



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 18, 1862.

No. 49.

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

### CHAPTER I.

Many years ago there lived in the town of Galway, in Ireland, an old miser of the name of O'Donnell, a descendant of the ancient and once wealthy and powerful chiefs of Tyrconnell, but who were now poor and decayed—at least that branch of which the old miser prided himself as being the head—the broad lands and princely revenues which had once formed the patrimonial inheritance, having long been confiscated to the Crown in consequence of the adherence of the family to the fallen fortunes of the Stuarts, and the scanty remnant dissipated by the recklessness and improvidence of succeeding possessors.

Of the representative of the family little was known with certainty. A few of the older inhabitants of the town remembered him as a shy, proud youth, living with his parents in a remote quarter of the town. The boy being wild and intractable, his father had been advised to place him in some foreign service, the only path then open to honor and renown; for his religion (he being a Catholic) would have proved an insurmountable barrier to his entering the army in his own country; and as for the liberal professions of civil life, from most of them, too, he was excluded by the same cause.

A commission in the service of the Empress Maria Theresa was accordingly obtained; but on the day appointed for joining his regiment, young O'Donnell suddenly disappeared. He had been last seen in company with the Captain of a Spanish trading vessel, and as he was known to possess a strong predilection for the sea, it was inferred that he had accompanied him on his homeward voyage. Nothing further was ever heard of the daring and adventurous youth, until he returned an old and broken-down man. It was supposed that he had been a merchant abroad, either in some of the Spanish or West India Islands, for nothing of the sailor was suggested by either his language or appearance; and, for the accomplishment of one single object, which seemed to have been the engrossing aim of his life, had realized a large fortune, which he had amassed by the most saving and penurious habits. Though he had formed no new ties, he had never sought after his family, whom he had left in poverty at home, until when advanced in life, with that sickly yearning for kindred and country which survives even old age and debility, he sought his native place.

The day he arrived in Galway he excited some speculation among the good town-folk, to know who was the old foreigner, whose appearance was so eccentric as to elicit jeers and shouts of laughter from the groups of ragged boys and idlers that stood at the corners of the streets.

Though in the midst of summer, a heavy travelling cloak was closely wrapped round his thin, stooping figure; a rusty, high-crowned beaver surmounted a bronzed, sun-burnt visage, whose features were moulded in that peculiar form which seems almost to bid defiance to the ravages of time; lips thin and satirical, with deep-set eyes of intense blackness, to which age and avarice had given the restless glance of distrust and suspicion without queching their brilliancy or destroying a certain intensity of gaze, which gave to the countenance a strange, unearthly character.

After proceeding rather slowly down the principal street, he turned abruptly into an obscure bye street or lane at its extremity. He stopped before an old stone house whose quaintly carved wooden balconies and arabesques, after the Moorish fashion, denoted a Spanish architect; and, after a quick and hurried glance over it, commenced rapping at the old-fashioned, ponderous hall-door with the head of a stout ebony staff which he carried. Receiving no answer, and his repeated efforts to obtain admittance only exciting laughter from the mob that followed him, the stranger, after another keen and anxious survey of the mansion, turned away, and retraced his way to the lane. There was something in the look and manner of the old man as he moved from the door, that averted the gaping crowd of idlers into silence; his face was as livid and as ghastly as that of a corpse, his mouth worked convulsively; his thin, arched nostrils dilated and contracted alternately; and his whole frame shook like one whose nervous system had received some sudden and tremendous shock.

He was seen to enter the Green Dragon, one of the oldest inns in the town, where it was afterwards ascertained he had been most particular in his enquiries for the family of O'Donnell.

The landlord, with some difficulty, recollected their history. 'The old people,' he said, 'had been dead some time, and he believed they had left a son who had gone to sea when a young man, and had never been heard of since.'

'But they had a girl, a fair, dark-eyed girl—what of her?' said the old man anxiously.

'That's true,' said the landlord. 'I forgot Eily O'Donnell; why, she married a young man

of the name of Shawn Barry, and they are both dead long ago; they suffered a deal, too, poor things. They left one little boy after them.'

'And that boy?' said the stranger, who had manifested considerable emotion during the narrative.

'He lives with a poor woman, who took charge of him, in one of the lanes hard by?'

'Her name?'

'Nance Meelan; she's a water carrier.'

The old man, whose thin lips worked convulsively, took it down instantly on his tablets.—After this he remained for many hours shut up in the little parlor of the inn. At length he ordered dinner and wine, which he paid for without tasting. He then abruptly left the place. The stranger was seen by many to enter the habitation of Nance Meelan, but no one saw him come out again, and from that hour all trace of him was lost.

The following Sunday the old woman and her charge appeared in new clothes at chapel. As she was known to be very poor, this event created some sensation amongst the neighbors, which was increased by the mysterious disappearance of the stranger, whom they charitably supposed she had made away with for the sake of his money. The silence which the old woman chose to observe irritated them still more, and the landlord of the Green Dragon, who had not forgotten that the stranger had not partaken of the refreshment he had ordered and paid for, vociferously insisted that the matter should be investigated. Excitement rose to the highest pitch, until at length it came to the ears of the authorities, and the old woman and boy were taken up on suspicion of murder; and, after having narrowly escaped being torn to pieces by the enthusiastic mob, were hurried to jail, where they remained for several months until the assizes. When the trial came on, the Court was crowded to suffocation. The greatest curiosity prevailed to know what had become of the body, for not a doubt of the murder existed; and the dwelling of the old woman had been dug up, and all the drains and sewers of the town rigidly searched without a trace of its discovery. There was no proof beyond circumstantial evidence; but the jury were anxious to dine, and little doubts were entertained but they would return a verdict of guilty against the water carrier.

Suspense was at the highest, when a shout arose from the assembled mob outside the courthouse. Lo! the old foreigner, in his identical high-crowned beaver and black mantle, was seen walking composedly down the street. He looked paler and much older; and though his dark eyes shone as brilliantly as before, there was a gloomy fire in their glance that scorched those that looked on him.

There was a general rush made to the courthouse, the constables were forced back and the crowd entered pell-mell into the presence of justice. The din and hubbub that ensued baffles description; but at length the man point was ascertained, the man had been seen alive by hundreds—and, *pro forma*, (as a matter of course) the prisoners were acquitted of the charge, but were sagely ordered to be remanded until they could be personally confronted with the stranger.

In utter unconsciousness of the events and surmises that his disappearance and arrival had created in the minds of the good people of Galway, the mysterious stranger again directed his steps to Green Dragon, and a few minutes after his coming, a couple of stout porters laid down at its door, two large heavy chests covered with leather, and well secured with several strange-looking locks.

After eating a hearty dinner, which scarcely convinced mine host that he was veritable flesh and blood, the stranger announced his intention of becoming a resident in Galway, and inquired if there were any houses to let in the town. He was told of several, and amongst the rest the one formerly belonging to the O'Donnells was mentioned as being about to be sold by the Corporation, whose property in default of claimants it had become. Since the deaths and dispersion of the family, it had remained untenanted except by the rats, who seemed to have chosen it for their special abode, for they were often heard by the passers-by scampering and chasing each other in troops up and down the floors.

In this decayed and ruinous tenement did the last lineal descendant of the O'Donnells install himself. A few articles of the commonest description of household furniture were provided, the boy was taken from Nance Meelan, and draped in a suit of coarse clothes. Beyond this, a veil of impenetrable mystery shrouded all future proceedings of Mr. O'Donnell, or the O'Donnell, as he was generally called. He was reputed to possess immense wealth, yet he sedulously shunned all communion with the few friends who remembered him; rarely stirred out, and then only by night. Time passed on, old people shook their heads when his name was mentioned, and said they remembered him to have been a strange youth, always moping by himself, and

mourning the decadence of his family, and that he had often said to his mother: that he would never return until he had gained, not only wealth enough to rescue her from poverty and misery, but sufficient to build up the broken fortunes of his family, and purchase their ancient possessions.

Fate, probably, had hindered the accomplishment of these visions of his youthful ambition, which, though uttered in the ardent and unthinking recklessness of youth, seemed, from the reputed wealth of the individual, to have been pursued through life with a steady, persevering and successful aim. Others whispered, that a greedy love of gold had banished all purer and loftier imaginings from the old man's heart; and such, indeed, appeared the truth. The lamp that once burned so brightly in his breast had expired—the fond proud wish which had been the loadstone to which all his hopes and aspirations had pointed, of aggrandizing his kindred and raising them to their former rank and position in society, had fled for ever. He had returned to his native land to find himself a stranger—the dear ones for whom he had toiled late and early, and planned and speculated, had died in neglect and poverty—poverty which a title of his hoarded wealth would have relieved, a relief which, in the engrossing nature of his pursuits, he had forgotten to administer. The pangs of remorse and the disappointment of long-cherished hopes—hopes that had cheered and lighted years of solitary exile, infused gall and wormwood into a spirit that had grown harsh and worldly from commerce and mankind. Thrown back upon himself, the passion of avarice burnt with renewed vigor, and what had once been self-denial and passion for the noblest ends, degenerated into the insane selfishness of the sordid miser.

In the meantime Neill Barry, or Neill O'Donnell, as his uncle, immediately on his adoption named him, had grown up ragged and half naked; for his first suit of clothes had never been replaced, and ignorant to be sure, for his uncle never sent him to school, or gave him any opportunities of education, beyond the very questionable kind obtained from grooms, coach-drivers and errand boys in the streets.

### CHAPTER II.

But with all his defects, rarely would one see, either in person or disposition, a finer specimen of youth than Neill: tall, handsome, with the dark eyes, raven hair and marked features of his mother's race, and possessed of a native politeness and irresistible fascination of manner that endeared him to every one that knew him. It was a matter of wonder to many that the old man did not display more tenderness and natural affection to the only one remaining of his kindred. Those who knew his family said it was on account of the low condition of the boy's father—for the O'Donnells were always a proud race. But they wronged the miser—he passionately loved his nephew—loved him with an intensity which made him almost unconscious of all the blessings and advantages he robbed him of—and yet not wholly so, for the deep-rooted thoughts and feelings of the past would momentarily displace the fierce thirst of gold within his breast. And often when the wearied boy had retired to his pallet, the old man, moved by some strange impulse, would steal after him, and, leaning over him, gaze proudly on his countenance—which, even misery, hardship and insufficient food had not deprived of the rich brown hue of health and exercise—and mutter to himself—'How like his ancestor, Hugh! then, as some remorseful feeling would smite him for his neglect of him, he would clasp his withered hands in deep emotion, and say, 'and yet not like thee, for he was gently bred and nurtured; and thou, poor child of my Aileen; but, it is for your sake I pinch and starve myself and you;—for you I deny myself the necessities of life, and shorten the remnant of my miserable days, that you may one day live in ease and luxury, and enjoy all the pleasures of that wealth, for whose accumulation I have devoted my existence. I know that hard and gripping eyes are upon us.—Yes, they thought I had gold, and would would gladly have robbed me of it. But we have cheated them—poor wasteful fools, they couldn't dream or think that if we had riches we would prefer nakedness, cold and hunger to clothes, generous food and kindly warmth; but they know not to what the indomitable will of man can attain, when directed to one single object—that object I have failed in, for those hearts its attainment would have gladdened, have vanished from the earth. But you shall possess the escheated lands and forfeited possessions of your race; you shall restore to its ancient splendor the name of O'Donnell. You are young and beautiful; you shall be wealthy, and shall marry amongst the magnates of the land, and when my bones have long mouldered with the dust, you and your descendants will flourish in the land of my fathers, like trees planted by the rivers of waters.'

But, in general, the old man's demeanor was cold and distant to the youth, always pleading extreme poverty for obliging him to do the menial

offices he performed, for the boy had to draw water from the fountain, gather sticks for fuel, and cook their humble provisions; Nance Meelan, on whom these multiform duties had at first devolved, having one day been unceremoniously thrust out of doors by the miser for attempting to prey into the mysterious arcanum of his bed-chamber. Neill loved the old man tenderly, and for his sake bore cheerfully with many a hardship and privation galling to a youthful spirit; and thought he would have often starved but for the kindness of his good nurse, as he loved to call Nance, who gave him many a plentiful meal;—still Neill never murmured; a natural gaiety and happiness of temperament enabled him to bear, like a stoic, the positive miseries of his condition. His time was chiefly spent at his nurse's, who had been so insufficiently rewarded for her care of him, as to be compelled still to follow her original trade of water-carrier.

Nance Meelan was an honest, simple-hearted woman, with the excitable temper, quick impulses and warm affections of her country. To O'Donnell, as the unconscious cause of her being brought within the power of the law, as well as for his close and miserly disposition (a vice held in utter detestation by the lower order of Irish) she entertained a most cordial dislike; and abundantly gifted with that flow of bitter eloquence which, when fully aroused, few of her sex are found to be utterly deficient in, Nance seized every opportunity of bestowing a flood of invective on the 'negardly *ould colough*;' but, above all, for his 'threatment of her darlin'.

'Erra wouldn't id be better for you, *ma bouchal* *dhias dhonn*, that he left you wid her that took you from your mother's corpse, when you had neither kith nor kin in the wide world to care for you. Ask the neighbors if I ever let you want a clane shirt, or a belly-full of dacent vittles airy and to the fore of you. Glory to your soul, ashore, what good did he do for you since? Shut you up in his owid rat trap and starved you alive, as if you warn't a Christian at all, let alone his own flesh and blood. *Monan sin dhau!* (the Lord betune us an' harm for sayin' it) but shure it's enough to scare the heart out of one to think that the owid raven that doesn't know the ind of his goold ud be atther thrating his own sister's son in this way.

The only way which could put an end to these impetuous bursts of the faithful Nance was by threatening to leave her, which generally had the desired effect.

Time passed on, and while it increased the niggardly and avaricious disposition of O'Donnell, it perfected into the strength and vigor of manhood the youthful frame of Neill. His education had been confined to the simple elements of reading and writing, an ample knowledge of a few ancient tomes of Irish history, which formed his uncle's library, and over which he had pored until their contents had become as familiar as household words to him—a smattering of French and Spanish, which he had picked up from his uncle—singing a song, and dancing a jig to perfection. But of the nature of any of the polite arts or abstruse sciences of modern days, he was in a state, of the most profound and blissful ignorance.

But, though his mind was in a great measure uncultivated, still he possessed a fund of good sense, and a native strength and vigor of intellect, which triumphed over every disadvantage, and which lent a poetic enthusiasm to his language when excited. Grown up to manhood, he began to pine a little beneath the miseries of his condition. But all these would have been comparatively light, had he not suddenly been assailed by the darts of love. One evening he was lounging at his usual haunt, the corner of the old Post Office, when a jaunting car abruptly turned the corner of the street near him; two persons were on it—one a young, military gentleman, who drove on the left side near him; the other a female, wrapped in a travelling cloak and large black calash, who sat on the opposite side. The gentleman looked hesitatingly up and down the street, which at that hour scarcely contained an individual; then perceiving Neill, he called to him in an authoritative tone of voice:

'Ho! fellow, do you know where Colonel Vernon lives?—here's a crown, and show us the way to it, I think this is the street, but may I be hanged, if I know in what part of it his domicile is located.'

Neill, though in rags, knew he was a gentleman, and would one day be the lord of no mean inheritance; so his only reply to a request which would have instantly complied with, had it been couched in more civil terms, was a haughty indignant stare in return for the cool, contemptuous one bestowed by the young officer. Then turning on his heel, he commenced whistling with all his might the tune of 'the wind that shakes the barley.'

That moment he heard a sweet, melodious voice issue from beneath the black calash:—'Do young gentleman, be so kind as to direct us to Colonel Vernon's, if you know it, for we are

strangers in your town, and are quite fatigued from travelling.'

Neill turned with the instinctive gallantry of an Irishman, and saw the loveliest face he ever beheld, with sparkling blue eyes, and bright golden tresses, peeping archly at him beneath the huge calash; a close observer might have detected a smile lurking round the resolute lips of the lady, as she commenced this appeal. Neill was too fascinated to see any such thing; his *caubeen* was instantly flourished in his hand, and, scraping and bowing, he stammered in his most insinuating accents—'With great pleasure, my lady.'

The lady thanked him with the sweetest smile in the world. The gentleman whispered something to her, and laughed heartily. Neill however pocketed this affront for the sake of the beautiful lady, and marshalled the way, with such rapid strides as to cause the tired horse some effort to keep up with him.

He stopped before a large, ancient-looking mansion at the end of the street.

'This is Vernon House,' said he, giving a thundering knock at the hall-door. The jaunting car stopped, the officer leaped down and assisted the young lady off.

'You'll take something now for your trouble, won't you, Pat?' said the gentleman, good humouredly, and emptying out the contents of his purse, he presented it to him, surveying at the same time, with a critical and admiring glance, the handsome sun-burnt face and athletic proportions of his ragged guide.

'My name isn't Pat,' said Neill, haughtily, 'but that's no matter. I want no money. The lady is quite welcome to the trifling service I have been able to do her; I would do more than that for a woman any day.'

'Ha, ha,' laughed the young officer; 'not an hour in Galway, Sully, and you have made a conquest already. By Jove! Ireland may well be land of gallantry. Well, you're a fine fellow, and I'll not offend you with the money any more, but we must be better acquainted. Come to me to-morrow, and I'll see what I can do for you.'

The patronising close of this sentence might have again offended the sensitive pride of Neill, had not the soft voice of the lady broke silence.

'Good night, my friend, and accept our thanks for your kindness, as you will not allow us to present you with any more substantial proofs of our gratitude.'

As she spoke, her hand, by the merest accident, escaped from beneath the folds of the mantle. Neill seized the soft snowy fingers and pressed them to his lips. The lady started and blushed, but the gentleman was engaged in taking some things out of the car, and he did not see the bold action. The next moment the hall-door was flung open by an old serrant-man with a powdered head, pompadour-colored coat, with gold lace, and crimson knee-breeches. The lady glided into the richly furnished and brilliantly lighted hall, whilst the old servant, smirking and smiling with delight, bustled to the car to receive the parcels. The young lady stood one moment with her tiny, fur-clad feet resting on the soft mats, the odious black calash was slipped off, the heavy mantle fell from her shoulders, and Neill who, fascinated, still lingered, caught a glimpse of a slight, rounded form with a profusion of golden hair, silky and luxuriant as that of a beautiful child, hanging in a volume of rich ringlets over a neck of dazzling whiteness, lips smiling like rosebuds, and a pair of wild, mischievous eyes fixed on himself. The bright vision had disappeared, the hall-door was shut, jaunting car and all had vanished, and hour after hour had fled by, and still Neill O'Donnell stood leaning against the lamp-post, gazing like a fool up at the windows of Vernon House. He might have remained there longer, had not the hoarse voice of the watchman bawling out the hour beside him, rudely aroused him from his spell of entrancement.

Started at the lateness of the hour, he looked round the deserted streets, and remembering that his uncle who lived in continual apprehension of robbers, would hardly admit him if he delayed longer, he made the best of his way home, over head and ears in love with the beautiful lady.—Much he marvelled who she was, for Colonel Vernon, to the best of his belief, was an old bachelor, at least he never heard of his having a child.

This same Colonel Vernon was descended from an old English family, one of the off-shoots of which had come over with Cromwell, and falling in love with a fair daughter of Erin, having thrown up his merciless commission to slay, ravage, and burn, had married and settled down into a quiet-country gentleman. But his descendants though naturalized to the soil, had never forgotten the original stock from which they had sprung and being wealthy and independent, as well as zealously loyal, they did good service to the state in several agitated epochs of Irish history, for which they had been rewarded in many cases with the confiscated lands of the malcontents.