

THE
EARL OF DESMOND;
OR
O'BRIEN'S COTTAGE.
AN IRISH STORY.
(Continued from our last.)

"As surely," returned he, "as you are my own beloved Dennis; little did I look for this joyful meeting to-day, though it is what I have been thinking on ever since I first set foot on Irish ground; but the mark on your cheek first struck my attention, and convinced me I was not mistaken, though so many years of separation has worn away every other recollection of your face."

The affectionate conversation and enquiry which took place between these worthy men, may easily be conceived. The earl and his children walked out for a short time, to leave them to an unreserved discourse, and as soon as Georgiana could separate herself from Judy, they again resumed their journey, leaving Patrick with his brother.

The many painful scenes the sight of O'Brien's cottage recalled to the mind of the earl, increased the dejection the separation from Edmund first occasioned. Mr. Fitzhugh was equally absorbed; and lady Georgiana's mind, likewise, was occupied by many revived ideas; therefore, they pursued and finished their journey, in almost perfect silence.

The castle of Desmond, a magnificent Gothic structure, which had been in the possession of the Desmond family, almost ever since the conquest of the kingdom by Henry the Second, soon presented itself to the view of Georgiana. Long avenues of elm and oak led in various openings to its numerous gate and the whole edifice, and the surrounding country, struck her as beautiful, romantic, and desirable.

The earl of Desmond could not overlook the visible and increasing gloom and reserve of Fitzhugh, which he accounted for in a great measure from the disappointment and chagrin he must experience in returning now, only as a visitor, to a mansion where he had so lately commanded. This the earl could easily suppose must be a very mortifying circumstance to him, even without the least ill-will or envy to himself; and the idea had frequently crossed his mind of resigning the title and mansion to him, as he himself was totally indifferent about pagentry, yet he still thought this an act of far too much consequence to be lightly resolved on.

A few months had passed since lord Desmond's family had taken possession of his castle, and Mr. Fitzhugh had not yet regained that good humour and cheerfulness which had attended him in London: to the enquiries made into the cause of it by his family, he always gave as a reason that he was not well; and this complaint of his health daily increasing (though only visible to others by the dejection of his spirits,) he at last declared to the earl his intention of going again to Italy, where, he said, he had no doubt his health would be restored, as the climate was so beneficial to complaints of the nature of his.

This intimation surprised lord Desmond, but concluding it a whim of the moment, he made little observation on it, supposing he had no serious intention of this nature; but in a few days afterwards, Mr. Fitzhugh again renewed the conversation, and spoke of his going to Italy as a point determined on, and that he intended lady Georgiana should accompany him.

At this time Georgiana was visibly advanced in pregnancy, and the earl, with horror, recollecting her mother's situation and fate, trembled at the bare idea of her being removed from his tender care in such alarming circumstances.

In the most pathetic manner, he stated to Mr. Fitzhugh his apprehensions, recounted again to him the difficulties and anxieties he had encountered in a similar situation; and concluded with assurances, that if his health really required immediate change of climate, and he was resolved to go, if he would leave his daughter under his care, till her perfect recovery, he would then himself attend her to any part where he might judge it beneficial to his health to be.

After reiterated entreaties and conversations on this subject, Mr. Fitzhugh was prevailed on to consent that lady Georgiana should remain with her father till after her recovery; and then, that the earl should

escort her to Naples, where he intended to reside for two years.

This important concern at length settled to the earl's satisfaction, Mr. Fitzhugh began his preparations; and, in less than ten days he was ready to depart.

Lady Georgiana bore this separation with great fortitude. She never had entertained for Mr. Fitzhugh either esteem or affection; and though parting with a husband in her present circumstances, must naturally, in some degree, affect her, yet the impression was so transitory, that a few days, in the society of her beloved father, perfectly reconciled her to it.

The time of her confinement now approached, for which every preparation was made magnificence could furnish; and, at the expected moment, she was safely delivered of a very fine boy.

Before lady Georgiana had quitted her chamber, lord Seymour and Edmund Netterville arrived, rather before the stipulated time; but the impatience of Edmund was so great to see and congratulate his beloved friends on this addition to their family, that he prevailed on his grandfather no longer to delay his journey.

The happiness this meeting afforded was inexpressible. Soon after their arrival, lady Georgiana was enabled to join her friends as usual: and letters having arrived from Mr. Fitzhugh, stating, that he already began to experience the good effects of his resolution to travel, being in much better health and spirits, contributed to render them still more happy.

Spring, with all its smiling graces, was rapidly approaching, and the amusement of long walks were now added to the fascinating charms of music and drawing. Edmund had made rapid improvement in the different branches of science which he had studied; and though the advantages of education with him had commenced late, yet, from being sensible of the value of the improvement, he had applied with such indefatigable industry to his different studies, that few young men of his age were better qualified for conversation, or were, indeed, better informed on most subjects than he was.

The earl of Desmond found in lord Seymour, a companion whose congeniality of sentiment rendered extremely pleasing to him; and the two noblemen, with pleasure, observed the mutual friendship subsisting between Edmund and Georgiana. But though thus happy, the earl of Desmond, faithful to his promise of accompanying his daughter to Naples, began the preparations for his expedition, which were in great forwardness; when one morning entering the breakfast-room before the rest of the family assembled, he took up the newspaper, which lay on the table, to amuse him till they arrived, and had not read many minutes, when he was horror-struck by the following article of intelligence:—

Naples.—"A duel was lately fought in this city between an Italian nobleman of great distinction, and an English gentleman of the name of Fitzhugh, which, we are sorry to add, terminated fatally with the English gentleman, who was mortally wounded in a few moments after they engaged. We hear the quarrel originated concerning a lady under the protection of Mr. Fitzhugh who has, since his death, taken refuge with the Italian nobleman."

The effect this paragraph had on lord Desmond is indescribable—it was not sorrow, most certainly—for, from a boy, he had disliked Francis, and only wished to reconcile his mind to him, as he was his daughter's husband, but it was a strange sensation of shock and surprise, with which the account of sudden death is always received.

A few moments consideration however, recalled to his recollection how vague, and how little to be depended upon, all newspaper communications are, and he felt rejoiced that he was the only person who had seen the news, as it most probably had not the least foundation, and the alarm it would have given would have been very great:—therefore, crushing the paper closely together, he had but just time to put it in his pocket before his family came to breakfast.

But the earl had not got the better of the first shock, though he had done so much to argue it away; yet, in spite of all his endeavours to appear as usual, the effort was ineffectual, and he could not, for even one moment, divert his thoughts from the subject of his contemplations.

Georgiana and Edmund, alarmed by his altered behaviour, earnestly enquired if he was unwell. Availing himself of this excuse, he said he had a slight indisposition, but hoped a long walk, which he intended immediately to take, would make him much better before they met again, as his principal complaint was a severe head-ache, which walking generally relieved.

Accordingly, as soon as they separated, he retired to a lonely walk, and ruminated on the most likely and effectual means of discovering the truth of this intelligence, which the more he thought on the less likely it appeared to be true. Had such an accident happened, they must certainly have been apprised of it before it could be publicly known. This convinced him of the improbability of it; yet he could not help thinking there was some foundation for the article.

To remove suspense, as soon possible, he determined to send an express to Naples for confirmation, with letters to Mr. Fitzhugh's banker for particulars, should it be found any accident had really befallen him.

With this resolution, he immediately returned to his study and wrote his letters; and having in his family a confidential servant, who understood the French and Italian languages, he determined to send him directly to Naples to enquire into the origin of the report; and he made the servant promise the most profound secrecy on the nature of his mission, till its result should be thoroughly known.

After this arrangement he became more composed, and having given the letters he had wrote, with his further instructions to his servant about his instant departure, he was sufficiently recovered, by dinner time, to meet his family with his usual cheerfulness.

The earl, during the space of time which must intervene before he could hear from his servant (for, from the length of time the accident was stated to have happened, he despaired of other intelligence), continued his preparations for their Italian tour, as the moment which proved the account false, he resolved to commence his journey.

In as short a space of time as could possibly be expected, lord Desmond received a letter from his servant, importing the fatal news was true—that the duel had taken place, with nearly the circumstances he was acquainted with—that as soon as the event took place, the body of Mr. Fitzhugh was embarked on board a vessel, to return to his family vault for interment, attended by all his English servants.

That, well knowing no such event had taken place as the return of the body (which the time would have permitted before he left Ireland), he had made very minutes enquiries amongst the shipping; and he found that the family of an English gentleman, at a corresponding time, had embarked for England with a corpse, to which the mariners warmly objected at first, but were at length bribed to compliance—that the ship was named the Santa Marie, which it was well known in a storm had foundered, and all the crew had perished, which tended greatly to confirm the Italian superstitious, and entirely accounted for the want of intelligence on this unhappy business—of which, having taken place exactly at the time specified in the papers, there could not remain the smallest doubt.

He further added, that having met with a very lucrative offer from a nobleman, a native of Naples, to live with him, he hoped his lordship would pardon him if he accepted an offer so advantageous to him, as he had, to the utmost of his abilities, fulfilled the purposes for which he was sent.

Satisfied now of the truth of this event, lord Desmond planned the gentlest manner of breaking it to Georgiana. He first informed lord Seymour and Edmund of the circumstance, and they mutually agreed the next morning to divulge it to her, but to conceal the manner of Mr. Fitzhugh's death.

The news, though communicated with so much caution, effected lady Georgiana exceedingly. The suddenness of his death shocked her beyond measure; but the earl reminded her of the ill state of health Mr. Fitzhugh had long been in, which, he had no doubt, was of much more consequence than they had imagined; and that, therefore,

this was an event naturally to be expected. Reconciled, at length, to this inevitable change, lady Georgiana resumed her usual habits—her infant grew a lovely child; and being extremely healthy and engaging, became a grand source of amusement to all the family, and daily won on their warmest affections.

The first shock (for it was not grief) of Mr. Fitzhugh's death being in a great degree subsided, the earl of Desmond looked forward with pleasure to the realisation of plans he had formed in India, if he found his dear daughter living. Edmund had long in his affection been as his child, and he had hoped to a right of calling him by that endearing title. He now saw with infinite satisfaction that the union he had so long projected had the prospect of being as perfectly desirable to all concerned, as to himself.

In this agreeable situation were affairs at Desmond castle, when one morning a servant entered lord Desmond's apartment, and informed him an elderly man requested the honour to see him—"He appears like a gentleman, my lord," continued the servant, "by his manners, but his dress is very indifferant."

"Has he given his name," answered lord Desmond.

"He declined mentioning it," replied the servant, "but said his business was of great importance."

"Admit him instantly," said lord Desmond, "he will, in course, soon make himself known."

In a few minutes a venerable man, with a quantity of grey hair, and corresponding eyebrows, was introduced.

But the moment of his entrance, fixing his eyes on lord Desmond, he exclaimed—"Good Heaven! Is this possible!"—and, unbidden, sunk in a chair in the extremest emotion.

"I am greatly surprised, sir," said lord Desmond, "to find the sight of a person you had requested so earnestly to see, should so greatly affect you—explain, I entreat you, the cause of the agitation, for to me it appears really unaccountable."

"I know it must appear so," said the stranger, hastily and incoherently, "but pardon me—I little expected to see you—it was Francis Fitzhugh I thought of when I requested an audience of lord Desmond."

"That unfortunate gentleman has been dead some time," answered lord Desmond—"he died in Italy, where he travelled on account of his health—I am brother to the late earl, whose melancholy end must be well known to all in these parts—my unexpected return from a very long captivity deprived Mr. Fitzhugh of the title long before his death, as I am the immediate successor—in which capacity, if you have any request to make, or any thing to communicate, I shall with pleasure attend to you."

The stranger, apparently overcome by his feelings, burst in a flood of tears, and said, in accents which vibrated on lord Desmond's heart—"Oh! dear Frederic, do you not know me?"

Then disengaging himself from the grey wig and whitened eye-brows—the earl stood aghast with astonishment—for the form of his brother stood before him—him whom he had so long considered cruelly murdered.

But he had not time to suppose him a spectre—for his brother instantly rushed into his arms, strained him with fraternal affection in his arms, whilst the tears continued to flow from his eyes.

(To be continued.)

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