

Evening Memories

(By WILLIAM O'BRIEN.)

CHAPTER XXVII.—(Continued.)

Was there, at least, the fierce joy of a good hater whenever we were looking into the eyes of the foe in the English Parliament, and giving blow for blow? My sensations were more complex than that. In the sense of beholding in that arena the figure and substance of the cruel power that for all the long ages since the Crusades tortured, debased and calumniated a race at least their equals in all moral and physical gifts, and only inferior to them in their supply of guns and gunpowder, I detested the name of England with all the white heat of the John Mitchel of the *Letters to Clarendon*. To crush her rule in Ireland was a sacred life-mission to be pursued, come weal come woe, with a will-power that would stand any strain, and could be abated by no terror and by no bribe. During more than the average span of life, the fortunes of Ireland never left my thoughts for a single day and not very often for a single waking hour. And there did not enter into these thoughts any possibility of regret or faltering. At the same time the England of my hate was an abstraction, and an abstraction that, once her grip was loosed of Ireland, might be transfigured into something very different in the light of a broader democratic day. It was not forty millions of fellow-men born unto sorrow like ourselves with whom my quarrel lay—it was not even the six hundred eupeptic, self-sufficing Saxons on the benches on front of me. But as fate would have it they were the enemy drawn up before us in order of battle with shotted guns, doubtless numbering many fine fellows to be cordially fraternised with as soon as the wars were over, but as to whom, in the meantime, the *consigne* on pain of death for the Irish Cause was to sit tight and to shoot straight. Until we had shot our way to victory, fraternisation would be treason. More than that, by an instinct not too difficult to understand by the light of subsequent events when Parnell's resolute, unconquerable at Cannae, yielded to the softnesses of Capua—when from an Irish Party they became as clay in the hands of the potters of an English Party—my antipathy to the House of Commons and my dissociation from all its inner ways and friendships grew only the more marked, notwithstanding that more than half its members were Home Rulers, and it seemed almost moroseness to refuse to be made friends to and even petted in a House where once we had been howled down with cat-calls and proscribed in every form of outlawry. Ever after 1885, profuse friendship was to be had either from the Liberals or from the Tories, but only on the condition that you must not be friends of both of them, and the Irishman who indentured himself either to the one English Party or to the other was so far lost to Ireland. To be "a good party man" in the English sense was to be a bad Irishman. Be our national failing over-suspiciousness or (as I think) over-softness, at all events, it is not to be concealed that I quitted the House of Commons by the members' entrance for the last time with as whole-hearted a detestation of the place and of the life as on the day I first entered there five-and-thirty years before, and with a stronger conviction than ever that the House of Commons had not advanced an inch towards understanding Ireland in the interval.* And the conclusion may not be the less worth attention because it is arrived at by one who spent more than half of these five-and-thirty years in risking all the amenities of life in order to help in a reconciliation of the two nations.

* Funnily enough, my most cherished recollections of the proud Commons of England are of the doorkeepers, attendants, and policemen. Also what could be quaintier than the simple English body's unfathomable ignorance of Ireland? Testify my delightful little English landlady in Pimlico who used to sit under a silver-tongued Irish clergyman in a neighboring church, and who in the earlier days, when the poor lady at the back of her head probably suspected my business in London was not altogether without a whiff of dynamite, used to plead: "You may have anything else you like, you know, but do please leave us our dear Established Church!" Having struck my bargain for the safety of her dear Established Church, she was my firm friend for life.

sight of a soldier? There's no knowing what he might say or do if he saw him."

"There's my thanks for sendin' him into your own room till your grandfather was gone to bed, whin I hear ye comin'."

"Peg, you are very foolish." And Bessy commenced tapping the table more nervously than ever. "What would be said if he was seen in my room?"

"Faith, you're losin' your courage," returned Peg Brady. "I thought you wouldn't mind what any wan'd say."

Bessy Morris closed her lips tightly and gazed into the fire.

"He said he wrote a letter to you from Dublin," said Peg Brady.

"So he told me," Bessy replied, absently. "But I did not get it. Maybe 'tis at the post-office."

"Begor he's a fine, handsome man, anyhow; an' he's a sergeant. He said that in all his thravels he never see' the like uv you."

The compressed lips parted, and a flash of light shot from Bessy Morris's eyes; and, bending down her head, she covered her face with her hands as if she wished to hide these symptoms of gratified vanity from her companion.

"I don't know how you manage to come round the whole uv 'em," said Peg Brady, with a sigh. "I wish you'd make up your mind an' take wan an' put the rest out uv pain. An' maybe thin some uv us might have a chance."

"Well, Peg," said Bessy, as she rose from her chair, "don't say anything about it. You don't know how hard the world is."

"Oh, yes; that's the way. Purtend to the whole uv 'em there's no wan but himself, and keep 'em all on your hands."

"There it is," said Bessy, stopping, before she had reached the door of her room, as if Peg's remark was a foretaste of what she had to expect.

"Well, you may depend on me," returned Peg; "I'll say nothin'."

Bessy Morris retired to her room greatly excited.

"But what is there to be frightened at?" she thought.

"Sure he's not the first bachelor that ever came to see me. But people are so bad-minded."

Yet it never occurred to her that if she had not been such a "divil for coortin'," as Billy Heffernan had expressed it, the dragoon, in all probability, would never have heard of the existence of Knocknagow, where he found himself the previous evening, and learned from Mat Donovan's mother that he had passed Phil Morris's house and left it a mile or two behind him.

"May heaven direct me!" exclaimed Bessy Morris, as she knelt down to say her prayers. "I feel as if some misfortune was hanging over me."

"I wish to the Lord," said Peg Brady, as she raked the ashes over the embers on the hearth, "that he was afther whippin' her away. An' sure what betther match could she expect? An' who knows but—well, there's no use in countin' our chickens afore they're hatched. What a fool poor Mat is!" And Peg Brady broke off with a sigh as she put the back-stick to the door.

(To be continued.)

St. Mary's Tennis Club, Invercargill

St. Mary's Tennis Club, Invercargill, held an opening day the other Wednesday, when a large number of players and spectators turned out (writes our own correspondent). Mrs. Haigh, a vice-president of the club, played the first ball and declared the courts open, after which many enjoyable sets were played. During the afternoon the ladies served refreshments. The club has a good membership, and everything promises well for a successful season.

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E. S. Robson

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