

THE  
EARL OF DESMOND;  
OR  
O'BRIEN'S COTTAGE.

AN IRISH STORY.  
(Continued from our last.)

"At this time, the indefatigable Maynard began to be extremely anxious for some better regulations to be adopted in respect to Georgiana; but as Lord Desmond had really been indisposed, and I, for my own purposes, had magnified his slight complaints into serious maladies, and had influenced his physician to prevail with him to travel, he resolved himself to visit Maynard, embrace his niece, and settle some eligible plan for her residence, until his return from abroad.

"As I could not bear to hear these family discussions, I went forward to Dublin, to wait his return from Clonish.

"Having made his arrangements with Maynard, much to his satisfaction, we proceeded on our travels, and, in due time, arrived safely in Naples."

Here Fitzhugh paused, quite exhausted with the exertion of so much speaking; and the colonel, plainly perceiving his incapacity of proceeding further in his conversation at present, left him to the care of his attendants, advising him to compose himself as well as he could; and in an hour, he said, he would return, and see whether he was then sufficiently recovered to continue what he had further to communicate.

The colonel, returning according to his promise, found Fitzhugh anxious to see him, though he had particularly requested to see none of the family but him.

"You are come, colonel," said he, "which I am glad of, as I cannot be insensible my time approaches fast, and the dreadful task I have yet remaining I wish to complete. It is with great difficulty I have brought myself to the resolution of disclosing all which burthens my conscience—but, as I now have, I am impatient for it to be concluded, and will exert myself to go through it."

The colonel here wished much to say something to him consolatory and encouraging; but the dislike he had ever conceived against him strengthening, from his own account of himself, and the repeated deceptions he had practised against himself and family, prevented his tongue expressing what the humanity of his heart dictated.

The colonel, therefore, in silence, seated himself by the dying man:—with a deep sigh, Fitzhugh again proceeded in his detail.

"Behold us now in Italy, with several points gained in favour of my expectations, but many more were to be attained. Lord Desmond was but a few years my senior—he might survive me, he might marry. This last idea was a torment which harassed me night and day—I was jealous of every woman I saw in his company, and dreaded even the appearance of a handsome servant.

"This distressing sensation gained ground on me daily; for, on our first arrival in Naples, we had been introduced to a Mr. Montacute, whose society entirely engaged Lord Desmond, which you have heard me before mention; as also to the sister of this gentleman, to whom his partiality was sufficiently evident.

"Inflamed to madness, by the apprehensions which continually haunted me, a thousand horrible ideas presented themselves before me; and death alone appeared the friend—the only certain foundation to build on, to realise the expectation I had been so long forming—and even death itself, if it did not immediately take place, might be of no immediate gratification to me—children might be left, and increasing difficulties exceed the bounds of my endeavour to counteract.

"At this time we received an invitation, from Mr. Montacute, to spend a month or two at a beautiful villa he had at no great distance from Naples. The plan was perfectly agreeable, and was accordingly accepted.

"In the serenity of the romantic and love-inspiring scenes around me, the black and diabolical ideas of murder alone lay rankling at my heart. A thousand times I whispered to myself—I am in Italy—is it so difficult to accomplish my heart's dearest hope?

"We had not been long at Mr. Montacute's, before the arrival of another gentleman brought my wavering suggestions into

a determined resolution, and, soon after, into actual execution."

The colonel involuntarily started up, and was about to speak, which Fitzhugh observing, said—"For mercy's sake! have patience, and do not interrupt my last moments, for my soul's flight is delayed only for the purpose of confession."

Again the colonel seated himself; and he thus proceeded:—

"This man was an adventurer—an Irishman—whose whole estate consisted in his skill in play. Mr. Montacute had, during a short stay in Dublin, a year before, met this man at a public billiard-table, and had played with him several times; and some enterprize bringing him to Naples, he, with the easy effrontery so natural to his profession and character, had taken the liberty of paying a visit to Mr. Montacute, whom he knew fixed his general residence in or near Naples, on no other intimacy than this accidental meeting.

"The coldness of the reception he met with had no visible effect on him; and he frequently said—'he hoped Mr. Montacute would not construe into neglect, or want of proper attention to him, that he could not possibly prolong his visit beyond one week, but assured him, his next should be when he had fewer engagements.'

"You may be assured he was taken but little notice of by any of the family;—Lord Desmond, in particular, had a great antipathy to him—but, from some unaccountable sympathy between us, I was the most inclined to associate with him.

"As we were one morning, very early, sauntering about the very extensive and elegant pleasure-grounds of Mr. Montacute, he remarked how idly and unprofitably we were passing our time, and proposed our playing a game of hazard.

"The weather being beautiful beyond expression, and he having materials in his pocket, we sat down, under the spreading and sheltering branches of a large tree, and began our amusement.

"I may truly say, my evil genius presided, for I won every stake; and I may truly say my success on this occasion, I am assured, decidedly led to the dreadful events which have since followed.

"We played a number of games, but fortune still continued to favour me.—Provoked by his ill-luck, my companion doubled his stake, but without any better effect to himself—he still lost—and, in short, continued so to do till he was indebted to me a thousand pounds.

"Enraged, now, beyond the bounds of reason, he jumped up, swearing tremendously, and declaring his inability to pay me at present.

"I smiled at his vehemence, and begged he would compose himself—saying, if it was not convenient to him, I should be contented with his acknowledgement of the debt by a note; he might pay me in his own time—not doubting his honour, I added, in discharging it as soon as possible.

"He thanked me very warmly for this indulgence, so contrary to the established laws of gaming, and immediately signed a paper to pay it in twelve months; and, he insisted to add, with interest for the time.

"As I put up the memorandum in my pocket-book, I said, in a careless manner, though with peculiar emphasis and expression, if any thing should occur, which would cause me to be Earl of Desmond before this note is due, mind, I will not request it of you, as I conceive you to be a man of honour, deserving of my friendship; and I should then have it in my power to assist a worthy man in any little embarrassment, though my circumstances are, at present, too confined to permit me to enjoy that pleasure. But it is unlikely, I continued, I ever should possess the means of so much happiness; neither do I wish it, as my worthy relation is yet in the prime of life.

"Are you, he hastily answered, the next heir to Lord Desmond?

"I am at present, I replied; but, by this time twelvemonth, he may have a son.

"These words threw my companion into a fit of deep meditation, from which I did not think proper to rouse him.

"After a mutual silence of ten minutes, he turned towards me with a marked character of countenance it was impossible to misconstrue, for it conveyed to me the full

extent of his thoughts; and, in low, solemn, and impressive tones, said—Few words are necessary between men who perfectly understand each other.—I conceive that to be the present case.—You wish for the immediate possession of a title—I of money—both are within our reach—we may mutually assist each other.

"We extended our hands, without further explanation—for I spoke not, neither did he—as our purpose was secret, so were our tongues silent:—yet, as our hands united, it appeared as though the same thoughts occupied the brain of each. As though one soul animated each body, our eyes read each other's determination; and the firm grasp of assurance and fidelity was conveyed to the senses of each, without one uttered sentence.

"I will assist (at length, he said), in the same deep tone—I will assist, he repeated more earnestly.—What shall be my reward?

"Treble your note, I whispered, and that destroyed.

"Agreed.—When shall the business be completed?

"As soon, returned I, as a possibility occurs.

"This conversation brought us to a formal league; and, finally, we agreed to attack the earl and his servant, and murder them both."

The colonel had, with great difficulty, commanded his feelings thus far, but, unable longer to controul them, he exclaimed—

"Ah! execrable wretch, unworthy to breathe the air of Heaven, how did you dare, after the preparation of a crime, which, but to relate, makes human nature shudder, how did you dare to contaminate my innocent and defenceless child by a marriage with such a monster?"

"Spare me," said the wretched Francis, "in this sad, this awful hour—see how fast life ebbs—permit me, then, to finish my horrid story. I well feel and know how much I merit all your curses, but I throw myself on your clemency; and, as you yourself hope for the blessings of Heaven, pardon me, and speak peace to my desponding and departing soul, by announcing the forgiveness of all.—Do this; and may all your dearest wishes be crowned."

The colonel, softened by this, and by the ashy paleness and death-struck countenance of Fitzhugh, again seated himself; and, forbearing further reproach, begged him to proceed, if his strength permitted.

"The plan we had formed was soon put in practice. My accomplice, next day, took a formal leave of all the family, pretending urgent business required his immediate presence in England. All were glad to get rid of him; and even I myself, ever since our compact was made, hated the sight of him. Feeling how much I was in his power, I dreaded him; yet he was more faithful to me than I was to him.

"According to our projected engagement, we met—for my associate was only concealed in a wood near us—and we soon put in practice the scheme we had meditated. The particulars of what befel Lord Desmond you are all well acquainted with, therefore I may spare myself the distressing recital, as they have been very correctly stated.

"But you have yet to learn, that, when I had reason to suppose the fallen bodies of Lord Desmond and his servant were dead, I recollected how many had been betrayed by confederates, and that the compact between wicked men was seldom binding, and firmly resolved I never would bear or survive a discovery, to prevent all future apprehensions, I drew out a stiletto, which I always carried about me, and before my accomplice could possibly have the least suspicion of my treachery, stabbed him to the heart.

"As I intended the two first bodies to be discovered, I left them conspicuously; but fear giving me strength, I dragged the other to a ditch, and, throwing it in, covered it with such rubbish as my haste permitted me to collect; but, before I consigned it to oblivion, I repeatedly renewed the stabs.

"This infernal work taking up my entire attention, was the cause, I must suppose, which prevented me observing life in the other victims—or, rather, it was the interposition of Providence which permitted it,

to be the means of bringing my black deeds to proper disgrace and punishment."

Worn out now with fatigue, the colonel was under the necessity of leaving Fitzhugh to repose. The sequel of this eventful and dreadful story he longed to know, yet was fearful the miserable offender (who, he now hoped, was truly contrite) would never have sufficient strength to finish it.

Under this idea, he visited him again as soon as possible; and finding him still collected, though evidently worse, he entreated him to recount the farther particulars, whilst yet he had the power.

"Having, continued Fitzhugh (in a faint and low voice), concluded the business I was engaged in, in the best manner I could, I hurried back to Mr. Montacute's, and, most fortunately escaping all the servants, reached my own apartment unobserved.

"I here undressed, and, slipping on a morning gown, waited, in extreme anxiety the summons to breakfast.

"That Lord Desmond attended not at that meal created no surprise, as he frequently pursued his sports much later; but judge, if possible, what my feelings were, when, before the breakfast was scarcely ended, the wretched servant, notwithstanding his desperate wounds, had so far recovered as to crawl home, and give the account of his lord's murder.

"My consternation at this incident was so extreme and so evident, that it drew the first attention of all present, and was attributed to very different principles from those in which they originated, being supposed only proceeding from affection and sorrow.

"As soon as the first momentary shock was over, which all my philosophy and presence of mind could not prevent my feeling most acutely, I set out, attended by almost all the family, to bring home the murdered body; and, in defiance of every horror conscience presented, I rejoiced in the idea of seeing the corpse, which, I vainly concluded, would make me perfectly happy, by removing every doubtful sensation from my mind.

"To effect this, I was the first at the spot where I expected to find it; but, to my inconceivable astonishment, it was not to be found. What tongue can delineate my feelings on this occasion—a disappointment so unlooked for. A thousand dreadful tortures took possession of my ideas, which, from that fatal moment to this, which is nearly my last, have never been banished; and I can truly say that, from this circumstance, I have never enjoyed one day— one hour of undisturbed satisfaction and repose.

"But, well knowing I could never assume the title till the body was found, and, by that means, his death fully ascertained, I offered immense sums for the discovery of it, or any circumstance which might lead to a detection of the murderers:—but all endeavours failed of success—no intelligence was received. This increased my misery; and knowing some expedient must be had recourse to, I recollected the body of my accomplice, which I had thrown into the ditch, and resolved to substitute that for Lord Desmond.

"I arose from my restless bed on the third night after this horrible action, and, whilst all were wrapped in peaceful, silent sleep, I softly glided, like a hateful spectre, from the house, and arrived at the spot I sought; the pale moon serving to guide me to the victim of my perfidy.

(To be concluded in our next.)

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