

"Come, baronet," said he, "here's my arm. I am the old man, and you are the old lady; and now for dinner."

In the meantime, Reilly and the *Colcen Bawn* had gone far enough in advance to be in a condition to speak without being heard.

"That," said she, "is the husband my father intends for me, or, rather, did intend: for, do you know, that you have found such favor in his sight, that—that—" She hesitated, and Reilly, looking into her face, saw that she blushed deeply, and he felt by her arm that her whole frame trembled with emotion.

"Proceed, dearest love," said he; "what is it?"

"I have not time to tell you now," she replied, "but he mentioned a project to me, which, if it could be accomplished, would seal both your happiness and mine forever: Your religion is the only obstacle."

"And that, my love," he replied, "is an unsurmountable one."

"Alas! I feared as much," she replied, sighing bitterly as she spoke.

The old squire took the head of the table, and requested Sir Robert to take the foot; his daughter was at his right hand, and Reilly opposite her, by which means, although denied any confidential use of the tongue, their eyes enjoyed very gratifying advantages; and there passed between them occasionally some of those rapid glances which, especially when lovers are under *surveillance*, concentrate in their lightning flash more significance, more hope, more joy, and more love than ever was conveyed by the longest and tenderest gaze of affection under other circumstances.

"Mr. Reilly," said the squire, "I am told that you are a very well-educated man; indeed, the thing is obvious. What, let me ask, is your opinion of education in general?"

"Why, sir," replied Reilly, "I think there can be but one opinion about it. Without education a people can never be moral, prosperous, or happy. Without it, how are they to learn the duties of this life, or those still more important ones that prepare them for a better?"

"You would entrust the conduct and control of it, I presume, sir, to the clergy?" asked Sir Robert, insidiously.

"No, sir," replied Reilly, "I would entrust the conduct and control of it to the State. I look upon the schoolmaster to be a much more important character than the priest."

"Which description of priest do you mean, sir?" inquired the baronet again.

"Every description, sir. If the complete control of education were committed to the priests of any or all creeds, the consequence would be a generation of bigots, fraught with the worst elements of civil and religious rancor. I would give the priest only such a limited control in education as becomes his position, which is not to educate the youth, but instruct the man, and only in those duties enjoined by religion."

The squire now gave a triumphant look at the baronet and a very kind and gracious one at Reilly.

"Pray, sir," continued the baronet, in his cold, supercilious manner, "from the peculiarity of your views, I feel anxious, if you will pardon me, to ask where you yourself have received your very accomplished education?"

"Whether my education, sir, has been an accomplished one or otherwise," replied Reilly, "is a point, I apprehend, beyond the reach of any opportunity you ever had to know. I received my education, sir, such as it is, and if it be not better the fault is my own, in a Jesuit seminary on the Continent."

It was now the baronet's time to triumph; and indeed the bitter, glancing look he gave at the squire, although it was intended for Reilly, resembled that which one of the more cunning and ferocious beasts of prey makes previous to his death-spring upon its victim. The old man's countenance instantly fell. He looked with surprise not unmingled with sorrow and distrust at Reilly, a circumstance which did not escape his daughter, who could not, for the life of her, avoid fixing her eyes, lovelier even in the disdain they expressed, with an indignant look at the baronet.

The latter, however, felt resolved to bring his rival still further within the toils he was preparing for him, an object which Reilly's candor very much facilitated.

"Mr. Reilly," said the squire, "I was not prepared to hear—a—hem!—God bless me, it is very odd, very deplorable, very much to be regretted indeed!"

"What is, sir?"

"Why, that you should be a Jesuit. I must confess I was not—a—hem!—God bless me. I can't doubt your own word, certainly."

"Not on this subject," observed the baronet, coolly.

"ON NO SUBJECT, sir," replied Reilly, looking at him sternly, and with an indignation that was kept within bounds only by his respect for the other parties, and the roof that covered him; "on no subject, Sir Robert Whitecraft, is my word to be doubted."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied the other, "I did not say so."

"I will neither have it said, sir, nor insinuated," rejoined Reilly. "I received my education on the Continent, because the laws of this country prevented me from receiving it here. I was placed in a Jesuit seminary, not by my own choice, but by that of my father, to whom I owed obedience. Your oppressive laws, sir, first keep us ignorant, and then punish us for the crimes which that ignorance produces."

"Do you call the laws of the country oppressive?" asked the baronet, with as much of a sneer as cowardice would permit him to indulge in.

"I do, sir, and ever will consider them so, at least so long as they deprive myself and my Catholic fellow-countrymen of their civil and religious rights."

"That is strong language, though," observed the other, "at this time of day."

"Mr. Reilly," said the squire, "you seem to be very much attached to your religion."

"Just as much as I am to my life, sir, and would as soon give up the one as the other."

The squire's countenance literally became pale, his last hope was gone, and so great was his agitation, that, in bringing a glass of wine to his lips, his hand trembled to such a degree that he spilled a part of it. This, however, was not all. A settled gloom, a morose, dissatisfied expression soon overshadowed his features, from which disappeared the trace of that benignant, open, and friendly hospitality towards Reilly that had hitherto beamed from them. He and the baronet exchanged glances, of whose import, if Reilly was ignorant, not so his beloved *Colcen Bawn*. For the remainder of the evening the squire treated Reilly with great coolness, always addressing him as Mister, and evidently contemplating him in a spirit quite par-tok of the feeling that animated Sir Robert Whitecraft.

Helen rose to withdraw, and contrived by a sudden glance at the door and another as quick in the direction of the drawing room, to let her lover know that she wished him to follow her soon. The hint was not lost, for in less than half an hour Reilly, who was of very temperate habits, joined her as she had hinted.

"Reilly," said she, as she ran to him, "dearest Reilly! there is little time to be lost. I perceive that a secret understanding respecting you exists between papa and that detestable baronet. Be on your guard, especially against the latter, who has evidently, ever since we sat down to dinner, contrived to bring papa round to his own way of thinking, as he will ultimately, perhaps, to worse designs and darker purposes. Above all things, speak nothing that can be construed against the existing laws. I find that danger, if not positive injury, awaits you. I shall, at any risk, give you warning."

"At no risk, beloved!"

"At every risk—at all risks, dearest Reilly! Nay, more—whatever danger may encompass you shall be shared by me, even at the risk of my life, or I shall extricate you out of it. But perhaps you will not be faithful to me. If so, I shudder to think what might happen."

"Listen," said Reilly, taking her to his bosom; "*in the presence of Heaven, I am yours, and yours only, until death!*"

She repeated his words, after which they embraced each other in haste, and had scarcely taken their seats when the squire and Sir Robert entered the drawing room.

CHAPTER V.—THE PLOT AND THE VICTIMS.

Sir Robert, on entering the room along with the squire, found the *Colcen Bawn* at the spinet. Taking his place at the end of it, so that he could gain a full view of her countenance, he thought he could observe her complexion considerably heightened in color, and from her his glance was directed to Reilly. The squire, on the other hand, sat dull, silent, and unsociable, unless when addressing himself to the baronet, and immediately his genial manner returned to him.

With his usual impetuosity, however, when laboring under what he supposed to be a sense of injury, he soon brought matters to a crisis.

"Sir Robert," said he, "are the Papists quiet now?"

"They are quiet, sir," replied the other, "because they dare not be otherwise."

"By the great Deliverer, that saved us from Pope and Popery, brass money, and wooden shoes, I think the country will never be quiet till they are banished out of it."

"Indeed, Mr. Folliard, I agree with you."