



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XVII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 12, 1867.

No. 49.

ELLEN AHERN;

OR,

THE POOR COUSIN.

CHAPTER XVII.—NEW PERPLEXITIES FOR ELLEN AHERN.

Ellen Ahern opened her portfolio and sat down to her table to write the startling news. Her hand trembled, her heart grew faint, and her temples throbbled. She could not analyze the strange tumult of her feelings. Opposite emotions swayed her mind to and fro. One moment she rejoiced, the next she felt a sense of overwhelming, sickening woe. This news would carry with it a joyful and certain promise of deliverance to the miserable and down-trodden peasantry of Fermanagh; it was a guarantee that the honor of her old ancestral name would be vindicated and sustained; and afforded her an assurance that the last days of her venerated friends, Father McMahon and Sir Eadna Ahern, would be allowed to decline in peace and tranquility. These thoughts lifted up her heart in thankfulness, until, like a storm surge dashing out its sunshine, she remembered that to Mr. Wardell, Therese and herself, these changes must necessarily bring only misery and blight. She knew that Don Enrique, whose zeal for his friend was untiring, would lose no time in coming, but leave Ireland in the first ship that sailed for the United States to see the Wards, and arrange all the preliminaries for a final adjustment of Desmond Maguire's claims to the title and estates of Fermanagh. And if she saw him, a thing which she feared she could not avoid, had she not every reason to suppose that, under the influence of his friendly zeal for his friend, he would be led once more to advocate her kinsman's pretensions to her hand? The very thought of seeing him again, knowing all the while what a deep gulf lay between them, was agony enough; but when now, all unbidden, his noble presence arose in her mind's eye, and she heard the calm, winning tones of that voice—which had never fallen on her ears but in breathing the most generous and exalted sentiments—pleading for one to whom she was, and would continue to be an utter stranger, whatever his excellences of character might be, she started, and an indefinable dread stole over her, which made her shrink away from the task assigned her. Still more was the repugnance augmented by the thought of Mr. Wardell, to whom the discovery was fraught with ruin and disgrace, the downfall of his honestly-earned position, and the last blow that would destroy his already shattered health! For how did she know but that Lord Hugh Maguire and his mother might make such resistance as to oblige the matter to be brought before the legal tribunals of the land? How could she tell how it would be adjusted?

'I cannot do it!' she exclaimed in tones of anguish. 'I cannot do it!' Then, as if a sudden hope had sprung up within her bosom, she closed the portfolio and went out of the room, silently and swiftly to Mr. Wardell's door, where she paused an instant, then knocked with a light and nervous touch.

'Come in. Ha, Miss Ahern!' exclaimed Mr. Wardell, as she entered; 'what is the matter? You looked troubled and ill.'

'I am troubled, sir, but not ill,' replied Ellen Ahern, whose pallid countenance did not sustain her denial. 'I have come back to ask you to excuse me. I cannot write what you wish?'

'Not write what I wish, Miss Ahern?' said Mr. Wardell, while a shadow and perturbation gathered over his face. 'Upon what grounds do you object? Surely, surely, what you told me was no idle rumor or groundless jest?'

'All that I told you, sir, is true, every word of it; but I have been weighing the consequences of this discovery, and I have come to the conclusion that mine shall not be the hand to impart information of it,' she replied firmly.

'Ellen Ahern, come hither; lay your hand in mine, while I thank you; first for the joyful tidings that Desmond Maguire is living, which has lifted the brand of murderer from my brow, and last, for your kindly thought for me and the child. I understand you; and I am not displeased to find in you the true and generous soul that I all along supposed you to possess. But it must be done. You shrink because you feel as if it would be a betrayal of one who has done you some poor kindnesses. So far from it, you will only be doing that which will place it in my power to make full reparation and restitution for the wrong that in an evil hour I consented to and committed, and without which I should go bowed down and miserable to the end of my days. Go then, Miss Ahern, and write what I wish to be written to your friends. Unless you do I shall send for a lawyer, as late as the hour is, and put the matter into his hands,' said Mr. Wardell, in his quick, determined way.

'I will do it, sir, since you command it,' replied Ellen Ahern, while her tears dropped fast and heavy on Mr. Wardell's hand. 'I feel myself in a great strait. It is difficult to turn to

the right or to the left. Will you forgive me my agency in this matter, sir, if any evil to yourself or your fortune shall ensue?'

'I shall not find it easy to forgive you, Miss Ahern, if you hesitate a moment longer. You see the matter from a false point of view. Let meset you right. I committed a great wrong—a crime, the memory of which has haunted me and scourged me until my whole life was turned to bitterness. Through every varied and changeable scene of my existence it pursued me, and it was only by plunging into an endless vortex of business, and straining every energy to meet the hazardous emergencies my will created, that I could in a measure escape its ceaseless din and presence. Men called me diligent, and extolled my capacity for business and my talent for financiering, when my successes were only the effects of the god that was making my heart bleed at every step. I would have given all—life itself, to atone my crime, but because there was no way to do it, as whatever sacrifice I might make could not restore the dead to life, I was on the verge of despair and eternal loss when you came into my dismal home, bringing sunshine and blessing. Words that seemed to be all unnoted and uncared for by me when they fell from your lips, time after time, dropped down like dews on the hard rind of my heart; then your example, and the lessons of piety that you instilled into the mind of my motherless child which she, in her artless way, revealed by practice more than words, gave me glimpses of better things, and better hopes than I had known for many dark years. At last, through the mercy of God, compunction succeeded remorse, and I determined to renounce and abandon myself and my affairs to His infinite mercy and providence; to make any and every sacrifice that might be required, so that only I might obtain his pardon and a hope of rest in the world to come. I believe, my spirit of renunciation was complete—it was at least sincere. I did what I could, and resolved many good works to expiate the temporal evils that had resulted from my acts.—Comparative peace ensued—but the memory was still there, crowning my heart like thorns, and I accepted the suffering. Thus matters stood with me up to this night, when God, in the plenitude of his mercy, sent me comfort through you.—When you told me, in this dark room, that Desmond Maguire, whom I thought had perished thirty years ago in an almost inaccessible pass of the Sierra Morena, through my means, was still alive—that he waited only for me to come and establish his identity—that full and perfect expiation was within my reach—my God! the emotion, the feeling that ensued, are only a faint semblance of those I shall have, if, through the merits of Christ, I am permitted to enter eternal rest. Would you, then, be the means of deferring what I have so long and so earnestly desired? Believe me, I fear nothing so much as the possibility that the opportunity may in some way elude and escape my grasp. Go then, Miss Ahern, and write to your friends.—Tell them I await their commands, and am only desirous of affording my testimony, and giving up the proofs in my possession, to establish the claim of the true heir, Desmond Maguire, to the title and inheritance of his father.'

'I will go, sir,' replied Ellen Ahern. 'I dare not oppose your will, for, God help me, I feel that you are right. But, sir, you look very much exhausted, shall I not pour you out a glass of wine?'

'Anything to bolster me up, Miss Ahern, sweet or bitter, until my task is consummated,' he said holding out his hand to take the goblet which she had filled with ruby wine. 'A great calm has come over me, Miss Ahern—an indescribable sensation of repose. Oh, my God! I am all unworthy! all unworthy!' he exclaimed with a sudden gush of emotion, while tears coursed over his cheeks and his whole frame shook. Inexpressibly affected, Ellen Ahern glided out of the room to go and do his bidding. But again her heart rebelled, although her resolution did not fail her. She felt as if she was preparing to write the death warrant of the happiness of those to whom she was under the deepest obligations, as well as her own. But the case was clear. Justice, duty, and charity demanded the sacrifice.

She drew the paper towards her, dipped the pen into the ink, and with desperate resolution, wrote:—'By a mysterious turn of divine providence, I have discovered the Wards. They have no other disposition except to make reparation and do justice, which they have the means at hand to do. Mr. Ward has risen to high eminence here, and his life in this community has always been characterized by the strictest probity and virtue. To me, he has been an especial friend, which you will without difficulty understand when I inform you that Mr. Wardell and Mr. Ward are one and the same person.—The only favor that I shall ever ask of my kinsman, Desmond Maguire, is to implore him to take the most cautious measures possible in this

case, and make it as private as the circumstances will allow, to avoid bringing public odium on a man, who, whatever his errors may have been, has fully expiated them by years of sorrow and remorse. Apply to Bernard Wardell, South Dock Warehouse.' And the letter was folded, sealed, directed, and dropped into Mr. Wardell's mail. Ere another sunset it was far away on its course to Ireland—to Fermanagh.

Then Ellen Ahern began to look the matter full in the face, to view it under every aspect and arraign herself before the tribunal of her own heart to receive the sentence that her judgment would pass. The result of it was this.—She would not see Don Enrique Giron when he came—she would spare herself that trial—but she would take Therese and go into the country to spend a week or more with a family who, through the means placed in the child's hands for charitable purposes, had been saved from ruin and re-established on their little farm, which had been in their family for generations. They had been long urging a visit, and Ellen Ahern felt that no safer retreat for herself and Therese could be thought of than the Dairy Farm, while Don Enrique remained in the city. Thela, from whom she had been so long separated, should accompany them. As to going back to Ireland, as if to throw herself in her kinsman's way, it could not be thought of; she would remain in voluntary exile until he had sought and won some other bride, then, faithful to the home and friends of her love, she would return to spend her life in their service.

She was a poor cousin, it is true, but not so poor as to be willing to barter a single prerogative of her high, pure nature, for the most tempting prospects of worldly gain, or worldly honors, or worldly considerations. She was determined to be true to herself; to yield nothing to ignoble motives, and become, if necessary, the victim for the good of others. And days passed on, but they brought no calm to Ellen Ahern. She sought solace at the true source of consolation and if her heavenly hopes waxed stronger, her dreams of earthly happiness receded farther and farther away, until they floated like a wreck on the tide of memory. But while this mental strife called forth all her powers of endurance, she was outwardly calm and gentle. There was a paleness of her cheek, and her step lost its elasticity, these were the only outward evidences that told of the heart-sickness within her. But there was one amidst this circle of mystery and anxiety—Therese—who was untouched and unharmed by it all: her natural buoyancy and joyousness, augmented and elevated by gratitude for her father's conversion; nothing earthly could compare with her happiness. She did not know that he had always been a Catholic by birth-right and baptism—how should she? It seemed like a miracle to her, through which she adored the love and power of Him who had wrought it. An abiding, cheerful sense of the divine love—like a flower exhaling itself in sweetness, or like a star shedding forth its light in beautiful effulgence—gave forth all unconsciously expressions of serene gladness every hour of her life, which, like the manifestations of her piety, were constant, and so unobtrusive that they seemed like the spontaneous outpouring of her heart.—And, amidst it all, there grew up in the child's inner life a beautiful desire to consecrate herself to God; but this heavenly plant was nourished in a secret, with a sweet humility which imparted strength and durability to its roots. She spent every other afternoon with her father, the intervening ones with her grandmother, who, grown more petulant and exacting, would allow no one to speak to her on topics which she did not herself select, while her anxiety concerning her son led her to ask for, and listen to, the most minute details connected with him, with a perseverance and a patience which could not be surpassed.

One morning, when Father St. John called to see Mr. Wardell, he found him so much stronger and better as to be able to get around the room without any crutches. He congratulated him on his improved condition, and expressed the hope of seeing him quite recovered before Spring. 'Your visits are always opportune, Rev. Father, but you are specially welcome to-day,' replied Mr. Wardell, returning warmly the pressure of the clergyman's hand. 'I have been thinking of a visit to my mother, this morning; I think I can manage my crutches well enough to get there without accident.'

'I would advise you to be cautious, Mr. Wardell. A staircase is not so easily managed as a level floor,' said Father St. John. 'I think you had better defer your visit a few days longer.'

'Alas! Father, she is so old and infirm.—Who can answer for what may happen in a few days? I wish you to accompany me.'

'There lies a difficulty. She has steadily refused to see me, even when I have stood at her door, and, as far as it was prudent, endeavored to persuade her to do so,' replied the Father.

'Perhaps that which I have to tell her will

reconcile her to your presence. I cannot rest, my good Father, for thinking of her.

'Who can tell? God has His own times and ways. But it will be prudent to let her know that we are coming,' said Father St. John.

'Of course. Oblige me by pulling the bell cord for Cato. Cato,' said Mr. Wardell, when the negro came in, 'I feel so much better that I am going to try to get to my mother's room. I wish you to go and tell her that I am coming, and that Father St. John will accompany me.'

'Lor', Massa, you heap better stay whar you is. You dunno, sir, what a risk you's gwine to run. I know'd a man—he was a gentleman of color—he ventured to try his strength too soon, and he was struck smack down with another paralysis, and never 'covered, but died,' said Cato, impressively.

'But I've been up now some days, Cato, and have hobbled all around to-day, on my crutches. Make haste back and help me down,' argued Mr. Wardell.

'Taint no use, sir. I wont help nothing 'bout it, sir; and I wont have nothing to do with it, 'less you let me tote you down, sir. You looks like scuffing down them steep staircases! I aint gwine to help to kill you,' said Cato, doggedly but respectfully; while he measured Mr. Wardell's tall, emaciated figure from head to foot, with a glance that seemed to defy a contradiction of the position he had assumed.

'Very well. Tote it shall be,' said Mr. Wardell, who, during Cato's long services of nearly thirty years, had learned how perfectly useless it was to argue with him on any subject which he thought conflicted with his master's interest or good, in any way. 'Go, now, and prepare my mother for my visit.'

When Cato returned, he informed Mr. Wardell, with a sly twinkling of his eyes, that his 'ole Misses was glad to hear he was coming, but she say de chitabie smoke very badly, today, and 'trotter gentleman better not come.'

'But Father St. John doesn't mind a little smoke. I think we may venture, Father. I cannot go without you.'

After some difficulty, and aided materially by Cato's 'toting,' Mr. Wardell got slowly down to his mother's door. He went in without knocking, accompanied by Father St. John, who led him up to where she sat behind her screen, and assisted him into a chair.

'And is yourself come at last, a bouchal dhas, to the poor old mother that bore ye?' she cried, reaching out her arm and drawing his head down to her bosom, while she kissed and caressed him, and it was a rare sight, his patient tenderness, while she held him in that long embrace. Fast and warm her tears had rained on his head, where they glistened among his thin, grey locks, and trickled down over his forehead; when released from her clasping arm, he raised himself up.

'I am very glad to see you, *Mhair avner-nach*. But have you on greeting for Father St. John, my spiritual guide and dear friend?'

'I don't like strangers, Bernard. But if he's your friend, he's welcome!' was the ungracious reply.

'Can you not receive me also as your friend, my dear child? I am sure it is my wish to be so,' said Father St. John, soothingly.

'I don't like friends that pry into family secrets,' she said, spitefully.

For a moment a red flush mounted to the pale cheeks of the priest. In his more youthful days a high spirit and a too tender and jealous regard for his honor, and an impatient spirit under injustice, had caused him many and sharp conflicts in the holy science he had set himself to learn, and the old woman's sharp retort now roused in his blood the feverish sense of resentment that age and grace had not yet quenched; but it was only for a moment, and ere he spoke, he possessed his soul again in patience.

'Mother, you do not mean that, I am sure,' said Mr. Wardell, soothingly.

'Maybe I didn't. It depends on circumstances. I hope you'll excuse me, sir, if I am a little sharp; and not be after asking me any questions,' she said to Father St. John, fixing her gray eyes piercingly on him.

'You are right, my dear child to refuse your confidence to those who would pry into your affairs,' replied Father St. John, sweetly. 'If my zeal for your salvation made me appear officious, pray excuse me. Believe me, that I have your eternal good too much at heart to be in the slightest degree governed by an impertinent curiosity, or a careless disregard of your feelings. We shall be better friends by and by.'

'That depends on how it turns out with him,' she said, nodding her head towards Mr. Wardell.

'Mother! could ye bear good news?' he asked, smothering her hand.

'It's hard to say,' she replied, looking eagerly up. 'It's been many a weary day since I heard any.'

'Suppose I was to tell you that the little boy, Desmond—be quiet now, mother, it's nothing ill

—did not perish, as we supposed—that we are not guilty of his death, and that he is now living —?' Mr. Wardell paused, for the old woman's face had grown ghastly white, and she rocked to and fro with frantic violence, attempting all the while to speak, but uttering only broken, incoherent words, while her eyes glared like fire. Suddenly she uttered a wild shriek, and fell back insensible.

'I have killed her! My God! I have killed her when I only sought to comfort her,' exclaimed Mr. Wardell.

'Do not agitate yourself—be calm; she has only fainted,' said Father St. John, after he had felt her pulse. He then took down a bottle of camphor that stood on the mantle piece, and having saturated Mrs. Wardell's handkerchief with it, he began to bathe her face with it.

'I wish Ellen Ahern could be brought. She would know at once what's best to be done,' said Mr. Wardell, attempting to rise.

'I will go for her—where is she?' said the good priest. 'Do you remain here. You are not fit to go.'

'I heard the piano as we came past the drawing-room. I think you will find her there giving Therese her music lesson. Do not let the child come, Father—she knows nothing of the dark mystery of our lives. Oh! that I had the use of my limbs as I had one month ago!' groaned Mr. Wardell.

'Be resigned to the will of God—be resigned to whatever He permits, and abandon yourself to His divine providence,' said Father St. John, laying his hand on Mr. Wardell's bowed head. He then went away in search of Ellen Ahern, who he found, as he expected, with Therese in the drawing-room. Without alarming her, he told her that Mrs. Wardell had fainted, and he would be glad if she would come to her assistance.

'Shall I not come, too? I will try to be of use,' said Therese, anxiously.

'Not yet, my dear child. I will come presently and let you know how she is. Your father is there, and asked only for Miss Ahern,' replied Father St. John, kindly.

'Papa there! Oh, he must be very much better to be able to get down. But had I not better call the nurse, Father?'

'Wait a little while; it may not be necessary,' said Father St. John, who thought that when she recovered from her swoon she might unconsciously give utterance to words which it would be imprudent for a servant to hear. By this time, Ellen Ahern was standing beside Mrs. Wardell, holding her head on her bosom and rubbing her temples, and as soon as Father St. John came in she asked him to assist her in lifting her on the bed. It was long before she recovered, and when she did, her breath came so feebly and faintly, and she cast such piteous, bewildered glances around her—still unable to speak—that they thought she must be dying.—They succeeded in getting her to swallow a teaspoon full or two of wine, which seemed to revive her, and her breathing became stronger and more regular. Father St. John bent over her and asked her how she felt.

'Better,' she whispered. 'Stay.'

'I will not leave you, my poor child, be assured of that.' She was calm; the tempest that for years had tossed and wrecked away the fairest portions of her existence, was ebbing away: the clouds were passing by, and her poor frame, so long shaken by anguish and remorse, was to experience something like rest. At last, rallying her strength, she stretched out her hand to her son—fully remembering all that had passed—and said: 'Did you say the boy lived?'

'Desmond Maguire lives, mother,' replied Mr. Wardell, distinctly.

'Thanks be to God,' she whispered; 'but do they know all about it?'

'Yes, all.'

'How did you hear the news?' she asked, more distinctly; for her strength under the stimulus of hope was returning to her.

'There, mother—there is the bearer of these glad tidings,' said Mr. Wardell, pointing to Ellen Ahern, who knelt at the foot of the bed rubbing her feet.

'And how came she by it?' she asked, still doubting.

'She heard it from one who knew him in Spain, from his boyhood. It is said that he has grown up an honor to his name.'

'Thanks be to God! The way is clear before me now. Every one of you go out except the priest. Afterwards you can come back and tell me more.' Mr. Wardell, assisted by Ellen Ahern went with her into the school-room, where Therese was sitting, hoping every instant to be sent for. Great was her joy when she learned that her grandmother was making her confession, and she united the glad thankfulness of her heart with the rejoicings of the angels over her repentance. Blithely and affectionately she chatted with her father, as she stood with her arm about his neck smoothing back the thin