

# The True Witness,

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FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

Mick Hanlon was, at thirteen, the bully of the school,—but nothing else. Not that he wanted capacity for obtaining scholastic distinction, but that his ambition always aimed at the "bad eminence" surrendered to him. He was a boy of low stature for his years, with a fierce eye, a fleshy, out-curved defying lip, and a manner always overbearing. His shoulders were broad enough for a person six inches taller; his arms long, and his nether limbs muscular and hard. In running, in leaping, in wrestling, in boxing, Mick had no rival. Except a few who kept aloof from him, he brought every boy in the school to acknowledge his absolute supremacy, and his slaves submitted to him in mingled terror and admiration. Having thrashed into submission any one who dared to dispute his rule, he would next thrash, just as soundly, any one who even presumed "to look crooked" at his newly made vassal.

Such was Mick at thirteen. At about two-and-twenty, after having, on a St. Patrick's day, "in the evening," overwhelmed, at the head of a gang of youthful worshippers of the saint, the whole city constabulary, who were about the streets to keep peace and order, Mick next charged a guard of soldiers, who were coming to supply their place, and died on the point of one of their bayonets—the weapon, in his tiger spring forward and upward, having directly entered the young bravo's heart.

And there was Joe White, who, when directed, in common with his classmates, to tack two lines of poetry to the end of a prose theme, produced, after days of effort—

"Joe White, my hand and pen  
Will be good, but God knows when."

And Joe died, prematurely, an ensign in a militia regiment—the butt and the sot of its mess.

And upon the same occasion, Joe's constant crony, John Arran, rivalled him in a distich—

"Sticks and stones,  
And dead men's bones."

And John, refusing to be sent to college, and afterwards placed in a liberal profession, upon leaving the English Academy, is now only a hostler—and a hostler of no great parts either.

It may be added, that a third aspirant for the poetic wreath, Keeran Fitzgerald, who would be original, produced the following admirable couplet—

"It's a very fine thing, for a boy to follow,  
The tune of the harp, that's played by Apollo."

And that Keeran, during his whole life afterwards, was, indeed, very original in every respect, with, however, about as much claim to eminence, or common sense, in his originality, as may be found in the lines, for which posterity are indebted to him alone.

And in the English Academy, there were two or three very dirty fellows—dirty in their persons and attire, as well as in their minds and sensations—dirty fellows inside as well as outside;—and dirty fellows of exactly the same description they continue to be to this very hour.

And mean boys that have only grown into mean middle-aged men. And generous boys, who at five-and-forty, are still generous. And gentlemanlike boys who, through their whole after-lives, have always been gentlemanly. And all the boys who have been "Paddy lasts" in the English Academy, are "Paddy lasts" in the world. And the great majority of its pupils were content with middle places in their class—and farther than middle places they have never got into in society.

And very few indeed, of all that miniature crowd, struck out for real fame or eminence in any way—but it is a grateful and a gracious duty to add, that they who did so, in verity and from the heart, have since reached the smiling shore of their boyhood's ambition: not one of them, at all events, has been drowned in his bold struggle to attain it.

CHAPTER XIV.

Sometimes even the redoubtable James Charles Buchmahon, master of the English Academy, used to indulge in a social glass after dinner—nay, after supper, too, with a few select friends; and the following day, was sure to remain longer than was his wont, in his bed-chamber. By some means or other, the young gentlemen of his seminary were scarcely ever ignorant of the occurrences of such evenings; and consequently, for an hour or so, upon the mornings that succeeded them, the school-room of the English Academy used to be very unusually relaxed in discipline. It was, indeed, rather a venturesome thing, even with the temptation mentioned, to utter a loud breath, or for a moment vacate a seat, when, as will be remembered, the young students were divided from the awful bed-room by an oak plank, solely; to say nothing of the spy-holes which James Charles Buchmahon had boozed through the old partition.

It is evident, however, to the meanest capacity—and even George Booth quite understood

the matter—that if the spy-holes were good for the master's espionage upon the boys, they were just as good for the espionage of the boys upon the master—and, indeed, they were as often used one way as the other. Almost every morning in the year, reconnoitering parties were appointed from the first and second classes, who, with the help of those spy-holes, and their own eyes, telegraphed through the school the most minute proceeding of James Charles, from the instant he gave the first stir in his bed, until he laid his hand on the door-handle, to pass out to begin his duties for the day; and it need not be added, that upon the special occasions of stolen enjoyment alluded to, our young acquaintances were most particularly watchful. It is, then, one of these half-holiday mornings before breakfast. The school abounds with fan and gambol, Neddy Fennell being one of the greatest, if not the very greatest truant among all his compeers. James Charles has been sleeping later than ever was known before; and his subjects, believing that he must have been very drunk indeed the previous night, happily conjecture that he may not wake time enough for the morning lessons—nay, nor for the afternoon lessons—nay, that under Providence he may never wake at all.

But a change soon occurred in Neddy Fennell's sportive idling.

Mention has been made of some very dirty fellows in the English Academy. They were in their own way jocosse fellows, too, particularly upon this memorable morning. The had prepared a little blank paper book, and written upon each of its pages words that betokened, they said, a future fortune of some kind or other, to any or everybody who, by insinuating a pin between two of its leaves, should cause the mystic volume to unfold. The device was not a very original one in the school; and when practised by boys of anything like neatness of mind, produced much harmless fun. But in their hands the simple plaything, from the nature of the matter they had scribbled through it, degenerated, of course, merely into a vehicle of nastiness.

Neddy Fennell passed them after they had just offended—ay, and abashed to the very crown of his head, Tommy Palmer, by inducing him to read his future destiny; our little friend could also see that James Graham's eyes were fixed on the dirty fellows with deep indignation. They enjoyed, however, the success of their joint invention in fits of smothered laughter; and he overheard them arrange to have "rare sport" among the girls at the other side of the room, so soon as they should come up from the parlor to receive their morning lessons at the hands of James Charles Buchmahon. He started, reddened, and said, "I'll try my fortune too."

They held the book of prophecy to him. He divided its leaves in the usual manner, and read something very like what he had expected. He turned over some more of its leaves, and became satisfied of the nature of all its contents. Just then, the young girls entered the school-room, chaperoned by their mistresses as far as the door. Neddy glanced towards one of the little troop, and his blood boiled.

"You shall never take this fortune-book to the other side of the room, you blackguards," said Neddy.

"An' who'll hinder us?" asked they.

"I'll hinder you," he replied, and he put the book into one of the side pockets of his jacket.

There was a remonstrance, and then a pulling and dragging scuffle, and at last a boxing-match; the two dirty fellows, now even more cowardly than they were dirty, falling together upon one little boy, much their inferior in years, height, weight, and strength, while he, nothing daunted, jumped about them, rolling his little fists round each other, making a good hit whenever he could, and taking all their heavy punishment like a Trojan. But he could not fail having the worst of it. His lips and nose were bruised, and spouted with blood; his left eye became unwillingly half shut up, and he staggered often, and was clean knocked down at last.

A little scream came from the girl's table, and at the same moment one of the dirty fellows said, "The master is coming out."

"Wait till I see," said Neddy, "and if he is not, I'll come back to you."

He ran round the long desk, and was just applying his eye—his only available one—to one of the spy-holes, when, ye gods!—another eye, a well-known, large, gray, bluish eye, a cold, shiny, white and blue delft eye, was in the act of doing the same thing at the other side of the augerhole.

Neddy's first impulse was, of course, to start back in terror; but the next instant, he stuck his own eye as closely as ever he could, into the opening, shrewdly judging, that such a proceeding was the only one which could hinder his opponent from noting and ascertaining his personal identity. And now it became a real trial of skill and endurance between the two eyes; but, oh! the horrors of the ordeal that Neddy had to endure! Sometimes, the large greyish blue eye would withdraw itself about the fourth part of an inch, from its own side of the partition, as if to admit light enough into the orifice, to enable it to mark the rival orb, and

connect it with its owner; and then, the cold, freezy scintillations which shot from it curdled his very blood! Sometimes it would adhere as closely to its end of the hole, as did Neddy's at the other end; and then all was darkness to Neddy's vision—but he thought the fringes of the two eyelids touched! and his trembling limbs scarce supported him. He winked, and blinked, and so did the antagonist organ, and then he became assured that the opposing eyelashes absolutely intertangled, and felt as if his own optic was to be drawn out of his head.—Mental delusion almost possessed him. The cold, greyish blue eye seemed to become self-irradiated, and to swell into the compass of a shining crown-piece, while it darted into his rays of excruciating light. Still, however, he courageously held on, until at last, James Charles Buchmahon gave up the contest, and withdrew towards his bed-room door; upon which Neddy hastened to his place at his desk, but not before he had ascertained by a glance across the room, that the two dirty fellows, having filehed the fortune-book from his pocket during his late trepidation, were in the act of introducing it to the notice of the little dames, who sat to the old table in the recess. In fact, the alarm had been given by one of the dirty fellows, that "the master was coming" was but a ruse to send Neddy to the spy-hole, in order to enable himself the more easily to recover his precious property; and this was now evident, from the two friends being seen, without the least apprehension of the approach of that said master, endeavoring, in high glee, to impart a portion of their own nastiness to the pure little hearts and minds before them. Neddy had scarcely resumed his seat, when James Charles entered the school-room, and Neddy's eyes, or rather eye, fastened on his book. Almost at the same moment, the little voice—Neddy knew it well—which had before uttered a little scream, broke into a sudden fit of crying.

Neddy again glanced at the girl's table. The child who was crying, had just flung into the middle of the room the atrocious fortune-book; and he was about to vault across the desk a second time, to possess himself of the evidence of blackguardism, when James Charles Buchmahon saved him the trouble, by picking it up himself.

The two detected dirty fellows were slinking to their places. "Have the goodness to stand where ye are, gentlemen," entreated James Charles Buchmahon. They stood stock still before him. He sat down to his desk, put on his spectacles, and deliberately began to read the fortune-book.

In a few seconds he suddenly stopped reading, drew his chair smartly back from his desk, raised his hands and eyes, and then screwed the latter into those of the base culprits; he resumed a silent appeal upwards, and again as silently told the two dirty fellows what he thought of their playful device, and of themselves, and what they had to expect for their cleverness. Having quite finished the rare volume, he stood up, and beckoned them towards him.

They came. He held it open in his hand, before their eyes, pointed to it, and uttered the one word, "read." He then pointed to the girls' table, tapped the now closed book with his fore-finger; slowly opened his desk, slowly deposited therein the "sybilline leaves," and uttered another monosyllable—"kneel."

The despairing blackguards knelt.

"No!" interrupted James Charles Buchmahon, with great and severe dignity, stepping back from them—"I was wrong; do not kneel; go on all-fours; prop yourselves on your knees and hands together, and remain in that position; I will explain why to you, anon."

Again they obeyed him, their dirty faces growing pallid as death, and their dirty hearts quailing with an undefinable fear and horror at this unprecedented proceeding.

James Charles Buchmahon again returned to the desk, now standing upright before it, however. Very slowly and solemnly he next drew out his pocket-handkerchief, used it—and what a quivering, trumpet sound there then was!—folded and rolled it up into a round hardish lump, held it in both hands tightly, bent his head over it, and began rubbing across it, from side to side, the base of his very broad-backed and hooked nose. Great awe fell upon his subjects, big and little. The process described,—which they used to call, "sharpening his beak," was one which, by experience, they well knew betokened the approach of some terrific catastrophe; while they were also very well aware that, during the sharpening of the beak, the two bluish grey eyes were scowling round, from one to another of them—as before remarked, under their proper brows, and over their proper spectacles.

The beak was sharpened. The pocket-handkerchief was unfolded from its sphere-like form, shaken, and put up. James Charles Buchmahon then produced before himself a horn snuff-box, of his own manufacture; tapped it often; gravely took off its lid; dipped deep his finger and thumb into its pungent contents; put on its lid; returned it into his waistcoat-pocket, sniffed up, in a long, long-drawn sniff, about half of the huge pinch he had abstracted

from it, and then he uttered three words more.

"Master Edmund Fennell!"

The individual so summoned left his seat, and stood before the throne. James Charles applied his spectacles close to Neddy's face, deliberately and diligently scanning it, now upwards and downwards, now from side to side. With much suavity he then took him by the shoulder, and induced him to turn round and round, that he might critically inspect the evidences left upon his dress of his fall on the very dusty, old oak floor.

This investigation ended, a piercing "whew!"—which continued while his breath lasted, followed it; the "whew" was, by the way, usual on such occasions as the present, and it used to traverse the boys' heads, as if a long needle had been thrust into one ear, and out through the other. And then, after finishing the pinch of snuff, he politely addressed Neddy.

"Why, sir, you are quite a buffer—a perfect Mendoza. I had no conception whatsoever, sir, that my seminary had the honor of containing such an eminent pugilist. But, sir, any young gentleman, who aspires to become a bully, under this roof, must begin by fighting with me, and more than that—he must become my conqueror, before I can permit the English Academy to be turned into a bear-garden. But we shall speak of this, sir, when I shall have discharged a more pressing duty. In the mean time, Master Edmund Fennell, have the kindness to kneel down—a little apart, however, from those two prone animals," pointing to the two dirty fellows, who of course still continued on their hands and knees.

Neddy could have said something in his own defence, but he was either too proud or too much put out to do so; or perhaps he wisely reserved himself for the re-investigation of his case, which seemed to have been promised; so he knelt down.

A new fit of crying and sobbing was heard from the old table in the recess, and a beautiful little girl, her cheeks streaming tears, ran forward to the judgment-seat.

And—"Sir, sir," she exclaimed, clasping her little hands, "do not punish Ned Fennell—he doesn't deserve it!—he is a good little boy, and often comes to see my father, with old priest Connell—and my father says he is a good boy—and so does priest Connell;—and least of all does he deserve your anger, for what has happened this morning! I saw and heard it all, sir—and I can make you sure that he has done nothing wrong,—no—but done everything that was right, sir. Oh! good Mr. James Charles Buchmahon, do not take him into your room and hurt him!"

Neddy had not shed a tear before this moment; after an upward glance at his little advocate, he now cried heartily—but they were happy tears he shed. James Charles Buchmahon stood motionless—his large, cold eyes became half-covered by their upper lids. He smiled, in something like the kindness of human nature, and the boys thought, as well as they could judge through his spectacles, that a softening moisture came over them. At all events, he quietly sat down, took the little girl by the hand, drew her to his knee, and began to question her in a low voice.

She informed him that Neddy's scuffle in the first instance, with the two dirty fellows, arose out of his endeavoring to hinder them from approaching the girls' table with their atrocious book of fortunes. She repeated the words that had passed between Neddy and them; and how Neddy put the book into the pocket of his jacket, and then how they fell upon him, while he would not give up his prize, but defended himself as well as he was able. James Charles listened attentively, and questioned the child over again, and very minutely. When she had said all she could say, he bent his lips to her ear and whispered a few words. The little thing clasped her hands, dashed aside with them the tears and the golden hair at once, which were both blinding her, and her lovely little face was one glowing smile, as she whispered in her turn—"Oh! thank you, sir." But James Charles Buchmahon, becoming somewhat scandalized at so unaffected a show of feeling and of nature, raised his forefinger and said, in almost one of his freezing tones—"Now go back to your seat, Miss McNeary."

Little Helen, after making her little salaam, obeyed; but not before her smiling eyes and those of Neddy Fennell, now also smiling, contrived to meet.

A death-like silence ensued—

"It was as if the general pulse of life stood still, and nature made a pause, an awful pause, prophetic of her end!"

And during the "awful pause" James Charles Buchmahon, half inclining himself backwards and holding his head perfectly erect, while his hands hung clenched by his sides, frowned downwards upon the two dirty fellows, in, as it were, speechless abhorrence and indignation.

At length he broke the pause by uttering, in tones that seemed to come from the depths of his laboring bosom:—

"Quadrupeds! become for a moment, bipeds—imitate humanity by standing upright!"

With the facility of dancing bears the quadrupeds did as they were bid.

"Quadrupeds! how many senses are there?"

"Five, sir!" they bawled out in a breath.

"You quadruped, to my right hand, name those five senses."

"Feeling, hearing, seeing, tasting, and smelling, sir."

All this seemed very wide of the mark, and puzzled the dirty fellows, and the whole school besides, exceedingly.

"So far, so good. Well, then, none of my five senses ever yet perceived, so far as to cause my reflective powers to apprehend, and thereby my understanding to arrive at the conclusion that the English Academy was founded and instituted by me, for the training up of any of the inferior animals—of any of the brute creation, in fact. I could not have possibly imagined that, at this time of my life, I was to degenerate into an instructor of beast brutes—ay, of the foulest among the foul brutes—of foul, snorting swine. But you have undeceived me. And allow me to ask you, how has it come to pass that you have been enabled to stand upright in your sty, and present yourself, upon two feet, at the threshold of the English Academy? By what 'mighty magic' has been wrought the presumptuous deception?"

The quadrupeds did not venture to answer the question.

"I say to you both that, in daring to stand erect on your hind legs, you have attained the very climax of audacity. But—" here James Charles slowly took out of his desk the cat-o-nine-tails—"but I will assert over you the outraged dignity of human nature. Great as may have been the spell which enabled you, for a season, to look like human beings, I can overmaster that spell by a higher one, and force you to resume your pristine positions no earth. Down, therefore! Down, again on all-fours—I command your re-transformation!" he waved the cat slowly round his head; "abandon the bearing of humanity, and once more move along with prone visages and snouts, delving into your native mire and filth."

The swine, as James Charles now called them, evidently did not comprehend this long harangue, and only glared at him with pallid visages.

"Did you not hear me, unclean brutes?"

"Yes, sir," they gasped.

"Obey, then!"—a hissing of whiplcord came round their ears, and then its crash descended on their bare heads. They shouted, clapped their hands to their smarting craniums, and jumped aside. The cat next applied her claws to the backs of those ears; and there was a still louder yell, and a wider jump aside.

"We don't know what you want us to do, sir!" they screamed out.

But James Charles Buchmahon soon made them know; and again they were on their hands and knees.

"Grunt now, ye swine—manifest your nature a little further. Grunt!" he again elevated the cat.

They earnestly assured him they could not grunt.

"Can't? I will soon show all the young gentlemen here that I have not mistaken your nature or qualities—come, grunt, I say!" and the cat was scratching wherever she could insert a claw.

"Ugh, ugh—ugh, ugh—oh-ah!" they at last grunted and shouted together.

"Did I not judge aright, gentlemen of the English Academy—hark, how plainly they can speak their original language—walk forward, now, swine—but still on your four legs—do you hear? and grunt as ye go, that all human beings may avoid you."

Round and round the school-room he made them crawl, while, per force, they still imitated the discordant sounds of the animals they personified. In vain did they attempt to escape under desks or ferns. With a smart cane, which he had now substituted for the cat, their merciless driver soon hunted them out again to the middle of the floor; and if they ceased their motion, for one instant, or refused to grunt, down came the cane on them.

At last, growing tired of his occupation, James Charles halted, and allowed them to do the same.

"So far, swine," he said, "you have been only enforced to resume your proper natures, and display your proper attributes. Real punishment for your crimes you have not yet received. Punishment, first, for your unnamable crimes at yonder table, and all your proceedings connected therewith; punishment, secondly, for your cowardly swinish crime of attacking together one little boy; one little human creature, certainly inferior to you in mere brute strength—and rending and disfiguring the comely human features that providence had blessed him with. I am still your debtor I admit. But please God, I shall not long be so."

Only waiting to imbibe a fresh pinch of snuff, as a kind of piquant stimulus to his already perfect good will for the task before him, James Charles then belabored the two dirty rascals, from the nape of the neck to the termination of the back-bone—allowing them at last to go halting and roaring to their places only because