light breeze; a deafening cheer, blended with wailing from the shore, is responded to by a heartrending cry from the deck; a cry of woe and farewell, from riven bosoms, for sundried ties of human affections, which might have pressed, and rings awfully and evermore solemnly on the ear. Morn, rising in the open sky, shines upon the blue expanse of the deep, and upon the emigrant ship steering gallantly on her way, far, far upon her course, every sail inflated with favoring winds, and the briny gates of the shoreless realm fanning cheeks humid with tears, and bosoms yet heaving with convulsive throes from that wrench of the heart and hand from all that was dear to life. Maurice O'Driscoll, acting with the ghastly wound festering in his soul, brooding over the immeasurable ruin of all his hopes and fortunes, sat apart, gazing listless upon the foamy track out by their progress through the billows; while Miles O'Byrne, no less dejected by the stroke that had cast into eclipse all his future life, stood leaning against the mast with folded arms, hearing from O'Hart and Mooney the blacksmith—who had contrived to escape and smuggle themselves among the emigrants—accounts of various disasters befalling their friends; but he was chiefly interested in learning the fate of Ned Burke, who, having been taken prisoner along with Johnny Doyle in Dublin, were condemned by Major Sirr to receive each a hundred lashes, and be sent on board two separate transport vessels which had sailed for America the week before with gangs of prisoners, to be pressed into the war England was then waging with America; and of Kitty Burke, whom they had met making her way from Wicklow, where she had been confined for a time with a wound in her leg, received in the last action.

Meanwhile, day after day, the crowded emigrant ship held her steady course; night set upon the waves; sunrise illumined the Atlantic; and then came a change over the horizon. Skies lowered above, and from black, incumbent clouds spouted drenching rain-floods, and swept the breath of the equinox, engulfing the vessel in the abyss of mountain billows, and shaking every timber of the fragile hulk, as it quaked in the tornado's grasp of wrath. Nelly and Effie, terrified, kept near Don Antonio, whose own many troubles, bravely stemmed and crushed down, had not hindered him from manifesting towards them a paternal interest, and even courting their confidence; while in many a social moment he listened attentively to their prattle, and learned from them with profound sympathy and secret surprise, allied to pain, the history of the *ban-see*, and all the troubles of which she had been the dread forerunner. Now close by his side they crouched, within sight of the land their destined goal, and beheld a fine frigate in the offing, struggling to make the port; when lo! the close-reefed, togalant mast gave way beneath a shock of the tempest; the vessel lurched, floundered, and a death-shriek rose from the black abyss of the raging deep, strewn with human forms, gasping and struggling for life. Oh for an arm to aid! Swiftly the Amphitrite's boats are out and manned. Miles and Maurice strain every nerve; their comrades ply the oar with vigorous stroke; but long ere they reached the scene of disaster, buffeted by waves and winds, almost every soul had gone down. The foremost boat picked up two or three, one faintly struggling form floated towards theirs, then sunk. Miles leaped over, caught him by the hair, himself narrowly escaping being swept beyond reach of helping hands; and being aided back into the boat, he discovered in the inanimate form he had just rescued from a watery grave and the boiling surge the boy Ned Burke!

CHAPTER XLVII.

CASTLEREAGH ACHIEVES HIS END, AND ENDS HIS CAREER.

Triumphant over the herculean stand of Grattan, and the small cohort of magnanimous patriots who had fought by his side to oppose and resist the abolition of their country's independence, despite the rivers of blood shed by the gallant nation to preserve its freedom, coercion, bribery, corruption and falsehood—base tools of the minions of Castlereagh and the Government carried the day. Ireland's liberty was violently wrested from her grasp; the royal charter of the Irish nation, guaranteed by the British Legislature shortly before and confirmed by the words, the signature, and the great seal of the monarch, was cancelled, and the constitution of the country was voted away by paid British nobles, Orange gentry, and clerks and hirelings employed and smuggled into Parliament for the occasion.

"Upon the evening of the last year of the Act which was to transfer an ancient and respectable nation, crowned with an aureole of more than four thousand years of traditional and historic fame and untarnished honor, to the condition of a tributary province, dependent upon the questionable honor of England for justice, the Houses of Parliament were closely invested by the military, no demonstration of popular feeling was permitted. A British regiment, near the entrance, patrolled through the Ionic colonnades. The galleries were crowded, but not by those who had been accustomed to witness the eloquence, and to animate the debates of the assembly. A monotonous and melancholy murmur ran through the benches. A sacred word was exchanged among the members. At length the expected moment arrived. The order for the third reading of the bill for the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland was moved by Lord Castlereagh. Unvaried, tame, cold-blooded, the words seemed frozen as they issued from his lips; and, as if a simple citizen of the word, he seemed to have no sensation on the subject, at that moment he had no country, no God but his ambition. He resumed his seat; confused murmurs ran through the house; it was visibly affected. Every character in a moment seemed involuntarily rushing to its index, some pale, some flushed, some agitated. Several members withdrew before the question could be repeated, and an awful momentary silence succeeded their departure. The Speaker rose slowly from his chair, held up the bill, looked steadily round him, and then, in the presence of Parliament, he said: 'The bill is now read a third time.' The eyes have been dimmed with a subtle, stinging, and insidious, but steady state-like, then flung the bill upon the table, and sank into his chair, exhausted and indignant."

The last meeting of the Parliament in College Green was held on Saturday, October 20th, 1800; and in proportion as there was humiliation and mourning among the patriot few for their nation's downfall from glory's high pinnacle, and for its usurped right of self-legislation, so was there joy, and gratulation, and banqueting, in the high places of power, for victory achieved, what though the blood-

stained laurel wreath had been dragged in pollution, and honor and chivalry stood proudly aloof from the ignoble revolve of degraded slaves? Chief of the pandemonium, he whose brow glazes beneath the glare of a coronet—yet why is his cheek pale? and his eye, why does it gleam with a charnel light, in whose phosphoric glitter there is neither soul nor mirth? Has the cup not been filled to the brim for which he stipulated? Has the guerdon of his labor, weighed in the scale of his ambition been found fraudulently short of measure. He has achieved his end and aims. At the altar of ambition two most ill-assorted hands have been joined in bands of unhallowed union; over hecatombs of mangled dead, and