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FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER XXI.—(*Continued.*)

As Nelly Carty approached her door to unfasten it, the morning's blessed light—blessed even on a November morning—was spreading tolerably well through the interior of her hut, and by its help she saw an eye peeping in through the many cracks of that frail safeguard. She started back. But at a second glance it could not be Robin Costigan's eye, neither had it the expression nor the color of Father Connell's. It would have done very well for the eye of a jackdaw, on an extra-gigantic scale; as she smiled complacently at the re-assurance, an uncommonly low whistle, just breathing in, through another chink, quite convinced her of the identity of its possessor.

"Why thin, Tom Naddy, what in the world brings you here, at this hour in the mornin'?" she asked, dinging her door wide open.

Word Tom uttered not; but, half turning his head, without suspending his whistle, beckoned, as it were, with one of his shoulders, to a group of strong young fellows at his back, to follow him into the cabin.

Of this group each held a something in his hand. Two or three clutched good cudgels; another, what seemed a shoemaker's hammer; while two or more bore coils of quite new rope, whether for the comparatively peaceful purpose of securing somebody's limbs, or for another, too serious to be lightly mentioned, has never been perfectly ascertained. As for Tom Naddy himself, he had his hands in his waistcoat pockets and held nothing at all in them, so far as could be seen or known.

He lounged very leisurely into the hovel, and first struck by the figure of Mary Cooney, in a corner, stopped short, gazing and whistling at her. Then he as suddenly scraped one of his feet, and pulled his hat a little downward by way of a polite salute, and passed to Bridget Mulrooney's bed. The old potato-beggar awoke just as he was looking down upon her, his head turned sideways, and first screamed aloud, and then began to scold and curse him. He quietly proceeded to Nelly Carty's empty couch, and then, to the pig's well occupied one, and when this master of the house also began to remonstrate against his unceremonious intrusion on his luxurious morning slumbers, he only patted the animal's fat shoulders and sides, while his scrutinizing glances stole round and round the apartment. Finally he started up, and hurrying to the open door, and snatching his hands out of their repositories, spread wide the fingers of each, pointed outwards in various directions through the shower of houses, and then running himself through one of the crooked ways of the puzzle, and followed by his men, each running through another of its crooked ways, he and they were soon out of sight and hearing.

A few moments after, Father Connell, and Mary Cooney, side by side, and hand in hand, were also threading the labyrinth. After a few words with her, the bare-legged and bare-headed beggar-girl had taken his offered hand, smilingly and trustingly, as a child of six years old might have done; and while he worked and squeezed hers in it, as we know to have been his wont, on similar occasions, she did not shrink from the real pain thus inflicted, as, indeed, she might reasonably have done, but, looking up into his face, only smiled the more.

Nelly Carty watched the pair from her open doorway, till she could see them no longer. She then knelt on her threshold, and crossing her face with her hands, sobbed out, in a weak, feminine tone—"Ay, alanna machree—go home wid the priest—an' may he make you a better an' a happier woman than your misfortunate mother ever was, afore you."

CHAPTER XXII.

Miss Bessy Lanigan was the proprietress of a small, genteel house in a small genteel street, where none but small, genteel houses, inhabited by small, genteel people, held a place. No shop was to be seen in it, or any other evidence of an occupant who might be supposed to earn his or her bread by traffic, or handicraft pursuits. Towards its end indeed, a small, genteel boarding-school for young ladies, might have been found, but as this was not illustrated by a brass plate on the little, green hall-door, it passed well enough for a small, genteel, private house also.

Miss Bessie Lanigan herself was on a scale of small gentility with her house, her street, and her neighbors. Her figure was small, and her dress genteel—barely genteel, just a degree or two removed from thread-bare genteel; her little drawing-room was, by a series of contrivances, genteel; her voice was small and genteel; her talk small and genteel; her intellect, and her acquirements just as small, and just as genteel.

No person in her native city boasted a wider circle of acquaintances, among the small genteel, than did Miss Bessy Lanigan; and indeed she merited this distinction; her prodigious knowledge of the affairs of others, and her readiness, nay zeal, in imparting that knowledge, would alone have entitled her to it. But the little lady, furthermore, played whist and the more Irish game of five-and-twenty, incomparably well; she was always good-humored—nay, in recollection of former times—absolutely frisky; but above all other things, Miss Bessy Lanigan was good-natured. How? She had lived a certain number of years, and yet had never been married, nay, had never refused an offer of marriage; but instead of becoming soured at these circumstances, or envious of those whose fortunes were differently shaped, it seemed to do her little heart good to rejoice in, to promote, and particularly to be mad confidentially acquainted with the love affairs of her younger associates, from one end of the town to the other. Let it be added that Miss Bessy Lanigan was sentimental to the small, genteel extent of a perusal of a certain class of the novels of the era in which she lived, as well as of that before it; and poetical too, so far as an acquaintance with the love lyrics of those times might deserve the term.

Nor was her acquaintance limited to the small genteel alone. Some of the great genteel themselves — Heaven bless the mark!—who lived in a larger private street; in larger houses, and with everything larger surrounding them, shone upon her with the light of their countenances; and this is going to appear.

On a fine autumn evening, as Miss Bessy reclined genteelly on a little sofa in her little drawing-room, waiting for the hour to go out on an invitation to tea—for scarcely ever did her engagements, or her means, allow her to take tea at home—a hasty, though lengthened assault was made on the brightest of brass knockers at her hall-door—an oval-shaped one, of about four inches long—and, in a few moments after, a very lovely girl bounded into the room.

Had Miss Lanigan known Mary Cooney, and not known this visitor, she might have started at the supposed apparition of poor Mary, suddenly appearing fashionably dressed before her. For the young lady and the beggar-girl were of the same height, with the same turn of figure, and symmetry of limb; with the same blue eyes, or very nearly so, the same golden hair, the same general expression—their very smile was the same; and a difference in their age could scarce be detected. Thus Miss Lanigan might, as has been said, have been startled at this vision of Mary Cooney in fine masquerade; but the next instant would have removed her delusion, for when the young lady began to speak, and to express herself, through the still more emphatic language of movement, action, and manner, it could not have been our humble friend who stood before her.

When friendly greetings had been interchanged—"Gracious me now," cried Miss Lanigan, "only to see you here, in such a flurry, my dear!"

"And I am in a flurry," answered the young lady, "I've run away from papa and Mr. Stanton, while they are at their wine, just to ask your advice as usual, when I shall have told you something; and I must be back again to them, in time to make their tea."

"On this beautiful evening, when nature's self woos you, in gentle language, if the absent youth does not, to saunter far and wide?" said Miss Lanigan, and waving her little hand she quoted—

"'Primrose deck the bank's green side,
Cowslips enrich the valley,
The blackbird woos his destined bride.
Let's range the fields, my Sally.'"

"Oh, nonsense, now, dear Miss Lanigan—that is—I beg your pardon, I mean—but I have really something to say. Let us sit down till I take breath. How am I to begin? I scarce know how; I don't know whether to laugh or to cry; I don't know how to say it. A word against dear papa I will not utter; but every evening, since the last you spent with us, there is this Mr. Stanton, formally received by him, as my wooer, and as formally installing himself—the odious animal!—in the office. At first, I could laugh, till the tears came into my eyes, at the man; now, I really begin somehow to fear him—there is such a steady, stupid pertinacity in his proceedings."

"And you have bluntly rejected him, so often?" said the little cabinet councillor, "and he still continues his assiduities?"

"Yes, still continues his assiduities, as you are pleased to call them. Take a specimen from yesterday evening, of the various ways in which he continues them. I had gone upstairs to the drawing-room, and was busily employed with some work, when his creaking shoes and he entered the room."

"Gracious me now! I vow and protest, my dear! Well, my love? There you were, seemingly engaged with your needle, and he came in?"

"I was really engaged with my needle, for I dislike seeming to do anything which I do not in reality do. He sat for a long while on the edge of a remote chair, without opening his lips; his hideous eyes rolling about, as if they were glaring after a ghost, from which he seemed eager to escape if possible."

"My goodness, my dear! On the edge of a chair too! Oh, the creature, my dear! Just as if soft things could be whispered from the edge of a remote chair. My gracious goodness! Well, love?"

"At length his eyes fixed on my needle and thread, and he got speech. 'Miss Helen—' said he, and he stopped.

"To which you made answer, 'Sir,' and *you* stopped, my dear?"

"'Miss Helen,' quoth he again. 'Do you know what I'm thinking I'll do?' 'No, indeed, Mr. Stanton,' I replied, 'what is it?' 'I'm thinking then that I'll—I'll break your thread, Miss.' 'Don't sir, pray,' said I, and so he did not."

With a laugh that came from her usually merry heart, Helen M'Neary ended this anecdote. The little hysteric, "hi, hi, hi," of Miss Lanigan ably responded to her.

"Poor fellow, my dear, poor frightened fellow! It was his overpowering passion for you, that so bewildered him. If he could, he ought to have sung at the moment—

"'Since you've taught me how to languish,
Teach, oh teach me, how to please.'"

"Well, my dear, what did he do or say then?"

"Nothing for a long while, not a word, not a stir reached me. Suddenly his shoes creaked, so loudly and abruptly that I started, and for the first time, looked fully at him. He was standing erect, one hand in a coat pocket.—With that hand, from that pocket, he extracted, by-and-by, a soiled old pocket-book, of huge dimensions, and from it again, a letter, folded and wafered. Then he advanced to me, and saying 'I would thank you to read that, Miss Helen,' turned his back on me, and strode out of the room."

"Dear me! good gracious, my dear! a tender epistle! oh, can I see it, my dear? can I read it, love?" admired and interrogated Miss Lanigan.

"You can do both; I have it with me.—Here it is, and perhaps you will let me read it for you."

"Oh, of all earthly things, my dear! gracious goodness! I am dying to hear it."

"Listen then," and Helen read, with a good mock gravity, the following, 'tender epistle,' as Miss Lanigan called it. The young lady, now young no longer, has handed it to us for insertion in these memoirs; we copy it word, and letter for letter; and moreover, we preserve it carefully for inspection, by any sceptic who may doubt, reasonably enough, however, the real existence of so valuable a document.

May 2, Anno Domini.

"DEAR HELEN,—i hope to be excused for taking the liberty of writing Those few Lines to you, which I hope will be instigation of terminating my affection towards you, or a perpetual Existency for futurity, viz. in matrimonial bands. For i positively declare that I hold you in the utmost estimation, in respect of your principles, and other caractherizing transactions deserving the greatest attention; and, moreover, my particular motives for addressing you thus is, that you would be so partial and kind as to divulge a part of your sintiments to me, in an Answer to this Letter, which i shall expect instantaneously; and, moreover, i request and conjure you to be neutral about it, for fear of extending it into circulation, which would be no addition to Either of us. Now, dear Helen, i am candid with you, and Declaring to you in the following lines my intention, i am fully determined to undertake or rather promote myself in some measure, and as to Land property, its laborious attended By several difficulties, to wit, oppression of taxes and other tributes, high rents, and many other inconveniences to what there would be in a situation in the town. Now i hope you will answer this letter in the affirmative and negative manner, sincerely declaring your intention to me; and, moreover, i hope you will make a distinction or rather a choice of the Conduct and edefying abilities of youth for a permanent contract, for I hope to the great omni potent that I shall prove and humble and affectionate comrade until the termination of my existance. I hope you will excuse me for making so free, for i allow i am not equalyfyed with principles to equalize your, nor neither am i descended from such a dignifyed extraction. But i hope to God I shall ratify my declarations, if fortune favours me to obtain my wishes or elevates my mind that i can produce a character as worthy of attention as any other young man of my age in town or country, of my abilities, and I suppose you are not without knowing that it was a particular Business caused me to cross the Atlantic to Philedoa, although at my own expenses. But i hope to be retaliated handsomely at a future day, for i am the person was elected to go, and am the person that is in possession of the deed and will hold it, I shall expound nothing more in respect of that consequence as my acquaintance with you dear. It is still for i assure you it's a very near friend i would make such an open about a consequential affair.

"Write to me what your sentiments are in respect of me, and if you Encourage i shall more to you, and if you discencourage it never shall be more but Bewried in Oblivion, no person the wiser, and i hope you will do the same, what i should think is a very proper way for both of us. Now i am confident you have Intimates in abundance, and i hope as i have placed a confidence in you, you will never show it to either of them but burn it.

"Direct your letter thus, U. R. L.

"The name of the town and
Parish forward it soon,
Particular place and it will soon,
Be with me.

"Write immediately.

"I shall call to see,
Again in short,
But i expect it will
Be useless.

"No more at present,
From your loving
And affectionate friend,
Q. O. unexpounded."

"Well," said Helen M'Neary, looking steadfastly at her little companion, "what do you think of your tender epistle now, Miss Lanigan?"

"Think, my dear! Gracious goodness me, my dear!" was Miss Lanigan's only reply, while she returned the affectedly solemn stare of her young friend with a very puzzled look, not knowing how she was wished to answer.

"Do you continue to think it tender?"

"Bless me, no my dear!" now beginning to see how she ought to reply.

"Do you think it the production of a gentleman?"

"Dear me, not at all; not a bit of gentility about it."

"Is it quite comprehensible? Do *you* perfectly understand it?"

"Me, my dear?"

"Why," said Helen, abandoning all her attempts at continuing grave, and again bursting into a hearty laughter, "was there ever such a mass of puzzled vulgarity? and without saying a word of anything else connected with it, or the man who wrote it, you notice of course the fact of 'Q. O. unexpounded' placing his own letter with his own hand before me, in my father's house, whither he comes as a suitor at my father's invitation. What a 'caractherizing transaction,' as he himself would call it. And then you also observe, of course, the incomprehensible manner in which he requires my answer to be directed, while he himself is to be its bearer. Why the person's head must be one great ravelled skein of confusion."

"Oh, good gracious my dear! Surely—

"None ever had so strange an art,
His passion to convey."

Poor Q. O. unexpounded! Tell me, my dear, did you return any answer to this strange effusion?"

"Indeed I did, and here it is:—

"Mr. Q. O. unexpounded.—Your very perspicuous letter is certainly the instigation of terminating my affection towards you, and the perpetuity of future existence—you have full permission from me, I assure you, to promote yourself in some measure, both in the affirmative and negative manner, and according to the abilities of youth, you are welcome home from Phila. at your own expenses, and I would advise you by all means to hold the deed, and I hope to see you retaliated with all my heart—as you express it very clearly, calling to see me again will be useless.

"So no more at present
"From your humble servant,
"G. O. unexpounded."

Both ladies indulged anew in laughter. At length Miss Lanigan resumed:—

"Why, my dear, rich as he is, the man must be a very low person. I thought from the first that he had nothing of a genteel look about him; though, to tell the truth, his clothes are very nice and new, and his cambric very fine. Dear me! How did papa become acquainted with him?"

"That's a little secret. Twenty years ago, he was a poor and distant relation of our family; papa himself sent him out to America, to some mercantile friends, and he now returns to Ireland, rich enough, in papa's estimation, to become my husband. And oh, dear Miss Lanigan, you know papa's determination, in anything he once sets his mind upon; and you know if crossed in it, his terrific, his almost maniac temper—Heaven forgive his daughter, and only child, for saying it—and you can easily imagine what, under these circumstances, my fears for the future must be. Oh, I wish, I wish," the young lady continued, her manner completely altered, while tears rolled down her cheeks—"I wish — as I have often wished, since this misfortune began to threaten me—that I had been brought up under a mother's care, and that I had a mother now."

Miss Lanigan, not having heard the last words, ran on—

"Gracious goodness, my dear; the crisis of your fate approaches indeed, the distress of your plot thickens terribly! Bless me, my dear, what is to be done? Ah, Edmund, Edmund, why are you now absent from us?"

Helen M'Neary started up hastily, and seemed attentively studying some little pictures, on the walls of the little room, as she said—

"My dear Miss Lanigan, we are beginning to talk nonsense, I do fear. At all events, I cannot now enter into that question; oh, how I dread to enter into it; oh, I dread that my conduct has been all wrong; oh, why did I ever allow a childish, almost an infantine friendship, to become confirmed into a more serious attachment—at least, why did I ever let *him* know it!"

"Poor, dear, suffering soul!" said Miss Lanigan, sobbing sympathetically, as she rose and took Helen's hand, looking up into the young lady's face, as stood about the height of Helen's elbow.

"Why, at least," continued Helen, "did I suffer the matter to steal upon me, without consulting my father, my only parent! And yet again, could I have dared to open my lips to him about it. Edmund Fennell *his* daughter's lover! Edmund Fennell, poorly, poorly born, the protege of a poor priest, and beyond everything else, a Roman Catholic! As to lineage or birth, I don't think indeed there is much superiority on my father's side in that respect; but, my dear Miss Lanigan, papa would as soon make the Pope of Rome, tiara and all, an alderman and mayor elect of his native city, as bestow his daughter on a papist—"

Helen said this, with something of a return of her laughing temperament.

"Good gracious defend us, my love! but why does not the youth himself come home, to advise you what to do—or at least, to console and cheer you? I protest and declare now, my dear, I begin to think that he takes your gentle distress very coolly—"

"Do not say that, Miss Lanigan, do not wrong poor Edmund. Oh, Miss Lanigan—will you—can you keep a secret—*my* secret? Ever since he gave up his business to enter college in Dublin, with a view to a profession, now more than twelve months ago, I have had a letter from him almost every day—and advice and consolation he does offer me; but oh, are they of the description I ought to accept?—Farewell—'tis more than time I should be at home. And what do you think sent him away from here to begin a new career, and perhaps a ruinous career, in Dublin? Oh, you will hate me for telling you! One word of mine—one foolish, vain word of mine! I was led to say it, however, in the hope that my father might—but I must hasten home—Farewell. Oh, I am indeed very, very erring—and"—Helen added, bursting into fresh and plenteous tears—"very, very unhappy!"

The young lady flew down stairs, without stopping for Miss Lanigan's advice. Had she really come expecting that any was to be had? Her little friend paused a moment in consternation at her hasty and agitated departure, and then ejaculating—"My gracious goodness!—Dear me!" hurried to put on her things for going out to tea.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Upon that day, as has been observed, "Q. O. unexpounded" dined at Gaby M'Neary's.—Gaby provided him with a dinner he preferred himself, believing that it was one "fit for a king." Somewhat unrefined, however, it certainly was; but no matter, Gaby did not do it the less justice on that account; and it may be conjectured that neither the tastes nor the experience of his guest found any fault with it. And yet Mr. Stanton scarcely touched a morsel of dinner, replying to every expostulation on the subject, while his large green-and-yellow eyes fixed on Helen—"No, sir; I am obliged to you, I choose to admire."

Dinner being over, and Helen supposed to be in the drawing-room, host and guest remained *tete-a-tete*. There was prime old port and sherry to hand, together with Helen's little dessert, and they looked very comfortable.

"Blug-a-bouns, man!" cried Gaby M'Neary. "Do you mean to keep the decanters before you all the evening? Fill your glass, and send them this way. Good ating deserves good drinking; and though you didn't stand like a man to your knife and fork during dinner, the more fool you; but I'll take my oath you shan't keep me thirsty at present."

"I ask your pardon, sir—may I make so bold as to give you a toast?"

"And heartily welcome, my buck."

"Well then, sir, I'll give you the-a, the-a—I'll give you, sir, Miss Helen M'Neary's very—good—health."

"Helen's health—here it goes. Come, no heel-taps to that toast, my chap. But tell me. Have you yet agreed on the day between you?"

"The-a—the-a—the day, sir. What day, sir?"

"Why, the splicing-day to be sure, you great goose."

"The-a—the splicing-day, sir?"

"Ay, to be sure—the wedding-day."

"No, indeed, sir, we have not."

"And why the devil haven't you? Why do you come here, sneaking about my house, for nothing? Why, man, when I made up to Helen's mother, I didn't give her time to say Jack Robinson, till I had made her consent to run away with me. I ran away with her mother, by Gog, or they would never have given her to me. Well, Masther Tom Naddy," Gaby continued, addressing that individual, as he entered the parlor—Tom having left the service of Father Connell, in the hope of "promoting himself," as Mr. Q. O. unexpounded would say—"Well, Masther Tom Naddy, you lazy, scheming rascal; have you hung Boxer, as I bid you?"

"Oh faix, sir, and sure I did."