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FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER IV.

When Father Connell first undertook the care of the parish in which he ministered until he died, the whole code of penal laws against Catholics was in full force, and, according to one of them, no papist could impart literary instruction, either privately or as a teacher in a public school, without subjecting himself to fines and imprisonment. Yet, under hedges in by-ways, and in gravel pits, or in confidential, or in lonely suburb houses, contraband education was stealthily whispered to ignorant youth and childhood.

The predecessor of Father Connell had contrived to found and maintain, on a very humble scale indeed, in a cabin in the outskirts of the town in which he lived, an illicit seminary for the instruction of the poorer children of his flock, and by great exertion, and many stratagems, his successor endeavored to follow up his example—though, indeed, by this time of day, much of the good man's precaution might have been spared; for the unmerciful and wanton law, which doomed to helpless ignorance an entire population, had for many years been looked upon as too barbarous to be literally observed; so that—thanks to the self-asserting principle of justice in the general human bosom—even the very magistrates appointed to enforce the unholy statute, winked at the smuggling system of education which was going on almost under their eyes.

And something like better days now began to dawn on the efforts of Father Connell. In the year 1780 this law was repealed. Little ragged papists could at last go to school openly and legally, and shout as shrilly as any of their Protestant contemporaries, when let loose from its threshold. Our priest, therefore, determined to erect, in the shabby straggling suburb in which was his own poor dwelling, an absolutely public school-house for the instruction of the children of the indigent.

The question, however, soon presented itself; where could funds be obtained to purchase even the materials for building the contemplated edifice?

In truth he did not know. Private means he had not; in fact, his daily extravagance in giving often left himself a creditor for his dinner; so he pondered seriously for some time, until at length a happy thought struck him, and with a mixture of simple and great glee of heart, and yet as great perseverance of head, he proceeded to carry it into effect.

Might not the poor urchins themselves be made contributors to the uprearing of a building to be appropriated to their own advantage? To be sure they might; and working his hands together, and smiling to himself in the solitude of his little parlor, he at once went to work on his project. He purchased for the poorest of his future scholars a great many wooden bowls; others of them provided themselves with some such implement of industry; and in a short time, almost all the ragged little fellows in the parish might be seen running here and there like a swarm of bees—not indeed in quest of honey, but of a few struggling stones, wherever they could be found; and when these were obtained, heaping them into their wooden bowls and other utensils, and then trotting with their acquisitions to a place appointed for the accumulation of a grand pile, destined for the erection of their own parish poor school.

These small laborers had received strict injunctions, to appropriate solely such stones as they should meet scattered along the roads and suburb streets, and which could not be called the property of any particular person. Yet it has been rumored that when a scarcity of unclaimed material began to prevail amongst them, our zealous purveyors were not over nice in ascertaining whether this or that stone belonged to this or that individual; nay, we have it on authority, that a good many infringements on private property were committed by them; certainly without the knowledge of Father Connell, as we trust need not be stated. And it also became impossible that among the heterogeneous mass of stones, great and small, now rapidly swelling in bulk, the owners of the unlawfully abstracted portions of it could recognize any evidence of the theft perpetrated on his or her old wall or loose enclosure.

No matter; after some time the heap increased to a magnitude fully equal to the hopes and to the architectural plan and calculations of our good priest; and greater than ever was his glee on the occasion. It might indeed have been whispered by shrewd commentators, that the great pyramid before which he now stood with admiring eyes, was not composed of stones of the best quality, or best suited to the purpose for which they had been intended; the greater part of them being in truth little better than pebbles. Other critics whispered that such as they were, they had cost Father Connell nearly, if not altogether, as much as good square blocks from the quarry might have been purchased for; and indeed such was the fact.

But great had been his delight in observing from day to day, the questing excursions of his

little stone-gatherers; there was, he argued to himself, industry, and therefore utility in the whole proceeding; and then the pigmy laborers seemed so brisk and happy at their task, that their childlike, though not childish employer—for there is a mighty difference between these two epithets—fully entered into their feelings, and he and they became the best friends in the world. And hence few of them ever went home of an evening empty-handed; a dinner or some pence rewarded the day's exertions; and from these circumstances very plausibly arose the conjecture, that apart altogether from the quality and fitness of his big heap of stones, the priest had, even in a pecuniary point of view, no great bargain of it in the end.

Another heap of another description of building material was now necessary—namely one of sand, and for this the bowl bearers were also sent out to quest—and exuberant success again crowned their efforts—although cunning judges still hinted that his acquisition, as well as the former one, had been bought dearly enough.

But however all this might be, what with well-begged donations from every class of society within his reach, and contributions from his own pocket, whenever by chance he found a spare shilling in it, before twelve months since his first thought on the subject had elapsed, Father Connell's grand public school-house was erected, to the wonder and admiration of his Catholic parishioners, and to the unutterable grievance and abomination of some of his dissenting ones; the important object of interest on both sides being meantime nothing but a thatched house, though more substantial and better appointed as to the size and fashion of its two front windows, and its door and doorway, than the more reverend cabins with which it grouped, and containing only two apartments on the ground-floor. If the critics on the occasion of the uprearing of this public edifice were at present alive, we wonder what they would say to the beautiful Catholic college now nearly finished at the aristocratic end of Father Connell's native city, and already inhabited by Popish ecclesiastical students, walking under handsome colonades, in academic caps and gowns. Well—to say no more of the pretensions of Father Connell's parish school-house, there it was, and in a short time a goodly throng of the future ragged men of Ireland were assembled in it; and it had been in existence twenty-five years at the time when we first introduced its founder to the reader's acquaintance.

The present teacher of the establishment had been a pupil in it from his infancy to his early youth; and as it was customary with our priest to select, from amongst his scholars, the one most distinguished for learning and good conduct, to be promoted to the very desirable station of "priest's boy," Mick Dempsey became at about sixteen years the object of his priest's patronage in this respect; and after proving under his own roof, until the boy was a boy no longer, Mick's confirmed morality and exemplary behavior, the good man then pushed forward the humble fortunes of his late servant, by appointing him head teacher, master, in fact, in the school-house in which he had so long been a pupil—king of the realm where he had once been a subject.

And Mick was now a very well-clad monarch indeed, within the very walls which well remembered his former tattered inferiority; and we mention this pleasant progression of the young man's luck in the world, that we may have an opportunity of relating a circumstance in connection with his present new clothes, which took place between his patron and himself.

Every Thursday the parish priest and his curates used to attend, in their very humble little chapel, for the purpose of instructing the poor children of the parish, principally composed of the pupils of the school-house, in their catechism; and, during Lent, every evening after vespers was devoted to the same purpose. The curates each taught a class; but as the number requiring instruction was large, and made up of different ages and capacities, it became necessary that these clergymen should have lay assistants, who were also appointed by Father Connell; and while the boys on the earthen floor of the chapel, and the girls on the galleries, assembled in little groups, each group attending to its own instructor, the parish priest walked up and down, from place to place, now superintending the business of one class, and now of another. Amongst the lay teachers, the master of the school-house held of course a superior rank; and, after his appointment to his new office Mick Dempsey fulfilled his duty in the chapel as faithfully, and as well, as his duty in the school.

For some time before the occurrence of the little scene we are about to describe, Mick had been attired indifferently enough; but on a certain evening in Lent, in the dimly lighted chapel, Father Connell having listened to, and observed, as usual, his catechism classes, one after the other, and reproached or encouraged, as the case might call for, suddenly remarked a tall and exceedingly well dressed young man, in the centre of a circle grouped round him, very fitly discharging the office of teacher. The old clergyman stopped short and looked

hard at the young man, standing at some distance from him. "Who was he?" questioned Father Connell—"was he a stranger, or had he seen him before?"—he thought he had; yet the dress, and even the air of the individual (for new clothes, when a rarity, do alter for the better even the very mien of their wearer) seemed quite strange to him. The person's back was, however, at present, turned to our priest, and he longed to look into his face; but feeling that it might be an indecency in manners to go at once up to him and stare into his features, he walked down the chapel, as if quite unobservant, yet turning his head every now and then in curious criticism; and presently he made a wide circuit, that the object of his interest might not suppose he was rudely inspecting him; till, at length, by prudent management, he stood face to face before his own schoolmaster, Mick Dempsey. And now he opened his smiling blue eyes, and contracted his brows, and poked forward his head, from its usual erect position, and drew it back again, and stood straight as ever, and smiled and smiled until his whole countenance lighted up—the degree of severe authority which he had thought necessary to assume in it, as befitting his character of inspector of the catechistical instruction, quite subsiding; until, finally, he nodded with undisguised delight, and almost with familiarity, to his quondam "boy," now attired from head to foot in a "spick and span new suit" of elegant clothes.

But, anon, he bethought that the young observers around him might notice his raptures, strange and unaccountable to them, and that such an exhibition might not, in their eyes, be seemly for the place and the occasion; so he suddenly resumed his former austere bearing, and addressing his schoolmaster, said aloud—laying a particular stress on the first word, and using much courtesy of manner—"Mister Dempsey, I shall be glad to see you below in my house, when the teaching is over; and don't fail to come, Mister Dempsey; I have something very particular to speak about, sir."

"I'll attend upon your Reverence," replied the well-pleased, though puzzled Mister Dempsey; and more puzzled was he when the old priest moved the lids of one of his eyes into an action, which could not indeed be called that of a wink, for we doubt if he had been guilty of such a thing since his ordination—but still moved them in a fashion which very much resembled a wink; and then he turned away from Mick Dempsey, to pursue the routine of his business of the evening, still looking back, however, very often to the person who had so charmed him, and whenever their eyes met still nodding and smiling.

The evening's instructions terminated; Mister Dempsey followed Father Connell to his house, and found him anxiously awaiting his arrival.

"Mick, Mick, is that you? Is that you, Mick?" began the priest, gently rubbing his hands within each other, and again smiling with pleasure, while he dropped the term *Mister*, which he had deemed fit to assume in the chapel.

"Indeed, and it is myself sure enough, sir," replied Mick.

"Upon my word, Mick, very good—very good indeed, Mick, upon my word,—turn round, Mick, my good boy, till I can have a full view of you; very nice, very handsome indeed; and very good, Mick, I declare you are—a very good boy;" and while thus addressing Mick Dempsey, he turned the young man round and round by the shoulders; now viewing him in front, now in the back, and now upwards and downwards, and in conclusion walking round about him, and clapping his hands softly together and laughing outright.

"And now, Mick," he continued, more seriously, after indulging his joy; "now, Mick, I like that! It shows that you don't throw away your little savings; and isn't it a fine thing, Mick, for a good boy to buy elegant new clothes for himself, and look so decent and respectable in them, and not lay them out on whiskey, or cock-fighting, or dancing-houses, isn't it a fine thing, Mick?"

"Indeed, sir," answered Mick, somewhat astray as to the term he should use in assenting to his own eulogy, "I think it's a great deal better than to use them in the other ways you make mention of, sir."

"Sit down, Mick, sit down, my good boy—Peggy!" and here Father Connell cried out as loud as he could, and the burly person of his housekeeper appeared in the doorway of the parlor. "Come in, Peggy, and look at Mick Dempsey's new clothes, Peggy, aren't they very nice, Peggy? and all bought with his own earnings; aren't they very nice, Peggy?" and he again made Mick Dempsey revolve on his axis, for Mrs. Mulloy's inspection, who with her hands and arms thrust up to her elbows in her capacious pockets, critically analyzed her former fellow-servant's outside, and then happening to be in something like good humor on the occasion, Mrs. Mulloy pronounced Mick Dempsey to be a first-rate beau.

"Bring Mick Dempsey a drink of ale, Peggy," continued Father Connell. "Pon my word I think he deserves a little treat," and Mrs. Mulloy not demurring, a pewter vessel

of ale was shortly placed before Mick, who drank from it to the health of his entertainer, and to that of Mrs. Mulloy also; and here he noticed, that to a measure of good ale was limited all the libations in which our priest indulged his favorites, or himself.

Mrs. Mulloy retired to her kitchen, and a silence of some moments ensued between Mick Dempsey and his patron, the latter steadfastly regarding Mick, though now evidently in a fit of abstraction, for his old eyes opened and shut very fast, and his well formed and handsome old lips, although uttering no sound, tried to keep up with them. At length his face unbending to his former glowing smile, he re-addressed Mick in a confidential whisper—

"Now, Mick, don't you think that something handsome, and respectable, and a little like what gentlemen wear, would be very becoming, with the new clothes, Mick?—a watch now, Mick, suppose a watch! don't you think so, Mick?"

The schoolmaster shrewdly guessed to what the question might lead, but fiddling with the vessel from which he drank, he only assumed great innocence and unconsciousness, as he said—

"I have no more money left, sir, and a watch would be too dear a thing for me at the present time, sir."

"And yet for all that, Mick, the watch would show off the new clothes right well;—and so, my good boy, listen you to me. I told you before that I did not like to see young men spending their money in public-houses, or dancing-houses, or such resorts; I believe in my heart, indeed I know well, that almost all the misfortunes that befall young people, are to be met with in places of the kind; but I do like, above all things, to see a young boy, or a young girl either, dressed well, ay, a little above their station, Mick, because that shows that they have a respect for themselves; and self-respect, Mick, will surely obtain respect from others. And now, Mick, because I brought you up, and because I see that you are careful, and don't spend your money badly, and because I am sure that your good conduct gives good example, I will take on myself to bestow a token of my encouragement and approval, where I think it is so well due. I'll give you the watch myself, Mick, to wear with your new clothes; and you may tell the people when you take it out of your fob to see the hour of the day—you may tell the people, Mick, that your poor priest made you a present of that watch; and you may tell them, too, all the reasons why he did so, just as you have now heard them from his own lips,—and when I am in my grave, and you show that watch as your priest's gift, it will do you no harm to be a little proud of it, and people may not think the worse of you for having deserved it."

As the old gentleman finished this earnest though simple address, tears trembled in his eyes, and while the person so complimented fumbled at some expression of his thanks, Father Connell put on his spectacles and busied himself in writing a few lines, and when he had completed them, he folded the paper into the form of a letter, directed it, handed it to Mick Dempsey, and added—

"Take this to Tommy Boyle, Mick," meaning by Tommy Boyle a wealthy and much-respected inhabitant of the town, fully of the middle age of human beings, on which, however, he still continued to bestow the appellation, by whom he used to address him a good many years before, when that person was only a boy; "take this to Tommy Boyle, Mick; I have told him in it to give you a watch, to wear with your new clothes, which he will charge to my account; 'tis not to be an expensive watch, Mick, because I have not much money to spare; but I have told him to give you a watch to the value of four pounds; and when he gives it to you, which I make no doubt he will do, wear it for my sake, Mick."

The young man was sincerely thankful for this handsome gift, and now found words to express his feelings, promising that he would be careful of it in remembrance of the donor; and the ale being despatched, and the priest wishing to be alone, Mick Dempsey bent his head to receive the old man's blessing; and early the next day, a flaming red ribbon, indicative of his watch, was seen streaming down the school-master's right thigh, and he was often stopped in the street, but not too often to feel himself much annoyed at the circumstances, by humble persons requiring to know the hour of the day; indeed, he would very urbanely inform, upon that subject, any individual, man woman, or child, who hinted, no matter how remotely, his or her anxiety about it.

CHAPTER V.

It was nearly a year after the death of Atty Fennell, that Father Connell paid a visit to his parish school. Christmas-day was near at hand and the weather horribly and peculiarly cold, even for Ireland in winter; that is to say, it snowed a great deal, or it rained a great deal or to try and reconcile the two rival whims of the amiable atmosphere, it sleeted even more than it rained; and after that, by way of jocular variety, it froze hard for a few hours—following which the short-timed frost came down as we natives say, in pleasing rain again; and

all these things, it seemed happy to do over and over, while, through every interesting change, it blew keenly, all the same from every quarter; and the surface of the earth became upturned and uprooted puddle; and the clouds, instead of sailing above the earth, at a convenient distance, absolutely sank down upon it, or rolled familiarly over, or along it; and all places, all vitality were humid, and shivering, and beyond human endurance, insufferable and abominable, in the land we sincerely love best above all the lands we have yet seen in this wide world. It must pardon us, however, this one little demur against its climate.

Father Connell's business to the school-house, on the present occasion, was to superintend the distribution, amongst the most deserving of his pupils, of certain clothing which he had purchased for them; indeed, if we said the worst clad amongst the poor creatures, we should be nearer to the real motive that guided him in his selection of objects for his benefaction.

About fifty suits of clothes awaited his arrival in the school-house, some of one calibre, some of another, and some of another; in fact, all selected, to the best of his or their judgment, as available to boys of from about five to twelve or thirteen. They were of nearly uniform material; namely, a shirt, a felt hat, a grey frieze jacket and waistcoat, a pair of worsted stockings, and a pair of brogues, with the addition of a very peculiar pair of breeches or small clothes, locally termed a "ma-a." And of course this word "ma-a" requires some passing explanation from us. It was, then, in the first place, bestowed on the portion of dress alluded to, as seeming to explain its pre-eminence and quality, by imitating the bleat or sound uttered by the animal, from which the substance of the article had been abstracted. In good truth the "ma-a" was fabricated from a sheep-skin, thrown into a pool of lime-water, and there left until its fleshy parts became corroded, and its wool of course separated from it;—and with very little other preparation, it was then taken out, dried in the sun, and stitched with scanty skill in fashioning it, into something rudely resembling a pair of knee-breeches.

Such as it might have been, however, a "ma-a" was the general wear of the humbler classes in the district of which we now treat, and at a period considerably later than that with which we are concerned. Its manufacture engaged many hands, as the term is; but there is no such trade now; a "ma-a," alas! is not to be had for love or money. Let us, notwithstanding, before posterity loses sight of it for ever, be allowed a little longer, on our gossiping page, to hold up unto general admiration this once celebrated piece of costume.

We are besides a standing, near the market-house, in High street, on a market-day, and upon it are exhibited "ma-as" of all sizes, from among which can be equally accommodated the peasant of six feet, and the urchin who dons his first masculine suit of clothes.—Purchasers come up to the standing in turn; one experienced young peasant selects a "ma-a" which when drawn over his limbs, reaches nearly to his ankles, although eventually destined to button just beneath his knees, thereby making sage provision against the drying of the article after the next shower of rain—which would be sure to shrivel it up to half its primary dimensions; so that if he chose one, extending, in the first instance only over his knees, he must shortly find it shrunk up to about the middle of his thigh. Another gigantic "country boy," unacquainted with this collapsing propensity in the "ma-a," which it is the interest of the vender very often to conceal, chooses, on the contrary, the tightest fitting "ma-a" suited to his thigh and sinew, to make himself look smart at mass next Sunday, as is mentioned by the seller; it does, indeed, seem even rather too small—that which is so earnestly recommended to him; and to end all doubts on the matter, he and the trader adjourn from the standing, the debated article in the hands of the latter. We follow them across the street into a little, unfrequented, narrow lane, curious to observe their proceedings; and there we notice that, having persuaded the rustic would-be dandy to squeeze himself half way into the garment, the adroit "ma-a" vender grips the article at both hips—himself being a very strong man, he tugs and tugs, with professional dexterity, lifting the half-ashamed peasant off his feet, at every tug, until, at last, forcing the over-strained small-clothes over the fellow's huge limbs, and half buttoning it at the knees, he sends him blushing and smiling away, with a slap on the thigh that sounds like one bestowed on a well braced drum. But woe and trouble woe to that skin-fitted and already straddling dupe! On his way home the rain falls in torrents—the sun then shines out fiercely; and by the time he arrives at his mother's door, he is a laughing-stock to her and his whole family. The dandy "ma-a" has coiled up more than midway along his thighs, very like damp towels tightly bound round them.

Antiquarians!—and all ye lovers of the worthless obsolete—forgive this digression, for you will sympathize with it.

(To be Continued.)