

feathers, but the veritable old Ailsie of four years ago, in the same old garb cotton dress, brogues, straw bonnet tipped over her nose, and all (where on earth did she get them?) in which she had tripped in to him on that other August evening, of which this was the anniversary, when she had shown him her invitation to Lady Betty's ball.

Now, the gloaming was just putting out the glare of the sunset behind the latticed windows, and when Hughie had pinched himself and found that he was not dreaming at all, he next became very sure that he had gone out of his senses with trouble, and that he was looking at an object conjured up before his eyes by his own diseased imagination. However, the apparition looked very substantial as it approached, and sitting down on the end of one of the forms, it displayed a paper which it unfolded in its hands—hands that were white instead of brown, making the only difference between this and the old Ailsie.

"I've got a letter here, Mistor Devnish," said Ailsie's old voice, speaking with Ailsie's old brogue, and in the sly, mischievous tone that Hughie remembered so well: "an' if ye please, I want ye to answer it for me. I'm a bad clark mysel', ye know."

Not knowing what to say to her, he took the letter out of her hand and glanced over it. It was a proposal of marriage from Ailsie's old tormentor, MacQuillan of the heek.

The schoolmaster was trembling, you may believe, with many confused ideas and sensations when he folded the letter and returned it; but he inked his pen manfully, and produced a sheet of paper, then sat waiting with much patience for his visitor's dictation. But Ailsie sat quiet, with her eyes upon the floor, and so there was a cruel pause.

"Well?" says Hughie, at last, with a bewitched feeling, as if he were addressing only his pupil of old days, "what am I to say in the answer?"

"Feth, I don't know," says Ailsie.

"But what reply do you mean to give?" asked Hughie, striving, we are assured, to command himself. "Am I to say yes or no in the letter?"

"I tell ye I don't know, Hughie Devnish," said Ailsie crossly. "I gave a promise to another, an' he never has freed me from it yet. I b'lieve ye'll know best what to put in the letter yersel'."

"Ailsie!" cried Hughie rising to his feet, "did you come here for nothing but to dbrive me mad? Or, avourneen, is it possible you would marry me yet?"

"Feth it is Hughie," said Ailsie.

And after the letter was written they went in and had tea with the widow Devnish.

The next morning Miss MacQuillan appeared amongst her guests as if nothing had happened, but before night a whisper flew from ear to ear that the heiress was engaged; while the lady herself did not contradict the report. Every man looked darkly at his neighbour, and "Who is he?" was the question on every lip. At last "It is not I," said one noble droue, and flew off to seek honey elsewhere; and "It is not I," said the others, one by one, and followed his example; and by-and-bye Ailsie was peacefully in possession of her castle; whereupon there was a quiet wedding, at which Mary, Jamie, and the widow Devnish were the only guests.

A nine days' wonder expires on the tenth, and after a few years Hugh Devnish MacQuillan, Esq., was looked upon as no despicable person by many who thought it their duty to sneer on his wedding-day.

## STEPPING-STONES OVER BIG DIFFICULTIES.

### ROUND ABOUT HELL.

(BY REV. FATHER CASSIDY, NEW PLYMOUTH.)

(Continued.)

FOR as long as the thunders peal and lightnings flash, and foaming breakers beat upon the shore, as long as a flower blooms in the sunshine, or a bird sings in the stillness of the morning, as long as the sun shines above us, or the glow-worm glimmers below, so long will God's infinite wisdom lie manifest and man's powerlessness to understand Him, and everything will proclaim its existence, as Hermanus told the Athiest, that the very feather with which he penned the words, there is no God nor any proof of His wisdom, refuted the audacious lie. Thus wherever we go we shall find God's wisdom displayed before us, and if in the present condition of the human race and its surroundings we cannot easily reconcile its actual gloomy state and its future, gloomier still, with the actual wisdom and goodness of God, still we must admit that God is always wise and God is always just, and if wrong, if evil, if sin, if misery prevail, God is not responsible, and that man, and that man only, is their cause and the fountain of their origin. God being good, He must have made man for a good purpose. He must have made him for happiness. God being wise He must have made man wisely; the endowments He gave him then were right and good, and if we cannot understand either the gifts or the Giver, we must shrink from judging the Judge, and if man abused the gifts and scorned the Giver, he must confess he has done wrong. God gave man liberty. What nobler gift could He give him? God gave man reason to direct his liberty and make that liberty always rational or conscientious. Man can and man ought to remain conscientious and rational. If he does not act according to his conscience or reason, he feels that he is going against first reason, he knows that he is disobeying the changeless law, he knows that he is going against the instincts of nature, he is going against the tide of moral gravitation; he knows that he is earning no reward but punishment for himself he knows that he is separating himself from goodness and right, he knows that he is leaving the light and slinking into the darkness, he feels that he is going from heaven to hell. Hell, then, begins in the human conscience, for the effects of sin and its punishment first manifest themselves there. And hell is only an effect of sin or its continuation in the fullest sense; and as sin is only the creation of man, so hell, that is but its consequence, is his work also.

Sin is a free and deliberate act or thought by which man does or desires what he ought not to do or desire, and from which follows the conscientiousness of his being in a state that he ought not to be in, and a knowledge that he has no similarity of nature or feeling with God, and that God can have no friendship for him in consequence. If this conviction and this feeling become permanent, then we have the permanent separation from, and the permanent loss of God, then we have hell in its simplest yet most terrible aspect. Man cannot enjoy the friendship or a union with God unless he resembles God, unless he loves what God loves and hates what God hates, and it can happen that man may so disarrange his nature as to attain a permanent desire to hate what God loves, and to love what God hates; and thus can man continue to feel and be for ever unlike God in life, and separated from him in consequence: unlike God in death, and separated from him till the abyss is bridged over that never then can be bridged. For death does not interfere with the feelings of the soul, it does not annihilate them, it does not change its nature, it does not give it anything it has not already, it does not take from it any feeling or disposition it may have acquired in life, and if the soul leaves the body at death in a state of dissimilarity and separation from God, death only widens the breach and confirms the separation. To think of an essential reformation taking place in the soul's feelings and character when it passes the mysterious frontier, and a new career of experiences dawns before it; to believe that the higher illumination coming direct from the divine Majesty will transform its nature, and give it a supreme love of what it hated till then, as some think, is to assert and believe what cannot be. There is illumination sufficient in life to move the darkest natures to love and obey God. Will the soul receive more illumination when it crosses the gloomy ferry than it has received while here, and if it does, will it use it? Both one and the other hypothesis rest on the merest probability, and if the law of moral gravitation works like the law of physical gravitation, both one and the other will be an impossibility, for where the tree falls under the laws of physical gravitation it lies fallen under that same law and lies for ever fallen. So under the law of moral gravitation in whatever state man dies in that state he remains. "Bind his hands and feet, cast him into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." No liberty, no illumination here to depend on or hope for. But Origen, Emerson and many others will tell us, however, that the will is free in eternity, and that it is unnatural to suppose that the will will fall into final dissimilarity of feeling with God, or lose all desire to be holy, or will not choose the right when greater light comes. But will greater light come? and will it show God more amiable than in life? May we not reasonably believe that the greater light, if greater light there will be, will only show the sinner his defilement, his unworthiness, his ingratitude, his moral deformities as they are visible to the divine Mind, and may we not conclude that the majestic beauty of God will be completely shrouded from one so unworthy of seeing it, and that the knowledge of being at variance with God will intensify the soul's hatred of itself and Him. The other life is not one of trial, everything tells us it is not, and even if it were, there is no reason to believe that, there across the mysterious silent frontier, and lost on the external darkness that envelopes in gloom the rebels of God's goodness, those who cursed and hated Him, those who opposed His will and scorned His love, should turn suddenly in their downward flight, and, filled with feelings of sublime adoration and enthusiastic love, would cherish and bless Him with all the fervour of the seraphs. This world is the theatre where we must play our part, right or wrong; when the curtain falls there only remains for us the groan of scorn and disappointment or the outburst of applause and jubilee, if the permission of sin presents a mystery, its punishment certainly exhibits none. If sin were not punished, it would be the greatest of all mysteries, since reason, common sense, experience, history, science, every movement of life, every law of nature, every throeb of creation, every breath and every sorrow, every ray of light, every sunny hour and every stormy one, every sigh or smile tell us that he who goes against nature, he who disobeys the higher power, he who opposes the tide that moves majestically on to the One who made it, he who brings confusion into God's creation, must suffer confusion, and must be expelled from the enjoyments of perfect peace and love. Wrong must be opposed and punished as long as wrong is wrong; even science, if true to its principles, must confess the same, for it must acknowledge that it finds in nature and the universe an universal law that tends heavenwards, whose violation must be repaired or repented of. Many, however, of the baby scientists of the day, forgetting that Hell or Heaven is completely beyond the limit of their jurisdiction, would have us believe that eternal punishment is an impossibility, and must be considered only as the remnant of a barbaric creed fast fading away. With the light and brilliancy of the century, with the help of geology and astronomy, with the strides of electric discoveries, everything in their minds has changed, and to believe in a place of punishment beyond this life is to turn again to the dark ages, to fall back into paganism, or to become insane. But these are mere sayings, and nothing more. For what has science done to explain the problem of life? Nothing but further to confound the already confounded. What can science say about Heaven or Hell? Nothing. Or what light can astronomy throw on the dark mysteries that surround us? None. It can only force more vividly upon us the conviction that in the Heavens God has declared His glory, that He is beautiful and good, and infinitely wise and great. From the day Adam first beheld the setting sun, when the mysterious darkness gathered over the face of nature, shrouding the earth from his astonished gaze, and the stars brightened into splendour one by one; ever since that first day and that first memorable night, the human mind has anxiously struggled to understand the mysteries that dwell in those bright orbs and to wander over the boundless field of mystery they present. On the hill tops of Eden watched that first astronomer; generation after generation have since then rolled away, enlarging by their contributions the stream of celestial discovery, unravelling the mysterious movements of the worlds, weighing their immensity, computing their reciprocal influences, and tracing their complex wanderings, but lost