

THE COLLEGIANS.

A TALE OF GARRYOWEN.

BY Gerald Griffin.

CHAPTER XL.—Continued.

A small square window, closed with a wooden bar and shutters, was to be found above the rack, and opened on a hay-yard, which, being raised considerably above the level of the stable-floor, lay only a few feet beneath this aperture. Danny Mann was in the act of devouring a potato, reeking hot, which he had cooked in the embers, when a noise at the window made him start, and set his ears like a watch-dog. It was repeated. He stood on his feet, and crept softly into a darker corner of the stable, partly in superstitious apprehension, and partly in obedience to an impulse of natural caution. In a few minutes one of the shutters was gently put back, and a flood of mild light was poured into the prison. The shadow of a hand and head were thrown with great distinctness of outline on the opposite wall; the other shutter was put back with the same caution, and in a few minutes nearly the whole aperture was again obscured as if by the body of some person entering. Such, in fact, was the case; and the evident substantiality of the figure did not remove the superstitious terrors of the prisoner, when he beheld a form wrapt in white descending by the bars of the rack, after having made the window close again, and the apartment, in appearance, as gloomy as ever.

The intruder stood at length upon the floor, and the face which was revealed in the brown fire-light, was that of Hardress Cregan. The ghostliness of his mouth and teeth, the wildness of his eyes, and the strangeness of his attire, (for he had only wraped the counter-pane around his person) might, in the eyes of a stranger, have confirmed the idea of a supernatural appearance. But these circumstances only tended to arouse the sympathy and old attachment of his servant. Danny Mann advanced towards him slowly, his hands wreathed together, and extended as far as the sling which held the wounded arm would allow; his jaw dropt—half in pity and half in fear, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Master Hardress," he said at length, "is it you I see dat way?" Hardress remained for some time motionless as a statue, as if endeavoring to summon up all his corporal energies to support him in the investigation he was about to make.

"Won't you speak to me, mather?" continued the boatman; "won't you speak a word itself? Twas all my endeavor since I came hether to thry an' get 'em to let me speak to you. Say a word, mather, if it is only to tell me 'tis yourself dat's dere!"

"Where is Eily?" murmured Hardress, still without moving, and in a tone that seemed to come from the recesses of his breast, like a sound from a sepulchre. The boatman shrank aside, as if from the eye of Justice itself. So sudden had the question struck upon his conscience, that the inquirer was obliged to repeat it before he could collect his breath for an answer.

"Mather Hardress, I thought, after I parted you dat time—" "Where is Eily?" muttered Hardress, interrupting him. "Only listen to me, sir, one moment—" "Where is Eily?" "Oh, vo! vo!"

Hardress drew the counterpane around his head, and remained for several minutes silent in the same attitude. During that time the drapery was scarcely seem to move, and yet Hell raged beneath it. A few moans of deep but smothered agony were all that might be heard from time to time. So exquisite was the sense of suffering which these sounds conveyed, that Danny sank trembling on his knees, and responded to them with floods of tears and sobbing.

which he gave no credit. "Be still, and hear me. For many years, it has been my duty to heap kindness upon you. For which of those was it that you came to the determination of involving me in ruin, danger, and remorse, for all my future life—a little all it may be, certainly?"

It would seem from the manner in which Danny gaped and gazed on his master while he said these words, that a reproach was one of the last things he had expected to receive from Hardress. Astonishment, blended with something like indignation, took place of the compassion which before was visible upon his countenance.

"I don't know how it is, Mather Hardress," he said, "dere are some people dat it is hard to please. Do you remember saying anything to me at all of a time in de room at de mather's, at Killarney, Mather Hardress? Do you remember givin' me a glove, at all? I had my token surely for what I done."

So saying, he drew the glove from his waistcoat, and handed it to his master; but the latter rejected it with a revulsion of strong dislike.

"I thought I had ears to hear at dat time, and brains to understand," said Danny, as he replaced the fatal token in his bosom, "an' I'm sure it was no benefit to me dat dere should be a hue-and-cry over de mountain after a lost lady, an' a chance of a hempen cravat, for my trouble. But I had my warrant—dat was your very word, Mather Hardress—warrant, wasn't it? 'Well, when you go,' says you, 'here is your warrant,' and you ga' me de glove. Worn't dem your words?"

"But not for death," said Hardress, "I did not say for death." "I own you didn't," returned Danny, who was aroused by what he considered a shuffling attempt to escape out of the transaction. "I won't you didn't; I felt for you, an' I wouldn't wait for you to say it. But did you examine it?"

"No!" Hardress exclaimed, with a burst of sudden energy. "As I shall answer it in that bright Heaven, I did not. If you crown in among my accusers at the judgment-seat, and charge me with that crime, to you, and to all, I shall utter the same disclaimer that I do at present. I did not. If you crowd in among my judges, I did not. I even bade you to avoid it. Did I not warn you not to touch her?"

"You did," said Danny Mann, with a scorn which made him eloquent beyond himself, "an' your eye looked murder while you said it. After did, I never more will look in any man's face to know what he manes. After dis, I won't believe my senses. If you'll persuade me to it, I'll own dat dere is nothing as I see it. You may tell me dat I don't stand here, nor you dere, nor dat de moon is shining trough dat roof above us, nor de fire burning at my back, an' I'll gainsay you after dis. But listen to me, Mather Hardress. As sure as dat moon is shining, an' dat fire burning, an' as sure as I'm here an' you dere, so sure de sign of death was on your face dat time, whatever way your words went."

"From what could you gather it?" said Hardress, with a deprecating accent.

"From what? From everything. Listen hether. Didn't you remind me den of my own offer on de Purple Mountain a while before, an' tell me dat, if I was to make dat offer again, you'd tink different? An' didn't you give me de token dat you refused me den? Ah, dis is what makes me sick, after I putting my neck into de halter for a man. Well, it's all one. An' now to call me out o' my name, an' to tell me I done it for harm! Dear knows, it wasn't for any good I hoped for it, here or hereafter, or for any pleasure I took in it, dat it was done. And talkin' of hereafter, Mather Hardress, listen to me. Eily O'Connor is in Heaven, an' she has told her story. Dere are two books kept dere dey tell us, of all our doings, good an' bad. Her story is wrote in one o' dem books, an' my name (I'm sore afeard) is wrote after it; an' take my word for dis, in whichever o' dem books my name is wrote your own is not far from it."

As he spoke these words, with an energy beyond what he had ever shown, the fire fell in, and caused a sudden light to fill the place. It shone, ruddy brown, upon the excited face and uplifted arm of the de-

formed, and gave him the appearance of a fiend denouncing on the head of the affrighted Hardress the sentence of eternal woe. It glared likewise upon the white drapery of the latter, and gave to his distorted and terrified features a look of ghastliness and fear that might have suited such an occasion well. The dreadful picture continued for but a second, yet it remained engraved upon the mind of Hardress, and like the yelping of the hounds, haunted him awake and dreaming to his death. The fire, again sunk low, the light grew dim. It came like a dismal vision, and like a vision faded.

They were aroused from the pause to which this slight incident gave occasion by hearing the sentinel arrest his steps as he passed the door, and remain silent in his song, as if in the act of listening.

"All right within there?" said the sentinel, with his head to the door.

"All's right your way, but not my way," returned Danny, sulkily.

"In a few minutes they heard him shoulder his musket once again, and resume his walk, humming with an air of indifference, the same old burthen:

"We won't go home till morning, Until the dawn appears."

Hardress remained gazing on his servant for some moments, and then said in a whisper:

"He has not heard us as I feared. It is little worth at this time, to consider on whom the guilt of this unhappy act must fall. We must at least avoid the shame, if possible. Could I depend upon you once again, if I assisted in your liberation, on the understanding that you would at once leave the country?"

The eyes of the prisoner sparkled with a sudden light. "Do you tink me a fool?" he said. "Do you tink a fox would refuse to run to earth wid de dogs at his trush?" "Here, then," said Hardress, placing a purse in his hand. "I have no choice but to trust you. This window is unguarded. There is a path-way through the hay-yard, and thence across the field, in the direction of the road. Depart at once, and without farther question."

"But what'll I do about dat fellow?" said Danny. "Dat sentry comes constant dat way; you near him now asking me if all's right."

"I will remain here and answer for you," said Hardress, "until you have time to escape. In the meantime use your utmost speed and take the road to Cork, where you will be sure to find vessels ready to sail. If ever we should meet again on Irish soil, it must be for the death of either, most probably of both."

"An' is dis de way we part after all?" said Danny. "Well, den, be it so. Perhaps, after you tink longer of it, mather, you may tink better of me." So saying, he sprang on the manger, and ascended, (notwithstanding his hurt) with the agility of a monkey to the window. A touch undid the fastening, and in a few moments, Hardress became the sole occupant of the temporary dungeon.

He remained for a considerable time leaning with his shoulder against the wall, and gazing with a vacant eye upon the decaying fire. In this situation, the sentinel challenged several times in succession, and seemed well content with the answer which he received. But the train of thought which passed through the mind of Hardress became at length so absorbing that the challenge of the soldier fell unheard upon his ear. After repeating it without avail three or four times, the man became alarmed, and applying the butt of his musket to the door, he forced it in without much effort. His astonishment may be conceived, when, instead of his little prisoner, he beheld a tall figure wrapt in white and a ghastly face, on which the embers shed a dreary light. The fellow was a brave soldier, but (like all people of that class in his time) extremely superstitious. His brain, moreover, was heated with whisky punch, and his imagination excited by numerous tales of horror which had been freely circulated in the servant's hall. Enough only remained of his presence of mind, to enable him to give the alarm, by firing his musket, after which he fell senseless on the pavement. Hardress, no less alarmed, started into sudden energy, and climbing to the window, with an agility even surpassing that of the

fugitive, hurried off in the direction of his sleeping chamber.

There were few in the house who were capable of adopting any vigorous measures on hearing the alarm. Hastening to the spot, they found the sentinel lying senseless across the stock of his musket, the stable door open, and the prisoner fled. The man himself was enabled, after some time, to furnish a confused and broken narrative of what he had seen; and his story was in some degree confirmed by one of his comrades, who stated that the time when the shot was fired, he beheld a tall white figure gliding rapidly amongst the haystacks, in the little enclosure, where it vanished in the shape of a red heifer.

The sentinel was placed under arrest in an apartment of the castle, until the pleasure of his officer could be known respecting him. Captain Gibson, however, in common with the other gentlemen, and the greater number of his soldiers, was at this moment wholly incapable of conceiving or expressing any opinion whatsoever.

This story, as usual, was circulated throughout the country in the course of the following day, with many imaginative embellishments. Amongst other inventions, it was said the ghost of Eily O'Connor had appeared to the sentinel to declare the prisoner's innocence and demand his liberation. Many persons adduced the well known character of Eily as a ground for lending credence to this fiction. "It was like her," they said; "she was always a tender-hearted creature."

The evidence remaining against the other prisoners was now so immaterial, that their dismissal became a necessary consequence. Several efforts were made to draw them into some confession of their participation in the offence alleged, but if they were cautious in their admissions while the murderer was in custody, they would make no admissions whatever after hearing of his escape. Equally unavailing were all the exertions made for the recapture of the suspected fugitive and in a few weeks, the affair had begun to grow unfamiliar to the tongues and recollections of the people.

Notwithstanding the assurances of Danny, and the danger which he must incur by remaining in the country, a doubt would frequently cross the mind of Hardress, whether he really had availed himself of his recovered freedom to leave it altogether. He had money; he had many acquaintances; and he was an Irishman; an indifferent one, it is true, but yet possessing the love of expense, of dissipation, and the recklessness of danger. It was almost an even question whether he would not risk the chances of detection, for the sake of playing the host among a circle of jolly companions in the purlieus of his native city. These considerations, often discussed between Hardress and his now miserable mother, made them agree to hasten the day of marriage, with the understanding that (by an anticipation of the modern fashion) the "happy pair" were to leave home immediately after the ceremony. The south of France was the scene fixed upon for the commencement of their married life—the month of honey.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOW THE ILL-TEMPERED OF HARDRESS AGAIN BROUGHT BACK HIS PERILS.

A circumstance which occurred during the intervening period, once more put Hardress to a severe probation. It was not less severe moreover, than it came like the accessions of a nervous disorder, suddenly and from a cause extremely disproportioned to its violence.

He had been conversing with his intended bride, on that day which was fixed as the penultimate of their courtship, with a more than usual appearance of enjoyment. Anne, who looked out for those breaks of sunshine in his temper, as anxiously as an agriculturist might for fair weather in a broken autumn, encouraged the symptom of returning peace, and succeeded so happily as to draw him out into quick and lively repartees, and frequent bursts of laughter. Unfortunately, however, in her ecstasy at this display of spirits, she suffered her joy to hurry her unwisely into the forbidden circle which enclosed his secret, and their music turned

to discord. She thought this holiday hour afforded a fair opportunity to penetrate into the Blue Chamber of his heart, from which he had so often warned her, and which a better impulse than curiosity urged her to explore. She did not know the interior was defiled with blood.

"Well, Hardress," she said, with a smile that had as much of feeling as of mirth, "is not this a happier score for counting time, than sitting down to shut our eyes and ears to the pleasant world about us, and opening them on a lonesome past, or a foreboding future?"

If the clouds of the past and the future, both, had met and mingled in the mid-heaven of consciousness, they could not have cast a darker or more sudden shade than that which now overspread the brow of Hardress. The laughter darkened on his cheek, his eye grew stern and dull, and his whole being, from the inmost feeling of his nature to the exterior on which those feelings were indicated, seemed to have undergone an instantaneous change.

Anne perceived her error, but did not cease to follow up her claim upon his confidence.

"Do not let me feel," she said, "that I have brought back your gloom. Dear Hardress, hear me still without uneasiness. My sole intention is that of procuring your health and peace of mind; and surely it should not be considered an intrusion that I desire your confidence. Do you fear to find in me anything more foreign than a near and interested friend? Believe me, you shall not, Hardress. I am driven upon this inquiry in spite of me. There is something hidden from me which it would be kinder to reveal. I see it prey upon your own health and spirits, day after day. I see it even fixing its cruel hold at length upon my aunt. You meet, with a consciousness in your eyes, and you both glance from time to time at me, as if I were a stranger or—I should not say it perhaps—a spy. If I come upon you when you speak together, there is a hush at my appearance, and sometimes an embarrassed look, and I have often seen trouble in your eyes, and tears in hers. Tell me, my dear Hardress, what is the cause of this? You either apprehend, or you have endured, some terrible misfortune. It is not now the time to treat me as a stranger."

She ceased to speak, and seemed to expect an answer, but Hardress said not a word. He remained with his hands crossed on the back of the chair, his cheek resting upon these, and his eyes fixed in gloomy silence on the floor.

"Or, if you do not think me worthy of a confidence," Anne resumed, with some warmth, "at least—Nay, but I am ill-tempered now," she added, suddenly checking herself. "I should not say that; I would say Hardress, if you really find yourself prevented from admitting me into your confidence, at least assure yourself of this. If it is anything in your present situation—in—in I fear to say too much—in your engagement with myself, that interferes with your peace of mind, I—I—had rather suffer anything—than—than—be the cause of suffering to you."

She turned away as she said these words, to hide from him the burst of tears with which they were accompanied. She pressed her handkerchief against her lips, and used a violent, though silent, effort to avoid the convulsive utterance of the grief that struggled at her heart.

It often happens that the most sensitive persons are those who are most blind to, and make least allowance for the susceptibility of others. The long habit of brooding over his own wants and sufferings made Hardress incapable, for the moment, of appreciating the generous affection which this speech evinced. He answered gloomily, that, "there were many things in the minds of all men which they would hide, if possible, even from themselves, and which therefore they could not reasonably be expected to communicate over-readily to another, however undeniable the claim to confidence might be."

With this cold answer, the conversation ceased. A little, yet but a little, warmed, to find her generous proposal (a proposal which cost her so much agony) thus unhandsofly received, Anne dried her tears, and remained for some minutes in that sorrowing and somewhat indignant composure, to which in virtuous breasts the sense of unmerited injury gives birth. Subduing, however, as she had long since learned to do, her personal feelings to a sense of duty, she forced herself to assume an air of cheerfulness, and once more resumed the tone of conversation, which had preceded this unfortunate failure. Again her wonted spirits arose at her desire, and again she was successful in withdrawing Hardress from his mood of dismal meditation.

One remarkable feature in the mental disease of Hardress (for such it

might now be justly termed), was as we have before remarked, the extreme uncertainty and arbitrariness of its excesses. His existence seemed to be without a basis, his mind without a centre or a rest. He had no consciousness of duty to support him, no help from Heaven, and no trust in man. Even the very passion that ate up his soul was incapable of affording to his mind that firmness of purpose and false strength which passion often gives; for his was merely retrospective, and had no object in the future. He became a passive slave to his imagination. Frequently, while enjoying a degree of comparative tranquillity, the thought would suggest itself to his fancy, that "perhaps this very day, secure as he believed himself, might see him manacled and in a dungeon." Instead of quietly turning his attention to an indifferent subject, or baffling the suggestions (as a guiltless person might) by resigning himself to a directing Providence, he combated it with argument; it increased and fastened on his imagination, until at length his nerves began to thrill, his limbs grew faint, his brow grew moist, and his whole being disturbed as at the presence of an actual danger. At other times, when sitting alone, it would occur to him that his servant might, notwithstanding his caution, have abused his confidence, and remained in the country. The idea of the danger, the ruin, which would most probably attend such disobedience, frequently produced so violent an effect upon his mind, that he would spring from his seat in a transport of frenzy, sink on one knee, and press both hands with his utmost force against the ground, as if in the act of strangling the delinquent. Then, hearing the footstep of Anne, or his mother, approaching the door, he would arise suddenly, covered with shame, and reach his chair exactly in time to avoid detection.

Soon after the conversation we have above detailed, Mr. Cregan entered, and some questions arose on the escape of Mr. Warner's prisoner, and the possibility of his recapture. This led naturally to a disquisition on the nature of the crime alleged against him, and of capital punishments in general.

"People have hinted," said Mr. Cregan, "that this might have been a case of suicide; and for my part I don't see the impossibility."

"I should think it very unlikely," said Anne. "Suicide is a very un-Irish crime. The people are too religious for it, and some people say 'too miserable!'"

"Too miserable!" exclaimed Mr. Cregan. "Now, I should think that the only cause in the world for suicide—the only possible palliative."

"I am not metaphysical enough to account for it," returned Anne, with a smile, "and I only repeat a sentiment which I heard once from Hardress. But their misery, at all events, is a cause for their piety, and in that way may be a cause of their resignation also."

"Of all crimes," said Mr. Cregan, "that is the most absurd and unaccountable, and I wonder how jurymen can reconcile it to themselves to bring in their shameful verdict of insanity so constantly as they do."

"When you hear of a fellow's cutting his throat, look at the inquest, and if you can't laugh at the evidence, you have nothing in you. The deceased was observed to be rather silent and melancholy the day before; he wore his hat on one side, a fashion which his nearest acquaintances had never observed him to use till then; he called his wife out of her name, and went into the rain without an umbrella. I should like to see how far such evidence would go to prove a case of lunacy in Chancery."

(To be continued.)

Premium TO Subscribers.

We offer as a premium to each Subscriber a neatly bound copy of the Golden Jubilee Book, who will send the names and cash for 5 new Subscribers to the True Witness

This is a splendid opportunity to obtain a most interesting chronicle of the work of Irish Catholic Priests and laymen in Montreal during the past fifty years.