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ELLEN AHERN; OR, THE POOR COUSIN. CHAPTER I.—FERMANAGH.

On the coast of Ulster, where the ocean tides break with a sullen and terrific sound against the magnificent cliffs and frowning rocks that line the shore, an old feudal castle, looking seaward, stands on a rugged and almost inaccessible eminence. Its ruined battlements and crumbling turrets stand out distinct and dark against the clear sky beyond, and as the wind tosses the dark and flaunting vines which cling about them, to and fro, it requires but little aid of the imagination, to fancy that the pennons of its ancient lords are floating over Fermanagh. This pile, of which only a portion was habitable, was erected in an age when Ireland was governed by her own kings, and when the O'Donnells and the Maguires, who were the lords of Fermanagh, were the most powerful septs in their province. With well-manned battlements and towers, from whence the arrows of unerring arches were ready at a moment's warning to fly from their shafts; surrounded by deep and precipitous ravines, and approached only by a sinuous and narrow defile, it was in those days a magnificent and impregnable fortress, where the Lord of Fermanagh always entrenched himself after his forays, and held wassail with his followers in as much security as an eagle in his Alpine eyrie. This stronghold of the Maguires was the boast of the North; it having defied for more than two centuries all the assaults of foreign and intestine foes. But Saxon treachery at length accomplished that which might, and all the stratagems of war, had failed to do. The noble Maguire, aided by O'Donnell, and other princely chiefs of Donegal, had driven the English out of Ulster, with great rout and slaughter, determined if possible to preserve at least that portion of their fair land from the yoke of the aggressor. For this act the English government outlawed them and set a price on their heads. The sleuth hounds of tyranny were let loose on their track, eager for noble prey. But secure in his crag-bound habitation, the Lord of Fermanagh laughed them to scorn, and amused himself by making his archers shoot headless arrows into the English camp, to which billets couched in the most taunting language were affixed. Wearing out at length, the besiegers withdrew, but in a short time an English officer, attended by only a few followers, made his appearance at the gates of Fermanagh, bearing a white flag significant of truce, and a letter from his government, who offered to withdraw the sentence of outlawry against him, provided he would cease to hold a hostile attitude towards it: and with many sweet and gracious words, concluded by inviting him to Dublin, to ratify the treaty.—Flattered, thrown off his guard, and credulous as noble natures are wont to be, he invited the envoys into the castle, feasted them, and sent them away loaded with presents, with assurances that he would meet them as early as possible in Dublin. Having arranged his affairs, he started with his retinue on his journey south, but when he got beyond the borders of Leinster, he was met by two breathless messengers coming from opposite directions. One was a follower of the O'Donnell, and informed him that his chief and two other northern princes, having been inveigled into the snares of the English, were then lying in chains in Dublin castle. The other was his own foster-father, from the hamlet of Fermanagh, who gave him the still more disastrous intelligence that the English occupied his fortress, and had slaughtered and imprisoned the garrison, who had defended it to the death. The word 'Treachery' burst from his lips, and without waiting to hear any further particulars of the event, he gave the order to return, and with a heart swelling with rage and indignation, retraced the wearisome road he had come by, and like a whirlwind burst on Fermanagh, only to find every pass guarded, and every avenue impregnable. With a grim, black smile, he withdrew quietly, and remained in concealment for a few days with his followers; after which he bade them be ready at midnight to march to Fermanagh. With light and cautious tread they followed his footsteps—not knowing on what wild scene he was bent, but ready to die with him—until he entered a cavern in one of the ravines below the castle, and hearing back a slab of rock, which turned on iron pivots, he led them up through a sinuous, steep, subterranean way, into the very heart of Fermanagh; where, surprised and wild with terror, the English officers and soldiers, aroused from their sleep by the slogan of the Maguires and the clangor of arms, were indiscriminately slaughtered. But from that era the power of the Maguires waned. Unable to resist a power which like an inevitable destiny, encroached daily, more and more on them, they became tributary chiefs, and at length dependants, on the bounty of their oppressors; who had with a perseverance worthy of a better cause hunted them down.

Time rolled its inexorable waves undeviatingly onwards, sweeping away the noble and heroic men of old. One by one, contending to the last for the honor of their beautiful land, and the sacred Altars of their Faith, or pining in English dungeons, into which they had been snared by treachery, they perished; leaving only their untarnished fame and the memory of their noble deeds, to cheer their country, on which the bonds of an accursed slavery had fallen. Slowly, and as if rivetted with adamant, the chains and gyves were fastened about her once free limbs, until she sat a captive before the proud conqueror, even as her Loved Saviour had once sat in the Court of Pilate, clothed in the mockery of power, and derided and scorned by those who sought to crucify Him. And as generation after generation passed away, the old stronghold of Fermanagh began to crumble. The salt storm winds, that forever swept up from the restless sea, claimed of Time a division of the tribute of its decay, and hurled down huge masses of stone from its battlements and turrets, until there remained only enough of its grandeur to attest the history of its fame. On a terrace whose marble steps were broken and defaced, and whose slope was overgrown with flaunting weeds and a matted undergrowth of ivy and other creeping vines, stood an old and bowed man, leaning on his staff, who, although his hair and eyebrows were as white as a mountain fleece, showed by the keen, flashing glance that he cast around him, that the latent fires of a strong and fierce spirit were unsubdued, and ever ready to flash into scorn or wrath, as he might be moved. A gray cotamore hung loosely from his broad shoulders, and his thin legs were encased in woolen stockings and breeches of the same color, which according to a fashion now almost in disuse, met each other at the knee, where they were fastened with small silver buckles. On his left, the terrace overhung a deep and craggy ravine, at the bottom of which dashed a wild mountain torrent, that sent up a rolly reverberating sound as it tumbled over the rocky barriers, which nature had thrown in its way. On the right, a small portion of exhausted land, covered with nettles and farze bushes, with here and there a small plantation of mountain ash and pines, which had sprouted up an age before, between the interstices of the bald limestone rocks, was all that remained of the spot from utter barrenness, while the steep declivities beyond, suggested the idea of inaccessibility to the place. In front, up to the very terraces, which were cut in the rocky hill side, was a rude way of approach which narrowed as it descended, until in some places it was impassible for more than two men abreast, or a single horseman to pass. Through an opening in the rugged scenery a broad, glorious view of the ocean was discernible, and the roar of its waves against the rugged coast sounded a deep, solemn monotone on the ear. The sun was declining, and the sky and billow were iridescent with splendor. Behind him was the ancient ruin: and a scattered heap of stone arches and pillars, overgrown with lichens, and exhibiting traces of exquisite sculpture in their decay, lay where they had fallen fifty years before, in an incongruous pile with fragments of friezes, entablatures and capitals. It was an eyrie scene—the old feudal ruin—the ancient man—the sound of the unseen torrent, and the barrenness and ruin that reigned everywhere! He appeared to be the only living thing there—the guardian genius of the spot, as he stood motionless under the shadow of the gray pile. But presently a low, deep-mouthed growl aroused him from his reverie, and a large brown wolf dog, fierce and strong-limbed, bounded through one of the ruined arches, and lay panting at his feet. 'Aha, Thela! a bouchal dhas!' said the old man, as he stooped to smooth the dog's shaggy coat. 'Thela! Thela! Here, sir! Where are you, Thela?' cried a shrill, clear, and withal, sweet voice. 'She is calling thee, Thela,' said the old man, in his native tongue, with a low chuckle; 'down, sir, down; don't be making a manus (booby) of yourself, and the sunlight of Fermanagh will be here anon. Hist!' And as he spoke, a maiden of some eighteen summers old, appeared looking down from an ivy covered battlement overhead. She was flushed with exercise, and radiant in loveliness, which the smell of the mountain heather and the soft salt air from the sea had nurtured into rare perfection. Thela uttered a sharp, quick bark on being discovered, and the maiden after doubling her small white fist, which she shook threateningly, towards him, disappeared; and in a few moments was standing beside the old man who, with an air of once fond and confiding, welcomed her. 'Why art thou plotting treason with Thela, thou knight of the Red Branch? Come, sit here on this broken pediment, which is so overgrown with moss, that it looks like a velvet cushion. I am tired; very tired, cousin Eadhna.' 'What is the wonder?' replied the old man, as he sat down on the place indicated. The balleaghs (mountain road) hereabouts are more fitting for goats and wolf tracks than for Christian feet. See, a sulish, Thela pants like an old starved gowan (hack horse). 'He's growing old,' said the girl pressing the dog's head to her side, and smoothing his long shaggy ears with her delicate, tapering hand.—'I will lead him no more such races. No wonder he fled to you for refuge. He knew the appeal would not be vain.' 'And where have ye been? By token of the dampness that's almost droobin' (dripping) from your curls, I should say you had been somewhere near the sea.' 'That is just where I have been, cousin Eadhna, and I was so hungry that I stopped at Alice Riordan's house, and got a draught of milk and some of the very nicest strabout that was ever made out of oatmeal. Then I rested at Father McMahon's, and Biddy Colgan, his housekeeper, informed me that he had started at daylight, to go up to a wild and out-of-the-way place among the hills, to persuade some poor fellows, who had been turned out of their houses by a fiend of a middleman, with their wives and children to perish, to be peaceable and not bring the sword among themselves, by committing any outrage on their oppressors. At least that is the meaning of what she told me, and she's in a terrible taking, for she says, 'it's too much to expect from flesh and blood, for them to take all and give none; and the Soggarth (priest) will get hissel' into business yet, meddlin' in such matters. It's no use to be crying peace, peace, when there's no peace; and that's the long and short of it,' added Mrs. Colgan, in which sentiment I heartily join. Then Thela and I went down into the ravine, where I saw a stranger, who was—only think—trying his best to get up to Fermanagh on that side.' And the light-hearted girl laughed merrily at the idea. 'He and the Soggarth must believe in miracles,' said the old man bitterly. 'How so, Sir Eadhna Ahern?' 'Your stranger, a sulish, tried to do that which he could not do without wings; and Father McMahon's gone at the risk of his life to put his comther—and maybe he's right—on a set of miserable wretches who have been starved, scorned and hunted down like wild deer by the low tyrants their landlords have put to reign over them; and exhort to submission men who had better died honestly resisting their wrongs, than live enslaved and degraded, the scorn of their masters and the by-word of their parasites.—Bachal Essu! but it makes my old blood boil to think how tamely we must bear it all.' 'It's an old story, and as sad as old, cousin Eadhna,' said the girl with a sigh; 'we can do nothing but suffer.' 'This, very hopelessness is the bitter draught. If we could see deliverance ahead—even remotely—it would be something. If the princes and heroes of old could return, we would suffer, oh, most patiently until their coming, but their sleep is unbroken; neither slogan nor wail can arouse them again,' said the old man sadly. 'They live in their deeds!' said the girl with enthusiasm. 'When the time is ripe, their heroism transfused to this generation, perhaps, will effect the long hoped for deliverance.' 'Och sin?' (who comes) said the old man, as he peered through the gathering shadows, at a gaunt, awkward figure, mounted on a Shetland pony, who approached the terrace slowly and cautiously. 'That—my beloved—is no less a personage than Timothy Fahey, esquire, agent for Lord Hugh Maguire, and tyrant by especial dispensation, of man, woman, and child, in the Barony of Fermanagh. What can bring the creature here, where he comes so seldom, I cannot imagine.—I have a strong mind to set Thela on him.' 'Thela is too noble a dog to hunt carrion,' said the bitter old man. While they were talking the man dismounted at the foot of the terrace, threw the bride over his pony's neck, gave himself a shake as if to get his huge limbs in joint, and came striding on the broken steps with a grim, dark look, to where the old man and girl were sitting. Thela growled and showed his fangs, and but for the presence of the small, white hand on his shoulder, he would have sprung at the unwelcome visitor. 'Is that yourself?' Sir Eadhna; bad luck to your divil of a dog, was his salutation. 'I think, by the powers! that it would only be decent to keep such basties out of the way of gentlemen.' 'What brings you to Fermanagh, Fahey?' said Sir Eadhna, calmly. 'Business, business—not pleasure surely, or by my soul, I'd be disappointed. It'd be like going to a goat's house for wool, bedad! unless I

could turn out the bats, and ghosts, and the like.' 'Name your business.' 'Well, it's this. Here's a few lines that I was directed to read to ye, and bedad, if the letter hadn't come from headquarters, sorra bit would I have scraped my shins, at this late hour, in the break-neck pass of Fermanagh.' 'In old times, Timothy Fahey, when one of your kind came into the presence of a Maguire, it was with bared head and courteous words.—Do you not see Miss Ahern?' 'No offence intended, Miss Ahern, my jewel,' said the agent, with insolent familiarity. 'Still full of your crack-brain, high top airs, Sir Eadhna, knight by tradition and the will of the scrubs of this barony! Bedad! but you've lived here so long, that you begin to think surely that you are one of the old lords of Fermanagh.' 'I am of their blood,' replied the old man proudly, 'and can never forget the immeasurable distance between me and their agent. What is your business here, Fahey?' 'My business is to let you know that Lord Hugh is coming with his mother, the dowager countess of Fermanagh, to visit their estates in Donegal, and this one in particular; and the bed rooms is to be aired, and the furniture uncovered, and everything to be put in first chop order,' replied the agent pompously. 'The young Lord! When do they come?' inquired the old man, steadying his hands on the head of his staff. 'They're on their way up from Dublin, the letter says, and it's more than I can tell, not being a prophet, what day or hour they will arrive. But come when they will, the young lord'll let the barony know he's in it, for they say he raises Tom wherever he is. And I'll tell you what, Mr. Ahern, the tenants think I squeeze them for their rents, but they'll sing another song when my lord comes, by token of his taking the trouble to be after seeing into his own matters. They say he's hard pushed for money, and has put up some of the old acres for sale. An' I heard, moreover, that he's no friend to Papists, and wants to get a colony of Scotch manufacturers settled on the old Abbey lands forment the castle, to weave and spin and weave linen.' This was all said with an air of ill-concealed exultation. 'How did you gain this information, Fahey?' Does Lord Hugh make mention of any such plans in his letter?' asked Sir Eadhna. 'Two of his servants are at the Maguire Arms,' his cook and his wally-de-sbam; fine, sociable fellows, that look like raal gentlemen, and seems to be pretty well posted about my lord's affairs,' replied Fahey. 'Go in, Ellen, a sulish,' said the old man, tenderly, 'it is growing damp.' 'I say, Mr. Ahern, have you got anything stronger than water up here, for my throat feels like a dry sponge, bedad.' 'You know the way to the dining-room, Fahey, go in; you will find some poteen in the liquor case that stands on the buffet,' replied Sir Eadhna, coldly; 'help yourself.' 'It's well a could welcome don't freeze me!' replied the agent with a scowl. 'If my lord don't take some of these airs down, I'm a false prophet—the old beggar,' he muttered as he went in. 'These are all tidings, a lanna vought,' (my poor child) said the old man to Ellen Ahern, who, instead of going in, had come closer to him, and was now leaning on his shoulder; 'bad tidings for thee, and for me also.' 'And why, cousin Eadhna? You have, by the will of the late lord, a residence here as long as you live. The same provision was made for me. I do not think that Fahey's intelligence is reliable, and if it is, they cannot drive us out, whatever else they may do. Let us look on the bright side of things. I think God intended His creatures to do this, for I have read that Hope is one of His fairest and most beloved Angels. I should say, it would brighten us up bravely in our mountain eyrie—their coming,' she said, in a cheering way. 'It will be something very sweet to me, to enjoy the companionship of a female relative; to show her all the wonders of Fermanagh, and learn her to love her old historic home. How can she but be proud of it, with all its grand associations.' 'She is an Englishwoman,' replied the old man, bitterly; 'and her son, who bears the title of the old Lords of Fermanagh, is nothing more than the Ass in the fable, who decked himself in the Lion's skin, if all reports are true. Faugh! it sickens me. Lord of Fermanagh?' 'But how? Is he not a Maguire? Was not his father the last Lord of Fermanagh?' enquired Ellen Ahern, who had never heard her relatives referred to in this bitter tone before. 'Yes, His father—God rest his soul, for a truer and better man never breathed—was the late Lord of Fermanagh; but he is the son of a

second marriage, which he contracted with the handsome daughter of an impoverished and spend-thrift nobleman.' 'Was he the heir?' 'No. The rightful heir, was a son, who was the issue of his first marriage.' 'Did the heir die?' 'They say so—they say 'so,' replied the old man, scornfully. 'But there were whispers of foul play. I could never learn any particulars, for he died abroad, either in Germany or Spain.' 'Hist! The agent is coming,' whispered Ellen Ahern. And Mr. Fahey made his appearance, and having informed them that he would send Alice Riordan and her daughter up the next morning, to assist in getting things ready at the castle, he took his departure with as little ceremony as he came. CHAPTER II.—THE PORTRAIT GALLERY. All was bustle the next day at Fermanagh.—Every apartment in the habitable part of the castle was turned topsy-turvy. The astonished mice and spiders, who thought they had a life lease of their old corners and hiding places, scampered frantically out of sight or were swept away with the besom of destruction. Clouds of dust rolled like murky fogs slowly out of the windows, and pail after pail of water sluiced the floors, through which Alice Riordan and her stout handsome daughters waded like Naads, mop in hand, singing as they toiled, and only intent on cleaning off the accumulated stans and dirt of years. Hangings were to be put up and carpets to be dusted and put down. Covers were to be removed from the antique furniture, linen was to be aired; the old silver service, that Sir Eadhna Ahern kept in a strong box under his own bed, was to be cleaned; and a general scrubbing and polishing was to be accomplished. There was no place of refuge amidst this uproar for Ellen Ahern, except the Picture Gallery, so called par courtesy, for only a few of the portraits of the departed Lords and Ladies, Bards and Chieftains of Fermanagh were in good preservation; the others being mildewed and tattered from exposure to the damps and the neglect of many years. There was an oriel window at the end of the gallery, which set back in a deep embrasure of the stone wall, from whence the fern-covered hills, that stretched away to the eastward, and their shining quartz peaks, presented a picturesque view to the eye; while a ruined abbey, surrounded by a rich luxuriance of vegetation, lifted its gray arches in the valley, a fitting memorial of the holy and princely dead whose dust reposed there; which suggested many a sad thought, as well as glorious recollections of the 'days that were.' Far beyond this and scarcely discernible through the dense wood which surrounded it, arose the massive ruins of one of the strongholds of 'the O'Donnell,' adding grandeur and solemnity to the scene, by the story its despoiled columns and crumbling battlements told of the past. Here Ellen Ahern loved to muse and dream; and here, her heart full of large and hopeful schemes, used to paint a brilliant future for the land she loved. She now sought shelter here, and with her head bowed over her needlework—some articles of dress she was fashioning—she began to speculate on the character and appearance of her expected relatives. She feared they were cold and proud, and feeling that she was only a poor cousin, she dreaded the supercilious glance and haughty demeanor which, from the knowledge of the world that books had given her, she naturally expected. 'But,' thought she, 'the English are all cold at first, and I won't mind, but endeavor to win on the Countess for the sake of the poor tenants of Fermanagh; and if Lord Hugh Maguire has one spark of humanity in his disposition, I do not fear but that I shall be able to fan it into a blaze. I wonder is he handsome?' He should be, for the males of our race were all noble-looking men! I hope he loves his country; if he does all will go well, for he will respect her sorrows in the persons of the impoverished creatures who, by the sweat of their brow and the waste of their very life-blood, fill his coffers with gold. Oh, I will appeal to all his noble qualities, and implore him by the unsullied name he bears, to become their friend and protector!

Considering, cetera an carbone notandum, (where to be marked with charcoal or chalk), is the new advent at Fermanagh? Eh, Aileen, my child? said a kindly voice beside her, which caused her to start from her reverie. 'Father, McMahon! I will answer your Latin, which I do not understand one word of, in a warmer and more glowing language, cead mille faltha!' ('a hundred thousand welcomes') said Ellen Ahern, dropping her work, while she grasped the good priest's hand. 'When did you get back?' 'Back? Where have I been?' he said, laughing.