

HONOR O'HARA

VOL. I.

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HONOR O'HARA.

A Novel,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY .

MISS A. M. PORTER,

AUTHOR OF "THE HUNGARIAN BROTHERS,"
"THE RECLUSE OF NORWAY,"

&c. &c. &c.

"O when shall I regain my orbit of peace and glory!"
ERSKINE'S *Internal Evidence*, &c.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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PREFATORY NOTICE.

ERE the Reader proceed to the perusal of the following volumes, he is requested to prepare himself for a perceptible difference in their character: a difference observable, perhaps, as much in the strain of their thought, as in the style by which it is expressed.

Will it be a sufficient apology to say, that rather more than the first volume was written directly after the whole story was planned, three years ago;—that it was laid aside, in consequence of temporary loss of sight, and not resumed until last winter, before the end of which, it was entirely completed?

So long an interval could not fail of producing such changes in the mind and feelings of the Writer, as might be expected to ensue from witnessing, or experiencing, certain changes in the current of her own, or of other dear persons' lives. Thus, she is aware, that the careless tone of her commencement, is altered to a much graver one in many succeeding parts; and that she has suffered one or two characters to slip from her hands with very little colouring, merely because she found her own spirits less calculated to finish them highly, than when they were first sketched. The Writer confesses that her inclination points to what is serious, perhaps saddening, in composition; but friends had so repeatedly urged her to try a lighter style, that she was induced to make the attempt.

Doubtful of her qualification to embody the fashionable manners of the day we are now living in, or to give the

amusing idioms of its peculiar dialect with elegance and fidelity, she has deemed it prudent to throw her story back to a period of which few of her readers are likely to retain such vivid recollections, as would render inaccuracy of dates, or of fleeting modes, a matter of moment. She is not, however, conscious of having erred in the period allotted to any public event; having always resorted to the Annual Register for certain information. Such as it is, this Novel is now submitted to the Public, with the assurance, that if, in attempting to pourtray ordinary life with a livelier pen than she had employed in tracing the humble history of Jeannie Halliday, the Writer shall be found to have failed in interesting or amusing, she will then lay it aside altogether, and resume that of romantic fiction.

ESHER, *August*, 1826.

ERRATA IN VOL. I.

- Page 24. line 6. from bottom, *for is read are.*
49. line 11. from bottom, *for dark read back.*
100. line 8. *for who no knew read who knew no*
165. line 8. *for covered read formed.*
324. line 7. *for usal read perusal.*

HONOR O'HARA.

CHAPTER I.

AT the upper end of a straggling village, hanging on a steep hill's side, in the North of England, stood an old tumble-down rectory: its walls had once been white-washed; but, like a dirty fair face, only looked more unseemly, from sundry patches of lime staring here and there, through gaps in its crust of weather-stains.

In times past, a waving mixture of ivies and jessamines, had increased the picturesqueness of its gable-ends, and

clustering chimnies ; but these vegetable hangings having a trick of harbouring birds and insects, a certain ruler in the mansion, tore away, with a strong hand, the ivy and jessamine of twenty years' growth. So now, the sole remaining testimonial of former ornament, was but the root of the ivy ; which being of great thickness, and sawed to the ground, served as an occasional standing place for a broken-spouted watering-pot ; which oftener lay covered with dirt, as well as bruises, (a most unsightly spectacle,) just under the parlour window.

Close by this degraded spot, a worm-eaten gate swinging on one hinge, and kept fast by a bit of rope passed through a hole and slung over a nail, opened into a forlorn space, once known by the name of *the garden*, now jointly occupied by pigs and potatoes. The stumps of two or three decayed apple-trees, and the stem of one living wine-sour plum, appeared above the potatoe tops, and served for rubbing-posts to the hogs ; but, saving these wretched memorials of better days,

not a shrub, not a flower remained, to mark

“ Where a garden had been.”

To the left of this delectable spot lay a little plashy Close, called the farmyard; where a stable, a pigsty, a dunghill, and heaps of puddly straw were all huddled together into so many floating islands, divided by different channels of wet and mire. A few draggled-tailed fowls, — “ a toothless mastiff bitch,” — a lean Alderney cow, — a wall-eyed cart-horse, and thirteen pigs, (when they chose to transfer their fragrant persons from the garden to the sty,) made up the complement of living furniture in the farmyard.

The house had nobler inhabitants. These consisted of Mr. Meredith the incumbent, his wife, his niece, a great gaunt woman of all-work, an Irish nurse, and a lank-haired footboy, not undeserving the very coarsest name for seedlings of his class. Mrs. Meredith (who would venture to deny her precedence?) was in

truth a most formidable personage ; being a lady without either temper, sense, or breeding. For eighteen years it had been her laudable practice to pass through the whole of her house twenty times every day, carrying all before her like a whirlwind ; scaring men, women, children, dogs, and cats, into the first hole they could find shelter in. Doubtless she did it on the principle of purifying the moral atmosphere of the Rectory.

Be that as it may, banging of doors, rattling up and pulling down of windows, clattering of sundry culinary vessels, squalls of luckless household animals, squabbles with itinerant venders or menders of useful commodities ; bawling, calling, scolding, slapping — such was the full chorus of domestic discords which had regularly followed Mrs. Meredith's issue from the nuptial couch, every morning during seventeen years, eleven months, and two weeks. Mr. Meredith's honey-moon having had but half a face.

'Through the whole of the ordinary

day, this hurricane blew with the constancy of a trade-wind, during which time Mrs. Meredith went slopping about in a dingy gown and flap-eared cap; but on the signal of a visitor, or by the evening, the fierce drab changed into a smart woman, all smiles and servility; seated at the card-table of a *bettermost* neighbour, or presiding over her own tea and toast, surrounded by misses in muslins, matrons in discoloured silks, and spinsters in scoured satins. Mrs. Meredith had indeed so becoming a company face to put on with her company gown, that had it not been for eaves-droppers and servants, she would have passed current, (at least amongst new acquaintance,) for a good-humoured, uneducated woman; but with the last visitor, her last smile duly disappeared, and she was rude Boreas again. So relentless in truth, was the scythe, or flail of her insufferable temper, that it mowed down and scattered all before it, and seemed in a fair way, therefore, of leaving her nothing to scold at last. However, against this direful calamity

she was fortunately provided with a victim for life — that victim was her husband. He, poor gentleman, had a sorrowful trick of sighing at intervals; and a sigh from him was ever the precursor of a storm from her. At that unlucky signal Mrs. Meredith was ready with her fiercest bolt. This was sure to fall in the shape of biting reproaches for his indifference to her value as a chaste wife, and skilful manager — of certain *castings-up* of former obligations from her kindred; and of her own especial grace, in accepting the forsaken swain of the scornful Bell Foster, — of violent invectives against that proud beauty, and broad hints that she had not taken herself off with the captain of dragoons, until it was high time.

The meek-spirited Mr. Meredith could sit quietly under the storm whilst it only buffeted himself; but whenever it beat upon the fair living form, or too probably the ashes of that misguided young creature to whom his heart had once been devoted, he was no longer master of

himself, and a brimming eye and quivering lip ever accompanied the hasty action with which he started from his chair, and quitted the apartment.

Mr. Meredith would have honoured a better fate; for he had a tender heart, a yielding temper, tolerable talents, and much better principles. He passed amongst his servants and immediate neighbours for a very learned man; because having no attraction to his parlour, he lived principally in his study. There, he rather dozed over books of research, in melancholy indolence, than buckled to their pith and argument with any vigour of intellect akin to their own. His first affections having been disappointed, and the narrow circle he then moved in, as curate merely of Edenfell, furnishing no other creature fitted to cope with the image of the really charming girl he worshipped two or three years in respectful silence, Mr. Meredith went on from twenty-five till thirty-seven without feeling a new attachment, or dreaming of matrimony.