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The Lost Tribes

by

George A. Birmingham

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THE LOST TRIBES

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BY

G. A. BIRMINGHAM (pseud.)

AUTHOR OF "SPANISH GOLD," "GENERAL JOHN REGAN," "LALAGE'S LOVERS" ETC.

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THE LOST TRIBES

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CHAPTER I

NATHAN P. DANN does not come into this story. He died before any of the things which I have to record happened. And he died, as he had lived, in New York, while the scene of the story is a small village in County Galway. It is, however, necessary to write down a few words about Nathan P. Dann.

He was by birth and descent an Irishman. Very early in life, at about the age of nineteen, he left Ireland and went to America. There he prospered and became very rich. This is an important fact. If Nathan P. Dann had not left a large fortune, his widow could not have done or attempted the things she did.

Like most Irishmen, who live anywhere in the world except Ireland, Nathan P. Dann was patriotic. He did not, indeed, return to Ireland, or show, at any time of his life, the smallest desire to live there. The patriotism of an " Exile from Erin " never takes that form. Generally, though not in the case of Nathan P. Dann, it expresses itself in a series of self-denying efforts to help other people out of Ireland. The Irish Exile pays his friends' fares from Queenstown to New York. He only pays his own fare from New York to Queenstown when he takes a return ticket, and he always uses the second half of it. Dann did not even take an Irish holiday at any time during his life. He made two expeditions to Europe, but on both occasions he spent his time chiefly

in Italy. This was perhaps his wife's fault. She was fond of art and poetry. Dann himself was not.

Nor did his patriotism lead him to subscribe to the funds of any "League." Most Irishmen in America subscribe generously to Leagues whose objects they only vaguely understand. We may suppose that they find this the easiest way of quieting their consciences. They feel that they owe something to the country of their origin; so they listen to people who talk beautifully about Kathleen ní Houlahan, and then write a cheque for five or ten dollars in support of the cause. Nathan P. Dann was often asked to subscribe to Ireland, but he never did. Many people thought that he had no conscience; but in this, as appeared after his death, they were mistaken. The real reason of his refusal was a religious one. He was born and brought up a Protestant, and he remained all his life convinced that Kathleen ní Houlahan and the "Leagues" which supported blameless Members of Parliament to plead her cause were deeply touched with the spirit of the Papacy. He also believed that the Irish people were descendants of the ten tribes of Israel which got lost in the time of the Assyrian Empire. At these two beliefs Nathan P. Dann's religion stopped short. There was no more of it.

It is true that he built a church, a very handsome one, for the Reverend Richard Sebright, who was a popular Baptist minister; but this was not, strictly speaking, a religious act. He did it to please his wife. Mrs. Sebright was Mrs. Dann's first cousin, and the two ladies were great friends. Nathan P. Dann found it necessary, for the sake of domestic quiet, to do something for the Sebrights. It was suggested to him that he should start a newspaper and present it to Bobby Sebright, the minister's son, who was a journalist. After going into the figures carefully he came to the conclusion that it would be cheaper to build a church for the Reverend Richard.

It is not therefore possible to add belief in the doctrines of the Baptists to the other two articles of Dann's creed. He disliked the Pope. He thought fondly of the Ten Lost Tribes. But he never went to hear the Reverend Richard Sebright preach in the new church.

Nevertheless, Nathan P. Dann had a conscience. This was made plain when his will was read. He left everything he had to his wife; and he expressed a wish that she should search out, and if possible assist, the descendants of his sister, who had married an Irish clergyman called Mervyn. The Reverend Richard Sebright was of opinion that Nathan P. Dann showed a Christian spirit in this request. Bobby was of the same opinion at first. Mrs. Dann the widow was thrilled. She was a lady of high romantic nature. The wish which her husband expressed provided her with a mission. She held Mrs. Sebright's hand tightly and said that she would devote her life and her husband's fortune to the children of her sister-in-law and to dear Ireland. She was an American of New England descent, but she had no difficulty in feeling a strong affection for Ireland.

Afterwards Mr. Otto Bernstein, in the course of a private conversation with Bobby Sebright, threw some light on the spirit of Nathan P. Dann's will. Otto Bernstein was Nathan's partner and his only intimate friend.

"The widow of my partner," he said, "is one d d fool."

"Sure," said Bobby, "but there's points in her favour. She's a good-natured woman."

"It is that which I meant," said Bernstein, "when I said d d fool, and my poor friend he knew it. He knew the money would go-fly."

"That's so," said Bobby, "but there's a lot of it. I guess it'll last out her time."

"The other woman," said Bernstein, "the sister, is a still more d d fool. So my poor friend said to me,

The wife, that is the widow now, she did one wise thing. She married Nathan P. Dann, that is what my poor friend said to me. 'She did marry me,' he said, 'but the other one,'—the sister you understand me—'she hadn't as much wisdom as that. She married the d dest fool of all the three.'"

"I'm out after her, or her children, this minute," said Bobby, "kind of hunting her up in books of reference. Aunt Sally May—she's not my aunt, you know, but I've always called her aunt—"

"It will be to your advantage still to do so," said Bernstein.

"I don't deny that it may. But just now she's not thinking of me. She's dead set on tracking out this Mervyn man. The lady—so old Nathan seemed to think—is dead."

"It's the same thing," said Bernstein. "The money will go. My poor friend he said to me, 'They may do anything with it.' He meant any fool thing, anything with no sense in it at all. 'It may be,' he said to me, 'that they will use my money to—' I have forgot the word, but it meant to make better the state of his country, of Ireland."

"Regenerate?" said Bobby.

"That is it. There is much sadness in the thought. My friend he did feel the sadness of it. His money that he made, he and I together in the past time, it will be used by fools to make better, to regenerate, the state of Ireland, so my poor friend did say to me."

"Aunt Sally May," said Bob, "will take on the job of regenerating Ireland right away, as soon as ever it occurs to her that Ireland wants it."

"It is that," said Bernstein, "which we did foresee."

Mr. Otto Bernstein disappears from our story at this point. He has served his purpose in reporting to Bobby Sebright the words of Nathan P. Dann. There is no

doubt that he reported them quite accurately. But it is possible, even likely, that he conveyed a wrong idea to the mind of Bobby Sebright. The soul of a clever Irishman is a very curious thing, and this is peculiarly true of clever Irishmen who have lived long in England or America. Bobby Sebright thought he understood. The dead man was a cynical pessimist who found a kind of torturing delight in the thought that the money he had made laboriously would be wasted by a foolish woman in a singularly foolish manner. But Nathan P. Dann had one positive belief of a romantic kind. He clung to the faith that he and his fellow-countrymen were descended from Ephraim and Manasseh, and he knew that his wife, though a fool, had a very kind heart. It is possible that both Otto Bernstein and Bobby Sebright were mistaken. Dann may have hoped that his wife would do some good with his money; that just because she was what Bernstein called a d d fool she might succeed where wise people fail. She did not, in fact, do anything for Ireland, though she tried; but she did accomplish some tangible good.

CHAPTER II

IN an upper room of the little rectory Delia Mervyn stood brushing a coat. It was her father's best coat, a garment of respectable antiquity. He bought it for his wedding, and the wedding had taken place twenty-two years before. Coats very seldom last twenty-two years, but this one showed no signs of wear. Mr. Mervyn only put it on once every year, on the occasion of his bishop's visitation. At all other times it lay in a drawer, guarded from moths by a piece of camphor. Mrs. Mervyn watched over it as long as she lived. When she died Delia, her daughter, took over the care of the coat, the housekeeping books, and the key of the storeroom. She brushed it and laid it on the bed with a sigh. It looked quite decent. There were no thread-bare patches, no polished surfaces at wrist or elbow, but Delia sighed. She feared that it was likely to be antique in shape, altogether different from the coats of younger men. Her fear was well founded. Mr. Mervyn's coat had long been a joke amongst his clerical brethren.

Delia looked out of the window and saw her father. He was in his shirt-sleeves and was harnessing a white pony. Æneas Sweeny, an incompetent man-of-all-work, was giving advice and rubbing at the brass mounting of the harness with a cloth. Delia turned to a cupboard and took from it a silk hat, carefully wrapped in tissue-paper. She looked at it sadly. It was old, as old as the coat, but it still took a fine gloss when she brushed it. But Delia feared it was old-fashioned and that her father would look grotesque when he wore it. Delia did not know what contemporary hats looked like. It is very

hard to keep abreast of the fashion when you live in a remote village in County Galway. Had she been able to walk along Bond Street or Piccadilly she would have been reassured about her father's hat. It was almost exactly the shape most favoured by hatters at the moment. The silk hat varies within very narrow limits. It gets higher or lower. Its brim is broad and curly or narrow and flat. The middle of it, its waist, if we can use the phrase of a hat, may be compressed, or it may remain of the same girth from crown to brim. But with these the possibilities of variety are exhausted. The fashions in hats and collars work in circles. Keep a hat or a collar long enough and it rides once more on the foremost wave of the mode. Mr. Mervyn had kept his hat for twenty-two years. It was a little behind the fashion when he bought it. It was quite of the newest style when Delia brushed it.

The pony was harnessed at last. Æneas Sweeny, dressed in his best clothes, drove it round to the front of the rectory. Onny, christened Honoria, Donovan, a servant carefully trained by Delia, stood on the doorstep to watch the departure. Mr. Mervyn put on the coat and hat. Delia, looking at him doubtfully, followed him to the door. She patted his coat and pulled at it. It had fitted him once, but Mr. Mervyn had shrunk of late years. He was a bigger man, wider round the chest and thicker in the arm, when the coat was made. Meek men, and Mr. Mervyn was very meek, seldom grow portly in later life.

"I hope—I do hope," said Delia, "that she'll be nice."

"I hope so; I sincerely hope so," said Mr. Mervyn.

He was nervous. The occasion was a great one. He was to pay his first formal call on his new sister-in-law, a lady whom he vaguely suspected of being wealthy.

"I wish," he said—"I almost wish that I could take you with me, Delia."

There was no reason why he should not take Delia. Yet he shook his head gravely as he expressed the wish. He failed to realise that Delia had grown up into a young woman. We meet occasionally elderly country gentlemen who speak of their elderly sisters, ladies of sixty years of age, as "the girls." Their lives have been spent in pleasant monotony. They have failed to note the passing of time and the coming of grey hairs. Mr. Mervyn was like them. His days, since the death of his wife, had flowed calmly. There was nothing in them to force on him the thought that they were flowing at all. He still thought of Delia as a child, and Delia herself, though she knew she was a woman, still regarded it as impossible that she should be taken to pay a visit.

Mr. Mervyn fed the pony with two lumps of sugar. She and he were old and affectionate friends. Her name was Biddy and she had pulled him about the parish for many years. Delia looked critically at the phaeton. It was a very old vehicle, bought originally at an auction at Druminawona House after the death of the last Lady Engleby. It could not by any means have been made to look smart, but Æneas Sweeny had done his best with it. He had washed it. He had also washed his own face. He realised fully that the occasion was a great one. An Irish servant may be, and often is, singularly inefficient at ordinary times. Routine will paralyse his energies, but the worst Irish servant will rise brilliantly to a great occasion. The unaccustomed, which bewilders the mechanically efficient Englishman, spurs him to heroic exertions. Æneas Sweeny had rubbed a quantity of soft soap into his skin although the day was Saturday, not Sunday. He had also scrubbed the phaeton and polished the harness. He had groomed Biddy's white coat.

Mr. Mervyn got into the phaeton and waved his hand to Delia, affecting a cheerfulness which he did not feel.

Æneas settled himself on the small perch at the back of the phaeton. This was another concession to the occasion. Æneas usually sat beside his master and conversed with him in a friendly tone. He had not for several years sat on the perch at the back. Mr. Mervyn looked round nervously. The phaeton was very old, and Æneas had grown heavier of late. He thought it possible that the perch might break. Æneas reassured him with a smile. The little seat was stronger than it looked. Æneas folded his arms across his chest, put his chin up and stared straight in front of him. Mr. Mervyn shook the reins. Biddy ambled down the drive towards the road. Delia and Onny Donovan were left standing at the rectory door.

The Irish gentry of bygone days showed singularly little imagination in the building of their houses. Not one of them in a hundred had any idea beyond four straight unbroken walls, meeting each other at right-angles. But they all rejoiced in long avenues. If circumstances rendered it impossible to place their mansions a mile or more from the high road, they laid out curved winding approaches so as to get the longest possible amount of driving through their own grounds. The avenue of Druminawona House coiled about among lime-trees and beeches in a wholly unnecessary way. Biddy, who was a wise pony, resented the extra toil imposed on her and relapsed into a walk. When he came in sight of the house Mr. Mervyn hit her sharply with the whip. He had never done such a thing before. Biddy stopped in sheer amazement. Recovering herself a little, she turned her head round and looked at Mr. Mervyn. Her eyes expressed reproach and astonishment. Mr. Mervyn apologised at once. His apology took the form of an explanation. He addressed it to Æneas Sweeny; it was really meant to soothe Biddy's feelings.

frank friendliness of his sister-in-law's manner was breaking down his shyness. And Delia was a subject on which he felt well qualified to speak. He often thought about her when he was alone, in an aimless affectionate way. He ventured a quotation from his favourite poet, starting the lines with a shy smile:

"'She dwelt among the untrodden ways,
Beside the springs of Dove;
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.'"

"That's Wordsworth," said Mrs. Dann. "I'm there all the time in cultured society, and I've always reckoned Wordsworth to be right on top in the matter of poetry. But don't you try and get me by saying that Delia hasn't got any young man."

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Mervyn.

"My, Phil! and why not? That's not what I call natural."

"The fact is," said Mr. Mervyn, "that there aren't any young men in Druminawona."

"That's so? Come to think of it there wouldn't be, of course. I ought to have seen that straight away without being told. A place with a name like Druminawona wouldn't run to young men unless they were poets, and I reckon even a poet wouldn't stay long enough to get young again after his first attack of the divine inspiration. He'd be off to London or across to our side to make something out of the fit while it lasted. But I'll fix Delia up all right. You tell her when you go home that I'll fetch along Bobby Sebright for her. Bobby's got a commission over this side any way. He's crossing by the next boat. This little island of yours is booming just now; and Bobby's to write up your politics for his paper—Home Rule, or something. I never took on much with politics. Nathan P. Dann was sort of con-

temptuous and wouldn't subscribe a dollar, so I didn't get much chance of catching on. But Bobby Sebright's out to do the thing thoroughly. Seems to me he can't do better than come straight through here and stop till his time's up. Druminawona's just Ireland done up in a small parcel. What isn't in Druminawona isn't Ireland."

Mrs. Dann seemed to expect either an answer to her speech or some applause. Mr. Mervyn supplied a feeble assent.

"That may very well be so," he said. "I shouldn't be in the least surprised if it were."

"You tell Delia what I say anyway," said Mrs. Dann. "The thought of Bobby Sebright will keep her from moping. The streams of Dove are real poetical, Phil, and I'm not undervaluing Wordsworth, but it seems to me a girl might get moped mighty quick in Druminawona."

Mr. Mervyn rose. He wanted to go home and think quietly about his sister-in-law. He felt startled and bewildered. The shock of further plain speaking would be too much for him. Mrs. Dann misunderstood his action.

"My, Phil!" she said, "you are in a hurry. Delia will wait a while without taking cold. You needn't tell her about Bobby Sebright for a bit yet. Sit down again."

Mr. Mervyn did so without attempting to explain that he did not intend to speak to Delia about Bobby Sebright.

"Bobby's what we call a hustler," said Mrs. Dann. "When he comes along he'll want to speed up this place. It would do with a little speeding up. Seems to me as if nobody had got a move on anything in Druminawona since a few years before the Flood. That's the charm of the locality; but I'm not sure that Bobby will quite

appreciate it. Come to think of it, I'm not sure that I'd care for it myself as a permanency unless I'd made up my mind to die. Druminawona is the best place I've run across yet for a peaceable death."

"Yes," said Mr. Mervyn seriously. "I've often felt that when my time comes—and it can't be very far off now—"

He paused. He thought of the quiet corner of his churchyard, a place where a thorn-tree grew and bore a mass of pink blossom in springtime. His eyes grew dreamily dim. For many years death had seemed to him no more than a quiet kind of release from the responsibility of living.

"What the place wants," said Mrs. Dann, "is boosting. The inhabitants have got into the habit of lying down under it without kicking. I don't say that's not natural enough in Druminawona. Anybody would be inclined to do the same with a five-syllabled name like that hatching on top of him all day long. But it's not right, Phil. It doesn't do to get left in a siding. What you've got to do is boost a bit."

"Boost?" said Mr. Mervyn feebly.

The word was new to him. He was not sure that he knew exactly what it meant, though he suspected that Bobby Sebright, who was described as a hustler, was likely to be an expert in the art of boosting.

"I'm not sure that I quite understand—Boost!"

"I don't know that I can explain the idea to you right off. You haven't got the thing over this side, specially in Druminawona. So it's not to be expected that you'd have the word. It means to kind of swell yourselves out about the chest and gas a bit about the way you have the upper grip on the rest of creation. A first-rate booster figures to trample down circumstances that get interfering with the proper working out of the eternal

destiny of a mighty race; sort of brush them off the track without losing grip on the rails. You catch me, Phil, don't you?"

"I think I'm beginning to," said Mr. Mervyn.

"I'll help you all I can," said Mrs. Dann, "and when Bobby comes along we'll make him lecture on 'Man the Unwearied Striver and the Path to the Far-off Mountain Top.'"

Mr. Mervyn smiled faintly. He had long ago given up strife of every kind. He did not think that any one in Druminawona cared much for the mountain tops.

"Delia will admire him some when she hears him," said Mrs. Dann, "and he'll take to Delia right away."

Mr. Mervyn rose again. This time he was quite determined to go. He disliked the idea of being goaded on to boost by Bobby Sebright. He still more disliked Mrs. Dann's cheery plans for his daughter's future. It seemed to him indecent to assume that Delia would fall in love with a young man the moment she saw him.

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Dann stopped abruptly and clutched her brother-in-law's arm. On the gravel sweep Biddy was standing in an easy attitude between the shafts of the phaeton. Her head drooped towards her knees. The reins hung loose on her back. Æneas Sweeny, his pipe in his mouth, was lying back in Mr. Mervyn's seat. There was nothing about him to excite the surprise of any one accustomed to his ways. Mr. Mervyn supposed that it was the pony which had attracted Mrs. Dann's attention.

"That's Biddy," he said with some pride, "my pony. She's very intelligent and a great pet of mine."

"I wasn't referring at that moment to the quadruped," said Mrs. Dann, "though now I come to look at her she strikes me as being pretty well in keeping with Druminawona. She wants speeding up a bit before she will be able to sit for her portrait as a four-footed courser of the Arabian sands. What brought me up short when considering the landscape wasn't so much Biddy as Judas Iscariot."

She pointed to Æneas Sweeny as she spoke. He slipped his pipe into his pocket, slouched sideways out of the phaeton, and touched his hat, grinning amiably.

"It's proud and pleased I am," he said, "to be bidding your ladyship welcome to Druminawona. His Reverence is after telling me that it's America you come from. There's a brother of my own out those parts, living with an uncle in a place they call Pittsburg; and Father Roche was telling me 'ere yesterday of a cousin he has that's a priest in Chicago. Indeed I wouldn't say but there isn't one in the place but has friends more or less out where you come from. And it's a warm welcome the people will give you and pleased they'll be to see you."

Mrs. Dann ignored this speech. She seemed highly excited and addressed a vehement explanation to Mr. Mervyn.

"Nathan P. Dann," she said, "wasn't what you'd call a first-rate believer in religion. I don't know that I ever struck a creed that he'd have been willing to say right through without clearing his throat. But he wasn't a bed-rock atheist. There was one religious notion that had a powerful hold on his intellect. He had it fixed up that the Irish people are the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. There were two shelves of books in his bedroom that proved it. Seemed a foolish idea to me and one that didn't matter much any way. I just thought he was a bit cracked about it. Seems to me now that I misjudged him some. He'd more sense than I gave him credit for. Look at that man!"

Mr. Mervyn looked at Æneas Sweeny. Æneas himself seemed blandly unconscious of anything peculiar in his appearance. He knew that Mrs. Dann was talking about him, but he gave no sign that he was either pleased or annoyed.

"If his mother," said Mrs. Dann, "wasn't a great-granddaughter of Judas Iscariot, I reckon his father must have been the great-grandson of that patriarch. I've studied Italian art quite a bit and attended two courses of lectures on the Old Masters. I'd recognise the face anywhere."

Mr. Mervyn looked at Æneas with fresh interest.

"His beard is red," he said, "very red."

"If it would be pleasing to your ladyship," said Æneas, "to be taking a bit of a drive along by the river where them big ferns do be growing, there's nothing to hinder my bringing up the pony at any time that your ladyship would appoint. It's little use his Reverence makes of her," he added, as a kind of afterthought, "and it's as good for Miss Delia to be walking as driving. She's young, and has a fine pair of legs under her."

"Look at his eyes," said Mrs. Dann. "It's not his

hair I'm going by so much as his eyes. If there are many more people like him in this locality, Phil, I'll do a little original research along the lines of that notion of Nathan P.'s."

Mr. Mervyn pulled himself together with an effort and said a decided good-bye to his sister-in-law. He got into the phaeton and took the reins. Æneas Sweeny settled himself cautiously on the rickety back seat. Biddy lifted her head and looked round to see that everything was ready for a start and then trotted quietly down the avenue.

"Your Reverence——" said Æneas at last.

Mr. Mervyn took no notice of the appeal. He had forgotten Æneas and Judas Iscariot. He was not thinking of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. His mind was entirely occupied with the idea of boosting Druminawona. It seemed to him very horrible that he should be called upon to boost. He found some little comfort in the thought that it would be difficult to get the people of Druminawona to join in the effort. Without the co-operation and hearty approval of Father Roche, the parish priest, it would scarcely be possible to start the thing at all. Mr. Mervyn did not think the priest would approve of anything of the kind. He tried to picture a scene in which he and Father Roche would boost together for the edification of their parishioners. His imagination reeled. But Mrs. Dann was evidently a woman of great force of character. She would quite easily overpower him. She might in the end compel Father Roche. They would neither of them like it.

"I beg your Reverence's pardon,——" said Æneas again.

Mr. Mervyn did not hear him. He was thinking that Sergeant Ginty, of the Royal Irish Constabulary, would certainly approve of the boosting. The sergeant was a lean, cold-hearted man, full of contempt for Drumina-

wona. He was a native of Portadown, and he despised Connacht. Twenty-five years' service in County Galway had softened the harshness of his northern speech, but had only intensified his admiration for the bustling ways of Ulster. Sergeant Ginty was hopelessly out of touch with the spirit of Druminawona. It is part of the plan for the good government of Ireland that the police should, as far as possible, be aliens in the places where they live. Having enlisted a recruit in Kerry and trained him carefully in Dublin, the authorities set him down in some corner of County Antrim. The object is to prevent the possibility of any sympathy between the people and the law; and, as a rule, the system is entirely successful. Sergeant Ginty in Druminawona was a fine example of its working.

Mr. Mervyn had no doubt that once back in Portadown the sergeant would boost spontaneously and well. By contemplating the sergeant he arrived at a certain understanding of the meaning of the word.

Biddy trotted on. Æneas leaned forward cautiously and spoke into his master's ear.

"Your Reverence, sir,——" he said.

Mr. Mervyn's mind had passed from the subject of boosting. He was troubled by the thought of Bobby Sebright and his marriage with Delia. The prospect was singularly distasteful to him. Mrs. Dann had hinted that Bobby Sebright was a hustler. Mr. Mervyn felt quite sure that he could never really like any one who hustled. Delia might. He admitted the possibility with regret. It was possible that Delia herself might learn to hustle. She would almost certainly wear smart frocks if she could get them. He thought with regret of a transformed Delia, a daughter hopelessly lost to him.

Æneas, despairing of attracting his master's attention by mere speech, leaned forward again and shook him by the arm.

"Well, Æneas," said Mr. Mervyn, "what is it?"

"I wouldn't like to be speaking in any way that would be disrespectful to a lady that's a near friend of your Reverence's," said Æneas.

"I'm sure you wouldn't," said Mr. Mervyn.

"And, of course, I know well that she doesn't mean the half of what she says. It would be a queer thing if she did, but she doesn't. That sort likes to be funning, and small blame to them."

"I wish I could agree with you about that," said Mr. Mervyn. "I wish I could."

"She has a kind heart," said Æneas, "and she's one that would be good to the poor."

This had not struck Mr. Mervyn; but he had no contradictions to urge. He said that he agreed with Æneas.

"It's no more than what I'd expect," said Æneas, "in any one that would be a near friend of your Reverence, let alone that you could tell it by the two eyes she has, and them twinkling like stars."

Mrs. Dann had been greatly impressed by the appearance of Æneas Sweeny. It seemed that he had been equally impressed by hers. Biddy, who had been walking very slowly for some time, stopped altogether, and began to eat the grass which grew at the roadside. Mr. Mervyn made no effort to make her go on again. He was interested in Æneas' estimate of Mrs. Dann's character.

"She's the kind of lady," said Æneas, "who'll be wanting to do something, be the same more or less, for the advantage of the people of the district where she would be living, whether it might be Druminawona or the continent of America."

Mr. Mervyn recognised the truth of this; but he was not pleased. Mrs. Dann seemed to him over-anxious to benefit Druminawona. He woke to the fact that Biddy was eating grass. He chucked at the reins decisively and made a clicking noise with the corners of his mouth.

Biddy was a pony with a conscience. She had resented the way in which Mr. Mervyn had hit her with a whip earlier in the afternoon because she felt that the blow was unjust. She displayed no anger when her head was pulled ruthlessly up from the pleasant grass because she knew that she ought not to be eating grass. She trotted on obediently.

"I'd be the last man in Ireland," said Æneas, "to be vexed at anything that the like of her would say, knowing well that she'd mean no harm by it, whatever it might be."

Mr. Mervyn was far from being able to attain this mood of high charity. He was ready to admit that Mrs. Dann might not mean any harm by what she said. He was very much afraid that, without meaning it, she might do a great deal. He explained this at some length to Æneas.

"That's just what I'm after saying myself," said Æneas. "It's little she thinks of the trouble that might come of the name she's after putting on me. I wouldn't mind it coming from her. And I wouldn't mind it from your Reverence, or Miss Delia, if so be you was to be amusing yourselves by saying it. But it's a name I wouldn't like to get about the place. Sergeant Ginty beyond there in the barrack has a terrible spite against me, and them three young lads of his would take a delight in shouting the like of that name after me, and me going down the street. It could be——"

Æneas' voice sank to a whisper, and Mr. Mervyn knew that he was getting at the heart of his grievance.

"It could be that some time or another, when I had a drop too much taken—and that's what might happen to any man—unless maybe to your Reverence—I'd strike one of them lads in a way that would make a cripple of him. I needn't be telling your Reverence of the way the sergeant would be acting then. I'd be ashamed, so

I would, and me in prison, of the disgrace I'd been the means of bringing on yourself and Miss Delia."

Biddy turned in at the rectory gate. Æneas, realising that his time was short, came rapidly to the point at which he had been aiming.

"If your Reverence would speak a word to her," he said, "so that she wouldn't be saying the like when anybody'd be listening, I'd be obliged to you."

Before Mr. Mervyn was able to make any promise Delia burst from the rectory door and ran to meet him.

"Well," she said breathlessly, "tell me all about her! What's she like?"

"The grandest ever you seen," said Æneas, "with gold and silver hanging round her the same as pots and kettles on a tinker."

"She seems very nice and kind," said Mr. Mervyn, "and very—very full of life."

"I'm sure I'm glad to hear it," said Delia. "It's time somebody alive came to Druminawona."

Mr. Mervyn sighed. He foresaw that Bobby Sebright would also be alive.

"She has a great way with her," said Æneas, "you'd wonder to see the two hands of her going this way and that, and her talking like it might be the shuttle of old Danny the weaver when he'd be making the tweed."

"Is that true, father?" said Delia.

"She does—I hardly like to say—gesticulate!" said Mr. Mervyn. "She emphasises what she has to say with her hands."

"And them ringing like little bells," said Æneas.

"How lovely!" said Delia. "I thought only French people did that. What's her name?"

"Sarah," said Mr. Mervyn, "and, I fancy, Mary."

Delia did not seem at all pleased. She knew that her aunt's initials were "S. M." She had hoped for something more striking than Sarah Mary. Salome, perhaps.

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ing-room for tea. She had often heard the story of the man who spent fifty-five years in New York and then came home to die. He remembered nothing about the religion taught him in his youth except the fact that " In a vale in the land of Moab there stands a lonely grave." The words, he said, had been a great comfort to him all his life.

CHAPTER IV

SUNDAY morning was very fine. Mr. Mervyn stood at the window and looked out. The nearer hills were brilliantly green. The spring had almost entirely repaired the harsh brown scars which the winter torrents had scored on their sides. The distant mountains showed as masses of dim violet colour, waiting for the midday heat to deepen into glowing purple. The river lay like a twisted shining band along the valley. A deep peace was over all the land. Mr. Mervyn gazed, and the calm possessed him, a great untroubled kind of joy.

Delia stood at the breakfast table and poured water into the teapot. She set a boiled egg beside her father's plate. She cut slices of bread from a flat home-made loaf. Then she waited. She knew very well what would happen next. Mr. Mervyn was one of the few men who have read right through, and read many times, Wordsworth's longer poems. It was his habit to make quotations, more or less appropriate, from "The Prelude" or "The Excursion" on all possible occasions. There were two lines which he invariably cited on fine Sundays. It was for those that Delia waited. Mr. Mervyn produced them at last, turning from the window to the breakfast table. He said them again as he cracked his egg. A really brilliant Sunday morning deserved this double recognition:

> "To you each evening hath its shining star
> And every Sabbath day its golden sun."

Delia received the quotation with every appearance of pleasure. She was a dutiful girl and she had a real

affection for her father. Therefore she smiled sympathetically when he said the lines. In her heart she disliked them very much; partly because she had heard them a great many times, and partly because they struck her as quite untrue. The suns of her Sabbath days were not golden; because it was her duty on Sundays to instruct the three sons of Sergeant Ginty in the Church Catechism and certain passages of Holy Scripture. These three boys formed the Sunday School of Mr. Mervyn's parish. There were, of course, other children growing up in Druminawona, but their parents preferred the ministrations of Father Roche and regarded the Church Catechism as a dangerously heretical document. Delia was very glad that they took this view. The three Ginty boys were enough for her.

They came to the church a little before eleven with shining faces and aggressively clean collars. Delia led them to a large square pew near the pulpit and set them in a row in front of her. For half an hour she impressed on them the duties of Christian people whilst they wiped their boots on the front of her skirt. The seat on which they sat was too high for them. Their legs dangled from it without reaching the ground. There was therefore every excuse for restlessness; but Delia, who disliked being dirty, scolded them occasionally. At the other end of the church an aged woman, playing the part of sexton and bell-ringer, tugged at the bell-rope during the half-hour. The clang of the bell, occurring at regular intervals, often drowned the voices of the young Gintys, and made it very hard for Delia to hear such answers as they gave to her questions.

At twenty-five minutes past eleven Sergeant Ginty entered the church and took over control of his family. He moved them to another pew half-way down the church and warned them in an impressive whisper of the unseemliness of conversation. Delia brushed the dust from her

skirt for the last time and crossed to the opposite side of the church. There she sat down in front of the harmonium and began to play. The congregation, some five-and-twenty people in all, began to dribble in. The old woman stopped pulling the bell-rope, and wiped her forehead with the corner of her shawl. Mr. Mervyn emerged from the vestry-room, Delia pulled out two stops and pressed hard against the knee swell of her instrument. She had once attended a cathedral service in Dublin, and had heard the organist greet the procession of choir and clergy with a mighty outburst of sound. She was a girl with a strong sense of dramatic fitness. She did her best to welcome her father to the reading-desk with chords of triumph. Mr. Mervyn read prayers and lessons in a thin quavering voice. The people muttered or whispered their responses. The time for singing a hymn arrived. Delia sang it, accompanying herself on the harmonium. The congregation stood up and watched her solemnly. This time an unexpected thing happened. Another voice joined hers in the middle of the first verse. Delia thrilled nervously and almost lost her place in the music. The congregation turned round and looked at the audacious stranger who sat near the door. Delia could not look round, but she knew that the singer could be no one but her aunt. In the second verse of the hymn Mrs. Dann forsook the treble part and supported Delia with a clear resonant alto. The congregation looked round again. Singing of this independent kind was new in Druminawona. Delia became excessively nervous, and, with her aunt's voice in her ears failed to sustain her own part. In the third verse Mrs. Dann took pity on her and went back again to the treble.

When the service was over Delia played her harmonium again while the congregation left the church. She hurried this final tune a little because she feared that if she made it too long her aunt would have escaped. She need

not have been anxious. Mrs. Dann was waiting for her in the porch. The rest of the congregation stood in a group outside the church. Mrs. Dann was addressing them.

"Where I come from," she said, "I'm not reckoned to be much of a vocalist, but if I lived in Druminawona I'd be a top-note prima donna. I never came in among a crowd that fancied its own singing less than you do. Why can't you give out some kind of a noise if it was only to make that harmonium of yours sound less silly?"

Then she turned and saw Delia.

"You're Delia," she said, "sure."

She kissed her niece heartily. Sergeant Ginty sniffed.

"I'm your aunt Sally May," said Mrs. Dann, "and I admire you quite a bit. I don't know that I ever met any one before who'd go on singing when nobody else would take the trouble to join in. I've just been giving your folks a kind of little appendix to the sermon. Your papa, Delia, is too good for them. His religion is right away up, and I set a value on it. But the congregation isn't on the same level. They haven't got beyond the Ten Commandments. If they had they'd sing."

Sergeant Ginty sniffed again. Then he collected his three small boys, who were staring at Mrs. Dann, and marched them off towards the gate of the churchyard. He did not approve of Mrs. Dann's flippant treatment of sacred subjects. She did not strike him as the kind of woman who would be respected or liked in Portadown.

"My! Delia," said Mrs. Dann, "who's that?"

"He's the sergeant of the police," said Delia. "His name is Ginty."

"I was studying him in church," said Mrs. Dann, "and I made dead sure his name was Ananias."

"Ananias!" said Delia.

"Or Caiaphas—Ananias and Caiaphas the High

Priests. Those two men always did get mixed up in my mind. But if he isn't one of them he's the other."

"Annas," said Delia. She had profited by the lessons she gave to Sergeant Ginty's boys, and she knew that Annas and Ananias, though both undesirable characters, were different men.

"I'm no good at all when it comes to names," said Mrs. Dann, "but that policeman is just a Jewish High Priest. I'd know him anywhere from his portraits in the works of the Old Masters. I expect your papa told you that I'm interested in the Lost Tribes of Israel. It was your poor uncle that taught me the importance of the subject."

"No," said Delia; "Father didn't tell me that."

"He would have told you sure," said Mrs. Dann, "if he got a proper grip on the notion. But I somehow suspected he hadn't caught on. Your papa's a dear, Delia, and I love him. I'd hug him any day he expressed the wish. But he's not what I call prompt at catching on. I expect you're better. You're poor Nathan's own niece, so you're sure to be. Nathan P. Dann had his faults, and there wasn't a man or woman in New York knew what they were better than I did, but I'd never say that he wasn't slick. You take after him, sure. You haven't had his chances so far. There's not much to catch on to in Druminawona. If there was you'd be on it, frozen tight. Just you wait, Delia. The world's going to move round a bit now I'm here."

Mrs. Dann looked round as if to challenge the immobile world of Druminawona. She noticed that the congregation was slipping away by twos and threes, making for the churchyard gate by various paths among the tombstones. She also noticed that everybody seemed amused and pleased.

"The crowd," said Mrs. Dann, "is kind of melting. What's frightened them?"

"I expect," said Delia, "that they all want to get home to tell their friends that you called Sergeant Ginty Ananias. The sergeant isn't very popular in the place."

"That so? Well, we may as well be getting a move on too. I suppose your papa will follow us."

Mr. Mervyn was in fact lurking in the vestry-room. He did not want to have another interview with Mrs. Dann, because he feared that she might bring up the subject of boosting, or speak with offensive directness about Delia's marriage. His plan was to keep sanctuary until Mrs. Dann was well on her way home. He watched her and Delia reach the road together. Mrs. Dann took Delia by the arm and turned her slowly round.

"I reckon," she said, "that I'd better cable right off for a selection of new frocks for you, Delia. That shirt waist you have on might have been up to date fifty years ago. It's a back number now."

Delia flushed uncomfortably.

"It's the best one I've got," she said, "if you mean my blouse."

"You call them blouses on this side. I'll remember that when I get on the cable. What's the best ladies' outfitter in London?"

"In London! I don't know."

"I'll tell my banker to send my message right through to the best man and get over a complete trousseau for you to sample. Bobby Sebright's coming over. Your papa told you that?"

"No, he didn't."

"I've very little use for your papa as a messenger," said Mrs. Dann. "I told him to let you know about Bobby. I reckoned the news would cheer you up. Bobby's not an expert on fashions. That's not his department on the paper; but I never met a man yet who wasn't put off by a dowd."

Delia was excited and pleased when her aunt spoke of

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"That's modesty," said Mrs. Dann, "and modesty is a thing I simply adore. So will Bobby Sebright. He's New York right through to the marrow of his backbone, so he'll admire modesty for sure. He doesn't see enough of it to tire him—here's your papa now, so we'd better not talk about frills any more. He'll want something more appropriate for Sunday."

Mr. Mervyn had come through the churchyard gate. Very much to his surprise he found himself within a few yards of Mrs. Dann. He had allowed her time enough to walk a long distance from the church. He could not have guessed that she would have stopped in the middle of the road to plan new dresses for Delia.

"Phil," said Mrs. Dann, turning cheerfully to a subject of conversation suitable for Sunday, "that church of yours is a one-horse show. I'd like you to see the sacred edifice that Nathan P. Dann built for Bobby Sebright's papa. It was a pretty big cheque that went through when it was finished. There were nineteen angels, life-size, in groups of three, with the odd one in the middle over the door, ranged out along the west front facing the street. Every one of them is playing Hallelujah on a different kind of musical instrument. They're done in white marble after the original designs of Fra Angelico. My idea entirely. Nathan P. Dann never studied much in Italian art. Inside there are cherubim in stucco, coloured pink and brown, exact copies of Sir Joshua Reynolds', clouds and all complete."

"The effect must be very striking," said Mr. Mervyn politely.

"Refinement was what I aimed at," said Mrs. Dann. "And there's nothing in the way of refinement equal to the real English art. But what I aimed to do was to make the worshippers in that church kind of feel knit up with all the old English country rectories in red brick with virginia creepers on the walls, and fine plump deans

with ascetic faces reading the classical poets, and the mediæval dramatists of the church on shaven lawns under immemorial oaks. I've always been clean crazy about the Oxford Movement and the Catholic spirit. Seems to me Sir Joshua is just the man to express my feeling, so I had him copied straight down in stucco with the original colouring. I'd have had the child Samuel saying his prayers in his night-shirt as an altarpiece, but old Sebright kicked. He's a Baptist, and doesn't value altars."

"It must be a very remarkable church," said Mr. Mervyn, still polite.

"You bet. I don't say I can bring yours up to the same level, but I mean to try what can be done. Just you leave the matter to me, Phil. I'm cabling to London anyway for a complete fit-out for Delia. I'll tell my banker to put me on to a first-rate ecclesiastical contractor and we'll get over whatever fixings he happens to have in stock. My notion would be a reredos in alabaster and one of those brass birds that hold books. If we don't like what he sends us we can have others made to order."

"But," said Mr. Mervyn, "the expense—"

"Don't you fret about the expense," said Mrs. Dann. "Nathan P. Dann annexed quite a big box full of dollars. There'll be a lot of spending done before we'll see the bottom of it. I'll get you one of those mediæval copes, Phil. There's one I picked up in Nuremberg last time I was across, and I have it on the back of a piano. It's the cunningest thing I know in the way of embroidery, and if I can get one off the same piece for you, Phil, you'll look sweet."

Mr. Mervyn became seriously uneasy. The Church of Ireland has made the severest possible laws against the wearing of gorgeous vestments. Mr. Mervyn did not want to come into conflict with his bishop in an ecclesi-

astical court, nor did he wish to be entangled in a dispute with Sergeant Ginty. The sergeant was a Protestant of a most definite kind, and in Ireland the word Protestant really means something. It is pronounced everywhere through the country as if the first of its three "t"s were a "d." The English say the word as it is spelt. There is something more than a mere phonetic accident in the difference. The letter "d," as any one can discover by saying it, conveys a sense of explosive obstinacy which cannot be expressed by a mere "t." Take for instance the Englishman's favourite oath. "Damn" has some force about it. Change its initial "d" for a "t" and it becomes simply ladylike, a word which the gentlest spinster might use without offence. It is the same with Protestant. For the Englishman it has no fixed meaning at all. Ritualists use it about Nonconformists and hate having it used about themselves. Even the Nonconformists are beginning to be ashamed of it. In all probability the English will soon soften the "t" into "th" and lisp about Prothestants. In Ireland no Protestant is the least shy of the word. He pronounces it "Prodestant," and if there were a harder and more decisive letter in the alphabet than "d" he would use it at the end of the first syllable.

Sergeant Ginty, born and brought up in Portadown, where the Pope was not well spoken of, was a Protestant in the full Irish sense of the word. He would view an alabaster reredos with horror and would almost certainly disapprove of a brass bird in church. Mr. Mervyn hardened his heart and spoke with unusual firmness.

"I can't," he said, "I really can't wear a cope."

"Theophilus," said Mrs. Dann, "you're making me tired."

Mr. Mervyn felt the full weight of the rebuke. He had been warned that the use of his name in its unab-

breviated form would be a sign of Mrs. Dann's anger. But he stuck to his point.

"And a reredos wouldn't do here," he said. "It really wouldn't, because—the truth is that I don't want a reredos."

Mrs. Dann's ill-humour vanished at once.

"If you don't want the fixings, Phil," she said, "I'll not get them. They'd have been good for you. You'd have improved in spirit when you saw yourself parading round in that mediæval cope. You'd have swelled out and been a bigger man. But if you'd rather not I'll not say another word. I wasn't twenty-five years married to Nathan P. Dann without learning a thing or two. When he said he didn't want to go messing about the city in a chest protector I didn't speak another word. I just 'phoned off to the doc' and told him to get ready his cough mixture. It's about the same with you and that cope, Phil. It would have been good for you; but you don't want it, so I won't fuss."

Mr. Mervyn felt that his refusal had been ungracious. He tried to explain to his sister-in-law that if left to himself he would wear a cope and kneel before a reredos in order to give her pleasure, that he had no personal objection to the ornaments; but that the Church to which he belonged, possessed by a spirit of rigid Puritanism, frowned upon them. His statement was confused. He repeated himself frequently. He stammered apologies. Mrs. Dann listened to him with puzzled wonder. At last her face lit up with understanding. She interrupted him.

"Don't you say another word, Phil," she said. "You're quite right, and I just hate myself for being stupid. What you feel is that these surroundings"—she waved her hand towards the mountains and the river—"with the works of nature right here all the time, there would be a kind of meretricious vulgarity about angels

with long trumpets. I see that now, Phil, and I thank you for pointing it out. What's this that your favourite poet says about plain living and high thinking? That's what you aim at, Phil, in your church; and you're right. Those little cherubims are all right in Fifth Avenue, but they'd be out of place here. You have the true artist's soul, Phil, and that's the fact."

For so gracious a speech Mr. Mervyn could feel nothing but gratitude. He invited his sister-in-law to return with him to the rectory and have luncheon. Greatly to his relief she refused the invitation. But she had not quite done with him.

"Delia," she said, "you run along and get your papa's dinner for him. I'll send him after you in a minute or two when I've done speaking to him."

Delia could not ignore so plain a command. She walked on slowly, and so Mrs. Dann took her brother-in-law by the arm and whispered to him.

"Delia's a dear," she said. "Bobby Sebright will be struck the minute he sets eyes on her, and I'll tell him that he's just got to marry her straight away and take her out of this. Druminawona is no place for a girl with eyes like one of those brown reproductions of the masterpieces of the artist Greuze."

"But," said Mr. Mervyn, "Delia hasn't been brought up in that way."

"I know that. You've reared her on high brow culture and refinement. Bobby'll have to polish up a bit, and that's a fact. But he'll do it, Phil. Bobby's a young man who'd do a lot for a girl like Delia. Just you wait and see."

Delia had not gone far along the road. She had made no attempt to reach the rectory before her father. He found her, after he had parted from Mrs. Dann, seated on a low wall, waiting for him.

"Father," she said, "who's Bobby Sebright?"

Mr. Mervyn hesitated. He might have replied, "Your future husband." But he shrank from putting Delia in what seemed to him an awkward position.

"He's a young man," he said at last, feebly.

"Is Aunt Sally May very 'fond of him?"

"She must be, I think," said Mr. Mervyn.

"Do you think he'll be nice—really nice, I mean?"

Mr. Mervyn confidently expected that he would not be nice. He hesitated again.

"Anyhow it doesn't matter," said Delia. "He won't be here long. Did Aunt Sally May tell you that she's going to get me a lot of new clothes?"

"I hope they'll be suitable," said Mr. Mervyn, "I shouldn't like to see you—"

Delia tossed her head.

"If they don't suit me I won't wear them," she said. "But I don't see why I should go on being a dowd—"

"A what, Delia?"

"A dowd. Aunt Sally May said I was a dowd. And I don't see why I should be if I get the chance of wearing pretty frocks. I like Aunt Sally May awfully. She's what I call a real good sort."

CHAPTER V

THE Psalmist complained that when he laboured for peace other people made themselves ready for battle. Mr. Mervyn was fond of quoting this verse and Delia was nearly as tired of it as she was of Wordsworth's lines. Circumstances were for ever suggesting it. Outsiders, Mrs. Dann, for instance, accustomed to the fume and fret of a great city, invariably supposed that peace was, if anything, too easily attainable in Druminawona. The place seemed to promise, to Mr. Mervyn certainly, almost excessive peace. He had about fifty parishioners. He had only one child and he lived strictly within his income. Yet he considered himself a harassed and a worried man.

It is recorded of one of the Egyptian hermits of the fourth century that he retired to an absolutely solitary corner of a remote desert in search of peace, and did not find it. The rustling of the reeds which grew near his cell became intolerable to him. No doubt, had the winds stopped blowing, the persistent activity of the sun, which will keep on rising and setting, would have got on his nerves—so difficult is the attainment of perfect peace.

Mr. Mervyn had more than the reeds and sun to complain of. His fifty parishioners had fifty different annoyances in their lives which Mr. Mervyn shared with them. At least twenty-five of them had grievances as well—grievances against the Government, the Land Commissioners, the Congested Districts Board, the County Council, and other bodies difficult to get at. They one and all held that Mr. Mervyn ought to have restrained the evil-doers. Sometimes they felt they had been un-

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"She was there at the time," said the sergeant, "and she heard the language that was used."

"What language?" said Mr. Mervyn.

"Ananias!" said the sergeant. "Ananias" was the word used.

Delia smothered a spasmodic laugh.

"She meant Annas," she said. "She told me so afterwards."

"Who?" asked Mr. Mervyn. "Who said that? I don't understand."

"Aunt Sally May," said Delia, "said the sergeant looked like Ananias, but she meant Annas—she really did."

"Is she a Protestant?" said the sergeant.

"She is," said Mr. Mervyn—"I rather think she's a Baptist. Her husband built a church in New York."

"If she'd been a Papist," said the sergeant, "I wouldn't have said a word about it. They're an ignorant lot, and you can't expect better from them. But if she's any kind of a Protestant she'd know rightly the kind of man that Ananias was."

"It was Caiaphas she had in mind," said Delia. "She got confused about the name."

"Any way," said the sergeant, "it was Ananias she said, and there's plenty will swear to that. I'm going to take an action against her for defamation of character."

"Don't do that," said Mr. Mervyn. "It'll only lead to trouble."

"But I will. I was brought up decent and respectable. I've lived decent and respectable, keeping myself to myself and mixing with no one. It's a poor thing if I'm to be called Ananias to my face, and that within three feet of the church my children was baptized in."

"Think it over until to-morrow," said Mr. Mervyn.

"I've more respect for the Sabbath day," said Sergeant Ginty, "than to be profaning it by going to law on it. I

wish there was others," he added bitterly, "that had any regard for it at all."

"I'll speak to her about the matter to-morrow morning," said Mr. Mervyn. "I'm sure there's some mistake which can be cleared up quite easily."

"There's no mistake," said the sergeant, "and there's no use talking to the like of her."

"I'm sure she will express her regret," said Mr. Mervyn. "She wouldn't hurt your feelings willingly. She means to be kind to every one."

"It's a curious way she takes of showing it, then," said the sergeant.

Then Delia broke into the conversation.

"Sergeant," she said, "I'm sorry to tell you that Tommy didn't know his catechism this morning."

This was quite true. It had been true every Sunday since Tommy first began to learn the catechism. But Delia did not say it with any desire of effecting an improvement in the boy. She hoped to divert the sergeant's anger to a fresh victim. It was better that Tommy should suffer in the flesh than that her father should be worried in mind.

"Only for what happened to-day," said the sergeant, "I'd leather the catechism into Tommy with my belt. But, if I was to strike a blow at him now, he'd cast it up in my teeth that the strange woman at the church called me Ananias. I'm afeard to look my own son in the face, much less beat him as he should be beat."

This confession of fear recalled to Mr. Mervyn's mind the conversation he had had with Æneas Sweeny. He, too, had been afraid of the young Gintys.

"It's a very curious thing," he said. "That's almost exactly the feeling that Sweeny has."

"What feelings has Sweeny?" said the sergeant.

"He's afraid of your boys."

"It's the first time I ever heard of Æneas Sweeny

being afraid of anything," said the sergeant. "It's a good thing if somebody would drive terror into him. He wants it."

"Mrs. Dann happened to say yesterday, in his hearing—"

"If the lady called him Ananias," said the sergeant, "there'd be some sense in it, for a bigger liar than Æneas Sweeny—"

His feelings towards Mrs. Dann were becoming more respectful. He had called her "the woman up at the church." He now admitted that she was a lady. He very much disliked Æneas Sweeny.

"What she called him," said Mr. Mervyn, "was Judas Iscariot."

"She was right enough there," said the sergeant, "and I wouldn't wonder but the young lads, as soon as they hear it, will cast it up to him and shout it after him when he's going along the street. I wouldn't blame them."

"That's just what Æneas is afraid of," said Mr. Mervyn.

Sergeant Ginty's anger began to give way to a feeling of satisfaction.

"It's a name that'll stick to him," he said. "There isn't one about the place but will call it to him."

"I hope not," said the rector.

"They will. Don't I know them?" The sergeant chuckled grimly. He found great pleasure in the thought that his boys, and no doubt others with them, would bait Æneas Sweeny day after day.

"The best thing," said Mr. Mervyn, "is to say nothing about either name. I'll speak to Mrs. Dann about it, and I hope, sergeant, that you'll warn your boys—"

"I'll welt Tommy anyway," said the sergeant. "He'll be sorry before he has his dinner ate that he didn't know his 'ghostly enemy' when he was asked for it."

This was not exactly what Mr. Mervyn wanted. He

intended to expostulate. The sergeant saluted stiffly. Delia was pleased. Tommy had wiped his boots on her dress persistently. He had even kicked her several times.

"Delia," said Mr. Mervyn, as they went into the house together, "I wonder if your aunt will stay here long."

"I hope so," said Delia. "I like her, and she seems very kind."

"There can't be much for her to do in a place like this," said Mr. Mervyn. "I should be sorry to lose her at once, but—"

"She's sure to stay till Mr. Sebright comes," said Delia hopefully, "and I think she's quite able to find occupation for herself."

Mr. Mervyn and Delia sat down together to a very frugal dinner. The income of the rector of Druminawona is so small that only the cheapest kind of maid-servant can be hired. Onny Donovan was paid 8*l.* a year. You cannot expect competence or devotion to duty for such a sum. On weekdays, Onny was wonderfully forgetful and rarely did anything unless Delia watched her do it. On Sundays she did not even profess to do anything after breakfast. It was understood that she went to Mass at ten o'clock. This she always did. It was also understood that after Mass she went home to see her mother. This she very seldom did, because there was a young man, called Jamesy Casey, who attracted her more than her mother did. Jamesy Casey was in the service of Father Roche; so there was a flavour of sanctity about Onny's love affair. Delia knew all about it. She made no attempt to interfere, and allowed Onny to spend her Sundays as she liked.

Delia's own Sunday mornings were spent in church; so the dinners eaten that day in the rectory were cooked on Saturday. They were therefore cold on Sundays, and there were no potatoes. The Irish people have never learned to like cold potatoes. They will not eat them

even when oil is poured over them and they are called salad. Mr. Mervyn was a man of quiet and philosophic mind. He said grace over a cold roast chicken and then quoted Wordsworth. There are quite a large number of passages in Wordsworth's poems which can be quoted appropriately about an unsatisfactory dinner. Mr. Mervyn knew them all. So did Delia. She hated them almost as much as she did the lines about the Sabbath sun. She was not inclined to grumble about having to eat cold chicken, though, in the West of Ireland, a chicken is an exceedingly lean fowl with no breast. She rebelled against being asked to believe that a poor dinner was food either for her soul or her mind. But it was only her heart that rebelled. Her father never suspected that she did not agree with Wordsworth.

A small salary is not, as a rule, preferred to a large one by any kind of man. But there are a few people in the world who are quite honestly thankful that their incomes are small so long as the amount of work expected from them is correspondingly light. Mr. Mervyn was paid no more than 180*l.* a year, which nowadays is reckoned a very small income—so small that even the income-tax collectors, a body of men very slow to give back anything, do not attempt to keep much of what they succeed, at first, in deducting from it. Many clergymen receive much larger stipends, but they are expected to do much more work than Mr. Mervyn. He would not willingly have changed places with any of them. He was a humble man and painfully aware that he did not do what he had to do very well. If he had more to do it seemed likely that he would fail altogether. He was also, owing no doubt to his fondness for reflective poetry, a wise man. It filled him with no envy to think that there were other clergymen, bustling archdeacons, or energetic rectors of large parishes, who received three or four times his salary. He knew that these men were

harassed with parochial organisations and an intolerable number of services on Sundays. They had better dinners than he did, no doubt, but they were forced to gorge themselves hastily. They had to rush forth, primed for fresh exertions, while chewing the last morsels of their feasts. Mr. Mervyn could eat his meals in peace. He remembered, and quite believed, what Solomon said about the advantages of a dinner of herbs. After dinner Mr. Mervyn could go to sleep.

He always went to sleep on Sunday afternoons. In his study he had a battered but very comfortable armchair. Delia had made him four cushions for it. He could sleep in that chair as soundly as in bed. In winter he drew it up before a large turf fire, stretched his feet out, balanced a book on his knees, and allowed his eyes to close. In summer, when the Sabbath days had golden suns, he set his chair beside the window. A mellow warmth flowed to him through the glass, and he slept easily. On those rare Sundays, occurring in the West of Ireland only twice or three times in the year, when the sun was really hot, Mr. Mervyn opened his window. Then his sleep was particularly sweet. The fresh air, and the scent of the roses which covered the house, soothed him. The murmur of the river, faintly heard, was a lullaby. Delia was always careful not to disturb him. She never entered the study on Sunday afternoons. She avoided walking on the gravel path outside the window.

Mrs. Dann was not so careful of his comfort. She paid a visit to the rectory at three o'clock. The hall-door stood open; so she walked in. She glanced into the dining-room and found it empty. She went along the narrow passage which led to the kitchen, and saw Delia washing plates. Delia washed the plates after dinner on Sunday because Onny Donovan was always too much exhausted by her interview with Jamesy Casey

to do anything when she came home. Delia, who was making a good deal of noise and stood with her back to the door, neither heard nor saw her aunt. Mrs. Dann withdrew softly. She went round the outside of the house and came to the study window. Mr. Mervyn was sleeping profoundly. The window was wide open. Mrs. Dann tapped sharply on a pane of glass with the point of her parasol. Mr. Mervyn awoke and blinked at her.

"Phil," she said, "you're preparing a sermon. There's no use denying it, for I saw you."

Mr. Mervyn was a man with a troublesome conscience. It at once insisted on telling him that he had not been preparing a sermon. It spoke with directness and vigour. His conscience was by far the most vigorous part of Mr. Mervyn.

"If you're through with it," said Mrs. Dann, "I'd like to have a talk with you."

Mr. Mervyn's conscience made itself highly objectionable.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that just at that moment I had dropped off into a doze."

"That's your modesty, Phil," said Mrs. Dann. "You had your eyes closed, but you were meditating. I know that, because poor Nathan always meditated at concerts. High-class music always set his mind working in that way."

No conscience in the world would have gone on trying to be disagreeable in the face of this reiterated statement. Mr. Mervyn's gave in gracefully, and allowed him to be silent about his sleep. Mrs. Dann perched on the window-sill.

"Phil," she said, "I've been thinking a bit since I left you this morning. It has come home to me that there ought to be money in those Ten Lost Tribes. I might have known there was when poor Nathan tangled himself up in them. Nathan hadn't any use for notions with no

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she was incredibly, appallingly, in earnest. She actually intended to try to attract public attention to Druminawona in such a way as to bring money into the place. She intended to use her dead husband's crazy theories and her own fantastic discovery of the Jewish type in the faces of Sweeny and the sergeant in order to advertise the parish. Never in his life had Mr. Mervyn been so startled and horrified. Never had his mind worked so rapidly and with such decision as during the few moments before he replied to Mrs. Dann. He desired to discover some way of putting a stop to the absurd scheme.

Mr. Mervyn, though a Protestant, was a genuine Irishman. He had moreover lived for many years in Connacht, where Irishmen are more Irish than they are anywhere else.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that you won't be able to do anything unless the parish priest approves of the plan. You don't understand this country, but——"

Everybody in Ireland, at all events in the western part of it, says this about every proposal. You may wish to be an Urban District Councillor. The point to be settled is whether the priest does or does not approve of you as a candidate. You may be the paid agent of some body of philanthropists trying to organise a Society or a League. Your first business is to ask the assistance of the priest. You may be a Government official anxious to spend public money in buying towns for the benefit of the inhabitants. The priest is the person you approach. Or you may want something not to be done, an abuse left unrepressed, a law left unenforced. You speak to the parish priest and place your reliance on the conservative instinct of the true ecclesiastic.

Mr. Mervyn felt that he was on strong ground. Father Roche was elderly and very fat. He would almost certainly disapprove of a Miracle Play in Druminawona. Such a thing was open to every possible kind of

objection. It might set people thinking on religious subjects, which is dangerous. It might, since the subject of it was likely to be more or less biblical, lead to an irreverent intimacy with matters better left to the Church. Father Roche would appreciate these risks at once.

"That's so?" said Mrs. Dann cheerfully. "Let's go and see him right away."

"I really think you'd better not," said Mr. Mervyn. "I'm certain he'd disapprove of your idea very strongly."

"When I've made it clear to him," said Mrs. Dann, "that there's money in it, he'll catch on. Nathan P. Dann was no fool, Phil. He was as smart as any man in America; and he always said that there was one thing you could count on about all ministers of religion. They're in it every time if there's money to be got. You must take me round to see that priest."

"You won't want me," said Mr. Mervyn. "The presbytery is quite easy to find. You can't miss it. Go straight along the street of the village—"

"Theophilus," said Mrs. Dann, "you walk right in and get your hat."

Mr. Mervyn obeyed her. He could do nothing else when she addressed him as Theophilus, and there was in him a certain unaccustomed feeling of curiosity. He wanted to see how Father Roche would receive this masterful American lady.

The rectory and the presbytery stand, in Druminawona, at opposite ends of the village, and each is a little separated from the less sacred dwelling-places of the ordinary inhabitants of the place. It takes a vigorous man about ten minutes to walk from one house to the other. Sergeant Ginty, who is dignified, spends twelve minutes on the journey. Mr. Mervyn, because he is leisurely, and Father Roche, because he is unusually fat, take thirteen or fourteen minutes to do it. Mrs. Dann,

in spite of the heat, took her brother-in-law from his own door to that of the presbytery in eight minutes. She noted, as she went along, the various things in Druminawona which required "speeding up." There were a great many of them.

The door of the presbytery stood open because Father Roche's housekeeper had gone out to take tea with a friend. Mrs. Dann knocked and got no answer.

"We'll walk in," she said.

Mr. Mervyn laid a hand upon her arm. He was quite sure that Father Roche would not like a strange lady to walk into his house without warning. Mrs. Dann had no misgivings and no scruples. She entered the hall. Mr. Mervyn hung back, and sidled out a little towards the middle of the road. He wondered whether it would be possible for him to slip away altogether while Mrs. Dann was exploring the presbytery. She did not give him time to make up his mind. She stood on the threshold and beckoned to him with a merry smile. Mr. Mervyn joined her. She led him into the hall, walking on tiptoe and pressing a forefinger against her lips. From a half-open door on the right came an unmistakable sound of snoring.

"Seems to me," said Mrs. Dann, "that the priest prepares his sermons rather louder than you do, Phil."

Mr. Mervyn drew back hurriedly.

"We'd better go home," he said, "and call again some other day."

Mrs. Dann had no manners. She pushed open the door beside her and went very softly into the room. Father Roche lay on a hard and uncomfortable sofa, but he was fast asleep. He was a bald man and the flies had troubled him. A large yellow pocket-handkerchief was spread over his head. Mrs. Dann went very quietly out of the room again. She found that Mr. Mervyn had gone back to the street. She summoned him in a loud

clear voice and then banged on the door of the house with the handle of her parasol. She went on banging until Father Roche came to the door and stared at her. Mr. Mervyn tried to explain the situation.

"This is Mrs. Dann," he said. "She has taken Druminawona House for the present. She is my sister-in-law. She wishes to speak to you about—about a little matter she has in mind."

"She's welcome," said Father Roche, "and you're welcome, too, Mr. Mervyn. Come into the house, the two of you."

"I expect I rattled you some," said Mrs. Dann.

"She means—" said Mr. Mervyn, who felt that he was bound to act as interpreter.

"I know well enough what she means," said the priest. "I've a cousin that's out in Chicago this minute; but he was home last autumn, and I'm well accustomed to the way he talked. And as for surprising me, Mrs. Dann, or putting me out, by any hour of the day or the night you might come here, it would puzzle you to do that. I'm used to it."

He led the way into his sitting-room as he spoke. The yellow handkerchief lay on the sofa. Father Roche picked it up and slipped it into his pocket.

"Sit you down, now," he said, "and if you'll excuse me for one minute I'll run into the kitchen and see if Mrs. Deveril has the kettle boiling. It's a hot day and a cup of tea will do you good after your walk."

"If we're to have tea," said Mrs. Dann, "I'd better go and see after it myself."

"Is it you?" said the priest. "No, but you'll sit where you are. It'll be no trouble to Mrs. Deveril to wet it, if so be she has the kettle boiling. And if she hasn't it'll be the worse for her; for I've often told her that in a house like this tea might be wanted any minute."

He left the room as he spoke, and it was fully five minutes before he returned.

"Mrs. Deveril's out!" he said, "and I don't know how long it may be before the kettle's boiled. You'd think now that she'd have had enough of going out at her time of life, but she hasn't seemingly. Believe me or not, Mr. Mervyn, but that woman's upwards of sixty years of age this minute, and after burying two husbands and eight children (as well as four that she has in America) you'd think after that she'd have learned to content herself without running off at all hours of the day. But that's the way with all of them, begging your pardon, Mrs. Dann, for saying it; but I never met a woman yet would rest quiet unless it would be in her coffin. I'm sorry now that I can't give you a cup of tea."

CHAPTER VI

"IF you've a cousin in Chicago," said Mrs. Dann, "I expect he'll have told you that there's a pile of money going to waste in Druminawona because no one will take the trouble to pick it up."

Father Roche was not greatly astonished at this. He had heard very much the same thing before, though not quite so emphatically stated. Every one with a plan for the regeneration of Ireland dangles the possibility of wealth before the eyes of people who live in places like Druminawona, and everybody with such a plan reveals it in the first instance to the parish priest. In other countries people who discover ways of making money keep their secret selfishly, go and make money themselves, and refuse to divulge their methods until their own fortunes are secure. If they require help they appeal to financiers and other business men, a notoriously selfish class. In Ireland we are all philanthropists. We press our gold-mines upon other people, refusing to pick up the smallest nugget for ourselves. We seek for allies and confederates among the clergy, knowing that they will not exploit our discoveries for their own benefit. Father Roche had been told of ten different plans for making Druminawona rich. It did not astonish him to find that Mrs. Dann had an eleventh.

"My cousin never said anything of the sort," he replied. "What he said, if you want to know—what he *did* say when he was over here last summer, was that he didn't know how any one could make a living in the place at all."

"He can't be a business man," said Mrs. Dann.

"He is not. He's a priest, like myself."

"They'll never make a bishop of him," said Mrs. Dann. "Not in Chicago anyway. They haven't got much use there for men who don't know dollars when they see them. Druminawona is worth half a million any day if it's worked right."

Father Roche was a tolerant and forbearing man. As a priest he had learned to bear patiently the extremities of human folly.

"Of course," he said, "if one of those Government Boards—there's enough of them, dear knows—was to give a substantial grant and let the people have the spending of it in the way they'd select themselves—which is what no Government Board will do, on account of thinking that they know better than the people that has lived in the country all their lives—something might be done. But what's the use of talking? Our poor people is overlooked in a way that would make you ashamed if I was to tell it to you."

"My notion—" said Mrs. Dann.

"If it's lace-making," said the priest; "or if it's cooking classes for the young girls; or if it's the prevention of tuberculosis, I may tell you straight that these things have been tried, and I don't know that anybody was a penny richer at the latter end, unless maybe the man who prints the notices of the public meetings, and he's in Dublin."

"You've not quite caught on yet, Father Roche," said Mrs. Dann; "my notion is, the name of the place is good for a big pile as soon as we put it on the market."

"If anybody will give me a shilling each for the five syllables of it," said Father Roche, "I'd take the money and say I'd made a good bargain."

"*As* the home of the Ten Lost Tribes and the scene of a real mediæval Miracle Play."

Father Roche looked inquiringly at Mr. Mervyn. He

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"And a Miracle Play," said Mrs. Dann. "There's money in the name Druminawona, especially when connected in the public mind with a Miracle Play, acted by the descendants of those vanished Israelites. We'll boom Druminawona into European celebrity. There's a spaciousness about it which leaves the imagination room to saunter round. There's a kind of meandering melancholy which you'd hardly beat among the best place-names in the itinerary of the Children of Israel. Ije-Abarim is a good name, I don't deny it. Bobby Sebright's father would draw tears from your eyes when he proclaims it. But it's a lap or two behind Druminawona in the race. Just you two reverend gentlemen let it sink into you. Let it work round and round in your minds, and you'll see."

"It's a good name," said Father Roche. "I don't deny that it's a good name."

"There's nothing in Europe to touch it," said Mrs. Dann. "Take Oberammergau now. That's a name that's gone round the newspapers of the five continents in connection with a play and it hasn't half the charm of Druminawona."

Father Roche knew the name Oberammergau, though he could not at the moment recollect what it was famous for. He felt that he was safe in agreeing with Mrs. Dann about the sound of it.

"It's as ugly a mouthful as you'd get," he said, "outside of a doctor's dispensary."

"When Bobby Sebright comes along—" said Mrs. Dann.

"Will he have time?" said Mr. Mervyn. "He has so many other things to do. You told me that he had to write about Irish politics. Surely if he does that—"

"Bobby Sebright will make time if I tell him to," said Mrs. Dann.

"If he can't do that itself," said Father Roche, "he

can borrow it. There's plenty here. I don't know but Mr. Mervyn and myself could make up a week for him between us and not miss it when it was gone."

It seemed to him that Mr. Mervyn was throwing unnecessary difficulties in Mrs. Dann's way. Her scheme, whatever it was, might be feasible or it might not. There was no reason that he could see why she should not be allowed to explain it. He smiled in an encouraging way. Mrs. Dann's next words seemed to justify his smile.

"You'll have less time and more money," she said, "once Bobby gets a move on the newspapers. You may put your little all into this speculation, Phil, and not lie awake at night feeling that you're going to rob your orphan daughter of her fortune. Bobby knows the way to go about the business. With a name like Druminawona behind him a worse man than Bobby would hardly be able to mess up the proposition, no matter how hard he tried. You'll see. First of all there'll be a par. here and a par. there, just scattered promiscuously among the most prominent organs of British opinion. Attention will be called to the kind of esoteric glamour that exhales out of Druminawona. Then there'll be sonnets in all the high-toned religious weeklies. Bobby's there all the time when it comes to lyrical effusions. There isn't a man on the New York press at present who knows what Bobby does about the note of restraint which gives its true distinction to the highest art. When he's worked that for a bit he'll turn his attention to the cheap dailies. He'll fill up with light sketches under first-rate pulling headlines—World Forgotten, by the World Forgot—calculated to permeate the hives of industry and persuade the busy workers of the pastoral virtues of the people of Druminawona."

"It could be done, of course," said Father Roche. "But what I'm thinking is, what'd it all lead to?"

"We're just coming to that," said Mrs. Dann. "When

Bobby has the prominent citizens of the British Isles and America cabling to each other to know who is responsible for there being no cheap excursions to Druminawona, he'll drop right into the middle of them with the Ten Tribes. The principal archæological journals will have articles describing the way the people of Druminawona have been running a Miracle Play of their own for unnumbered centuries, and how they'd be mad if anybody knew they were doing it. The other papers will copy out bits of those articles, and the general public will say that it would be nothing short of a crime to permit any one to break in upon the sacred relics of the past and vulgarise the play by going to look at it."

"It could be done, of course," said Father Roche, "if so be a smart man took up the job. But what I'd like to put before you—"

"Then Bobby will round up a few legislators," said Mrs. Dann, "and have a Bill before Congress—"

"We'll have Home Rule by that time, please God," said Father Roche.

"It'll be all the same to Bobby," said Mrs. Dann. "This Bill will forbid anyone attempting to interfere with the religious and artistic traditions of Druminawona."

"If a law of that sort was to be made," said Father Roche—"and mind you I'm not saying that it could—but if it was, the police would never be able to stop the people that would be wanting to come and see what it was we were doing."

"That's what I'm figuring on," said Mrs. Dann. "Everybody with credit for a dollar would realise straight away and book right through for Druminawona."

"I don't see how we'd manage with them when we'd got them," said Father Roche. "There wouldn't be beds in the place for twenty people over and above what's in it this minute; and if there were they wouldn't be the

sort of beds that those people would be accustomed to. But leaving that out of the question for a minute, what I'm trying to say is this—"

"The real difficulty," said Mr. Mervyn, "is the play itself. We can't have a play of any sort, much less—and we ought not to advertise it when—"

"Phil," said Mrs. Dann, "if anybody else but you were to speak to me in that way I'd feel hurt. You never involved yourself in any bigger error than you're doing now if you think that I'm calculating to swindle the innocent public. When Bobby Sebright announces that there's a play here, there will be a play. I haven't settled the subject yet; but it'll have to be something in the early part of the sacred history. It wouldn't fit in right if we represented those tribes as introducing incidents which took place after they'd got lost."

"Any plan," said Father Roche, "which would be for the benefit of the neighbourhood and would be the means of bringing a little money into a place where money's badly wanted is what I'd be willing to support to the best of my power, so long—"

He held up a warning forefinger.

"—So long as there's nothing in it that would be setting the people against their religious duties."

"Sure," said Mrs. Dann, "I told Phil you'd say that. And the money will eventuate in this case. It can't help it."

"I don't like the idea," said Mr. Mervyn, "and I don't think—I really cannot think—"

"I'd be glad to know a little more about it," said Father Roche, "before I say much one way or the other. What would Mr. Mervyn and I be expected to do?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Dann. "Nothing but gather in the royalties. The whole thing is done for you. There's Judas Iscariot in your own back-yard, Phil, ready made."

"What's that?" said Father Roche.

"But he doesn't like it," said Mr. Mervyn. "He told me he wouldn't be called Judas.—She means Æneas Sweeny," he added by way of explanation to Father Roche.

"Is it Æneas Sweeny?" said Father Roche, chuckling. "It's a great eye you have for a face, Mrs. Dann. Here I've been looking at Æneas Sweeny for upwards of thirty years and it never struck me till this minute that he's the dead spit of Judas Iscariot. But he is. Now that it's pointed out to me I see it plain enough."

"He doesn't like being told so," said Mr. Mervyn. "In fact—"

"Let him not then," said Father Roche. "Who cares whether he likes it or not? It's what he looks; and more than that it's what he is. If you weren't an innocent man, Mr. Mervyn, and easy deceived, you'd know that there isn't a bigger thief in Druminawona this minute than that same Æneas Sweeny."

"But Æneas won't allow himself to be shown off as Judas Iscariot," said Mr. Mervyn. "I'm sure he won't."

"I'd like to catch him refusing," said Father Roche, "if I tell him he's to do it. Is it Æneas Sweeny to be setting himself up against his clergy? It would be a queer thing, so it would, for the likes of him that's signed the pledge seven times if he's signed it once, and broke it oftener than that—it would be a curious thing if he was to dare to go against what might be laid upon him as a duty. But that's not what I was wanting to say. If this notion is to be carried out there'll be more wanted than Æneas Sweeny."

"There's a policeman," said Mrs. Dann, "that looks as if he's the twin brother of the High Priest."

Father Roche brought his fist down with a bang upon the table.

"Sergeant Ginty!" he said. "I'm with you there. Dressed up proper that sergeant—"

"He won't do it," said Mr. Mervyn. "He told me this morning that he'd take an action for defamation of character against any one who called him a high priest.

"He's a bitter Protestant, that one," said Father Roche. "The name priest is enough for him."

"Can't you manage him, Phil?" said Mrs. Dann.

"You can of course," said Father Roche. "If I put the fear of God into the soul of a blackguard like Æneas Sweeny, what's to hinder you talking sense to the police sergeant?"

Mr. Mervyn was unwilling to admit that his influence with his flock was inferior to that which Father Roche exercised. But he knew very well that nothing he could say would induce Sergeant Ginty to be posed in public as Caiaphas. He hesitated.

"If there's money in it," said Father Roche, "Sergeant Ginty will be as ready as any other one to take a share of what's going. But I wouldn't be acting fair with you, ma'am, or with Mr. Mervyn here, if I didn't say—"

"The dollars," said Mrs. Dann, "will roll in like the billows of the eternal ocean. Druminawona will be the brightest spot on the map of Ireland."

"Tell me this now," said Father Roche. "Wouldn't it do you as well if we were to have a pilgrimage? Play-acting of the sort you mean is what the people of this country is not accustomed to. But there's been pilgrimages off and on in different parts, and nobody has a word to say against them."

"Bobby Sebright won't take off his coat to run a pilgrimage," said Mrs. Dann. "He doesn't trade much in back numbers. The world's fed up with pilgrimages."

"There's a well beyond in the mountains," said Father Roche persuasively, "that's got the reputation of being a

Holy Well, ever since the time of St. Patrick and before it. It could be that if the pilgrimage was to be organised in connection with it—"

"There's no real novelty about a sacred-spring," said Mrs. Dann. "It has its value as an evidence of the poetical nature of the locality. But it's not novel. The ancient Greeks worked sacred springs for pretty well all they were worth. There was a professor from Oxford University lecturing on the culture of the ancient Greeks, and he said quite a lot about one of those springs in Helicon. You'll correct me if I'm wrong, Phil; but it's my impression that Helicon was the place he named. Still, I don't say but your sacred spring might be made to pay as a side show."

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Mervyn, "that we couldn't possibly work the plan out in a place like this. It wouldn't —it wouldn't suit us."

He looked at Father Roche for support. It was plainly the priest's duty to offer some definite and decisive opposition to a plan which was inherently absurd and which would certainly cause an enormous amount of trouble to every one concerned. But Father Roche had been attracted by his own idea of a pilgrimage. Such things have been successfully organised in Ireland in places with no greater natural attractions than his Holy Well. He did not quite understand what Mrs. Dann meant by regarding it as a side show. In a certain sense the avowed object of a pilgrimage is always of subordinate importance. The actual pilgrimage, a self-existing and self-sufficing thing, is what really matters.

"It might be of great benefit to the locality surely," he said.

Then, speaking in a meditative way more to himself than to Mrs. Dann, he added—

"I've known men made archdeacons for less."

Mrs. Dann caught his meaning at once.

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some vague but certainly distressing connection with the Ten Lost Tribes. Mrs. Dann stared at him.

"You're away beyond me, Phil," she said. "I don't know that I quite recollect what that original idea was; unless it was the improvements in your church. You didn't seem to cuddle up much to the notion of wearing the cope I offered you."

"I was thinking of what you said about our boosting Druminawona," said Mr. Mervyn.

He did not want to boost. He hated the very thought of such a thing. But it was the lesser of two evils. The shame of it would not spread far beyond Druminawona. The scandal and disgrace of a play acted by the Ten Lost Tribes would be flaunted in every newspaper.

"We'll all boost plenty," said Mrs. Dann, "once we get started on the present scheme. Up to that date I don't see that you've much to boost about."

She waved her hand airily as she spoke, went to the door of the room, turned, and nodded to the two clergymen. Then she left the house.

CHAPTER VII

FATHER ROCHE crossed the room and stood at the window. He watched Mrs. Dann going along the street. She walked with a brisk, springy motion, not unlike the way certain small birds move from place to place when it does not seem worth while to open their wings and fly. Her gait impressed him with a sense of her irrepressible energy. He envied her. It was a long time since he had walked otherwise than ponderously. He also felt a little uneasy. Restless activity always made him uncomfortable. At the back of his mind there was an idea that almost everything in the world was better if it were let alone. Little good ever came of trying to do new things or to move old things from their accustomed places. It would be pleasant, of course, to be an archdeacon; but honour may be purchased at too high a price. Mrs. Dann hopped out of view. Father Roche turned to Mr. Mervyn.

"I have a box of cigars in the drawer of the table," he said. "It's seldom I smoke them myself, but it's my belief that one of them would be good for you at this moment."

Mr. Mervyn was perfectly certain that a cigar would be very bad for him. He never smoked.

"You need something," said Father Roche, "and I need something myself. Will you take it cold or hot?"

Mr. Mervyn realised that he was being offered whisky. He did not drink whisky in his own home, but only because he could not afford it. He had been through a good deal of nervous excitement during the day. He felt that a stimulant would be good for him.

"A little," he said, "a very little, please."

"There's no soda-water," said Father Roche, "for I drank the last bottle in the house to my dinner. But if the kettle's not boiling it ought to be near enough by this time. It's not tea we're making."

"Thank you," said Mr. Mervyn, "a very little, and cold water."

It seemed to him for some reason which he could not explain to be a less abandoned thing to drink whisky with cold water than to sit down to a tumbler of punch.

Father Roche opened a cupboard which stood in the corner of the room and took out a bottle of whisky.

"That's good stuff," he said. "I get it down from Dublin. I've a bottle of port if you'd rather have it; but the other is what's required for the two of us."

He left the room. In a few minutes he returned, carrying a jug of cold water in one hand and a kettle in the other. He set these down on the table and then took two tumblers from the pockets of his coat.

"Mrs. Deveril isn't home yet," he said. "When she does come back she'll get a lacerating that she'll remember. What right has she to go stravaguing about the country as if she was a young girl or maybe something worse?" He put one of the tumblers down opposite Mr. Mervyn and pushed the whisky bottle across the table.

"If you'll fill up for yourself, Mr. Mervyn," he said. He turned away from the table as he spoke and went to the window.

"I don't see sight nor light of Mrs. Deveril yet," he said. "Will you fill up, Mr. Mervyn?"

He peered up and down the street, keeping his back turned to the room. Mr. Mervyn realised that the priest was behaving with extreme delicacy of feeling. There are many men who like a good deal of whisky in their

water, and prefer to make the mixture without being watched. A really courteous host considers this and looks the other way while his guest is helping himself. Mr. Mervyn was grateful to Father Roche and appreciated his kindly action in turning his back. He was ashamed that any one should see him pouring out his whisky, not because he intended to pour out much, but because he intended to take no more than a tablespoonful. He dribbled the spirit into his tumbler and then filled it up to the brim with water. After a decent interval Father Roche turned round again. He made a rather stronger mixture for himself, using hot water, and adding three lumps of sugar.

For a time neither of the clergymen spoke. Mr. Mervyn sipped nervously. Father Roche took two large gulps.

"Tell me this now," said the priest at last: "is that one right in her head?"

"She's very kind-hearted," said Mr. Mervyn.

"She may be that; but has she sense?"

"She seems to be all right about most things," said Mr. Mervyn.

Father Roche took another mouthful from his tumbler and again considered the situation silently.

"The bishop will never stand it," he said.

Mr. Mervyn also had a bishop to reckon with. He drank a little whisky and water and then expressed his agreement with Father Roche.

"No bishop would," he said. "No bishop could. It's not to be expected."

"Supposing the bishop heard of it," said Father Roche; "but he might not."

"He'd hardly be able to help hearing of it," said Mr. Mervyn. "You remember what she said about Bobby Sebright and the newspapers."

Father Roche sighed. It was undeniable that Bobby Sebright's articles and poems were likely sooner or later to attract the attention even of a very retired bishop.

"It's a terrible pity," said Father Roche. "If she'd content herself with an ordinary pilgrimage there'd be no objection to it. And the money that would come into the place would be very useful. We'd be able to snap our fingers at the whole set of them Government inspectors. What would we care for their parish committees and the twopenny little grants they give us? I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Mervyn—I'm sick and tired of going down on my knees every day of the week and presenting petitions to young whipper-snappers of fellows down from Dublin in order to get a fair share of what's going. If I had the handling of the money which a good pilgrimage would bring in I'd laugh at the whole of them. But what's the use of talking?"

"It can't be done," said Mr. Mervyn.

"If she'd be reasonable about it, it might. We can't have the people of the parish, either Catholic or Protestant, passed off as Jews; and, so far as I can make out, it's that that she wants to do."

"Æneas Sweeny objects," said Mr. Mervyn, "and so does the sergeant."

"I wouldn't mind those two; if it was only them. They deserve it. But the rest of the people—I wonder now couldn't it be done in some way that wouldn't attract so much attention as what she's proposing?"

"If it wasn't advertised," said Mr. Mervyn, "the public wouldn't come, and then—"

"I see that well enough—I'm not suggesting that it could be done. I'm only saying it's a terrible pity it can't. There's nothing now that I'd like better than to see Sergeant Ginty displaying himself to the admiration of the public as a High Priest. There'd be a satisfaction in that if we never earned a penny by it. She's a won-

derful lady. I don't know that I ever met a finer. If there were more like her Ireland would be a different country to-day."

"It would," said Mr. Mervyn, "but on the whole I'm glad it isn't."

"Here's to her," said Father Roche.

He held his tumbler at arm's length for a moment and then finished his whisky and water at a draught.

Half an hour later Mr. Mervyn went home. He was more than ever puzzled and perplexed. Father Roche had not indeed committed himself to a promise of co-operation with Mrs. Dann, but he was evidently tempted by the promise of wealth for the parish. Mr. Mervyn felt that he could not rely on the priest. If his energetic sister-in-law was to be opposed successfully he would have to oppose her himself. He felt quite unequal to the task.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. MERVYN was a man who had all his life slept well. He had every right to quiet unconsciousness at night. He neither owed money nor ate too much, nor were the worries of his parish of such a kind as to press heavily on his conscience. After his first visit to his sister-in-law he had a very unpleasant experience. He woke twice during the night. Each time he was conscious of a vague uneasiness. Each time the cause of the discomfort became clearer as sleep more completely forsook him. The first time he found that the idea of boosting had been lying, so to speak, undigested, on his brain. The second time—and this was at three o'clock A. M.—he was acutely worried at the thought of Bobby Sebright's marriage with Delia.

The next night, Sunday night, he suffered much more severely. He went to bed as usual at ten o'clock. Instead of going to sleep, he lay wide awake until eleven. He could not help thinking about the Miracle Play. There is a sonnet of Wordsworth's which treats of sleeplessness at night. Mr. Mervyn said it over to himself several times. But the Miracle Play crept in between the lines. The poet's foolish invocation—

"Dear mother of fresh thoughts"—

was far too successful. The fresh thoughts came in large numbers, but they were all concerned with Æneas Sweeny and Sergeant Ginty as actors in a Miracle Play. At twelve o'clock Mr. Mervyn felt that his situation was becoming desperate. He got out of bed and groped his

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was; but he gathered from the context that the word was used of something which the author very much disliked. It occurred to him that John Owen would very probably have spoken of a Miracle Play as a tympany. He certainly hoped that Mrs. Dann's tympany would turn out to be birthless. When he got his attention fixed on the book again he found that he had read several lines without receiving any idea at all. It seemed scarcely worth while to re-read them. He went on from the point which he had reached. "Concealing for awhile," he read, "all arguments for motives and inducements unto this way, with all those rocks and shelves appearing very hideous in former proposals." There was no doubt that John Owen had in mind something similar to the Miracle Play. It was a proposal and it appeared very hideous. Mr. Mervyn reached the bottom of the page. There he made a startling discovery. The pages of the eighth volume of the works of John Owen were not cut. It was evident that neither his great-uncle Erasmus nor his father Canon Latimer had studied the Puritan divine as much as they pretended. Mr. Mervyn felt annoyed. He wanted, if possible, to find out all about the birthless tympanies; but he was most unwilling to go downstairs for a paper-knife. He tried the experiment of reading only the pages which opened without being cut. He found himself at once on page 56. He read hopefully: "Yet I cannot but be persuaded that such toleration would prove exceeding pernicious to all sorts of men, and at last end in a dispute like that recounted by Juvenal between two cities of Egypt about their differences between their garden and their river deities, or like the contest related by Vertomannus in his travels among the Mohammedans, about Haly and Homar, the pretended successors to their grand impostor." There are, as every reviewer knows, many books which can be read quite comfortably and profitably without cutting the pages which the publisher has left un-

cut, but the eighth volume of the works of John Owen is not one of them. That Cromwellian theologian was a close reasoner. It is utterly impossible to gather the meaning of a phrase which occurs on page 49—"birthless tympanies," for instance—if the argument is only picked up again on page 56. But Mr. Mervyn felt encouraged and cheered. John Owen was a strong man. He would certainly have regarded any toleration of Mrs. Dann's plans as exceedingly pernicious. Mr. Mervyn wanted more language of this kind.

He got out of bed and went to his dressing-table for his shoehorn. He thought unkindly of his uncle, and, for the first time in his life, of his father, as he got back into bed. A shoehorn is not a good paper-cutter, because its blade is curved. Page 58 was torn in such a way that it became very difficult to read it. Part of it remained attached to page 59. Another portion got altogether loose and hid itself among the bedclothes. Only a fragment, a true church among schismatic communities, remained in its proper place. This annoyed Mr. Mervyn very much. He was beginning to realise with great satisfaction that the Rev. John Owen was not at all the kind of man who would have submitted without a struggle to the introduction of a Miracle Play into his parish. A sentence, of which he could neither get the beginning nor the end, appealed to him strongly: "If by non-toleration you mean that which the gloss upon that place 'Haereticum hominem de vita—' intended by adding 'supple tolle' to make up the sense—" At this point a gap occurred, which it was almost impossible to fill satisfactorily. Further on the sentence pursued its way: "'To have their new derided lights extinguished in that that, 'qua stantes ardent,' in Nero's bonfire, into the secrets of them that are thus minded let not my soul descend." Mr. Mervyn wriggled and felt the missing part of the page crumple up underneath his right leg.

He was a man of naturally good temper, and long residence in Druminawona had taught him the folly of violent emotion. He was besides a clergyman. Instead of swearing he threw away the shoehorn and set himself to think out some way of cutting the pages without tearing them. In less than five minutes he had hit upon a plan. He got out of bed again and took his tooth-brush. It worked much better than the shoehorn. The pages of the "Country Essay on Church Government" were left a little ragged at the edges. One here and there got torn, but not hopelessly. Mr. Mervyn reached page 64 and became so absorbed in the account there given of the generations of righteous men that he forgot Mrs. Dann and went to sleep. In less than an hour he woke again. The thought of Sergeant Ginty's libel action against Mrs. Dann had somehow been preying on his mind while he slept. It seemed, when he woke and felt its full intensity, to be a very horrible thing. The works of John Owen had proved to be a refuge before. He determined to return to them. The volume had slipped from the bed and lay on the floor, but it was easily found. The tooth-brush had unfortunately disappeared. Mr. Mervyn crawled about in search of it. Then his candle went out. He stumbled across the room and began to feel about the dressing-table for a box of matches. He might not be able to find the tooth-brush, but it was better to read one page out of every eight than not to read at all. Before he found the matches his hand came on his comb. It struck him at once that the back of a comb, if carefully used, ought to be a good paper-cutter, much better than a tooth-brush. He lit a second candle and opened John Owen again. This time he began further on at "Ebenezer—A memorial of the Deliverance of Essex County and Committee. In Two Sermons." The result was most satisfactory. He got as far as a statement that "a song upon Shigionoth leaves not one

string of our affections untuned," and then went to sleep again.

It was much later when he woke from this sleep. He realised at once that he had reached that turning-point in the night so greatly dreaded by Wordsworth, when "the small birds' melodies are first heard from orchard trees." A thrush opened the concert with a few disconnected notes of a mellow, almost soothing kind. Several other birds joined in with tentative pipings. Then suddenly a whole choir began to shrill together, shouting against each other with vehement rivalry. It was evidently quite impossible to read a sober author like John Owen while thousands of exuberant fowls were hymning the coming day with irritating and ridiculous exultation. Mr. Mervyn got up. He put on a pair of trousers, his dressing-gown, and bedroom slippers. Then he went out.

A garden at dawn has many attractive features. There is a freshness about the flowers not to be seen at other times. There is also a freshness about the air. Mr. Mervyn sniffed, pretended to enjoy the freshness, and felt chilly. There is dew. Most poets have written appreciatively about dew. Mr. Mervyn looked with great curiosity at a rose whose petals were covered with gem-like drops. Then other dew, which happened to be on the grass, began to soak through his slippers. The skirt of his dressing-gown, dew-saturated, flapped unpleasantly against his ankles. He left the garden and went into the yard. It was paved with round stones and therefore drier than the grass. He opened the stable door and looked at Biddy. She seemed to resent his intrusion. The hour was a very early one, and he could not but admit that Biddy's feeling was justified. Her stable afforded her no privacy during the daytime. It was hard if she could not have it to herself during the night. Mr. Mervyn sighed and shut the door again.

There was nothing for him to do except go back again to bed. He realised with great satisfaction that the birds had ceased singing. One or another of them twittered occasionally in an excited way, but they had stopped trying to drown each other's voices. He supposed that they had gone forth in search of worms. The proverb about the early bird and the worm occurred to him. It seemed even more silly than most proverbs are. He crept cold into bed and decided that the lot of the ordinary wild bird is a very hard one. A worm, even a particularly fat worm, is a poor reward for activity at unhallowed hours. He grew gradually warmer, and began to wonder why the worms got up so early. It would be much pleasanter, apparently also much safer, for them to stay in whatever beds they had until eight or nine o'clock. The thought of the folly of the worms soothed him. He went to sleep for the third time at about half-past five o'clock.

He slept profoundly through the tapping of Onny Donovan, who brought him a jug of hot water at eight o'clock. It was Delia who woke him at half-past nine by hammering on his door. Mr. Mervyn felt very sleepy indeed and utterly disinclined to get out of bed. Most people under these circumstances complain that they have got bad headaches, have not slept, and cherish no hope of sleeping. Thus they turn the reproach of the knocker at the door into sympathy. They then say they must be left alone to battle with their pain unaided. The murmured condolences outside the door die softly away. The whole house is hushed and sleep comes easily again. This is what Mr. Mervyn would have liked to do when Delia knocked at his door, but he allowed himself, as usual, to be enslaved by his conscience. He could not say he had a headache.

"Breakfast's ready," said Delia, knocking again, "and the tea will be cold."

Mr. Mervyn promised to dress as quickly as he could.

"Aunt Sally May," said Delia, "sent down a messenger half an hour ago to say that she wanted Biddy and the phaeton."

"I suppose Æneas took them up at once."

"Yes," said Delia, "he didn't ask my leave. He didn't even tell me he was going. I happened to see him start, otherwise I shouldn't have known."

"He offered to lend them whenever your aunt wanted them."

"I think it's rather disrespectful of him," said Delia, "to do anything of the sort without consulting you. And he ought to have been weeding the rose-border to-day."

Delia appreciated her father's submissive gentleness at its full value as a Christian virtue. But she thought that Æneas Sweeny took an unfair advantage of it.

"I wish you'd speak strongly to him about it," she said. "I don't believe he's even dug the potatoes, and he hasn't cleaned the boots."

"My dear! If your aunt wants the pony she must have her, of course."

"Of course," said Delia, "but Æneas ought to have asked leave."

Mr. Mervyn sighed. He was not in the least troubled by Æneas' want of respect. He was a little anxious about Biddy. Mrs. Dann was very vigorous and seemed to be always in a hurry. Biddy was unused to being hurried. She would, Mr. Mervyn feared, suffer a good deal. And Biddy was far from young. Galloping would be very bad for her, and Mrs. Dann would almost certainly make her gallop.

After breakfast Mr. Mervyn took a chair out of doors and set it in the sunshine. He felt the effects of his wakeful night and wished to rest quietly for an hour or two. Delia went into the pantry to see that Onny washed the cups and plates. At half-past ten Mrs. Dann drove

up. Mr. Mervyn started. He was not surprised at seeing his sister-in-law. A visit from her was, he felt, inevitable. But he did not expect to see Biddy trotting smartly along, her head well up, her feet lifted cleanly from the ground. The animal had a look of vigour and alertness quite strange to Mr. Mervyn. He hoped that Mrs. Dann had not been violently ill-treating his pet. The phaeton drew up before the rectory door. Mr. Mervyn looked anxiously at Biddy. He fully expected a mute appeal from her, a petition for rescue from the whip of tyranny. Such an appeal would have moved him painfully. But Biddy gave him no more than a single, brief glance, and in her eyes Mr. Mervyn, with quick sympathy, read contempt. She had already learnt to despise him. She was pleased with herself, and under Mrs. Dann's awakening influence was finding a joyful pride in her new activity. A feeling of loneliness came over Mr. Mervyn.

"Phil," said Mrs. Dann, "I'm grateful to you for the loan of this quadruped; but I won't keep her after to-morrow. I've got to circulate a bit quicker than you're accustomed to. I find I've no real use for the old-fashioned horse. An automobile will suit me better. I've cabled to Dublin to have one sent down. Dublin's reckoned by geographers to be a metropolis. I suppose it will run to a good car."

"I'm sure you'll be able to get one," said Mr. Mervyn.

He spoke coldly. It seemed to him that Mrs. Dann was guilty of a want of good taste in mentioning the motor-car in Biddy's hearing. It would have been both kinder and more decent to complain of the pony's want of speed privately, if a complaint had to be made. He looked at Biddy again, almost fearing to meet the creature's eye. Curiously enough she did not seem to feel the insult. She swished her tail from side to side with remarkable vigour, pawed the ground and shook

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of it, there's not room in the world for places like this which don't show up any either in solid stuff or fancy trimmings."

Mr. Mervyn felt crushed; but he was not any more inclined to send Mrs. Dann to his favourite scenes. There were valleys of the most desirable kind hidden among the mountains, but he preferred to sacrifice the reputation of Druminawona rather than reveal the secret of its beauties.

"I'm afraid " he began.

Then he was interrupted by Delia. From her father's study, which she was dusting, she had overheard the conversation. She could not understand why her father was refusing a perfectly simple request. She flung open her window and leaned out.

"Aunt Sally May," she said, "if you drive about two miles along the road beside the river and then turn to the left up a bohireen, that looks as if it led to a cottage but doesn't, you'll come to an old gravel pit. I expect it's very much the kind of place you want. There aren't any pine trees, but it's full of bramble bushes. I go there every autumn to get blackberries for jam."

"Designed on the model of an ancient Roman amphitheatre?" said Mrs. Dann.

"I don't know," said Delia. "I never saw an ancient Roman amphitheatre. It's a kind of deep hole with high mounds all round it."

"Delia," said Mrs. Dann, "you're splendid. Just you come right out through that window and tell me more about the amphitheatre!"

The study window was small and there was a prickly briar rose growing beneath it. Delia preferred to go round by the passage and the door. Mrs. Dann confided her satisfaction to Mr. Mervyn.

"Phil," she said, "Bobby Sebright will be pleased and proud when I tell him that Delia is a business girl who

knows how to run things. Old Sebright will admire her some when he gets to know her. He's slick himself. If he wasn't he wouldn't have got that church out of Nathan P. Dann."

"Please," said Mr. Mervyn, "don't say things like that to Delia."

"What sort of wild woman do you take me for, Phil? Delia's modest. That's her great charm. Do you think I want to rub that off her?"

Mr. Mervyn had no time to thank his sister-in-law for her consideration for his wishes. Delia appeared.

"Say, Delia," said Mrs. Dann, "is there a ruined cross or an ancient round tower anywhere alongside that amphitheatre of yours?"

"No," said Delia. "You see it's only a gravel pit really."

"They'd have been attractions," said Mrs. Dann, "especially if genuine. I reckon the side shows pay pretty near as well as the principal *chef-d'œuvre*. But if they're not there we'll just have to do the best we can to make them. Anyway we have that sacred spring of Father Roche's to fall back on. We can have the water pumped up by a wind vane and the public will drink it out of antique crystal goblets at a fixed tariff. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't run a bottling industry; souvenir flasks, filled and corked on the spot, and with a portrait of Father Roche on the labels, same style as the Polish count with the long moustaches on the Hunyadi Janos bottles."

"I don't think," said Mr. Mervyn, "that Father Roche will ever——"

"He'll get his percentage," said Mrs. Dann.

"I can't agree " said Mr. Mervyn.

"We couldn't put you on the bottles," said Mrs. Dann. "You'd be no kind of advertisement of the value of the sacred spring. You're too thin, Phil, and that's a fact.

Father Roche's picture would sell two bottles to every one you'd get rid of. The priest is just the figure we want, kind of comfortable-looking, as if the water had agreed with him."

Mr. Mervyn felt that there were "rocks and shelves very hideous" showing themselves everywhere in Mrs. Dann's proposals. The bottling of water from the Holy Well seemed to him the very worst kind of birthless tympany. He knew the well. A little row of white stones, laid with loving care, encircled it. A thorn tree bent over it. Upon the branches, held fast by the thorns, were bleached, discoloured scraps of cotton and flannel, fragments torn from the garments of women who came to the well, who asked that children might be given them or the lives of children spared, or perhaps the souls of children saved, pathetic memorials of the prayers made now to some Christian spirit, the same prayers which had been made centuries before to the deities who held the land before the Cross came to it.

Mr. Mervyn shuddered.

"I'll cable off to Dublin to-day," said Mrs. Dann, "and engage a sculptor to run us up an ancient cross, Celtic design, with shamrocks clustering round the base."

Mr. Mervyn could stand no more. Delia's gravel pit was not one of his favourite haunts. It bore too plainly the impress of human activity to attract him much; but it possessed beauties which appealed to him. The thought of its desecration moved him. Something of the strength of old John Owen came to him. He made his protest almost fiercely.

"You mustn't do such things," he said, "you'll ruin the place with your vulgar monstrosities."

"Father!" said Delia in astonishment.

Never in her life had she heard her father speak in such a way.

"Delia," said Mrs. Dann, "your papa's right. He's

made me ashamed. Phil, I own up. I admire you some for speaking up straight. And you're right. You've got the finest silk-finished gloss of European culture, and when it comes to a question of artistic *tout-ensemble* you're there all the time. I've studied Italian art some, and I'm considered to have read more poetry than any woman in New York. But I admit that I never properly caught hold of the simplicity of nature. The vulgarity is deep down in me and I don't know that I'll ever get rid of it. You're miles in front of me, Phil, in real refinement. When we're dealing with Europeans of the highest elegance it'll pay us to have that amphitheatre just plain, and let Judas Iscariot and Ananias play about spontaneously among the brambles. I see that now. The high-brow Oxford professor would blush his rosiest if we set him down in front of a faked cross. I'm thankful to you for pointing that out."

Mr. Mervyn's anger vanished. The extraordinary softness of Mrs. Dann's answer melted him. He felt sorry that he had mentioned his objection to the erection of the Celtic cross. He could not bring himself to make another protest, one that would put a stop to the bottling of the water from the Holy Well.

"Same time, Phil," said Mrs. Dann, "we've got to have side shows. When we're through with the professors, and the uninstructed public begins to drop in we'll have to provide some sort of supplementary attractions. That may not be art, but it's business. You've kicked against a Celtic cross and I've given in. It wouldn't do. But what do you say now to advertising for a tame wolfhound?"

She paused and looked at her brother-in-law apprehensively.

"The animal wouldn't obtrude," she said. "He'd look natural. The public would gurgle a lot at the notion of being able to go home and say its hands had been licked

by a real Irish wolfhound. We'd have the kind that reposes underneath the round tower with the rising sun in the background. That's real art, Phil—you can't deny it. There would be small statuettes of the quadruped on sale, imitation bronze. Nobody would grudge a dollar for a statue of a hound descended straight from the dumb friend of Brian Boru who fought alongside his royal master at the battle of Clontarf!"

Mr. Mervyn could not refuse his sister-in-law this small concession. After all, a wolfhound or two, even a whole pack of wolfhounds, if a pack should turn out to be procurable, would add very little to the absurdity of the Druminawona Miracle Play. Mr. Mervyn felt sorry that he had made a stand against the round tower. He had, he feared, wantonly humiliated his sister-in-law. He had effected very little real good.

"I kind of feel you don't like the wolfhound," said Mrs. Dann. "Just you say now, Phil, and I'll scratch him off the list."

"No, no," said Mr. Mervyn, "but——"

"I think a wolfhound would be perfectly sweet," said Delia. "I've never seen one."

Mrs. Dann turned to the phaeton.

"I'll be off now," she said. "I'll examine your amphitheatre thoroughly, Delia, and then I'll step in and interview a few of your prominent citizens about the play."

"Do you really think," said Mr. Mervyn, "that Druminawona's altogether the most suitable place for this experiment of yours?"

"You produce another place with a better name," said Mrs. Dann, "and I'll take it on at once."

"We're very much out of the way here," said Mr. Mervyn, "and the people are backward in many of their ideas."

"I'm figuring on that backwardness. It kind of matches the name."

She took her place in the phaeton and gathered the reins into her hand. Then she cracked the whip. Biddy, who had for some time been showing every sign of impatience, stood on her hind legs and shook her head playfully. Mr. Mervyn stared at her in amazement. At some remote period of the past, as a long-tailed filly in a field, Biddy may have been in the habit of prancing. Never once during her whole ten years at the rectory had she attempted any form of skittishness. Mrs. Dann cracked the whip again. Biddy came down heavily on her front legs, and looked round at Mr. Mervyn for admiration and applause. His face expressed nothing but surprise and sorrow. Biddy felt that she had behaved in a way unbecoming to her years. She was afraid to meet her master's eyes. The look of reproach in them filled her with shame. To Mrs. Dann's disappointment she pranced no more; but she trotted down towards the gate with unusual energy.

CHAPTER IX

DELIA turned to her father.

"Aunt Sally May is a darling," she said, "and I think it will be the greatest fun getting up the play. I do hope she'll ask me to act."

"Oh, I hope not," said Mr. Mervyn.

He spoke very earnestly. He had before him a horrible vision of Delia as the wife of Heber the Kenite, hammering a nail into somebody's head, perhaps Bobby Sebright's.

"Father," said Delia, "why are you so hard on Aunt Sally May?"

"My dear! I certainly didn't mean——"

"You were quite rude to her about the Celtic cross. I don't see that it would do anyone a bit of harm if she put up a Celtic cross. Lots of people do in graveyards and places."

Mr. Mervyn felt very much depressed. Biddy had proved disloyal, a fickle friend. She had transferred her allegiance shamelessly to Mrs. Dann. Now it seemed to him that Delia was deserting him too.

"And she was awfully nice about it," said Delia. "She gave in to you at once in the sweetest way. I was quite afraid she'd be angry."

Mr. Mervyn was pained. Delia was unjust to him. In the bitterness of his heart he made up his mind to tell her of the marriage arranged for her with Bobby Sebright. That would offend her. Her pride would rise in rebellion against such a plan. She would, at once, be estranged from Mrs. Dann, would return to her old trusting affection for her father.

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man may be in the throes of sermon preparation, even if he is sitting in a chair in the sun. But Mr. Mervyn made no attempt to deceive Æneas. He admitted, reluctantly, that he was in a position to receive any word that might be spoken to him.

"I'd as soon," Æneas went on, "that your reverence wouldn't be troubling yourself any more on account of anything I might have said to you, and me not knowing rightly at the time the way things was."

Mr. Mervyn had several troubles, and was acutely conscious of them; but he was not fretting over any remark recently made to him by Æneas Sweeny. He thought that Æneas' conscience must have been rendered morbidly acute by the whisky he had drunk. It was always unwise to argue with a man in such a condition. Mr. Mervyn determined to humour him.

"Very well," he said graciously, "I'll think no more about it. And now you may as well be getting back to your work in the garden."

"She's a fine lady, so she is," said Æneas thoughtfully, without moving from where he stood.

Mr. Mervyn knew that he must be referring to Mrs. Dann. He agreed with Æneas heartily, and then suggested that some potatoes should be dug up and brought into the house.

"And if she does speak a bit sharp now and again," said Æneas, "I wouldn't begrudge her the use of her tongue. 'Judas Iscariot,' says she. And I don't deny to your reverence but she had my temper riz, for it's what nobody ever called me before, and it's not a nice name to put on any man."

"She may not have meant it," said Mr. Mervyn. He knew that Mrs. Dann had meant it and that she intended to do more than merely fix the name on Æneas. But he felt the hopelessness of explaining the nature of a Miracle Play to a man who is not quite sober.

"I know that well enough now," said Æneas, "though at the time when she was speaking, it went through me like as if it was a knife. But I'd be glad if your reverence would speak a word to her so as she'd know that I'll not be interfering with her any way, and her calling it to me as often as may be pleasing to her."

Delia looked out of a bedroom window and spoke sharply to Æneas. She had disapproved of his conduct in the morning, holding that he had no right to take Biddy without permission. She disapproved still more of his idleness, now that he had returned.

"I suppose she gave you half a crown," she said.

"And if she did itself," said Æneas, "his reverence would be the last man within the four seas of Holy Ireland to begrudge it to me. It's terrible hard you are, Miss Delia.

"I expect," said Delia, "that anyone who gave you half a crown might call you by any name under the sun and you wouldn't mind."

At this point in the discussion Onny Donovan appeared on the doorstep. She had heard Æneas Sweeny's voice, which was naturally loud, and Delia's, which had to be raised in order to be heard from an upper window. The altercation promised amusement, and Onny liked to hear Æneas scolded. He often scolded her. Therefore she left her wash-tub and stood on the doorstep, her sleeves rolled up, the bubbles of her soapsuds bursting one by one on her hands and arms. She grinned with malicious triumph at Æneas. He saw her, and her grin intensified the reproachfulness of the tone in which he made his defence.

"It isn't half a crown, Miss Delia," he said, "nor it isn't twenty half-crowns, nor yet an ass-load of golden sovereigns, if so be that there is an ass-load of them in the world, nor it isn't the jewels out of the crown of the King beyond the sea, nor of the King of Spain along with

him, that could make me rest contented with an insult to myself and the Catholic religion the like of what that one put on me; so don't you be thinking that, Miss Delia."

"You'd better get on with your work at once," said Delia; "you're talking the greatest nonsense I ever listened to."

"I will get on with my work," said Æneas; "isn't it that I'm here for? But before I do I'd like your reverence would know, and I'd like Miss Delia would know, that it's not by reason of the half-crown she gave me that I'd be willing to let the lady practise her cursing on me, but it's because——"

He sank his voice to an impressive whisper. Delia, who was really interested in what he said, leaned far out of the window to catch his words.

"They do be telling me down below in the town," said Æneas, "what it is she has put out about Sergeant Ginty. It's proud and pleased I was to hear it."

Delia had her private grudge against the sergeant on account of the obstinate stupidity of his youngest son. She laughed suddenly.

"Ananias," she said.

"I disremember the word," said Æneas, "but the meaning the people took out of it was that Sergeant Ginty was the biggest liar ever seen; and that's what she told him straight up to his face."

"She meant Annas all along," said Delia.

"That may be," said Æneas. "But what I'm telling his reverence here and what I'd be glad if I might be so bold as to tell you, Miss Delia, is this: a lady that'll say the like of that to the sergeant—and I'm after hearing that he's fair mad this minute—a lady that would say the like of that to the sergeant, may put any name she likes on me."

Once more Mr. Mervyn was strongly inclined to say that Mrs. Dann had more in her mind than the distribu-

tion of pleasant nicknames. He doubted whether even the joy of seeing the sergeant humiliated would induce Æneas to act in public a particularly odious part. He was on the very verge of entering upon a description of a Miracle Play when Delia came downstairs. She was in a mood for vigorous action. She began with Onny Donovan, and spoke so forcibly to her that she fled back to her labours without a moment's delay. Then she turned on Æneas and told him to go into the garden and dig. He did not want to go. Labour with a spade was at all times distasteful to him. It was particularly odious at moments when he was enjoying the delightful freedom from all burdens which whisky gives. He wanted to stay where he was and talk politely to Mr. Mervyn. But Delia used threats, and Æneas, still imperturbably polite, gave way. Mr. Mervyn had a feeling that both maid and man were ill-treated. He was not inclined to make excuses for idleness, or for insobriety, but he felt the strongest sympathy with anyone whose leisure was disturbed. The day was becoming hot. He would not himself have liked to be obliged to wash clothes or dig potatoes. He suspected that, having spurred Onny and Æneas to action, Delia might want to make him also go and do something. She did.

"Father," she said, "don't you think you'd better go off now and see Sergeant Ginty?"

Mr. Mervyn looked sorrowfully at her. He had not expected such a request.

"What about?" he said. He always disliked interviews with Sergeant Ginty.

"You ought to talk him round," said Delia. "He's evidently furious with Aunt Sally May, and it won't be at all nice if he tries to go to law with her. Do go, father."

"But what can I say to him?" said Mr. Mervyn. "Anything I say will make him worse."

"Tell him," said Delia, "that she wants him to act in her play."

Mr. Mervyn gasped. He could imagine nothing more likely to increase the sergeant's fury than to be cast for a part in a Miracle Play.

"I expect she does want him," said Delia.

"I'm sure of it."

"Then why don't you tell him?"

The matter seemed to Delia perfectly simple. She wanted very much to act in the play herself—in any kind of a play. With that total lack of sympathetic understanding which is one of the blessings of youth, she supposed that anybody else, even Sergeant Ginty, must also want to act.

"He's a cross old beast, I know," she said; "but if once he understands that there's a chance of his being asked to act, he'll be as pleased as possible."

"I'm afraid, Delia, that you don't understand the difficulties."

Mr. Mervyn had no hope of being able to explain them. Delia, apparently, did not believe in their existence.

"Go on now, father," she said. "Don't waste the whole morning talking. I'll run and get your hat and stick for you."

Mr. Mervyn saw that he would have to go somewhere; but he was quite determined not to go to Sergeant Ginty's. Delia returned with his hat and stick. He attempted no further argument with her.

"You're a darling," she said as he got up, "and Aunt Sally May will be awfully pleased."

Mr. Mervyn walked towards the gate, Delia watching him until he was out of sight. His plan was to go into the village and buy some biscuits. He would then hasten past the police barrack and the presbytery. Once clear of the village he would strike across the fields and wander, lonely and secure, among the mountains for the rest

of the day. The biscuits would save him from actual hunger, and many hours must pass before the drawing in of the evening would drive him home. His spirits rose. In the evening he would, of course, be obliged to return home and meet Delia. But several things might happen in the interval. Delia might have forgotten what she sent him out to do. Mrs. Dann might have found a new and more desirable Caiaphas. Sergeant Ginty might have expressed his opinion of miracle plays publicly and vehemently. Even if nothing happened—if he had to go home and explain himself to Delia—the argument which would follow would be no more unpleasant when the lamp was lit. He would be no worse off then.

Almost everyone who lives in the west of Ireland becomes wise after a time. Mr. Mervyn had spent twenty years in Druminawona and was, therefore, a philosopher. He had learned certain great truths and realised the folly of rebellion against them. It is, for instance, a fixed law that troubles come to every man. Job noted this centuries ago. But life—Job also knew this and expressed it with picturesque force—is a brief affair and hastens to its end. There is, there can be, room in it for no more than a certain number of troubles. It follows—it is just in making these deductions that the true philosopher shines—that the longer the meeting of any trouble can be postponed the less time there will be left afterwards for the coming of other troubles. It is, for instance, very unpleasant to make up accounts of income and expenditure. The foolish man who does this once every three months, finds that there is room in life for many hours of suffering. The wiser man who postpones the production of his private balance-sheet until the end of the year has only one-quarter of the other's experience of that particular trouble. The true philosopher puts off the examination of his bank-book for five years, and so, in the course of his career, escapes nineteen-twentieths of the

first man's pain. This is certainly true. It must be true because, life being in or about the same length in all cases, there is not room in it, if it is lived philosophically, for the many repetitions of the nerve-shaking business which the unphilosophic man actually courts.

It was about eleven o'clock when Mr. Mervyn left the rectory. There was no need for him to go home before seven in the evening. He saw his way to gaining eight clear hours on the long procession of his troubles. He had once examined some actuarial tables published by an insurance company. He knew that he might expect to live for another nine years. It was something to secure eight hours of unbroken tranquillity, almost one hour for each year. Fresh troubles—so Mr. Mervyn understood—were lurking all along the roadway of those nine years; each trouble at its own milestone, waiting the arrival of its appointed hour. It gratified Mr. Mervyn very much to think that eight of these fiends—the last eight—would be balked of their prey. He was snatching their hours from them. By postponing his argument with Delia—even granting it was inevitable in the end—he was pushing back all his other troubles into a remoter future. The final eight would necessarily be squeezed out of the term of his life. They might fume and foam, but they would be impotent. He would be dead before they caught him.

He walked briskly to the village and entered Daniel Fogarty's shop. It was there that Æneas Sweeny, an hour or two earlier, had spent Mrs. Dann's half-crown. Æneas had gone far into the shop and done business with Mr. Fogarty behind a screen. In Ireland, which is Holy Ireland, everyone who drinks whisky does so behind a screen. Mr. Mervyn had only twopence in his pocket, so he could not have drunk whisky even if he had wanted to. He took his stand at the outer part of the counter, on the more public side of the screen. He asked for biscuits, mentioning that he only wanted twopennyworth.

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detested drudgery. "The Citron," which came next to his hand, failed to attract him. It sounded opulent and eastern. A certain unrecognised asceticism of temperament held him back. He was unaccustomed to, distrustful of, great luxury. He hesitated over "The Naples," but decided against it. Naples is a beautiful place, but the mention of it reminded him of Italian art. He had heard too much about Italian art from Mrs. Dann.

He drove his hand far into the pile and drew out a packet labelled "Oceania." He put it into his pocket at once. He knew that he had hit upon the very kind of biscuit he required. Its name was redolent of romance and poetry. It was evidently a biscuit designed for the use of sailors, men accustomed to wide, unbroken horizons; to long monotonous days; to the gurgling and laughing of the summer seas. He called to mind a very favourite sonnet about pilgrim ships. He felt that he could eat the Oceania biscuit with intellectual as well as physical delight. Another packet remained to be chosen. "The Corinth" made but a weak appeal to him. What, after all, is Corinth? A second-rate Greek port doing a small export trade. There is indeed a Latin proverb which laments the fact that every man cannot go to Corinth. It may be presumed that many men want to go there. They would readily buy and joyfully eat biscuits called after the city of their dreams. But Mr. Mervyn did not want to go to Corinth. He hesitated a moment and then laid the packet down. With the next which came to hand he dealt far more promptly. It was called "Boston Cream." There is, of course, a Boston in Lincolnshire; but Mr. Mervyn felt certain that the biscuit-maker was thinking of the more famous city in America. He felt the strongest possible shrinking from any more contact with America. Mr. Fogarty, noticing his difficulty in choosing, strongly recommended a packet labelled "Wee Pet." There is a touch of sentiment about

the intimate Scottish "Wee" which slightly repelled Mr. Mervyn. But the "Pet" attracted him. He thought of Biddy, trotting beyond her speed, to earn praise from Mrs. Dann, praise which would certainly be withheld contemptuously. He thought of Delia, who had once also been a pet, and climbed upon his knees engagingly. She was a pet no longer, but the memory of the old days survived. He put the package into his pocket and thanked Mr. Fogarty warmly.

A little beyond the shop stood the police barrack. A constable was sunning himself on a bench outside the door. The three Ginty boys, who at that hour ought certainly to have been at school, were playing in the street. The sergeant himself was not visible. Mr. Mervyn crossed the street to avoid the chance of speech with the constable, and hurried past as quickly as he could. The constable made no effort to stop him. The boys did not notice him. He felt that he was safe. Between him and the open country there was no house except the presbytery.

CHAPTER X

THERE are men whose pleasures, rare enough things for all of us, are spoiled by untimely reminders of physical infirmity. A twinge of rheumatism in a shoulder-blade gives a sudden check to the delight of picnicking. A swift stab of gout in a great toe puts an abrupt end to the joy of some innocent festivity. Those things are the *memento mori* of life's feasts, and are disagreeable enough in the way they interrupt us. But an active conscience is a much more effective murderer of joy. Mr. Mervyn never suffered from rheumatism and knew the meaning of the word "gout" only by vague report, but he suffered frequently and acutely from his conscience. Just when all seemed to be going well with him, when he had passed the dangerous police barrack, when his eight hours lay golden before him, his conscience spoke.

It dared to suggest that he had promised Delia to call on Sergeant Ginty. He denied that he had made any such promise, denied with emphatic plainness. His conscience, without raising its voice or displaying any strong feeling, accused him of Jesuitical evasion. We notice here how deeply the spirit of religious prejudice penetrates Irish life. Mr. Mervyn's was a Protestant conscience. It used the word "Jesuitical" as a term of reproach. The Jesuits themselves deny that they are more deceitful than other men, and are exceedingly indignant at any suggestion that they specialise in the kind of lie which can be defended as literally true. Mr. Mervyn, who had no strong prejudice against Jesuits, saw

his opportunity. He reproached his conscience with an unfair use of the word "Jesuitical"; thus carrying the war into the enemy's country. His conscience declined altogether to argue the point with him. Delia, it said, certainly understood that he meant to call on Sergeant Ginty. Mr. Mervyn argued that this might not be so. He said that he could not feel sure that Delia believed that he meant to pay the call. His conscience repeated the word "Jesuitical," still quietly, but with a scornful sneer. Mr. Mervyn retreated. He said that if Delia were making a mistake about his intentions she had only herself to blame. He had said no word which could be construed into a promise. His conscience said "Jesuitical" again, this time in a most insulting tone. Mr. Mervyn had by this time reached the presbytery. He stood still. The reproaches of his conscience were more than he could comfortably bear. He thought of turning back and going into the police barrack. His conscience, seeing victory within its grasp, began to flatter him. It said that he had always been an honourable and self-respecting man, and that nothing would have surprised it more than to find him shirking an obligation. It spoke in quite a soothing way, and, of course, in quite a low tone. It is characteristic of all consciences that they get their way more by persistence than by shouting.

Father Roche, on the other hand, believed in speaking loudly. In dealing with recalcitrant parishioners who failed to pay their dues at Easter time he seldom had to speak twice, because he always spoke very loudly. Catching sight of Mr. Mervyn from one of the windows of the presbytery, he spoke to him very loudly indeed, so loudly as to drown the murmurings of Mr. Mervyn's conscience.

"I'd be glad," he said, "if you could spare a few minutes, for I want to talk to you."

Mr. Mervyn crossed the road and took his stand out-

side the window from which Father Roche was speaking.

"I don't want to be making trouble," said the priest, "or to be going against a lady that's trying to do the best she can for the people of this parish. But what about this play?"

"I don't like it," said Mr. Mervyn.

"I'd be better pleased myself," said Father Roche, "if it was anything else. It's not what we're accustomed to in these parts."

"It's a novelty, a complete novelty, and, I must say, very objectionable from every point of view."

"At the same time, of course, if there's money to be made out of it—mind you, Mr. Mervyn, I wouldn't be one for giving out money to the people that they haven't earned. What I say is, let work be found for the people and decent wages along with it. If it was a bacon factory now that she was proposing to establish among us——"

"But it isn't."

"It is not," said the priest, "but a play. I'd be sorry to make trouble. The world is full enough of that same without bringing in more. At the same time——"

"There's your bishop," said Mr. Mervyn.

"And your own."

Both clergymen sighed. They stood silent for some time, paying a tribute of reverent recognition to the authority of the episcopate. Father Roche rallied first.

"She's a good woman," he said, "and I'd be slow to do or say what would vex her. But there's no denying it, Mr. Mervyn, the bishop would never stand that play. I'm speaking now about my own bishop. As soon as ever I write to him, and it's what I'm bound to do sooner or later——"

Then Mr. Mervyn remembered his philosophy.

"After all," he said, "you needn't write to him yet."

Father Roche had lived even longer than Mr. Mervyn in Druminawona. He too had absorbed the spirit of the place.

"That's true," he said. "There's many a thing might happen between this and then that could prevent the play from coming off. And that would be a pity too, if what she says is true about the money it would bring into the place. Tell me this now. Were you speaking to Sergeant Ginty yet about the part he's to take?"

"I haven't done so yet."

"Maybe you're thinking of calling at the barrack now?"

Mr. Mervyn's conscience had been silent for some little time. He was beginning to recover from its last attack.

"No," he said, "I may call in on my way back. I'm going for a long walk now."

"It's well for you," said Father Roche.

He himself could not go for long walks. He was too fat. He was inclined to envy those who did. Mr. Mervyn stepped into the middle of the road. Father Roche, leaning out of the window, wished him good luck warmly. Mr. Mervyn went a few yards on his way. Father Roche's voice reached him again.

"Here's Miss Delia," he said, "coming down through the village in the pony phaeton. If you hold on a minute she'll give you a lift to wherever it is you were going."

Mr. Mervyn looked back. Biddy and the phaeton were plainly recognisable at the far end of the village. But Father Roche had made a mistake. It was not Delia who was coming, but Mrs. Dann. Mr. Mervyn hurried on. Father Roche shouted after him.

"It's herself," he said, "and not Miss Delia. I see her plain now, and even if I couldn't I'd know it could be nobody but her by the way she's making your old

pony trot. Will you come back now and see what it is she wants? Maybe she's changed her mind about the play."

Mr. Mervyn did not mean to go back if he could help it. He even refused to look round. He felt strongly inclined to run. But there was a long, straight stretch of road in front of him. He had no hope of being able to get out of sight, however fast he might run. All that he hoped was to get so far from the presbytery as to be able to pretend to be out of hearing. He was not allowed to accomplish even this. Mrs. Dann pulled up at the presbytery door, and called after him. Mr. Mervyn heard her, but did not look round. Mrs. Dann got out of the phaeton and ran after him. She evidently wanted him very much, and since it was to be a chase preferred her own top speed to Biddy's. She shouted "Theophilus" once or twice. But the name is a difficult one to articulate while running hard. She fell back again on "Phil." Mr. Mervyn gave up all effort to escape and suffered himself to be led back to the presbytery door.

"Perhaps," he said, feebly hopeful, "you'd like me to take Biddy back to the rectory while you talk to Father Roche."

"She won't run away much," said Mrs. Dann. "That milk-white Arab of yours, Phil, has had pretty well all the running she wants for to-day. She won't object any to being allowed to stand still."

Mr. Mervyn looked anxiously at the pony. She was evidently hot and exhausted. He felt very sorry for her and tried to show his sympathy by patting her neck. But Biddy retained her self-respect. She had exulted in her strength earlier in the day and had proclaimed her attachment to Mrs. Dann. She had too much pride to fawn upon the old master whom she had despised. Mr. Mervyn understood her feeling and pitied her the more.

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"If that's the kind of man he is," said Father Roche sympathetically, "we'd better let him alone."

"It would be much better if you put it on your bishop."

"She wouldn't care a thraneen for any objections my bishop might make," said Father Roche. "Why should she? Isn't she a Protestant? All that would come of writing to my bishop would be trouble for me. I'll have that same whatever way it goes, but I'd rather it didn't come to me through her writing to the bishop. But tell me this now, Mr. Mervyn? Has she ne'er a bishop of her own? We might write to him."

"No, she hasn't. You don't understand perhaps, but as well as I can make out she's a Baptist, a particularly advanced kind of Protestant, that doesn't respect bishops in the least."

"If that's so," said Father Roche, "we may as well go in and face her. It's a mortal pity," he added querulously, "that she's so dead set on a play. What ails her that she won't content herself with a pilgrimage? There wouldn't be a word said against that. And if it didn't bring as much money into the place it would bring some."

They found Mrs. Dann seated at the dining-room table. She had a sheet of telegraph-forms in front of her and was writing busily. She had already filled four sheets with what seemed an inordinately long message.

"I'm getting off another cable to Bobby Sebright," she said. "He's a smart young man, but it won't do any harm to keep him on the jump."

"About this play, now," said Father Roche. "I've been thinking -"

Mrs. Dann rose and shook his hand heartily.

"I like you," she said, "you're the kind of man it's a pleasure to do business with. There's no trembling on the brink with you. You plunge right in."

"What I was going to say——," said the priest.

"You get plumb down into the azure depths first dive," said Mrs. Dann. "You see that there's money in the idea and you waste no time about getting it out."

Father Roche was greatly flattered by this unexpected compliment. He felt a delicacy about pressing his point of view upon a lady who had spoken so handsomely to him. Mr. Mervyn came to his assistance.

"Since we were talking together yesterday," he said, "it has occurred to Father Roche——"

"Phil," said Mrs. Dann, "that amphitheatre of Delia's is the cunningest romantic gorge in the universe. You can't think. Outside the works of the late Samuel T. Coleridge there's nothing equal to it. I don't deny that he had better fittings in his immortal "Kubla Khan," but that was a work of imagination. Delia's amphitheatre is cold fact."

"What Father Roche wants to say," said Mr. Mervyn, "is that he'd like to consult his bishop before all the details are settled."

"And Mr. Mervyn was telling me," said Father Roche, "that his bishop will be wanting a say in the matter. He's backward about mentioning it, but he told me so this minute."

"Well," said Mrs. Dann, "I'm not powerful struck with bishops as aids to religion. Seems to me they're kind of superfluous. But I don't undervalue them any when it comes to patronising popular entertainments. The general public likes to have a reliable certificate that the show is high-toned and suitable for family use. When it sees the names of a couple of bishops figuring in the list of promoters it brings its wife and family along right away."

"It could be," said Father Roche, "that the two bishops we're thinking about presently——"

He hesitated. Mr. Mervyn expressed part of his meaning for him.

"Father Roche," he said, "is afraid that his bishop will object to the play."

Father Roche saw no reason why his bishop should be the only one reproached.

"Mr. Mervyn's bishop won't like it," he said.

"Well," said Mrs. Dann, "you'll just have to step in and persuade them. Bishops are reckoned to be the incorruptiblest kind of men there are, but we could offer a percentage——"

"The idea of a Miracle Play will be new to them," said Father Roche. "It's not to be expected that either the one or the other of them will take to it. I wouldn't say but they might have liked it well enough one time, but they're getting to be old men now. I'd say that ours is a good bit over sixty, and Mr. Mervyn's is more."

"If they won't come in," said Mrs. Dann, "we'll have to get others. They're not the only two bishops in these islands. There must be some of them with sense."

Mr. Mervyn and Father Roche looked at each other helplessly. There seemed no possibility of further protest. Mrs. Dann dismissed the subject of the bishops. It had never really interested her.

"Druminawona's not progressive," she went on. "It's reminiscent of the Pilgrim Fathers and the *Mayflower* in its way of getting about. I don't make any complaint about that. It's part of the charm, and we'll boom it for all it's worth. But how to get the public out to that amphitheatre is a problem. I'd have an electric plant laid down and a proper service of cars running right out from the village; but you'd kick against that, Phil. And you'd be quite right. Any kind of street car would destroy the flavour of the place."

"It couldn't be done anyway," said Father Roche gloomily, "without you got in strangers to work the cars, and that's what the people of this parish wouldn't stand."

"That amphitheatre," said Mrs. Dann, "is pretty near

three miles from the village, and it's not just the sort of place a stranger would walk right up to. There's a good deal of the modest spring violet about it. It hides its head among the leaves. That's quite right. I'm not proposing to erect sky-signs. They'd spoil the *tout ensemble,* and you'd just boil over, Phil. Same time we've got to see that folks get there."

"There's many a one," said Father Roche, "would be glad to earn a shilling by showing the way to anybody that might be asking it."

"We'll have a properly organised corps of guides!" said Mrs. Dann, "with brass badges strapped on their arms above the elbow and a printed list of tariffs to show the visitor. That'll show that we don't mean to swindle. There's nothing the travelling public hates worse than any kind of unauthorised robbery. The news of it gets about and nobody goes near the place where it is practised."

The prospect of an enormous number of shillings to be earned in this simple way greatly encouraged Father Roche. He began to feel quite hopefully about the enterprise.

"There's them," he said, "that won't care about walking the three miles, more particularly if the day should happen to be hot. How would it be now if we got down some of those motor-cars from Dublin? I know a few steady lads about the place that would learn to drive them well enough if there was a man got for a week to teach them."

"You'd be mad if we did that, Phil," said Mrs. Dann. "It won't do, Father Roche. We've got to preserve the unsophisticated nature of the locality. We can't afford to diminish the poetic refinement of Druminawona one cent. I give in that the question of transport held me up for a bit, but I've found a way out."

"There's only four side-cars in the place," said Father

Roche, "counting my own, and the shafts of one of them is broke. So if it's them you have in your mind —"

"The jaunting car," said Mrs. Dann, "is your national vehicle, and of course it's got to be there in considerable numbers. We'll get a couple of dozen down from Dublin. The public would feel they'd been swindled if there weren't jaunting cars on view."

"I'm not sure," said Father Roche, "would there be that number of horses about the place. It isn't every horse you could put under a side-car. There's fillies, of course, long-tailed fillies running about the bogs. But even if they would be able to draw a car after them—and that's what they wouldn't be fit for on account of being half starved—you daren't put a strap on one of them. They'd have everything before and behind them kicked to smithers."

"What I'm figuring on," said Mrs. Dann, "is donkeys."

"Asses," said Father Roche, "is plenty anyway. There isn't a man between this and the city of Galway but has one or more; and there's others loose about the roads, that you'd be hard set to find owners for."

"We'll round them up," said Mrs. Dann.

"But they won't be able to draw cars," said Mr. Mervyn. "They're not big enough."

"My notion," said Mrs. Dann, "is to invite the public to ride. As I was going along behind that white charger of yours, Phil, trying to find the way to Delia's amphitheatre, I met a whole procession of people coming along on donkeys. I can't say I admired much the way they ride. Seems to me that sitting on the butt of the quadruped's tail isn't safe. The first man I saw, I made dead sure he'd be left standing in the road with the animal gone right away from between his legs."

"That never happens," said Mr. Mervyn.

"I guess the donkey's trained to go quietly," said Mrs. Dann, "and not let his hind-legs fold up under him. Anyway that kind of riding is novel, and a novelty will take on with the general public. There isn't one man in ten in the British Isles, and there isn't one in a hundred on the other side of the Atlantic that ever sat on the exact spot where the tail is hitched on to the donkey. The people that are mad after local colour—and that's the biggest part of any crowd—will just make a grab at those donkeys. We'll be able to charge what we like for rides, and Father Roche says that donkeys can be had for nothing, so there'll be a hundred per cent. profit."

"I wouldn't undertake that," said Father Roche. "There's many a thing besides asses that you wouldn't think anybody owned until the time comes when somebody else'd be looking for it. You'd be surprised, so you would, at the number of people that'll come to you laying the claim to that same ass the minute it gets out that there's a shilling to be earned by him. There was a fellow came down here one time, a shabby-looking spalpeen of a man, who was asking questions. Nobody would be bothered answering him, nor there was no notice took of him either good or bad barring that everybody got out of his way when they seen him coming down the road. Until one day he let it out that he was sent down by the Government to make a list of the people that might be in need of seed potatoes, the same to be given out free. Well you never saw such a change in the way a man was treated. There wasn't a question he'd ask but the people would be tumbling over one another who'd get the biggest lie told so as to satisfy him. There wasn't one but said they'd known his father or his mother in the old days, and there was some that made out he was a cousin of their own. I'm telling you this now so as you'll see for yourself what will happen about

the asses as soon as ever it gets out that there's money to be earned by them."

"Well," said Mrs. Dann, "if that's the way of it we'll have to pay, but it won't matter so long as we secure the animals."

"In the latter end," said Father Roche sadly, "that fellow left, and there never was a word more about the seed potatoes. They were telling me after, one day I was up in Galway, that it was a newspaper man he was from America, and had no more to do with the Government than I had."

"Bobby Sebright," said Mrs. Dann, "will——"

"It couldn't be done twice," said Father Roche. "And what's more, I wouldn't be a party to it. The poor people of this parish "

"All I meant to say," said Mrs. Dann, "is that Bobby Sebright probably knows that man."

"He'd better not say so, then, when he comes here, for there's a strong feeling in the neighbourhood among those that were taken in, and that's the most of the people."

"Don't you fret any about Bobby Sebright," said Mrs. Dann. "That young man is as well able to take care of himself as any one I know. Say, Phil, have you reconciled that police-sergeant of yours to the part of Pontius Pilate?"

"I haven't done anything about it yet," said Mr. Mervyn feebly. "I—I intend to see him to-day."

"Your groom," said Mrs. Dann, "was telling me this morning that the policeman's riled. But if you tell him about Father Roche and the bottle of mineral water——"

"What's this?" said Father Roche.

"Wasn't Phil telling you? That sacred spring of yours is going to come in useful. I was thinking the matter over. Seemed a pity to waste it. Nathan P. Dann used to say that the big profits in any business were

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Roche, "but I'll not have my picture on a soda-water bottle."

Mr. Mervyn went softly down the passage. He reached the hall door and then the street. Neither Mrs. Dann nor Father Roche noticed his departure. As he passed the window he heard Mrs. Dann's voice slightly raised in expostulation.

"The stuff those monks sell," she said, "is reckoned highly dangerous by the religious world. In one of the dry States on our side it wouldn't be allowed for sale. What you're going to do——"

"I'm not," said Father Roche.

"Is to persuade the public to drink good plain water, and you stand to become a hero of the Temperance Cause."

"I'll not do it," said Father Roche sulkily.

Mr. Mervyn walked quickly away. He felt his two packets of biscuits in his pocket. He had wasted some time at the presbytery, but he still had a long day before him.

CHAPTER XI

HALF a mile from the village the main road crosses the river by a bridge which bends very sharply to the right. The road, as if it protests against the bridge's attempt to alter its direction, turns to the left again as soon as the river is crossed, but there is, at the far side of the bridge, another road at right-angles to the main road. Strangers, the few who ever come to Druminawona, mistake this for the main road and go along it. At first it seems to be a well-kept important road. It passes two or three cottages. The surface is good. Its gradient is moderate. Then after a mile or so of good behaviour it suddenly begins to go uphill and becomes startlingly steep. A gurgling brook runs along one side of it. In winter the brook escapes from its channel and flows over the whole road. It scatters large stones about so that driving is almost impossible, and walkers must go carefully. Half a mile farther on the brook crosses the road and has cut a deep gully for itself across which no wheeled vehicle could possibly pass. From that point on the road disappears. The stranger who has been lured into travelling on it is obliged to turn back. The road has led nowhere, it has simply faded away into a mountainside.

It was this road which Mr. Mervyn took when he escaped from the presbytery. But he was under no delusions about it. He did not expect it to lead to any human habitation. He crossed the brook by stepping-stones and then picked his way through a stretch of boggy ground. There were thickets of stunted bog

myrtle, deliciously scented, on each side of him. Patches of bog cotton waved white feathers in the breeze. Farther on was a narrow valley through which the brook flowed joyously. Tall ferns grew on its banks. On the steep sides of the hills the heather and the bracken struggled together for room to spread. Broad grey rocks stretched their bare backs to sun and wind. Under their shelter fraughan bushes nestled, their black fruit already ripening.

Mr. Mervyn, stumbling among the heather, stepping suddenly into deep holes, sinking ankle-deep in treacherous patches of green moss, was supremely happy. He attained moments of Wordsworthian ecstasy and achieved a general oblivion of care. It seemed to him a very small matter that Father Roche should be writhing in his presbytery at the prospect of being used as an advertisement. He did not feel in the least troubled with the thought that Mrs. Dann was making active progress with her abominable plans. He was not, until quite late in the afternoon, disquieted by the necessity of meeting Delia again in the evening. It was about five o'clock that the thought of going home began to vex him. He put it from him resolutely. At half-past five it returned. He fought it off again. At six he began to consider seriously what he would say to Delia. He became acutely uneasy. Hunger added to his discomfort. He had eaten his biscuits at about one o'clock. The mountain air is invigorating, but not sustaining. At half-past six he turned homewards, dreading the interview with his daughter, but looking forward with some eagerness to a meal.

Hunger was stronger than fear at first. He walked briskly. Then fear subdued hunger, and for the last few miles he walked very slowly. It was eight o'clock when he arrived at the rectory. He skirted round the back of the house and entered it by way of the yard and

the kitchen door. He had no clear motive for this surreptitious approach; but he felt vaguely that it might be easier to meet Delia if he came upon her as it were informally from a direction in which she would not expect him.

In the kitchen he found Onny Donovan. She had taken off the white cap which Delia insisted on her wearing; and was sound asleep. Her arms were spread out in front of her on the table and her head dropped between them. Her hair was exceedingly untidy. The sight cheered Mr. Mervyn greatly. He stood and looked at the girl, reflecting that if Delia were in a vigorous and active mood, Onny would not be allowed to slumber peacefully with her white cap lying unheeded on the floor.

He coughed gently and Onny woke with a violent start. She at once asserted, with some vehemence, that she had not been asleep. She went on to say that she was at that moment engaged in putting back into its place an iron which she had been using vigorously during the evening. As she spoke she became more thoroughly awake. Her self-possession returned to her. She realised that it was Mr. Mervyn and not Delia who stood before her. She stopped short in the middle of a list of the garments she wished it to be supposed that she had been ironing, and grinned amicably at Mr. Mervyn. Onny could lie fluently and with great ease. She could lie with rare ability straight in the face of established facts. But she was a young woman with a sense of economy. It was a mere waste of good lies to pour them out for Mr. Mervyn. He did not know whether she ought to have been ironing or not. She had a feeling that he would not be seriously angry with her for being asleep. Mr. Mervyn, though hungry and anxious, smiled back at her. Onny's grin broadened.

" Miss Delia bid me tell you," she said, " that she'd left

the bit of cold meat and the bread and butter sitting in the dining-room."

"Has she gone to bed?" asked Mr. Mervyn.

Delia went to bed early; but it was beyond expectation that she should have retired before eight o'clock on a summer evening. Onny destroyed his faint hope at once.

"She is not; but she bid me say that if you'd a fancy for an egg I was to boil it for you."

Mr. Mervyn had a very strong fancy for an egg. He would have liked two. He glanced at the kitchen fire, which had gone out. Onny's eyes followed his.

"It wouldn't be easy," she said, "to boil one all in a minute, but I'd maybe be able to manage it by the time you had the meat ate."

"Where's Miss Delia?"

"Up beyond," said Onny.

This was vague. Mr. Mervyn pressed for something more definite.

"The strange lady " said Onny.

"Mrs. Dann?"

"The same," said Onny, "she has her whipped off."

"Did she say when she'd be back?"

"There was talk of dinner at the big house," said Onny, "but sure Miss Delia had hers ate at two o'clock."

Mr. Mervyn looked at his watch. He calculated that if Delia had gone to dine with Mrs. Dann she could not possibly be home again much before half-past nine. He had more than an hour before him. He saw at once the wise thing for him to do was to go to bed, actually to be in bed and at least apparently asleep before Delia got home. But an hour is a considerable space of time. It allowed for quite a luxurious meal. He ordered Onny to boil two eggs. Onny looked at the black kitchen grate.

"Two?" she said.

Mr. Mervyn argued that two eggs can be boiled as quickly as one. Onny seemed doubtful about this.

"How would it be," she said, "if I was to give them to you bet up in a drop of milk?"

Mr. Mervyn did not like the idea. But he did not want to press Onny to do unnecessary work against her will. She saw his hesitation.

"It's what the doctor ordered for the sergeant's wife," she said, "the time she was ill. 'An egg bet up,' says he, 'in a drop of new milk.' They do say that it did her a lot of good."

Mr. Mervyn was quite prepared to believe in the value of the mixture.

"You have some milk, I suppose," he said.

"It's set for cream for the breakfast," said Onny; "but what matter?"

Mr. Mervyn was really very hungry. He was averse to further argument with Onny. He went into the dining-room. He ate hastily, being unable to escape from a fear that Delia might return unexpectedly. He had finished before Onny came to him with the eggs and milk. He took the tumbler from her and went upstairs. At his bedroom door he paused and called Onny.

"If you see Miss Delia when she comes home——"

"I don't know will I," said Onny.

She would certainly not go out of her way to see Delia. She did not mean to allow Delia to see her if she could possibly help it. There were clothes which she ought to have ironed and had not.

"Tell her," said Mr. Mervyn, "that I felt tired and went to bed."

"I will," said Onny, "if so be that I see her, but it could be that I won't."

Mr. Mervyn might have eaten his supper in leisurely comfort. He might have insisted on Onny's relighting the kitchen fire and boiling the eggs. Delia did not get

home till nearly ten o'clock. By that time her father was sound asleep.

Next morning at eight o'clock Onny knocked at Mr. Mervyn's door. She brought in a jug of hot water, and remarked casually that Delia had been surprised the night before when she heard that her father was in bed. Mr. Mervyn, by way of reply, said that he intended to stay in bed at all events till after breakfast. The prospect of his interview with Delia seemed no pleasanter now that it was close to him. He was, besides, really tired.

"It could be," said Onny sympathetically, "that them two eggs was too strong for you. They do say that there's a terrible deal of strength in a bet-up egg, and that it was on account of that the doctor ordered them for the sergeant's wife, her being weak at the time."

"Tell Miss Delia that I'll not be down for breakfast," said Mr. Mervyn, "but there's no hurry about telling her. It will do quite well if she's told when she gets down herself."

But Onny was not the sort of girl who wraps news of an unusual kind in a napkin and buries it in the earth unfruitfully. She went straight to Delia's room.

"The master," she said, "is in his bed, and not fit to get out of it. It's my belief that there's some kind of a fever on him. There was a man took with that same fever at the Christmas last year, and he wasn't near as old as the master. What's more, he died on them, before they got him to the hospital."

Delia jumped out of bed at once and hurried to her father's room, wrapping herself in her dressing-gown as she went. She reproached herself with having deserted him in order to dine with Mrs. Dann. She remembered, with regret, that she had made him go out the day before, when he plainly wanted to sit quiet in the sun. She was relieved to find that he did not look seriously

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of bed. Delia very nearly smiled. Mr. Mervyn added that worry of any kind would intensify his symptoms and that he intended to take an absolute rest from business of every kind. Delia, now much less sympathetic than she had been, left him.

At ten o'clock she came back again, this time in a state of breathless excitement.

"Father," she said, "the post is just come, and there are hundreds of parcels for me! Oh, I do think Aunt Sally May is the greatest darling that ever was!"

"Hundreds of parcels! What's in them?"

"Clothes," said Delia. "Blouses and skirts and gloves and hats and all sorts of things, and quite the sweetest lace scarves you ever saw. Don't you remember Aunt Sally May said she was sending for things for me, but I never dreamed of anything like this."

"Has Mr. Sebright arrived too?"

"Mr. Sebright! I don't know. What has Mr. Sebright got to do with my clothes? Don't be perfectly horrid, father. Get up and come and see them all. You'll love them."

Mr. Mervyn firmly declined to get up. He said that he felt sure it would be very bad for him to leave his bed. It seemed to him very likely that Mrs. Dann would call at the rectory in the course of the morning. She would know that the clothes were likely to arrive and would be anxious to see them.

When Delia left him he began to reflect that although bed is a secure sanctuary for men against most women, it might not be any refuge at all against Mrs. Dann. He got up and locked his bedroom door. He was very glad a few minutes later that he had done so. He heard footsteps in the passage and then a tap at the door. The visitor was Onny.

"Miss Delia bid me tell you," she said, "that Mrs. Dann's within and waiting to see you."

"Tell her," said Mr. Mervyn, "that I'm in bed and can't see anyone."

"I will," said Onny, "and what's more, I'll run up and let you know as soon as she's gone, the way you'll be easy in your mind."

Onny was a girl of quick sympathy and of kind heart. She did more than keep her promise. At half-past eleven she tapped at the door again.

"She's not gone yet," she said, "and it could be that she won't for a while."

"Is she waiting for me?"

"She is not; but she's dressing up Miss Delia in all them grand clothes that came this morning. If she puts the half of them on her she'll not be out of this before evening. There's a terrible deal of them, so there is; for Mikeen Pat, the post boy, did have to come secondly with the boxes that he couldn't carry with him at the first go-off."

Mr. Mervyn groaned. Onny heard him.

"Who would have thought now," she said, "that two bet-up eggs would lie that heavy on the stomach? And the doctor after ordering them for Sergeant Ginty's wife. But sure you never know till after."

At twelve o'clock Onny returned.

"She's after going this minute," she said; "so if it would be any ease to you there'd be no harm in the world for you to get up."

"She's sure to be back," said Mr. Mervyn.

"She might, and that's a fact. But she did say as how she was going down to see Father Roche."

"I won't get up yet."

"I wouldn't say," said Onny, "but you might be right enough there."

Mr. Mervyn dozed pleasantly for about an hour. He had enjoyed a good deal of fresh air and exercise the day before; and he had arrears of sleep to make up after

the night spent over the works of John Owen. It was possible, under the circumstances, to doze a good deal. At one o'clock he was wakened by the sound of some one fumbling at the handle of the door.

"If that's dinner," he said, "leave it on the mat outside and I'll get it. The door's locked."

It was Delia who replied.

"Aunt Sally May is back again," she said, "and wants to see you."

"Well, she can't. I thought she'd gone to see Father Roche."

"So she did."

"Well, that ought to content her."

"But she didn't see him."

"Why not?"

Delia giggled quite audibly.

"He's in bed," she said.

"Do you mean to tell me he's ill?"

"He's got " Delia's voice was broken with laughter—"Oh, father, it's really too funny, but he's got sciatica too. He sent out word to Aunt Sally May that he was in great pain and couldn't see anyone."

"I can't either," said Mr. Mervyn. "That is to say, of course, I'd much rather not. I ought not to have said that I can't."

A few minutes later Mr. Mervyn heard two people approaching his bedroom together. He guessed at once that the second was Mrs. Dann. He felt very glad that he had locked the door.

"Phil," she said, "I've a couple of bottles of Patent Pain Killer in my big trunk. They belonged to poor Nathan, and I fetched them away as a kind of personal memorial. Seemed to me at the time that they'd remind me of him more than anything on account of the powerful smell. He thought a heap of that drug and used to rub it in whenever he felt any kind of uneasiness coming

on in any of his limbs. I didn't intend to part with those two bottles; but I guess charity comes before sentiment any day, so I'm sending one to Father Roche and one to you. I wouldn't recommend an excessive use of the stuff. I have it on my mind that Nathan P. Dann hastened his end by over-indulgence. But half an hour's brisk rubbing on the part affected won't lame you any. And it might do a heap of good."

"Thank you," said Mr. Mervyn, "thank you very much. But I'm not really very bad. You'd better keep one bottle. Father Roche and I will manage with the other one between us."

He meant to allow Father Roche to have first use of the bottle. Circumstances might so alter that he himself would be out of bed and walking about before his turn came for the Pain Killer.

"Say, Phil!" said Mrs. Dann, "can you hear what I'm saying?"

"I can, distinctly."

"Well, I can't hear you, and I'd be greatly obliged if you'd open that door. Don't you take up the notion that I want to intrude. I respect your feelings of modesty. Nathan P. Dann was the modestest man in New York outside of business. It would have given him fits if he thought any female relative ever watched him shave. That's how you feel, and I respect delicacy of feeling wherever I meet it. Same time, Phil, you'll admit it's a bit hard on me not being able to hear a word you say and having to shout like a full-sized gramophone to make you hear me. How would it strike you now if you were to meet me half-way? You open that door three inches, and put a chair against it if you like. I'll pass my oath not to push it any."

Mr. Mervyn disliked being shouted at through a closed door even more than Mrs. Dann disliked shouting. He agreed to her compromise. Mrs. Dann abode loyally by

her side of the bargain and became audible without shouting.

"I saw your friend the police sergeant yesterday afternoon," said Mrs. Dann. "He's prepared to walk right in and catch on as Ananias."

Mr. Mervyn gave a gasp of amazement. Such complacence was the last thing he expected from Sergeant Ginty. Mrs. Dann, who heard the gasp, felt that some explanation was necessary.

"Seems to me, Phil," she said, "that this section is just brimful of personal animosities. They don't interfere with the poetical charm and general pastoral simplicity of the place one bit, but they're mighty powerful as motives for action. This morning that hired man of yours told me he'd be quite willing to undertake the part of Judas Iscariot for the sake of seeing the police sergeant humiliated. When I went round to the police sergeant and told him that Father Roche's portrait was to appear on the bottled waters of the sacred spring he said he'd put up with anything I said on account of the way he admired me for insulting the priest. I don't say those are the most Christian motives; but this is a business proposition, and poor Nathan always said you couldn't mix religion with business. I expect he was right on that point; and we've got to take things as we find them."

Mr. Mervyn began to understand how it was that Sergeant Ginty had consented to talk in a friendly way with Mrs. Dann. He did not yet believe that he had consented to act in a play.

"What I want to know from you, Phil, is this: has Father Roche any personal enemies?"

For a moment Mr. Mervyn did not see the bearing of the question; but his intelligence had been quickened by two days' intercourse with his sister-in-law. After a very brief period of thought he realised that Mrs. Dann hoped

to win Father Roche's consent by giving a very objectionable part in the play to some one whom he particularly disliked. He drew the bedclothes up to his chin and shivered.

"He and I have always been excellent friends," he said. "I don't think Father Roche has any dislike for me."

"You're a dear," said Mrs. Dann, "and nobody could do anything but like you. I wasn't hoping to play on the reverend father's dislike of you. But, unless he's very different from the rest of the inhabitants of Druminawona there must be somebody he'd like to lie in wait for with a gun."

"The only person I ever heard him complain much about," said Mr. Mervyn, "is his bishop."

"I'll get on the track of that bishop to-morrow," said Mrs. Dann.

The extreme audacity of the proposal reduced Mr. Mervyn to gasping silence. In Ireland bishops are really respected. We may, as a people, have a poor opinion of the law, and be quite ready to insult judges if we get the chance. Kings and princes are subjects for open mockery. "The flag," to many Englishmen a sacred symbol, moves us to no awe or reverence by its flutterings. But we do keep up a fair outward show of respect for bishops. That anyone should propose, as Mrs. Dann apparently did, to make use of one of the sacred caste as a character in a play seemed to Mr. Mervyn wholly incredible. The very idea was an insult to faith and morals, the twin deities who occupy much the same position in Ireland as Baal and Ashtaroth did in the days when the judges ruled Israel. Turbulent reformers protest against them occasionally, but all sober-minded and sensible citizens worship them faithfully, and bishops are, of course, pledged to maintain their dignity.

"Don't," said Mr. Mervyn—"don't. Whatever you do, don't do that."

Mrs. Dann took no notice of this protest. Perhaps Mr. Mervyn's voice may have been smothered in the bedclothes. Perhaps she chose to ignore what she heard. At all events she turned sharply to another subject.

"I'm taking Delia up to my house now," she said, "and I'm keeping her till evening. You'll be all right without her, Phil?"

In some ways Mr. Mervyn was rather pleased. He no longer dreaded being catechised by Delia. Sergeant Ginty had agreed to act, and there would be no necessity for any explanation of his neglect of duty on the previous afternoon. He gave his consent to Delia's going.

"Run away now, Delia, and put on your hat. I've just one thing more to say to your papa, and I'll be more comfortable saying it if you're not here."

Mr. Mervyn would have liked to protest. He rather dreaded an entirely private interview with Mrs. Dann. But Delia ran away before he had time to speak.

"Phil," said Mrs. Dann in a loud whisper, "Bobby Sebright will arrive this afternoon. He cabled from Dublin that he was coming straight through."

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farther on, "do but conceive chaff and bring forth stubble." The words were most comfortable. Mrs. Dann was certainly a foolish undertaker. He gloated a while over the idea of chaff and stubble. Then he came upon a passage which caused him acute self-reproach.

"A condition of slumber and sleep," said sturdy John Owen, "is a weak condition. A sleeping man is able to do nothing. Jael can destroy a sleeping Sisera." He realised how futile was his policy of lying in bed. While he drowsed, while Father Roche slumbered, Mrs. Dann might be hammering nails into their heads. John Owen had not preached in vain. Such is the power of great thought and stirring words that, though they lie buried for centuries in the pages of dusty books which no man reads, they will in the end reach and move some human heart. No doubt the Ironsides of Oliver Cromwell gripped their sword-hilts mightily when John Owen exhorted them. "The overthrowing of monarchies"—in their day a very pressing business—"was not to be accomplished by sleeping men." Nor was the overthrow of Mrs. Dann's Miracle Play. Mr. Mervyn laid down his book and pulled on his trousers.

Then Onny knocked at the door. Mr. Mervyn sternly ordered her to go away. Onny wanted to go away, asked nothing better than to be allowed to go and stay away; but circumstances were too strong for her. She felt obliged to explain her business.

When Mrs. Dann and Delia left the house Onny made up her mind to spend a happy and exciting afternoon. She intended to try on all the clothes which had arrived for Delia in the morning. For this she required several hours free of interruption and was likely to get them. Delia was safely out of the way. Mr. Mervyn was not likely to interfere with her. She went out to the yard and then to the garden in order to make sure that Æneas

Sweeny had left the place and gone down to the village to get a drink. It was almost certain that he had done so, but Onny was unwilling to run the smallest risk. She assured herself by the evidence of her eyes that he was nowhere about the rectory grounds. Then she went up to Delia's bedroom. She chose, to begin with, a particularly fascinating blouse, one with an outer skin of very transparent material through which a gold-embroidered inner layer shone gorgeously. She had to wriggle a great deal in order to fasten the garment, for it was one of the sort, designed for ladies who have maids or meek husbands, which fasten at the back. She succeeded in the end in securing twenty out of thirty-five hooks, and then began to admire herself very much in the looking-glass.

She was interrupted by a sound of gentle whistling in the yard behind the house. Delia's window was open, and looked out over the yard, so Onny heard the whistling distinctly. She recognised it, having often heard it before, as the signal of a friend. She put her head out of the window and spoke.

"Is that you, Jamesy Casey?"

Jamesy Casey, who was standing outside the kitchen window, looked up.

"It is," he said. "Who else would it be?"

"If it is," said Onny, "the sooner you take yourself away out of that the better. Isn't it enough for you that Miss Delia's never done talking to me about the way you're after me on Sundays without you'd be coming here in the middle of the day? Do you want my character destroyed on me altogether? Do you think I've nothing to do but to be wasting my time talking to you? Get away home with you out of that."

"If I go away home it's yourself will be sorry after."

"I will not," said Onny firmly.

"You will; for it's a terrible chastising you'll get if

old Mervyn doesn't be given the letter I have in my pocket."

"You've no letter in your pocket. How would you?"

Onny had not read the sermon of the Rev. John Owen, D.D. If she had she might have called Jamesy Casey a foolish and a giddy undertaker. The words exactly expressed her opinion of him, and she liked him all the better for being that kind of man. But Jamesy was not so giddy as she thought him.

"I have a letter then," he said, "and what's more it's from his reverence. So there's for you, my fine lady!"

Jamesy was a little irritated. Onny eyed him carefully. She had to decide, and decide quickly, a very difficult point. Would Jamesy stand any more insults or would it be better for her to change her tone and speak kindly to him. She decided that he had not yet quite reached the limit of his endurance.

"Get along out of that," she said. "What would Father Roche be writing to the master about? And if he did write, is it likely he'd trust you with the letter? Doesn't he know you?"

By way of reply Jamesy Casey took an envelope from his pocket and held it up. Onny looked at it. Seen from the window of an upper storey it was impossible to tell whether it contained a letter or not; quite impossible to make sure that it came from Father Roche. Nevertheless Onny thought it well to recede from her position of entire scepticism.

"If you have a letter," she said, "why don't you go round to the front door with it instead of standing there whistling tunes under the kitchen window?"

"Sure, I did go round to the door."

"You did not. Don't I see you?"

"I did; and what's more I knocked at that same door, and it wasn't till nobody answered me that I went round to the back. So you may come down now and take it."

"I'll come when I've finished what I'm at," said Onny. "It'll do you no harm to wait."

"If you don't come down this minute I'll set the letter on the ground with a stone on top of it, and then you'll be sorry when an ass has it ate before you get it."

"There's no asses here."

"Or one of the hens, or the old cock himself," said Jamesy. "It will be equal to you after what eats it so long as it's ate. And let me tell you that there's 'private' written on the outside of it."

Onny had all along decided to go down to Jamesy Casey. The mention of the word "private" decided her to wait no longer.

"Why didn't you tell me that sooner?" she said. "What's in the letter at all?"

"I'll tell you that when you come down," said Jamesy, "Do you want me to be shouting and bawling his reverence's private business so as everybody could hear it?"

Onny went down to the kitchen and opened the door for Jamesy.

The Rev. John Owen, D.D., has not, anywhere in his writings, commented on the fact that Solomon found the way of a man with a maid something too wonderful for his understanding. This omission is the more striking because John Owen has remarks on almost every other text in the Bible. We may account for this by supposing that to John Owen the way of a maid with a man is a much more incomprehensible thing. To the modern-minded man—and John Owen, compared to Solomon, was a modern—a man's manner of wooing seems a simple straightforward affair. It is the maid who gives the air of mystery to the business which makes it fascinating and wonderful to watch. In Solomon's time, one supposes, the maid had very little opportunity for finesse. She was bought or captured and afterwards submitted

quietly. No one pretended that she had any choice about her destiny. Now she has asserted herself, and her way of behaving is very much more wonderful than man's ever was. Onny Donovan, for instance, teased Jamesy Casey from an upper window, but she was very much disappointed that he did not kiss her when she came down-stairs and opened the kitchen door. It was the splendour of Delia's new blouse which made him forget his duty. He stepped back instead of forwards when he saw it, and stared at Onny.

"Bedam," he said, "but that's a grand dress you have on you! Where did you get the like?"

Onny was aware that the blouse was grand—grand beyond experience or dreams; but that did not seem to her any reason why she should not be kissed. She spoke sternly to Jamesy Casey.

"Give me the letter," she said, "and away home with you."

Jamesy handed over the letter. Onny examined it carefully, turning it over and over in her hand.

"I'd be afeard to touch you," said Jamesy, "with a dress like that on you."

He was aware that Onny's manner was not cordial. He guessed at the cause of her coldness and offered his apology.

"He has it sealed," said Onny, still looking at the letter. "What way did you find out what was in it?"

"Who gave you the dress?" said Jamesy. "Tell me that now and I'll tell you what's in the letter. But tell me no lies, for if you do I won't believe you."

Onny was filled with curiosity. She also felt the want of the kiss she expected. The simplest and quickest thing to tell seemed to be the truth.

"The American lady," she said, "the same that's above in the big house, is after giving it, and more like it, to Miss Delia."

"Is she then? Well, it's herself will be sorry that ever she set foot in Druminawona."

"She will not be sorry. Why would she? Hasn't she the full of a bank of money?"

"To-morrow," said Jamesy solemnly, "or the day after, or the day after that, she'll be sorry."

"And what would make her sorry? It's little you know of the ways of them ones, Jamesy Casey, if you think that she cares for the trifle she's spent on dresses for Miss Delia."

Jamesy paused. He had a weighty and terrifying announcement to make. He wished it to have its full effect. Onny was affected by the extreme solemnity of his manner. She stood silently in front of him, her mouth wide open, her eyes staring.

"The Bishop's coming down," he said at last, "and he'll make her sorry."

He had in the course of the next minute a full revenge for the teasing he had endured. Onny's reception of the news was even more satisfactory than he hoped.

"The Lord save us and deliver us!" she said.

"You may say that," he said. "You may well say that. It's a pity of her, so it is."

"And is that what's in the letter?" asked Onny.

"It is," said Jamesy Casey.

He spoke as firmly and solemnly as ever; but the effect of his manner was beginning to wear off. Onny reasserted herself.

"And how do you know that? Don't tell me now that you're after reading it, and it sealed?"

"It wasn't sealed at the first go off," said Jamesy, "but his reverence gave it to Mrs. Deveril to give to me. I don't know how long it might be that she had it before he was calling for it again and put the seal on it. Anyway it's what I'm after telling you that's in the inside of it; for she told me so herself."

"And why would the bishop want to cross the American lady? Isn't she a good lady?"

"It's on account of the play-acting," said Jamesy. "You've heard about that."

Onny giggled delightedly. She had heard a great deal about the play-acting and was entirely pleased with the prospect of it. She had a feud of long standing with Æneas Sweeny, a feud kept fresh by daily altercations about water, which Æneas was supposed to carry into the kitchen from the pump in the yard. He maintained that she deliberately wasted water with the malicious intention of adding to his labour. She argued that it was impossible to wash clothes and dishes effectively with the miserable dribbles Æneas brought her. She also had a grudge against Sergeant Ginty, partly because he did not arrest Æneas for drunkenness, and partly because once, in a moment of excessive zeal, he had arrested Jamesy Casey. The hope that both Æneas and Sergeant Ginty would be held up to public ridicule in Mrs. Dann's play filled her with an unholy glee. She always giggled when the subject of the play was mentioned.

"There's no call for you to be laughing," said Jamesy Casey. "It's true what I'm after telling you."

This statement sobered Onny.

"Maybe," she said, "I'd better be taking the letter up to the master."

"It would be as well if you did," said Jamesy, "seeing that I'm to wait for an answer."

Thus it happened that Mr. Mervyn was interrupted in his dressing just at the moment when the energy of John Owen's words had stirred him to activity. Therefore Onny, being afraid to go away when he told her to do so, stood at the door with the letter in her hand.

Her persistence was rewarded. Mr. Mervyn made her come in. She turned the handle of the door and then hesitated. She remembered suddenly that she was still

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lows like him, that's never out of the public-house, deserve what they get, and more. Nor I wouldn't greatly care what she did about the sergeant. So long as he's well paid for what he does, I don't see that he has any right to complain. But what she said to me yesterday in my own house is more than I am prepared to stand. I'm in bed since with the shock I got, and I'm worse this morning since I heard that the sergeant is going about the town saying he has withdrawn his objection to the part she has down for him since he heard that she has worse for me. Æneas Sweeny has it put out that you're in your bed too. I don't wonder at it. Any man with the smallest feelings of decency left in him would be. The sergeant has none. I'd be glad if I saw any way out of the fix we're in without bringing two bishops down into a locality where they're not wanted either by you or me, but I don't know what else there is to do. It's no use talking to her. We've tried that. And I doubt if a public meeting would be much good, though I have one summoned for this evening, and I'd be glad if you'd find it convenient to attend. It's a chance if she'd care a pin for any resolution we could pass. And what's more, the majority of the people have got it into their heads that there's a heap of money to be made out of the play, and I doubt if they'd be willing to pass a resolution, though of course we'll try."

Mr. Mervyn realised once more the truth of John Owen's remarks. The policy of staying in bed is an utterly mistaken one. "A condition of slumber and sleep is a weak condition. A sleeping man is able to do nothing. Jael can destroy a sleeping Sisera." Even when there was no other danger except Jael—Mrs. Dann with her Miracle Play—he felt it necessary to do something. Now a fresh disaster threatened. The play was bad enough. A visitation from two bishops at once seemed to be worse. He had heard of Father Roche's bishop,

chiefly from Father Roche himself. He was a prelate of a masterful kind, one of those who was accustomed to say "Do this" to people who did it immediately. He knew his own bishop, a quieter man, but one who would be profoundly shocked and pained by any scandal in Druminawona. And there would be a scandal. Mrs. Dann was a lady who liked to have her own way. A conflict between her and two bishops would result in a scandal of the worst kind, would provoke the laughter of the ungodly.

It seemed to Mr. Mervyn above all things necessary to persuade Father Roche not to write to his bishop. He dressed as quickly as he could, went down to the study and wrote to Father Roche.

"Dear Father Roche,—I fully understand your feeling about the play and the other plans which Mrs. Dann has made for the good of the parish. We can't have anything of the sort here. It's the wrong place for experiments. The people aren't accustomed to them. Up in Dublin, now, or in Belfast—— But there is no use, I am afraid, suggesting that to her. But don't write to your bishop yet. Let me try every means of stopping this unfortunate business before we bring fresh trouble on ourselves. If you have posted the letter—which I hope you haven't—couldn't you send down to the post-office and get it back? I don't think there'd be any difficulty."

At this point Mr. Mervyn paused and looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes past one o'clock. The post-car left Druminawona at half-past one. The letter, if Father Roche had posted it, would be out of the Druminawona post-office before it could be rescued. Mr. Mervyn wrote on with feverish haste.

"If the post-car has started before you get this, send Jamesy Casey after it on a bicycle. The sergeant has a good bicycle and he'd lend it to Jamesy. I'll send him a

note by Onny asking him to oblige me by lending it. But we had better not tell him what it is wanted for. If your bishop comes down there'll be trouble. Mrs. Dann isn't accustomed to bishops. There aren't nearly so many of them in America as there are here, I mean in comparison to the size of the population. And she's a Baptist, so she has very likely never met one. I am not writing to my own bishop."

Having written so far in opposition to Father Roche's bishop plan, it occurred to Mr. Mervyn that he ought to suggest some alternative way of dealing with Mrs. Dann. None occurred to him. He sat for some moments biting the end of his pen. Then he went on:

"Mr. Sebright is coming to-day. He is Mrs. Dann's nephew and an American himself. Perhaps he will be able to help us. In the meantime we'll certainly try a public meeting of protest. I suppose it will be held in your schoolroom. That will be the best place. Will you send round word summoning the people for eight o'clock? I'll be there and do all I can."

Mr. Mervyn tried to write hopefully, but he had not much real belief either in a public meeting or in the intervention of Bobby Sebright. It might be possible, by the full exercise of a united clerical influence, to get a resolution passed condemning the play. It would be quite a different matter to persuade Mrs. Dann to take any notice of it. Nor had he much hope that Bobby Sebright would intervene. It seemed likely enough that the young man, being an American and a journalist, might support Mrs. Dann. He felt that he must say something in his letter if he wanted to persuade Father Roche to postpone his appeal to the bishops.

"I shall go up to Druminawona House at once," he wrote, "and lay the whole matter before my sister-in-law. I shall speak very plainly to her, and put our ob-

jections as strongly as possible. I am sure I shall be able to persuade her."

At this point Mr. Mervyn stopped short. He was, in fact, quite sure that he would not be able to persuade her to give up the idea of the play. He sighed, but he was still a man with a conscience. Mrs. Dann's abominable activities had forced him into crooked ways. He had allowed Delia to deceive herself about his visit to Sergeant Ginty. He had left both Delia and Mrs. Dann under the impression that he was confined to bed by a painful illness. But he was not yet prepared to set down a direct lie on a sheet of paper and sign his name to it. He sighed deeply; but he ran his pen through the last sentence of his letter.

Then he wrote a note to Sergeant Ginty asking him to lend his bicycle to Jamesy Casey. It occurred to him when he had finished it that there was no real need to send Onny Donovan down to the village. Father Roche's messenger was waiting somewhere. He could quite well carry both letters. It was necessary in any case to pass the police barrack on the way to the presbytery. Mr. Mervyn went into the kitchen with his two letters.

There was some scuffling when he opened the door. A more observant man might have supposed that Onny was getting, with interest, the kiss she expected at first. But Mr. Mervyn had other things to think of. He did not notice the red face of the girl nor the exaggerated detachment of the man.

Jamesy Casey raised a series of objections to Mr. Mervyn's plan. He pointed out first that the note to Sergeant Ginty would have more weight if it were left by a special messenger, Onny Donovan, for instance, and not simply dropped in passing by a man who was doing another errand. Then he hinted that he had a special objection, of a private kind, to entering the police bar-

rack. Finally, he urged that it was absolutely necessary for him to hurry back to the presbytery at his highest speed, and that Father Roche would be seriously angry if he stopped to deliver letters on the way. He gave it as his opinion that Onny Donovan ought to take the letter. Mr. Mervyn did not much care who carried it. Onny promised to be ready to start in less than a minute.

"I've nothing to do," she said, "only to slip on my hat, and then I'll be off."

This was true. Greatly daring, she intended to walk down to the village in Delia's London blouse. She was beginning to feel at home in the garment, and she liked the idea of the admiration and wonder which would be excited when she appeared in it. She left the kitchen, wondering whether she might venture to complete her costume by wearing one of Delia's hats. Jamesy Casey watched her go and then told Mr. Mervyn that he would not wait for her.

"You couldn't trust them ones," he said, "not to be delaying you, and I have it in my mind to be running the most of the way on account of his reverence being in a terrible hurry. Running's what Onny Donovan wouldn't be fit for, though she might be willing to try."

Mr. Mervyn went upstairs and changed his clothes. He felt that he had a difficult business before him, and he wanted all the moral support he could get. There is a great deal of moral support in a frock coat. Mr. Mervyn wore his so rarely that it added sensibly to his personal dignity. He also got out his silk hat. He needed all the dignity he could get if his remonstrances were to have any effect on Mrs. Dann.

On the way down to the gate he caught sight of Jamesy Casey and Onny Donovan imperfectly hidden behind a laurel-bush. Many men would have spoken bitter words to them, would have driven them, humiliated and angry, from their refuge. Mr. Mervyn merely turned his head

and pretended not to see them. He meditated, as he went his way, on the fondness of all lovers for crooked courses. There was no doubt in his mind—their attitude behind the laurel-bush was convincing—that Jamesy and Onny were warmly affectionate. He wondered why they had taken so much trouble to deceive him.

It was not till he was half-way to Druminawona House that he stopped thinking about Jamesy and Onny as lovers. Then it occurred to him that as messengers they were singularly unsatisfactory. How long they sat behind the laurel-bush after he left them he could not tell; but he knew that his letter to Father Roche would be very seriously delayed. He looked at his watch. It was half-past two o'clock. There was no hope whatever of rescuing Father Roche's letter. Even on a bicycle Jamesy Casey could not overtake the post-car. The summons to the bishop had gone forth and could not be recalled. Mr. Mervyn recognised the irresistible hand of destiny. He sighed. The consequences of an episcopal visitation would have to be faced. Then a pleasanter side of the matter presented itself. There was no longer any necessity for him to argue vigorously with Mrs. Dann. The bishop, when he came, could do that. Mr. Mervyn was free to go for a quiet, lonely walk.

CHAPTER XIII

LONG ago, thirty or forty years ago, the English people used to be much troubled by stories of famines in Ireland. Being themselves well fed and having very tender hearts, the English hate to hear of anybody else being hungry. Whenever they were told that the Irish wanted food they gave orders that food should be provided. The Prime Minister of the day—minister means servant—did what he was told. He took from the public purse ample funds for the feeding of the Irish.

But the English, besides being tender-hearted, are business men, and, in the days when famines were common in Ireland, they believed in a science called political economy. It is the science which explains and justifies the existence of business men, and therefore it attracted the English as soon as it was invented. Now, according to the science of political economy it is wrong to feed hungry people without first making them work for the food. The English therefore decided that the Irish must do something which might fairly be regarded as work, for which wages, in the form of food, might be paid. "Let us," they said, "set these Irish to work in the first place. They are, and always have been, lazy beasts. The work will do them as much good as the food." But the professors of political economy, the chosen seers of the English people, had another message from heaven to deliver. It is not, so it appears, right that men should be paid from the public purse for doing anything useful. This is a profound truth, and the English, though they have lost much other faith, still believe it. They still act

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who planned it that this road could ever be of use to anyone. They went home, after seeing it made, with the comfortable conviction that they had saved a number of Irishmen from starving without being false to the principles of political economy.

But there is a tricksy spirit—an Irish water fairy perhaps—which takes a fiendish delight in upsetting the plans which Englishmen make for the good of Ireland. Policies and laws which look quite perfect in Westminster develop curious twists when they cross St. George's Channel. They do not work out in the least as reasonable men suppose they must. The fate of the famine relief road in Druminawona illustrates the malign ingenuity of the fairy. No one supposed that it could be of any use; but it turned out that it was. It became a favourite promenade for members of the Royal Irish Constabulary when engaged in what is called patrol duty. It is a nice dry road and there is never the smallest risk of meeting anyone on it who ought to be arrested. It was also, of all roads round Druminawona, the one which Mr. Mervyn liked best. He was fond of walking for its own sake. He liked solitude. And there was a series of beautiful views to be seen and several rapid streams to be crossed by picturesque bridges. Thus within forty years of its making the road turned out to be a real benefit to the police, an important section of society, and to be a source of innocent pleasure to an elderly clergyman of whom assuredly no Government had ever heard.

Mr. Mervyn, having made up his mind that he need not call on Mrs. Dann. walked at an easy pace. He crossed the patches of bog, reached the road he loved and meandered along it looking forward to reaching in due time a very favourite resting-place. He went with head up, gazing at the hills on either side of him. His lips began to move, forming words. Soon he spoke aloud, finding strong satisfaction in the words of the poet he loved:

"Lights and shades
Which marched and countermarched about the hills
In glorious apparition."

Then he stopped, for the next few lines of the poem find Wordsworth in his mood of pompous prose. They were not dear to Mr. Mervyn, who was no indiscriminate admirer of good and bad alike. He began to recite another passage, a more famous one, and stopped again when he came to the line about "the dreary intercourse of daily life." He was not thinking particularly of Mrs. Dann, but he wished sincerely that the people whom he met in daily life were not so entirely out of tune with the "haunting passion" of the "sounding cataract."

The road, skirting a hillside, turned sharply round a large grey rock. Beyond the rock a narrow bridge, supported on a single arch, spanned a rushing brown torrent. It was very pleasant to sit on the wall of the bridge and watch the water flowing underneath. The men of the Royal Irish Constabulary knew the spot and often spent happy hours in gazing at the water. All men who lead a contemplative life—and the Irish police in country places cannot be active—are fond of running water. It reminds them of the passage of time, assures them that the minutes, days, and years are really hastening on, a truth which it is very difficult to realise if you have nothing to do. For the busy man, with engagements to keep, the passage of time is a nuisance. He wants it to stand still. To the meditative quietist time moves too slowly. He finds a pleasure in being reminded, by a brook or otherwise, that it really is going on, that his dinner or his bed is actually nearer than it was because a bubble which he saw far up the stream has passed out of sight.

But the men of the Royal Irish Constabulary were not selfish. They realised that Mr. Mervyn's need of the brook's teaching was greater than theirs. They liked leaning over the wall of the bridge, but when they saw Mr.

Mervyn coming they always stood upright, saluted him, and marched on.

This afternoon, after rounding the rock, Mr. Mervyn saw that Sergeant Ginty, attended by a well-proportioned constable, was standing on tne bridge. With them was a stranger, a young man dressed in a way which gave Mr. Mervyn a feeling of acute discomfort, almost of actual fear. He wore a suit of clothes of an iron-grey colour, cut in such a way that their very appearance suggested mental energy and efficiency. His face was thin, clean-shaved, and eager. His head was slightly tilted to one side and he was looking at Sergeant Ginty over his shoulder and out of the corners of his eyes.

Mr. Mervyn wished to turn round and slink back out of sight round the corner of the grey rock. He was unable to do this because the strange young man caught sight of him and held him fascinated. Sergeant Ginty and his muscular constable, whose faces were shining with perspiration, turned round, as soon as the stranger's eyes were off them, and walked with undignified haste back towards Druminawona. The young man approached Mr. Mervyn with outstretched hand.

"You're the Reverend Theophilus," he said. "I'd have known you anywhere. Old Sally May Dann has told me quite a bit about you. I recognise you as being in complete harmony with a scene which the poet Wordsworth would have admired. Sally May told me of your devotion to that bard. It was amid surroundings like this that he wrote his immortal lines on 'Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored.' I honour you, sir, for your devotion to William Wordsworth. My name is Bobby Sebright."

He shook Mr. Mervyn's hand heartily.

"I'm doddering round these islands," he said, "'Stepping Westward,' if you'll allow me to speak from the point of view of a man who has been having a look round

London in the hope of getting material for the instruction of the great American public on the subject of Home Rule. Sally May is of opinion that I don't require to circulate much beyond this locality to get what I want. That simplifies my job some if she's right. So far I haven't struck it rich in the way of copy; but things may brighten up when I meet your prominent citizens."

"You've not been here very long, have you?" said Mr. Mervyn.

"Stepped through Sally May's front door at 2.47 P. M.," said Bobby Sebright. "According to my watch, a five-dollar timepiece, guaranteed for twelve months, it is now 4.13 P. M., say one hour twenty-six minutes, of which one hour went in lunch and mixed conversation with Sally May and a charming young lady—your daughter, I believe, Mr. Mervyn. Net balance for study of Irish problem twenty-six minutes."

He paused. Mr. Mervyn felt bound to make a remark of some kind. He chose a very obvious one.

"I'm afraid that in so short a time you can hardly have gathered any very valuable impressions."

"Don't you waste any time in politeness, Mr. Mervyn, when talking to me. I shan't buck any against a plain statement of your opinion. 'Result nil.' That's what you mean to imply. Twenty-six valuable minutes gone. Result nil. But you're wrong."

"You could scarcely expect," said Mr. Mervyn, "in twenty-six minutes——"

"A natural mistake," said Bobby Sebright, "natural in a man ignorant of the training afforded by our New York journalism. I have here—" (he drew a notebook from his pocket) "an impression gathered from the surrounding scenery, more particularly that section of it which comes in view after climbing Sally May's boundary wall. I propose to cable this impression to New York as soon as I light on your post-office. It will enlighten our poli-

ticians some, and tend to clear away the misapprehensions of the general public. Would you care to hear it?"

"I should like to, very much," said Mr. Mervyn politely. He was not quite sure what Bobby Sebright was talking about; but he felt attracted by the young man. Exuberant vitality is one of the most attractive things there is to those who are growing old. Wordsworth felt this when he wrote about "the wantonness of heart" of a joyous band of schoolboys—a passage which Mr. Mervyn often quoted to Delia when Sergeant Ginty's sons were particularly annoying.

"Britishers mistaken," read Bobby Sebright, "in wanting to retain franchise. No dividends possible."

"Franchise?" said Mr. Mervyn.

The word, so he understood, meant the power of voting; a blessing much desired, he believed, by clever women; but quite unappreciated by him. He indeed possessed a double franchise, two votes, being an elector of Dublin University, but he had never used or wanted to use either of them. If Bobby Sebright used the word in the same sense the Britishers were unquestionably mistaken in wanting to retain the thing. It could be no use to them.

"On our side," said Bobby Sebright, "franchise means sole right of running street cars, electric light, telephones and general public conveniences granted by State Congress or other representative authority in return for considerations of value given by applicant financiers to ward bosses. See?"

"No," said Mr. Mervyn, "I don't."

"Don't you run away with the notion that my cable appears in New York Press as read to you. That's where the assistant editor earns his salary. He sits down to those two statements of mine and inspires into them until they swell. He produces an article of the length required, with cross-headings. I'd like your opinion now,

Mr. Mervyn, on that subject of dividends. Can this kind of show be made to pay? Can it cover expenses under proper management?"

Bobby Sebright looked round him. He seemed to be reckoning up the commercial possibilities of scattered grey stones, of heath-covered hill-sides, of brawling streams, of patches of fluttering bog cotton and fragrant thickets of bog myrtle, of "the lights and shades which marched and countermarched about the hills."

"Do you mean this place?" said Mr. Mervyn.

Bobby Sebright waved his hand comprehensively. Even the two policemen, visible as tiny figures far along the road, seemed to be included in his view.

"The country generally," he said, "of which this section is a fair sample according to Sally May."

"She thinks it can," said Mr. Mervyn.

"I have heard of that scheme. It strikes me as speculative, Mr. Mervyn. I'm not prepared to say but that, properly advertised, the idea may have money in it. Sally May is a fool; but she gets a notion now and then that's worth thinking of. As a holiday resort things might move a bit in this neighbourhood if run on religious and artistic lines. It's a novelty. Folks are accustomed to holidays, and know all they want to know about religion and art; but hitherto the three things have been kept separate. Sally May's notion is to mix them. That's so?"

This seemed to Mr. Mervyn a very fair way of describing the Miracle Play. It increased his dislike for the project. "It doesn't seem to me," he said, "a right thing to do."

"I rather gathered from Sally May," said Bobby Sebright, "that you objected on artistic grounds. I don't set any excessive value on art myself, though I admit that it has its uses. But it occurs to me that if this drama is run on what is generally understood to be the most

elevated lines your objection ought to vanish away. Now I've studied some on the question of dramatic art when I was running the theatrical criticism department of my paper last fall. I see that the regular ballet and musical comedy chorus work wouldn't do for the public you're out after, but I'm of opinion, and so is Sally May, that by proper attention to costume and by the use of select words culled from the genuine writings of the great Elizabethan literary men an effect may be produced which will not jar the most sensitive taste."

"That's not my objection at all," said Mr. Mervyn. "She has always misunderstood me about that. Perhaps I haven't made my meaning quite plain, but——"

"Miss Delia Mervyn confirmed my impression," said Bobby Sebright, "that you were against the scheme on the grounds of high art, mistrusting the capacity of Sally May. But it doesn't matter any way. The point we have to consider before we go into the scheme is what your objections are worth stated in terms of dollars. Now, don't you bristle up if I put it straight to you. Are you one of the bosses of this section? How do you stand with the ring which controls the votes? Can you arrange for a vocal expression of public opinion?"

"I don't think so," said Mr. Mervyn; "I don't really know. I am not sure that I understand what you mean. I never tried."

"If you don't know whether you can or not you may take it from me as a fact that you can't, and in that case your objection to the scheme won't matter one cent to Sally May. I respect you for it, but don't you make any mistake about the value of your opinion. It isn't of any value."

"I know that," said Mr. Mervyn. "I've felt that all along; but Father Roche——"

"He's a smart man, according to Sally May. He sees dollars at the far end."

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would be received. The young man before him seemed to be well disposed. He certainly spoke in a frank and friendly way, and yet Mr. Mervyn hesitated.

"Anything I can do for you," said Bobby, "you can reckon on as done, unless it amounts to a crime. I like you, Mr. Mervyn. You're a man of a kind I don't run up against every day. I reckon your type has rather died out in America. Unassuming merit is your speciality. Our civilisation hasn't room for it. The violet gets walked on, not having any wire in its stalk; whereas the silk-petalled azalea flourishes in the hat of the young lady who patronises an expensive artist in head ornament. No one tramples on it. That's why I'm inclined to cherish you. You're a work by one of the Old Masters, and anything I can do for you I will."

"Thanks," said Mr. Mervyn; "it's very kind of you to speak like that. What I thought of asking was——"

Again he hesitated.

"If it's a crime," said Bobby, "I'm not prepared to take it on. In an ordinary way I shouldn't hesitate, but I haven't been long enough in these islands to have gotten a proper grip upon your legal system; and from what I have heard your prisons aren't exactly up-to-date hotels."

"I wasn't thinking of anything the least criminal."

"Then don't hesitate. Ventilate your request."

"I merely wish to suggest that it would be better not to mention the meeting in the village this evening at Druminawona House."

"To Sally May or the young lady?"

"To neither."

Mr. Mervyn spoke quite decisively. Delia had deserted him. Like Biddy, the grey pony, she had yielded to the fascination of Mrs. Dann. He felt that she was not to be trusted.

"I don't deny," said Bobby, "that you've got me on a raw place. There are other things, Mr. Mervyn, that

I'd have promised with greater cheerfulness. It goes against me to keep that meeting a secret from Sally May. If she'd heard of it, she'd have attended and she'd have added quite a bit to the interest of the demonstration. It would have gratified me to have seen her opposing your resolution."

"But you won't tell her," said Mr. Mervyn anxiously.

"I've passed my word and I'll stand to it. And the block you've put on intercourse with Miss Mervyn shall be respected. Your daughter, Mr. Mervyn, is a young lady of remarkable innocence and simplicity. I'm not a stained-glass-window white-robed saint, but I'd hesitate to contaminate the mind of your daughter with a guilty secret."

"I don't think it's exactly guilty," said Mr. Mervyn uneasily.

"It would be," said Bobby. "You may take my word for it. It would be if communicated to your daughter. Once in possession of that secret she'd be obliged to dissimulate. While holding confidential intercourse with Sally May she'd be aware that silence was equivalent to deliberate deceit. She'd be placed in a difficult position; and I don't see how she could escape from it without losing that innocence which irresistibly reminds me of an arum lily."

"I'm afraid that it may be very inconvenient for you to attend the meeting. My sister-in-law dines, I believe, at half-past seven and——"

"Dinner is a consideration which doesn't jog the balance of the scales when duty is in the opposite pan. It doesn't weigh in worth a feather, and anyway I had figured on dining with you."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. MERVYN gasped. The reception of a guest of any sort in the rectory at Druminawona was a very rare event. Once a year one of his clerical brethren—a kindly man who held the important office of rural dean—spent half of a day with Mr. Mervyn. It was his business to gather information about the condition of the parish for the use of the bishop. But of his visit there was always ample notice. Delia had time to make Æneas Sweeny kill chickens. She and Onny Donovan between them made custard out of eggs laid by the mother of the chickens. The rural dean feasted royally and Mr. Mervyn did not grudge him his food. But Bobby Sebright invited himself to a meal without giving any notice at all. And he invited himself to late dinner. The rural dean ate his chicken at half-past one o'clock.

If Delia were at home—but Delia was not. If even Onny Donovan could be counted on—but it was very unlikely that Onny would leave the pleasant company of Jamesy Casey before nine o'clock. Mr. Mervyn remembered that she seemed to be enjoying herself behind the laurel-bush. The possibilities of such joy are not easily exhausted. She would certainly—and Mr. Mervyn had not the heart to blame her—find a walk with Jamesy a pleasanter thing than cooking a dinner in the rectory kitchen.

Bobby Sebright watched the shadows of deep perplexity gather on Mr. Mervyn's face. He was too quick a reader of character to suppose that the gentle old clergyman was an inhospitable churl. He guessed at the nature of the difficulties.

"Don't you worry yourself about the aspic for the quails," he said, "or let the thought of there being no ice for the champagne put you out any. A chunk of pie will satisfy my requirements."

"But," said Mr. Mervyn, "there isn't any pie. We—the fact is we hardly ever have pie."

"Last fall," said Bobby cheerfully, "I took up a contract for eight bright articles on the simple life. It was booming some at the time and editions of Thoreau's immortal work on Walden were selling off to our gilt-edged aristocracy in thousands, bound in pale green crushed morocco to indicate the vernal nature of the contemplative enterprise. My editor couldn't afford to be out of the boom, so I took hold and promised to write up to the requirements of the public. With a view to perfecting my information and putting on the colours strictly in accordance with nature, I tried the life."

Mr. Mervyn looked puzzled. He felt that he was very stupid, but he could not grasp the connection between the eight bright articles on Thoreau, and the total want of dinner in his house. Bobby Sebright obligingly explained himself.

"For six week-ends," he said, "I erected my teepee on the bank of a mountain stream with a proper furnishing of umbrageous pines and other fittings. I hired a milch goat at the rate of half a dollar for the twenty-four hours and her rations. That goat and I had a grey blanket and a bag of maize flour between us. I didn't wear boots any more than she did, and the two of us watched the sun getting up out of his bed every Sunday and Monday morning. We communed together on eternal verities during the day, and there wasn't any ill-feeling between us except at milking time. She didn't seem to allow that I was an adopted kid, and I had some work smoothing things out with her. But the articles caught on. They were the real thing. After the publication of the second

Thoreau's sales began to droop. When I finished the eighth, the general public swore off the simple life. Folks came to realise that artists in monuments for the deceased were the only people likely to benefit by the spread of the simple life if lived according to the strict rules. I mention this experience," Bobby added, "to explain to you that I'm not altogether dependent on pie."

Mr. Mervyn realised that Bobby was boasting of a capacity to endure hardness. He became more hopeful. He could, at all events, offer bread, made of wheat flour, and he drew his milk supply from a cow, a gentle beast, submissive to Æneas Sweeny, which was fed on ordinary grass, and kept her thought on the eternal verities strictly to herself.

"If you really don't mind a very frugal meal," said Mr. Mervyn, "there are sure to be eggs and bread and butter. I shall be very glad "

There are worse things than boiled eggs, eaten with bread and butter. Bobby Sebright would have been perfectly content with them. But he was seized with the desire to give Mr. Mervyn as good a meal as possible. He had for the old clergyman the same benevolent feeling which prompts a good-natured uncle to offer a hungry schoolboy the free run of a pastrycook's shop.

"Say now, Mr. Mervyn," he said. "We'll just step round to the principal store in this town and buy up such canned goods and patent farinaceous products as the proprietor has in stock."

Mr. Mervyn groped in his pocket. His fingers closed on a coin, but he did not feel certain whether it was a shilling or a halfpenny. At best it would be insufficient for the purchase of much canned food, but he remembered hopefully the penny packets of biscuits.

"We shall be able to get some biscuits," he said.

"Sure," said Bobby, "and "

He poured out the names of an amazing number of

eatable things. Some of them were quite strange to Mr. Mervyn. Others, tinned tongues and sardines, he knew by repute, and suspected of being horribly expensive. He clutched the coin in his pocket and then let it drop from his fingers hopelessly. If it were a shilling and not a halfpenny, even if, by some wild chance, it turned out to be a golden sovereign, it would be insufficient to buy half the things which Bobby mentioned. He determined to pledge his credit to the uttermost, buy every luxury obtainable in Druminawona. It might take him years to pay the bill, but he would entertain Bobby Sebright properly. In the west of Ireland men still retain the savage virtue of hospitality; and, on occasion, are capable of running into debt cheerfully. Mr. Mervyn had been born east of the Shannon, but he had lived long enough in Connacht to have caught something of the spirit of the country.

He tried to assert himself and take up his proper position as host when they entered the shop. But Bobby Sebright quelled him.

"This," he said, "is my show. You're having this on me. You're providing the eggs, milk, and butter. I'm undertaking the looting of the store."

He looked round him as he spoke. There did not appear to be very much to loot. On the floor beside the counter stood a large pile of biscuit tins and two sacks of flour. Bobby kicked the biscuit tins contemptuously. They appeared to be empty. Behind the counter stood Daniel Fogarty, smiling pleasantly. He had already received large orders from Mrs. Dann. The appearance in his shop of another stranger gratified him very much. Mr. Mervyn had never been a very profitable customer, and Miss Mervyn had a habit—unworthy of a lady, in Fogarty's opinion—of scrutinising her bills very carefully. It was almost impossible to make the usual profit by charging her for a pound of sugar or a pot of mar-

malade which she had not actually received. But Mr. Mervyn's American relatives and friends seemed to be people of a different temper. Fogarty hoped that many more of them would come to Druminawona.

Behind Fogarty, ranged on two long shelves along the side of the shop, were rows of bottles. Bobby looked at them. Here and there was one of strange shape, labelled "Ginger Cordial." Here and there a tall thin bottle of raspberry-vinegar, or a squat flask of lemon-squash. But most of the bottles contained whisky. Bobby smiled.

"This State isn't dry," he said. "If you feel inclined for any of those fancy drinks, Mr. Mervyn, name it, and we'll have the bottle papered up. I'm giving an order for the native wine." He pointed as he spoke to a large bottle of whisky.

Daniel Fogarty was not accustomed to having orders for whisky given in this blatant, shameless way. Irishmen drink whisky, of course, but they have the grace to be ashamed of it. The Temperance Movement has been gathering force for years, and when we want a bottle of whisky now we ask for it in a confidential whisper, leaning over the counter, and speaking into the shopkeeper's ear. We do not actually name the thing, but describe it as "the same as you sent before." A really sympathetic grocer will anticipate our order, gathering from our furtive expression that it is whisky we want, and sparing us the necessity of saying anything. Daniel Fogarty was further put out by hearing whisky called wine. He stared blankly at Bobby.

"John Jameson," said Bobby, "is, I understand, the local name of the article."

Daniel Fogarty got down a bottle and wrapped it carefully in brown paper. Bobby found some packets of desiccated soup on the counter. He flicked them contemptuously with his finger.

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"And it's ten to one I would be telling you a lie," said Fogarty, "if I was to name a price for the goods on the counter. I don't know the price of them, and that's the truth, for the invoice that came along with them has got lost on me."

Bobby Sebright got out his notebook, and wrote rapidly.

"Local colour," he said to Mr. Mervyn. "Worth money in a descriptive sketch. Business methods of the Western Britisher. Invoice lost. Goods unpriced."

"How would it be now," said Fogarty, "if I was to say ten shillings for the lot? The last thing I'd like would be to be over-charging you, and if there's to be a loss to any one it's better that I'd be the one to bear it."

"Including the bottle of whisky?" said Bobby.

Fogarty eyed him cautiously. Bobby returned his gaze with a stare of perfect innocence.

"It's joking you are," said Fogarty. "Sure the whisky's five shillings by itself, and whisky's a thing I do know the price of."

Bobby made another entry in his notebook.

"As near as I can figure it out," he said, "the total value of those canned provisions is about one dollar; but I'll give you the ten shillings you're asking. This illustration of your national methods of encouraging the stranger to trade with you is worth the balance to me. The American business public will appreciate this sketch. It'll be bright and replete with suggestive fact."

Daniel Fogarty appeared to be entirely unmoved. In his heart he was not a little proud of the impression which he had made on the American stranger, a member of a nation notorious for its astuteness in business matters. He was also pleased to think that he was to be the subject of an article in a newspaper. A free advertisement is as welcome as it is rare. But, like all Irishmen, Fogarty had the manners of a gentleman. He

made up his parcel without giving any sign of the pleasure he felt. It was only after he had tied the last knot in the string that he pointed out to Bobby his name and address printed in large black letters on the paper.

"In case you might be wanting it at any future time," he said.

Bobby laid down a sovereign on the counter. As he did so Father Roche entered the shop.

The priest went straight to Mr. Mervyn, took him by the arm and led him out of earshot of Daniel Fogarty, to a corner of the shop. He was evidently upset about something. Under ordinary circumstances he would have taken some notice of the stranger. Curiosity would have made him try to find out who Bobby Sebright was. Courtesy, habitual with him, would have led him to postpone his own business until he had said words of warm welcome to a man whom he had never seen before. But on this occasion he took no notice of Bobby at all.

"Mr. Mervyn," he said, speaking in a hoarse and agitated whisper, "I'm annoyed, so I am, with the people of the parish. I haven't been as much annoyed since the first day I came among them. I wouldn't be as much annoyed if the half of them were to refuse to pay their dues, and that's what they'll be coming to soon if they go on as they're going."

"What's happened?" said Mr. Mervyn.

"Would you believe it?—you would not, nor no man would: but there isn't one in the place will come to the meeting to protest against the insult to the religion of the people of Ireland that the American lady is trying to perpetrate. I don't know what the bishop will say when he hears it."

"Surely—surely, if you ask them to—they'd never refuse?"

"Wouldn't they? Just you listen now till I ask Daniel

Fogarty. He's one that I haven't asked yet, and you'll hear what he says."

Father Roche turned round to face Daniel Fogarty. As he did so he caught sight of Bobby Sebright.

"Tell me now," he said to Mr. Mervyn, "who's that young fellow that's leaning on the counter? I don't know did I ever set eyes on him before."

"His name's Bobby Sebright," said Mr. Mervyn. "He's an American journalist, a nephew—I think he said a nephew—of Mrs. Dann."

"Another Yank," said Father Roche, "and it's Yanks that's playing the mischief with the people of this country. I'm not meaning anything disrespectful to any friend of yours, Mr. Mervyn. But what I say is this, wherever there's a returned Yank you'll find the minds of the people stirred up to be disrespectful to the clergy. Come on now, till you see what sort of an answer we'll get from Daniel Fogarty."

"Mr. Mervyn," said Bobby Sebright, "will you introduce me to your reverend friend?"

Mr. Mervyn did so, a little nervously. Bobby gave the priest no chance of expressing his dislike of Americans.

"I am proud to meet you, sir," he said. "I understand that you're the principal boss of this neighbourhood and keep the votes of the citizens in your pocket. Sally May Dann, the lady who has recently come here, bursting with philanthropic plans for the advancement of this country, is relying on you, sir."

"She needn't," said Father Roche, "for I'm not inclined to support her. I don't deny that she means well —"

"She does," said Mr. Mervyn. "She's exceedingly kind-hearted."

"But what she proposes," said Father Roche, "doesn't

He turned from Bobby Sebright and addressed Fogarty.

"Daniel," he said, "I am calling a meeting this evening at eight o'clock in the schoolroom, and the purpose of the meeting is to make it clear that the people of this parish without distinction of religion or politics are opposed to the making of soda-water out of the Holy Well, or play-acting of a kind that the bishop wouldn't approve of, in our midst."

Daniel Fogarty shuffled his feet and fiddled nervously with the string of the parcel before him. Without seeming to notice what he was doing he swept Bobby Sebright's sovereign into the till. Father Roche had no right to complain of any sign of truculent disrespect in his attitude so far. He appeared to be exceedingly uncomfortable and cowed.

"What do you say now, Daniel?" said Father Roche. "Will you come to the meeting and support your priest? Speak up now, and speak plain."

"As for going against the clergy," said Daniel Fogarty, "and yourself in particular, Father, not to mention the bishop, it's what I wouldn't do; and no man has the right to say it of me that ever I did. You know that, Father, and Mr. Mervyn knows it, and everybody knows it. Amn't I the father of a long family, and is there one of them that's ever been neglectful of his religious duties? There is not. Many's the time I've said to the children: 'Let yees all be attentive to your religion and mind what the priest says to ye even if yees was to lose money by it.' Though I knew well they wouldn't lose money by it, for there's no better friend to the people than the priest, and he wouldn't see e'er a one at the loss of money."

He smiled in an ingratiating way at Father Roche as he spoke, but the priest was in no way mollified.

"You're ready enough to talk, Daniel Fogarty," he

said, "and to talk smooth and nice; but what I'm wanting from you now isn't talk. Will you come to the meeting or will you not?"

Bobby Sebright got out his notebook again. He stood, pencil in hand, waiting for Fogarty's answer.

"Our feeling," said Mr. Mervyn mildly, "is that the play Mrs. Dann wants us to act is not exactly——"

Fogarty interrupted him. Mr. Mervyn's explanations were all well enough; but Mr. Mervyn did not really matter. He was not a valuable customer.

"I'd come to the meeting," he said, "and I'd say whatever it was that had to be said if it was any other night but this night. I'm terribly busy, so I am, and herself is sick in her bed, so she can't be any help to me; so you'll excuse me, Father."

"I will not excuse you," said Father Roche, "and what's more I won't listen to the way you're talking. You're not busy to-night any more than another night, and I met your wife with the baby in her arms, and she was looking as well as ever I saw her."

"Father," said Fogarty, speaking in a kind of deprecating whine, "you won't ask me to do what might mean a loss to me. Your reverence would be the last man to stand in the way of the people of Druminawona making a little money. The Lord knows we want it. You wouldn't do the like and no more would the bishop."

"I would," said Father Roche—"I would, and what's more I do, when there's talk of Judas Iscariot, and my own picture on the outside of a bottle. It's not decent."

"I don't know, Father," said Fogarty, "do you rightly understand the way things are. Take my own case, now. There's no reason now in the wide world why the place I'm standing in at the present moment shouldn't be an hotel. There's room enough in it and there'd be more room if herself and me and the children was to go out

to the house at the back of the yard where the cows is presently, and that's what we'd do if we could turn the premises into an hotel."

"You'd sell your soul," said Father Roche, "for a five-pound note."

"I would not sell my soul," said Fogarty, "and there'd be more than five pounds in it; there'd be more than fifty pounds in it, if the American lady was to bring people down to the locality the way they're after saying that she will. That's what I'm thinking of, Father, the good of the parish; and it's a curious thing, so it is, that you'd be talking to me about selling my soul."

"Listen to him," said Father Roche,—"listen to him, Mr. Mervyn; and it's the same with all of them."

"Gentlemen," said Bobby Sebright, closing his note-book, "it occurs to me that the public meeting is likely to be a frost. I own I'm disappointed. I'd have liked to have reported the proceedings. The New York public would have been interested. That meeting would have been a scoop for my paper. But I'm not complaining. Sally May Dann was right when she fetched me down to Druminawona. I'm getting the real thing, valuable stuff. The insight I'm acquiring into the religion of this neighbourhood —"

"It's the fault of you and the like of you," said Father Roche, "coming here and upsetting the minds of the people——"

"Excuse me, sir," said Bobby Sebright,—"excuse my pointing out to you that you're mistaken in your estimate of my intentions."

"Mr. Sebright," said Mr. Mervyn, "is anxious to help us. Perhaps he may be able to suggest something that may help us out of our difficulty."

"If that's so," said Father Roche, "let him suggest. I'll be glad to hear him."

"Come right along," said Bobby, "come right along

with me, both of you reverend gentlemen. We'll sit round Mr. Mervyn's festive board and discuss the situation while we eat the miscellaneous tinned goods provided by Mr. Fogarty."

He tucked the parcel under his arms as he spoke. Then he turned suddenly to Fogarty.

"I kind of fancy," he said, "that there's something due to me out of that sovereign I laid down before you."

"Did I not give you your change?" said Fogarty.

Bobby Sebright looked at him with twinkling eyes.

"I admire your business acumen," he said, "and I'll compliment you some when I'm describing the interview in the New York Press; but there's five shillings coming to me out of that till of yours."

"That's the way with you," said Father Roche. "You begin with disrespect for the clergy, and the next thing you do is try to cheat a strange gentleman out of his change."

Father Roche was wrong. Daniel Fogarty had all his life been anxious to cheat anyone who could possibly be cheated. Never before had he found it necessary to resist the will of a priest. If there was any connection between the two sins it was not that suggested by Father Roche. Disrespect to the clergy may have been a consequence of a long course of petty swindling, the final crisis of his spiritual degradation. The willingness to cheat did not follow a decay of reverence.

Fogarty fumbled in his till and produced five shillings. To this, after a moment of hesitation he added a penny.

"Discount," he said, "for prompt cash, and I wish everybody paid what he owed as quick as you do."

"Thank you," said Bobby, "you encourage me to deal here regularly while in this locality."

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naturally, do not want to be killed by lions, so they keep away from each other at mealtimes.

Father Roche felt that he was running a desperate risk when Bobby Sebright swept him into Mr. Mervyn's dining-room. Mr. Mervyn was uncomfortable for exactly the same reason, but he had additional cause for disquiet. Onny Donovan was not at home. The kitchen fire, long untended, had gone out. The table was not laid for a meal. He would have liked, on the occasion of entertaining an American journalist, to have made as good a show as possible. That was a matter of personal honour. He particularly wished, if a Roman Catholic priest was to be his guest, to present a decent meal. There the reputation of his Church was touched. He apologised, making rambling excuses for Delia's absence, and giving a confused account of Onny's doings. He did not want to say much about Onny. Father Roche was responsible for her morals, and it was likely that he would take a severe view of her flirtation with Jamesy Casey. Unfortunately he said enough to give Father Roche a fairly clear idea of what had happened.

"Girls," said the priest, "is the terror of the world. You might watch them like a cat at a mouse, but you couldn't be up to them. I might have known there was something of the sort going on when I couldn't find Jamesy Casey high or low. I suppose it's him she's out after."

"It is," said Mr. Mervyn.

"If you did right," said Father Roche, "you'd take a stick to her. A stick is the only way I know of getting the fear of God into those ones. Talking's no use. You might talk till you were tired, and all they'd do would be to forget the beginning of what you might say before you'd got to the end."

"If you two reverend gentlemen," said Bobby Se-

bright, "will sit down, I'll prospect around and see what I can collect in the way of plates and knives."

"I couldn't think of letting you," said Mr. Mervyn, "and you wouldn't know where to find them. I'd rather —I'd really rather do it myself."

"You'll allow me," said Bobby Sebright. "Your time is valuable, Mr. Mervyn. You and the Reverend Father have to settle about the kind of stick that ought to be used on that hired girl. I shouldn't be able to help you any, for I'm unaccustomed to that kind of discipline. On our side we don't practise it. It's gone out with the advance of our so-called civilisation."

He left the room as he spoke. Mr. Mervyn wanted to go after him; but Father Roche took him by the arm and held him back.

"Will you tell me now," said the priest, "what sort is that fellow?"

Mr. Mervyn scarcely heard and did not heed the question. He could hear Bobby Sebright opening and shutting doors in search of the pantry.

"Is he queer in the head," said Father Roche, "like the lady beyond at the big house?"

Mr. Mervyn started. Bobby Sebright had evidently found the pantry. There was a crash like that made by the breaking of plates in large numbers. Mr. Mervyn did not possess very many plates. It would be highly inconvenient if Bobby Sebright broke a dozen of them.

"What's he doing here?" said Father Roche insistently. "You'd think one of the sort would be enough in the place at a time."

"He may be able to help us," said Mr. Mervyn. "I think he has a great deal of influence with Mrs. Dann. If we can persuade him that the Miracle Play is really undesirable he may——"

"If he's like her," said Father Roche, "it would take

more than you and me to persuade him into any kind of sense."

Bobby Sebright, pushing open the door with his knee, entered the room. He had a large tray in his hand. On it were plates, tumblers, knives, forks, a loaf of bread and some butter. Tucked under his arm he had a table-cloth.

"I've made good," he said, "in my collection of the various implements required for a banquet. If you two reverend gentlemen will prepare the provisions, I'll spread the table. Mr. Mervyn, will you pull the corks from the whisky and the digestive sauce. Father Roche will take the wrappings off the canned goods. I couldn't find a tin-opener, so you'll have to work with a table-knife." Bobby performed his own task rapidly. Mr. Mervyn got his two corks out of their bottles. Father Roche was unsuccessful with the tins. He punched three holes in one of them and turned the edge of Mr. Mervyn's knife. Then he cut his finger—not with the knife, but with the jagged corner of the tin. The knife could no longer cut anything, not even Father Roche's finger, though it was fat and soft. Bobby Sebright had to take over the job. He managed it in the end with Father Roche's pocket-knife which he borrowed. His own, he said, was not a good knife for tin-opening, though it was excellent for pointing pencils.

The meal began in depressing silence. Neither tinned tongue nor potted chicken and ham are exhilarating kinds of food. The digestive sauce was hot and strongly flavoured. It tended to blister the roof of the mouth of anyone who took much of it, but it did not act as a stimulant for the brain or nerves. Father Roche was frankly sulky. His finger bled obstinately and the blood soaked through fold after fold of the handkerchief which he wrapped round it. When he succeeded at last in making a bandage so thick that no blood could get through, his

finger was of such a clumsy size that he could not hold a fork comfortably. His disgust with the conduct of his parishioners increased as he put morsel after morsel of flabby tongue into his mouth. The human tongue, if one could eat it, would probably be highly flavoured. It is used, while the owner is alive, for sarcasm, jest, and sometimes profane language. It must, we may suppose, acquire piquancy. The nightingale's tongue was esteemed a delicacy by the ancients, which is just what one would expect, for the nightingale sings with remarkable sweetness. But the domesticated ox only lows, and the noise it makes, though soothing to poets on summer evenings, lacks both sparkle and variety. It would be surprising if an ox-tongue had much taste, especially after being sealed up, perhaps for years, in a tin. Father Roche tried to improve it by soaking it in digestive sauce, but the sauce did no more than slightly irritate him. It did not cheer him in the least.

Mr. Mervyn was even more nervous and depressed. He ate potted chicken and ham which he spread on slices of bread and butter. It brought no gladness to his heart. Hot soup might have given him courage and buoyancy. A joint of beef from which he could have cut large steaming slices would have done something to restore his self-confidence. But it is impossible for anyone to look cheerfully into the eyes of impending adversity when he is scooping minced chicken out of a small tin with a teaspoon. Even D'Artagnan's immense vitality would have failed him under such a trial.

There was, however, the whisky. Bobby Sebright, the only cheerful member of the party, insisted that both clergymen should take a share of it. Whisky is a genuine stimulant. Unlike digestive sauce, it gets beyond the palate and affects the brain. But it acts slowly. Bobby felt sorry that he had not got a bottle of champagne. It is almost instantaneous in its effects. The

dullest dinner-party brightens perceptibly when the butler fills the glasses of the guests with it. Even the stupidest woman, uncomfortably conscious perhaps that her dress is hooked crookedly, becomes airily conversational the moment she tastes champagne. The man next her, though up to that point he may have felt that two hours of her company would drive him mad, begins to appreciate her charm when he pushes away his half-finished sherry and allows his fingers to close round the stem of his champagne-glass. Such is the wonderful virtue of this wine. Whisky is different. In the end it produces something of the same effect, but it does its work very gradually. Even if it is mixed with effervescent Apollinaris it produces no immediate cheerfulness. When it is tempered by dead water, poured from a jug, it seems at first to be impotent. Nevertheless it does its business in the end.

Mr. Mervyn's tumbler contained a weak mixture; but it was strong enough to cheer him before he had finished it. Father Roche filled his tumbler a second time and began to feel that life was not altogether gloomy. Bobby Sebright was quick to recognise the altered tone of the conversation. The subject, of course, was Mrs. Dann, her Miracle Play and other activities.

"If it wasn't that I'm parish priest," said Father Roche, "I wouldn't have a word to say against her. But I ask you, Mr. Sebright, and I ask you, Mr. Mervyn, how can a man in my position, with the bishop behind him—how can he give his consent to that kind of work?"

He dug his fork into the tinned tongue as he spoke, and helped himself to a large chunk of it. That insipid meat was beginning to taste better than it did.

"If it was any other kind of play," said Mr. Mervyn, "I shouldn't so much mind. I don't approve of plays of any sort; but just for once, in order to please Mrs. Dann, I wouldn't oppose her getting up a performance

of something out of Shakespeare, but when it comes to a scriptural subject——"

"I don't think," said Bobby Sebright, "she's settled the subject yet. I quite realise the force of your objections and I respect them. Now that I know they're not purely artistic I respect them quite considerable, but Sally May has her feelings too and we've got to reckon on them. How would it strike you now, Mr. Mervyn, if I suggested a compromise? I daresay Sally May would consent to a subject taken from the Apocrypha. I'm not an expert in that branch of literature, but I kind of recollect a lady who cut off the head of a gentleman she disliked. That would be a dramatic incident, and Sally May would feel that her discovery of the Ten Tribes wasn't being wasted."

Mr. Mervyn hesitated. The Apocrypha, for a long time hesitating on the boundary wall between the sacred and the profane, has lately been pushed from its perch by the Church of Ireland and now ranks little higher than the Talmud. But Father Roche was still definite in his opposition.

"The way I'm situated," he said, "the one would be as bad as the other. It may be different with you, Mr. Mervyn, and I hope it is; but there's men I know—I'm naming no names, but I'll say this much—there's priests I know who'd be only too pleased to get the chance of reporting to the bishop anything I might do that they'd think he wouldn't approve of. If one of them was to see me this minute——"

He looked round the room. His eyes rested finally on Mr. Mervyn. No doubt his presence in the rectory dining-room, and the fact that he was eating tinned tongue beside a Protestant clergyman, might, if reported by malicious men, become a cause of grave scandal. Mr. Mervyn was uneasily conscious that his own position was not beyond reproach. There were some of his

clerical brethren who would be gravely shocked if they discovered him drinking whisky and water with a parish priest and a stray American journalist.

"I'm sure," he said, "that Mr. Sebright won't say anything which might——"

"Gentlemen," said Bobby, "I don't deny that I figured on making a lively article out of my reminiscences of this banquet. The New York public would have liked to hear about Father Roche cutting his finger on the sharp edge of a can. They'd have enjoyed being told that I couldn't induce the Rev. Theophilus to treat the whisky as anything but a dangerous poison. The title that occurred to me, gentlemen, was this: 'Priests and Parsons at Play,' with appropriate cross-headings: 'Irish Whisky as a Tongue-loosener,' and 'Clerical Life without a Tin-opener.' I'd have got credit for that article, and it would have been a pleasure to write it; but if you desire these proceedings to be treated as confidential I waive my right."

"If it went no farther than New York," said Father Roche, "I wouldn't mind; but what I'd be afraid of "

"It won't go so far," said Bobby Sebright, "you may rely on me. If every editor in the New England States were to gather round me and to go down on his knees for that article I wouldn't write a word that would compromise your characters. I wouldn't do it, sir, at a dollar a word, article to run into two thousand."

"Thank you," said Father Roche, "thank you. It's no more than I'd expect of a gentleman like yourself; but there's many a one wouldn't have said it."

"There have been times," said Bobby Sebright, "when the loss of a good article would have been a serious thing for me; but I don't mind owning up, gentlemen, that I can't claim my medal for generosity in this case. This country of yours is just a little gold mine to me. Since I came to Druminawona first-rate articles have

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Italy. It was seen there by Sally May, while touring, and the plan, with drawings, brought home."

"If he was the husband of that one," said Father Roche, "he's likely to be more comfortable now, wherever he is. I expect he'd have lived longer if he'd married a peaceable kind of woman."

"I don't know that Sally May hustled him into his coffin," said Bobby. "He understood how to deal with her. But, of course, she constituted a strain on his nervous system."

"I wish you'd tell us how he managed," said Mr. Mervyn.

Bobby Sebright took a cigarette-case from his pocket.

"Is there anything in the regulations of the two Churches which you gentlemen represent," he said, "which forbids you to sit in the room with a man who is smoking?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Mervyn—"nothing whatever, so far as I am concerned."

"I take a draw at a pipe myself," said Father Roche.

Bobby lit his cigarette.

"The following narrative," he said, "may be taken as an illustration of the methods adopted by the late Nathan P. There wasn't a cuter man of business in New York than he was. You never caught him butting against a locomotive or fooling about with a bucket and a spade with a view to staying the progress of the advancing tide. That's the kind of man he was. In earlier days he'd have made a first-class philosopher. On every point except the destiny of the Ten Lost Tribes he was sane."

Bobby paused and drew in a lungful of cigarette-smoke. Mr. Mervyn and Father Roche tried to realise the greatness of Mr. Dann's character. Father Roche failed.

"If what you're meaning is," he said, "that he gave in

to her an' let her have her own way, I don't think much of him, and what's more, his example is no good to us."

"No, sir," said Bobby. "My meaning is that Nathan P. didn't waste his strength in opposing her. He knew better than that."

"If he didn't oppose her," said Father Roche, "he let her have her own way. That's what I'm saying."

"You give your undivided attention to the following narrative," said Bobby, "and you'll understand how Nathan P. manipulated the situations which occurred. Sally May is a lady of tip-top amiability of disposition. Her desire is to benefit humanity, especially that portion of the race in which she happens to be interested."

"She has a very kind heart," said Mr. Mervyn. "That's why it is so painful to have to hurt her feelings."

"Nathan P. felt that," said Bobby, "and in shaping his conduct he allowed full play to the feeling. I am a journalist, gentlemen, and I'm a kind of cousin of Sally May's. At one time she took the notion of benefiting me. She wanted to set me up with a daily paper of the first class, complete from the linotype-room to the reporters' notebooks. Nathan P., gentlemen, was to find the dollars. Now I don't say that it would have broke him to do it; but it would have crippled his business. There'd have been a shortage of capital after I'd cashed the cheque. That was the situation, gentlemen. You know Sally May more than a bit, so you see the gravity of it. She was dead set on seeing me in the editorial chair of that daily paper."

He dropped the end of the cigarette he had been smoking into a tumbler, and lit another. Father Roche drew a pipe from his pocket and filled it slowly. He was deeply interested in the story.

"What Nathan P. did," said Bobby, "was this. He

suggested in a casual way one morning at breakfast that it would be a graceful act if Sally May were to build a new church for my father. He's a minister in the Baptist denomination," he explained, "and up to a recent date has preached in a church that was unworthy of his talents."

"I don't see that he did much good by that," said Father Roche, "beyond letting himself in for fresh expense."

"Next day," said Bobby, without noticing the priest's remark, "he kind of hinted that the ecclesiastical architecture of New York wasn't up to the standard of some of the European towns. When he thought that idea had sunk into Sally May's mind—allowing a little over a week for the process—he went on to observe that any cultured lady who'd build a first-rate Gothic cathedral, mediæval style, in New York, would benefit the general tone of American society, besides taking the starched conceit out of the inhabitants of Amiens and Cologne. Well, gentlemen, that church cost some money, but it was cheaper than the daily paper."

Mr. Mervyn and Father Roche looked at each other. Then they looked inquiringly at Bobby Sebright. They did not quite see how the story applied to their position.

"That was his method," said Bobby Sebright. "I've given you one sample of it, the one that came under my own observation; but Nathan P. pursued it invariably. He switched her off the main line into a siding whenever he noticed that she was intending to run through the signals. He diverted her. Sally May has a great mind, but she concentrates. I don't reckon that a fault; but it does prevent expansion. There's no room in her mind for two ideas at the same time. Nathan P. knew that, and he calculated that if he fixed her attention on the façade of a Gothic cathedral, she'd forget the newspaper. Well, gentlemen, she did."

"She offered to do up my church for me," said Mr. Mervyn. "I almost wish I'd let her."

"And will you tell me why you didn't?" said Father Roche. "If she'd been building a church for you she'd have left the rest of us alone. What harm would she have done you?"

"I don't care for the things she suggested," said Mr. Mervyn. "I refused. But it would have been better—I see now it would have been much better——"

"Do you think now," said Father Roche, "that she'd build a new church for me? I'd let her do it pretty near any way she fancied."

"Not a bit of good trying that," said Bobby Sebright. "Sally May isn't by any means a fool. She'll not be diverted the same way twice. If you were to go up to her to-morrow and say you wanted a church she'd laugh at you. What you've got to do, now that I've explained the method to you, is to hit upon something new, something that will arrest her attention and occupy the full energy of her mind."

Bobby Sebright rose to his feet as he spoke and threw the end of his second cigarette out of the window.

"I'll say good-bye to you now, gentlemen. I must be getting back to Sally May and your charming daughter, Mr. Mervyn."

"Sit you down," said Father Roche—"sit you down for one minute, and tell me this. How would it do if I was to represent to her the benefit it would be to the people of this neighbourhood if she was to start some kind of relief works or an industry that would give employment to the poor people?"

Bobby Sebright had reached the door before the priest finished speaking.

"No good," he said. "She thinks her Miracle Play and the water-bottling business will fill the place with money. So they will, if they're run properly."

He went out of the room as he spoke and closed the door. Father Roche and Mr. Mervyn were left staring at each other. They heard Bobby Sebright's step on the gravel outside the window.

CHAPTER XVI

THE sound of Bobby Sebright's footsteps died away. Father Roche tapped the bowl of his pipe on the edge of the table, thereby sprinkling a quantity of tobacco-ash on the floor.

"He's a smart young fellow enough," he said, "and I wouldn't say but he'd be a pleasant enough man to spend the evening with, if you knew him better. Tell me this now, Mr. Mervyn—what do you think of what he's after saying?"

"I'm afraid he's right," said Mr. Mervyn. "It will be no good to appeal to her to start a factory in Druminawona."

"It wasn't so much that I was thinking of," said the priest, "though I'm afraid he's right there. But what do you think of what he was saying about distracting her mind?"

"I'm sure it would be a very good plan," said Mr. Mervyn, "if only we could do it. But how can we? Can you think of anything?"

"It's hard to know what one like her would consider distraction; but we might do it. How would it be now —you said she was a tender-hearted kind of a lady, didn't you?"

"She is. I'm quite sure of that."

"Well, how would it be if the people boycotted you and Miss Mervyn? If Sergeant Ginty had to be mounting guard, day and night, on the doorstep, the way you wouldn't be shot while you were in your bed?"

"But why should the people think of such a thing? They wouldn't."

"They might if I told them to," said Father Roche.

"I'd rather they didn't—much rather."

"I'd see to it that you weren't put to any unnecessary inconvenience. Onny Donovan would have to leave you of course, but you would be better without her for all the good she is to you. Æneas Sweeny would stay with you so as to look after the pony, but he'd be under police protection. Do you think, now, that her mind would be turned away from foolishness, if she had to spend the most part of the day bringing down what food you wanted, which you wouldn't be able to get any other way?"

"I wouldn't like it at all," said Mr. Mervyn.

"She would be writing letters to the papers about the religious bigotry of the people in these parts, and how there wouldn't be a Protestant left alive when once we had Home Rule. She could have questions asked in Parliament, and the one lot of them fellows would be swearing themselves black in the face that the Irish Catholics were cannibals, and worse. Then the ones on the other side would say that they had it on the best authority that there never was such a place as Druminawona in Ireland, or anywhere else, so there couldn't be boycotting going on there, but that if there was such a thing as a cat, let alone a minister, belonging to a Protestant, ill-treated anywhere, it would be a blot on the fair fame of the Nationalists of Ireland, and that they'd resign their seats rather than stand it."

Father Roche was gradually becoming enthusiastic over the details of his plan. It appealed to him as in itself a pleasant thing, without regard to any effect it might have on Mrs. Dann.

"It would all be most disagreeable for me," said Mr. Mervyn. "Can't you think of anything else?"

"It wouldn't be for long," said Father Roche. "I'd say three weeks, at the outside, would have her mind dis-

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mountains while Sergeant Ginty and the rest of the police would be looking for his body. That might distract her mind, and any way he's one of them she's depending on to act the play. The weather's fine, and it wouldn't do Æneas any harm. He'd be kept from the drink for a fortnight or so any way. And at the end of that time he could come back again."

"I don't see how that possibly could be managed."

"Easy enough. Jamesy Casey would fire a couple of shots round in your backyard; and you'd run out to see what was going on. All you'd find would be the marks of blood on the stable-door—any man that would be killing a pig would give us the half of a bucketful, and that would be plenty. There'd be blood on the floor and on the ground. Jamesy Casey would do it for half a crown, and a pound would be good pay for Æneas. That and his food. We'd have to feed him, of course; but the expense is nothing. It would be worth double the money if we could distract her mind."

It is not likely that Mr. Mervyn would have agreed to this plan. The difficulties in the way of carrying it out were very great. It was possible, too, that Mrs. Dann would turn out to be quite uninterested in the fate of Æneas Sweeny. And the whole idea, judged by Mr. Mervyn's puritanical standards, was abominably fraudulent. But he was spared the necessity of giving his opinion. There was a tap at the door and Æneas walked in. He was not drunk, but he had had enough whisky to make him brave. The sight of two clergymen, where he only expected one, did not abash him in the least.

"It's no business of mine, your reverence," he said solemnly, "but I thought maybe you'd like to know; and it might be as well if Father Roche was told too."

At this point he stopped and bowed with grave dignity to Father Roche.

"I wonder," said the priest, "that you're not ashamed

to be coming in here in the state you're in at present."

"Begging your pardon," said Æneas, "and not wishing to be disrespectful, but if I was what you're after hinting at—and I'm not, for I can talk plain—but if I was itself, there's worse things in the world than a drop of whisky."

"I think you'd better go home," said Mr. Mervyn. "Whatever you want to say you can say to-morrow."

"It's no business of mine," said Æneas Sweeny, "and, of course, if your reverence is satisfied, and Father Roche has no objection, I'll not say another word, only just that I'm sorry to think that the clergy, Catholic or Protestant, would encourage such goings on. It's not what I'd expect of them."

"If I did right," said Father Roche, "I'd encourage you with the heavy end of a blackthorn stick. That's what would suit you and do you good."

"There's others," said Æneas impressively, "that might be deserving the stick more than me."

"Will you tell us what you mean," said Father Roche, "if you have any meaning?—and it'll surprise me if you have."

"I was going round by the back of the house this minute," said Æneas, "so as I'd get the cow milked and the hay thrown down to the pony before it came dark upon me, and I took a look in at the kitchen window, so as I'd see whether the chimney might be on fire or the like. Well, sure enough I seen something. I seen"—here his voice sank to a whisper—"I seen Onny Donovan."

"I'm glad she's home," said Mr. Mervyn. "I didn't hear her come in."

"She took care you didn't," said Æneas, "and she'd good reason for it. She was dressed up so as her own mother wouldn't know her, so as no respectable girl would be dressed, with gold and silver, so she was. I've

heard of the like of them clothes, and I've heard of the ladies that wear them. Gold and silver she had on her. I wouldn't give a thraneen for the character of one that would dress that way."

"You're too drunk to talk sense," said Father Roche. "Go home out of that. Where would Onny Donovan get gold and silver?"

"It may please you to say I'm drunk," said Æneas, "but I wasn't so drunk but I could see that she had Jamesy Casey along with her. I'd be ashamed to tell you what was going on, so I would, but I'll just say this: such kissing as was there, is what I never seen before, drunk or sober."

Father Roche got up from his chair angrily. He took Æneas by the shoulders and shook him heartily.

"Get home out of this," he said, "and take your drunken talk along with you. What do you mean by using such language in the presence of the clergy?"

He twisted Æneas round and pushed him out of the room.

It is one of the great glories of Ireland that the use of indecent language is sternly discouraged. Father Roche did no more than express the general feeling of respectable people when he objected to the sound of the word "kissing." Some time ago an association of musicians offered a prize for choral singing. A song was chosen, and choirs were invited to compete. Several choristers very properly objected to singing the song. It contained the word "kiss" twice, and the music was of such a kind as to emphasise the disgusting idea which the word conveyed. Father Roche, as one of the official guardians of our national morality, was not the man to sit quiet while Æneas Sweeny said out loud a word which no decent person would do more than whisper in the privacy of a bedroom, and only there to a companion of his own sex. It is to be hoped that the news-

papers will soon take to representing it as they do "damn" by its initial letter with a dash after it. Kissing is, no doubt, still practised in Ireland. Mothers, for instance, kiss their babies. Husbands, during the earlier years of married life, kiss their wives. Lovers —Jamesy Casey was an example—occasionally kiss the girls they are in love with; but the thing ought to be and is discouraged in every section of society, and the fact that it has not yet been entirely stamped out is no reason for speaking about it. There are many deplorable evils about which it is much better not to speak.

The only possible excuse for Æneas Sweeny was that he was partially drunk. Father Roche recognised this and did not deal with him nearly as severely as he might. He shut the door after him and sat down opposite Mr. Mervyn.

"I didn't give that fellow the satisfaction of hearing me say so," he said, "but I wouldn't wonder if there was some truth in what he told us."

Mr. Mervyn remembered Delia's complaints about the way in which Onny spent her Sundays. He had also a very clear recollection of the scene behind the laurel-bush earlier in the day.

"There is——," he said, "I feel nearly sure there is some kind of attachment between them. It may not amount to very much "

"Much or little," said Father Roche, "the sooner they're married the better. Will you come along with me now, Mr. Mervyn, and we'll lay it before the two of them what it is they have to do."

Mr. Mervyn had not Father Roche's stern moral strength. He also suffered from an incurable delicacy of feeling, delicacy of a perverted kind. He would at any time rather have talked about kissing, rather have tried to sing a song about it without an accompaniment to obscure the words, than have walked into his kitchen

where Onny and Jamesy Casey were occupied in the way described by Æneas Sweeney. He suggested a plan which would have the advantage of saving Onny's self-respect.

"Perhaps," he said, "it would be better if I rang the bell."

"A girl like her," said Father Roche, "wouldn't take any notice of a bell, no matter how hard you rang it."

Mr. Mervyn had a higher opinion of Onny.

"She might come," he said—"she sometimes does. Delia, my daughter, has often explained to her that it is her duty to come whenever a bell is rung."

"Much she'd care about her duty! Don't I know girls? The first thing she'd do when she heard it, and knew that we had caught her, would be to put Jamesy Casey out of the door; and the next thing would be to be off into her bed as quick as she could, so as to be pretending that she'd been asleep for an hour or more. Believe you me, there's only one way of dealing with her, and that's for me to go round to the yard and wait outside the door, and you to go into the kitchen. Then when Jamesy tries to make off I'll catch him, and when she tries to get to her bed you'll catch her. Then we'll have the two of them. Come on now."

"I'd rather ring the bell," said Mr. Mervyn. "I think she'll come. I do really."

"Have it your own way," said Father Roche.

Mr. Mervyn paused with his hand on the bell.

"You'll be able to speak to Casey to-morrow morning," he said. "It will come to the same thing in the end."

"Have it your own way," said Father Roche.

Mr. Mervyn rang the bell. He waited. There was no response whatever. Father Roche looked at him with twinkling eyes. Mr. Mervyn rang the bell again, violently. There was a minute of dead silence. Then came the sound of a door being shut somewhere.

"What did I tell you?" said Father Roche.

Mr. Mervyn opened the dining-room door. There was a noise of scurrying feet in the passage, and then another door was shut—this one with a bang.

"She's into her bed now," said Father Roche.

Mr. Mervyn was annoyed at the failure of his bell-ringing, and did not like the way in which Onny was justifying the priest's prophecy. He went slowly, with great hesitation, along the passage towards Onny's bedroom. Father Roche followed him. Mr. Mervyn reached the door of the bedroom. It was tightly shut. He looked round uncertainly. Father Roche was grinning in a triumphant and malicious way. Mr. Mervyn tapped gently at the door. There was no response.

"I don't think she can be there," he said.

"In another minute," said Father Roche in a whisper, "you'll hear her snoring."

Mr. Mervyn tapped loudly at the door.

Onny's voice, half-stifled by a yawn, reached them.

"Who's there?" she said.

"Come out," said Mr. Mervyn firmly. "I want to speak to you."

"Sure how can I come out," said Onny, "when I'm in my bed and asleep?"

Mr. Mervyn turned helplessly to Father Roche. "I don't think we can do anything more now," he said.

Father Roche stepped forward, turned the handle and flung the door wide open.

"Get up out of that, Onny Donovan," he said, "and stop your play-acting."

Onny was indubitably in bed. Her head rested on the pillow. The blankets were pulled up tightly round her chin. For one moment she gazed with wild surprise at Father Roche. Then she crept out of the bed and stood, tousled and dishevelled, but still fully dressed, on the floor. Delia's new blouse looked very much the worse

for wear. It had perhaps been subjected to treatment, during the afternoon, that was not good for it. It had certainly been tossed in the bed.

"Come along with me now," said Father Roche, "and give an account of yourself."

He went back to the dining-room. Mr. Mervyn and Onny followed him. Onny was crying bitterly, but Mr. Mervyn looked the more ashamed and crestfallen of the two.

"Now, Mr. Mervyn," said Father Roche, "you talk to her, and when you've finished I'll begin."

"Onny," said Mr. Mervyn, speaking as kindly as he could, "was there anyone with you in the kitchen?"

Onny sobbed and wiped her eyes with the sleeve of Delia's blouse.

"Was Jamesy Casey with you?" said Mr. Mervyn.

Onny sobbed again, choked, and wiped both her mouth and her eyes.

"He was not," she said.

"Onny Donovan," said Father Roche, "if you're not ashamed of yourself you ought to be. You're a disgrace to the parish, so you are."

"I never meant any harm," said Onny.

"There, there," said Mr. Mervyn, "don't cry. We'll say no more about it."

"We'll say no more," said Father Roche, "only this: that you'll marry Jamesy Casey next week."

"Sure I would," said Onny, her words separated by sobs—"sure I would if he'd ask me."

"He'll ask you," said Father Roche. "To-morrow morning he'll ask you before he has his breakfast ate."

"I hope," said Mr. Mervyn, "that you realise what you are doing, Onny. Marriage is a very serious and solemn thing. I wouldn't like you to feel that you have been forced into a union——"

He hesitated. It seemed to him that Onny was being

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as much respect as any man living for the Protestant clergy. But is there a minister in Ireland could have got Onny Donovan out of her bed the way I did?"

In all probability there is not. Even an archdeacon would have failed. Mr. Mervyn admitted the fact. What he wanted to say—what he felt would be an effective retort—was that if any other Church in Christendom had educated Onny Donovan, her father and mother, her grandfather and grandmother, her ancestors for a dozen generations, she would not have gone to bed in her clothes. But Mr. Mervyn had not the spirit of the true lover of controversy. He left Father Roche the last word, refraining from making his reply. Father Roche had no such delicacy of feeling. The victory was his. He did not shirk the pleasure of his triumph.

"It took a priest to do it," he said, "and it will always take a priest to put the fear of God into girls like her. Don't I know them?"

This was the last word. The sound of a door being opened prevented reply, even if Mr. Mervyn had been willing to make one. This time the door that opened was the front one of the house. A moment later Bobby Sebright and Delia entered the room.

"Oh, father, I didn't know you were going to have a party. I'm so sorry. I wouldn't have stayed with Aunt Sally May if I'd known."

"I can hardly call it a party," said Mr. Mervyn, "and I didn't intend—I mean to say it just happened that Father Roche——"

Delia shook hands with Father Roche.

"Miss Delia," said Bobby Sebright, "felt kind of anxious about your dinner. Sally May was upset. Said she'd have sent down a chicken-pie if she'd been informed of the entertainment. I was blamed quite a bit by Sally May. She seemed to consider it was my fault. I came along now to apologise. That's the ostensible

object of my visit, though I don't deny that it was a pleasure to me to escort Miss Delia home."

"I hope," said Delia, "that Onny got everything ready for you, and had things comfortable."

She looked at the table. The remains of the tongue in its tin, the chicken and ham also in its tin, the untidy table, did not suggest that the meal had been a very comfortable one. Delia looked distressed.

"I can't trust Onny," she said, "to do anything if I'm not here to watch her."

"Onny is going to be married," said Mr. Mervyn, "to-morrow, I think."

"Next week," said Father Roche.

"She can't," said Delia, "she hasn't given me a month's notice. I won't let her. Is it to Jamesy Casey?"

"It is," said Father Roche.

"I'll speak to her at once," said Delia. "These girls have no conscience."

"You're right there," said Father Roche; "but what can you expect? I've known girls, dozens of them, and grown women too, mothers of families, for the last forty years, and I never came across one that had a conscience yet. I'm not talking now about young ladies, Miss Mervyn. They're different."

"I'll speak to her at once," said Delia.

"I'm afraid she's in bed," said Mr. Mervyn.

"Then she'll have to get out of bed," said Delia, "for I mean to tell her what I think of her. The idea of arranging to get married "

She left the room. She had, no doubt, a genuine grievance. Servants are hard to get; very hard to get when you can only afford to pay low wages, and Delia had spent much time and trouble in training Onny Donovan. It was wholly unreasonable that she should rush into matrimony without due warning.

"I congratulate you, gentlemen," said Bobby Sebright.

"The late Nathan P. tried most things, but he never tried a wedding. I don't say you'll succeed, but the idea's novel."

"I beg your pardon," said Father Roche, "but I'm not sure do I catch your meaning."

"I left you an hour ago," said Bobby Sebright, "devising means for diverting the mind of Sally May, and I find you with a wedding arranged. I congratulate you. I don't guarantee that your wedding is on a sufficiently important scale. But the idea's good. Good-night, gentlemen. I will lie down to sleep to-night with a high opinion of the ability of the Irish clergy."

He did not wait to explain himself further, but he had said enough for Father Roche.

"There might be something in it," he said, "though it wasn't that I had in my mind when I said that Onny Donovan would be the better of being married."

Mr. Mervyn was slower-witted. He did not yet see why Bobby Sebright should congratulate him on Onny's marriage. Father Roche explained.

"Women or girls," he said, "it's the same with all of them. Haven't I been watching the ways of them for the last fifty years? They'd take more interest in a wedding than they would in Home Rule, if so be we had it —and I don't know yet will we get it or not. The better the woman—there's not much choice among them in the matter of sense, but the better they may be in other ways the more fools they'll make of themselves over a wedding. Haven't I seen them crying when you'd think they'd be pleased to get rid of some slip of a girl that had never been anything but a bother to them?"

"Do you really think that Mrs. Dann will take such an interest——?"

"If there's any crying to be done at a wedding," said Father Roche, "in my opinion it's the man that has the best right to be doing it."

"But," said Mr. Mervyn, "she's never even seen Onny Donovan."

"It makes no matter," said Father Roche, "a wedding's a wedding. That young fellow's right enough. Believe you me, if we let her know what's going on—and I'll take good care she does know—she'll think of nothing else for the next fortnight. Didn't you say she had a kind heart?"

"I always said that about her. Whatever her faults——"

"Then we'll have her mind distracted to-morrow," said Father Roche, "and there'll be no need to bring the bishop down here on top of us. I don't say I'm your equal, Mr. Mervyn, in poetry and such-like studies; but there isn't a turn or a twist in most women but I'm up to it. You may take my word for it, Mr. Mervyn, once she hears about the wedding there'll be no more talk of a play—nor of the soda-water out of the Holy Well, please God."

It seemed to Mr. Mervyn that Onny Donovan's wedding was scarcely important or exciting enough to make Mrs. Dann forget all about the Miracle Play. But he did not like to say anything which might damp Father Roche's high hopes. He felt, too, that the priest might be right. He had shown an extraordinary knowledge of the nature of girls, when he prophesied what Onny would do when the dining-room bell was rung. He might be equally right about Mrs. Dann.

Delia burst into the room.

"Father," she said, "Onny has been wearing one of the blouses Aunt Sally May got me from London. She has been wearing it all day and it's simply destroyed. It was the very nicest of all, too. Why didn't you stop her? Why didn't you make her take it off?"

"My dear," said Mr. Mervyn, "I never noticed what she had on."

"Father! you must have!"

"Æneas Sweeny," said Father Roche, "was saying something about her being dressed up in gold and silver; but nobody would pay any attention to what he said."

"A girl like that," said Delia, "doesn't deserve to be married."

"If it's any comfort to you to know it," said Father Roche, "she'll be sorry for herself after."

"But she's pleased now," said Delia, "and she oughtn't to be."

"She may be pleased now," said Father Roche, "but she won't be soon. Haven't I married scores of them in my time? and weren't they all sorry for themselves at the latter end? Believe you me, she'll have more to think of in a couple of years than peacocking about in silver and gold to be catching the eye of Jamesy Casey. She'll have had her 'nough of him in three months."

CHAPTER XVII

THE village of Druminawona was stirred to unusual excitement next day by the arrival, about noon, of the motor-car which Mrs. Dann had ordered from Dublin. There was, at first, no doubt in any one's mind that it was Mrs. Dann's car. It stopped in front of the police barrack and the young man in charge of it asked his way to Druminawona House. Sergeant Ginty's first impulse was to give him the directions he needed, but the sergeant looked at him before speaking, and a doubt crept into his mind. The young man struck him as a very superior person, not in the least like a servant. He spoke with a refined accent difficult to trace to any part of Ireland. It was possible that he was not a hired servant, but some new friend of Mrs. Dann's. Sergeant Ginty determined to find out something about him before giving him the information he asked for. He opened a general conversation making a few intelligent remarks about motor-cars, passing on to the condition of the roads, and then touched on the way in which the County Council did its work.

Daniel Fogarty, looking out from the door of his shop, was also struck by the young man's appearance. He leaped to the conclusion that he must be the first of the great flight of wealthy tourists who were to come to Druminawona under the protection of Mrs. Dann. He crossed the road and joined Sergeant Ginty beside the car. He arrived just in time to hear the sergeant's remarks about the County Council. If the driver of the car were, as seemed likely, a man of wealth and position, it was certain that he would be hostile to any form of

popular government in Ireland. Fogarty joined heartily in the abuse of the County Council. The sergeant, he felt sure, would not betray the fact that he was a member of that body. Jamesy Casey was, as it happened, standing at the gate of the priest's yard when the car drove into the village. He was feeling depressed. Father Roche had spoken to him very sternly earlier in the day. He had walked up to the rectory at ten o'clock and solemnly pledged himself to marry Onny Donovan. He felt in need of some cheering excitement. He joined the group round the car.

Sergeant Ginty was—as a policeman should be—skilled in getting the information he wanted even from a reluctant witness. Few secrets could be kept for long from a man of Fogarty's active intelligence. In a very few minutes it was obvious that the driver of the car was not another wealthy American but Mrs. Dann's hired servant. His appearance and curious accent were misleading. Daniel Fogarty hospitably invited him into the shop to have a drink. The stranger refused the invitation curtly. Fogarty and the sergeant were both impressed. This was their first experience of a new kind of man. The drivers of motor cars are not invariably teetotallers, but they are men who have received a scientific education. They are naturally inclined to regard the human body as a machine to be supplied for its work with suitable fuel in the form of food. They know that whisky is not food. The old-fashioned groom, who spent his life with horses, was accustomed to living creatures. He knew that other things besides oats and hay went to the making of an efficient horse. The encouragement of cheerful companionship makes no difference to the running of a motor car. It does affect the temper and willingness of a horse. Whisky is, perhaps, not food. Cheerfulness is not oats or hay; but it has its value. The groom was therefore not disposed to neglect the possible advantages

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resented the driver's silence. It seemed to him natural and right that any vehicle—horse drawn or petrol driven—should be used by anyone who wanted to go in the direction of the place for which it was heading.

"Get in, Father," he said, opening the door as he spoke. "It's two miles or maybe more to the big house, and you'll be better driving than walking."

"How many does the car hold?" said Father Roche.

Sergeant Ginty surveyed it critically.

"Three and the driver," he said judiciously.

"Six," said Daniel Fogarty, "six any way, and more if you was to sit familiar."

"Five," said the driver, "four and myself."

"There's myself and a few other people," said Father Roche, "that has business of a very particular kind with Mrs. Dann. I suppose now that you wouldn't have any objection to driving us up to the house."

"He would not, of course," said Daniel Fogarty. "It's pleased he'd be to do anything your reverence might ask him."

"Will you let the young man answer for himself?" said Sergeant Ginty.

"You're mighty civil and obliging this morning, Daniel Fogarty," said Father Roche, "but I didn't notice that you were so ready to do what I asked you yourself, last night, when I was talking to you about the meeting."

Fogarty grinned sheepishly and drew back a little from the motor-car. Father Roche looked round him. Jamesy Casey had also sidled away. He was half-way back to the presbytery yard when Father Roche saw him.

"As you're so anxious to be obliging," said Father Roche to Fogarty, "you can run after Jamesy Casey and bring him back here. I want to speak to him."

Daniel Fogarty did as he was bidden promptly. He

was not prepared to attend the meeting or in any other way to protest against Mrs. Dann's plans. But he could not possibly lose money by running after Jamesy Casey. It was quite clear then that the young man in the motor-car would drink nothing.

"I wouldn't ask you to do such a thing," said Father Roche to the driver, "if it was only my own convenience that had to be thought about; but Mrs. Dann will be wanting to see the people I'm bringing with me as soon as possible."

The driver felt that he was being pushed into a difficult position. He hesitated for a moment longer. Then he realised that he had little hope of finding the way to Druminawona House unless he took a guide with him in the car.

"Very well," he said, "I'll take you."

Fogarty came back, leading Jamesy Casey by the arm.

"I have him here, your reverence," he said, "and it's a hard enough job I had to make him come."

"Didn't you tell me, Father," said Jamesy, "that I was to be cleaning out the hen house, and after that——"

"What I tell you now," said Father Roche, "is to run up to the rectory as fast as your legs will carry you——"

"To the rectory, is it?" said Jamesy.

He had been to the rectory once already that morning. He could not suppose that Father Roche wanted him to pledge himself further to Onny Donovan.

"When you get there," said Father Roche, "you'll tell Mr. Mervyn that I'll call round for him with a motor-car in a quarter of an hour, and that I'd be glad if he'll have Onny Donovan ready to come with us. He'll know what it's for. You'll be wanted yourself too, Jamesy."

"Sure you won't be for marrying us to-day?" said Jamesy.

"I will not marry you to-day, though you deserve it. Go now and do what I tell you."

Jamesy was vaguely apprehensive. It was a relief to him to know that he was not to be married immediately; but he dreaded some unknown preliminary ceremony which might be horrible. He did not understand why he and Onny should be dragged up to Druminawona House in a motor-car. It was, however, plainly to his advantage to propitiate Father Roche, as much as possible, by prompt obedience. He set out for the rectory at a sharp trot.

"I'll be with you in ten minutes," said Father Roche to the young man in the motor. "I have to change my coat and lace on a pair of boots."

He turned and went back to the presbytery. Sergeant Ginty looked after Jamesy Casey with an expression of disgust on his face. The young man in the motor-car was grinning.

"The people of this country," said Sergeant Ginty, "is priest-ridden something terrible. Isn't it a shame to see a young man running away like that at the bidding of a priest?"

Fogarty was standing behind him as he spoke. If the sergeant had known this he would have been more cautious about what he said.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, sergeant," said Fogarty. "What right have you to be insulting the people you live among, before a young man who might be a good Catholic for all you know? What did you say your name was?" he added, speaking to the chauffeur.

"I don't think I told you; but I don't mind your knowing that it's Michael Staunton."

"There," said Fogarty, "what did I tell you? As good a Catholic name as ever I heard."

"My mother was a Protestant," said Staunton.

"I respect her for it," said the sergeant.

"I haven't seen the necessity for either religion so far," said Staunton. "I'm a free thinker."

"The Lord save us!" said Fogarty, genuinely shocked. "Do you mean to tell us you've no religion at all?"

"None whatever."

"I'm not surprised then," said Fogarty, "that you refused a glass of whisky when it was offered to you. I suppose you're that way on account of spending all your time with them stinking motor-cars."

There was evidently a connection in Daniel Fogarty's mind between atheists, teetotallers, and skilled mechanics. It is, indeed certain, that men who look after horses and drink in a natural way are seldom found in active opposition to religion. But it is not necessary to conclude that a knowledge of machinery is, in itself, destructive of faith. The case of Michael Staunton was in many ways peculiar. As the child of a mixed marriage his religious training had been overdone. Most children have one set of doctrines taught to them. Michael Staunton had two. His spiritual stomach—if such a phrase is allowable—was overloaded in infancy. His spiritual digestion suffered in after life. It is this risk which makes all ecclesiastics afraid of what are called mixed marriages. The clergy have the wisdom born of centuries of experience behind them, and they know that while most men, if taken young, can be taught to believe one creed, hardly any man can be induced to accept two, especially when they contradict each other on important points. Besides, Michael Staunton had served his apprenticeship in England, a notoriously irreligious country. It was this foreign education which gave him the kind of courage required for the making of a dangerous confession. There are, it is reputed, several men in Ireland who are not altogether sound in

any faith; but they do not say so out loud. They are afraid of incurring the dislike of devoted souls like Daniel Fogarty. Michael Staunton was made to feel himself an outcast almost at once. Daniel Fogarty turned and walked back to his own shop. The sergeant, no less sincerely religious in his own way, scowled at Michael and went into the barracks.

Father Roche came out of the presbytery and sat down beside Michael Staunton. He was, of course, ignorant of that young man's deplorable lack of belief. At the rectory Father Roche got out. Mr. Mervyn was standing on the steps. His face wore an expression of anxious perplexity. He had received the priest's message and was ready to start: but he did not know where he was going or why. Father Roche whispered to him.

"If we're thinking of distracting her mind by means of the marriage," he said, "the sooner we're at it the better, before she has anything done that it might be difficult to undo after. When I saw the motor-car on the street, it struck me that we couldn't do better than go up to the house in it, taking Onny Donovan and Jamesy Casey along with us so as she'll see them."

"Very well," said Mr. Mervyn. "If you think it will be of any use."

Considered by daylight the plan of diverting Mrs. Dann's energies from the play by means of a marriage did not seem very hopeful; but Father Roche was evidently still full of confidence.

"Didn't Mr. Sebright say last night," he said, "that a marriage would be a grand thing for the purpose? And wouldn't he know? Tell me now, have you Onny ready?"

Onny was ready. She was, in fact, rather more completely prepared for the interview with Mrs. Dann than she wanted to be. Delia had insisted on her wearing the

new blouse. Onny feared that if she appeared in it again she might be put in prison. But Delia was determined that she should wear it. It could never, so she pointed out, be worn by any one else after the way she had treated it the day before. Therefore Onny appeared at the rectory door wearing the blouse. She had very much the air of a dog which has been caught killing chickens and condemned to walk about for days with the corpse of one of his victims tied round his neck. A dead chicken is a delightful thing. So is a new blouse. But neither is desirable when it becomes the unescapable mark of evil-doing, a kind of convict uniform, distinguishing its wearer as surely as if it were stamped all over with broad arrows.

Father Roche arranged the party in the motor car. Jamesy Casey was made to sit in front. Mr. Mervyn, Onny and Father Roche got into the tonneau. This was an excellent plan for preventing any intercourse of an undesirable kind between Onny and her future husband. But the designer of the car, though he meant it to hold three passengers at the back, did not calculate on the third being as large as Father Roche was. Onny, herself a plump damsel, could not by any means be squeezed in between the two clergymen. She had to crouch on the floor of the car at their feet, a position which, besides being very uncomfortable, made her feel more than ever that she was a criminal led off to execution.

Jamesy Casey was less unhappy than she was. He had a seat to himself. The sensation of driving in a motor-car was new to him. He enjoyed a sense of responsibility, for it was his business to point the way to Druminawona House. Michael Staunton sat silent at the steering-wheel, making no attempt to respond to Jamesy's conversation. He had allowed himself to be hustled into accepting a whole car load of passengers

of whom he knew nothing except that two of them were clergymen, members of a profession which he despised. He did not know what to hope or fear. If his new employer turned to be a lady who liked to have her house filled with clergymen, his situation would not suit him. He might possibly be compelled to go to church. If, on the other hand, she was a lady with a proper sense of self respect, who disliked clergymen, he would at once get into trouble for picking up two of them on the road and bringing them to her.

The car drew up at the door of Druminawona House. Mr. Mervyn got out. Father Roche, trampling on Onny as he did so, struggled out too. Michael Staunton sat rigidly upright staring straight before him. Jamesy, his original uncertainty returning, eyed Father Roche uneasily. Onny, weeping quietly, crouched in the bottom of the car. Mrs. Dann rushed out to them. She had heard the car approaching and was all eagerness to see it. She stopped abruptly.

"My!" she said, "What a crowd! Phil, I'm glad to see you. Feeling better? And Father Roche. Bobby was telling me last night that you'd dragged yourself from your bed of sickness. Walk right in, both of you. You'll find Bobby inside. I've got Bobby moving!"

She turned from the two clergymen and addressed Michael Staunton.

"This the car I cabled for?" she said. "Right. And you're the chauffeur?"

"Yes, madam," said Michael Staunton.

"Right," said Mrs. Dann. "But I didn't say anything in my cable about your bringing an assistant chauffeur with you," she pointed to Jamesy Casey, who touched his cap politely. "And I didn't say anything about bringing your wife down," she was standing on the step of the car and was peering at Onny.

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was within hearing. He was gratified to notice that she was still talking to Michael Staunton.

"We have the matter we were speaking about last night arranged," he added confidentially, "and I expect she'll be pleased when she hears."

Bobby glanced at Onny who was crying quietly near the door.

"Brought the blushing bride right along?" he said. "She doesn't strike me as exuberant, but the notion's all right. It may wash. I don't say for certain that it won't. But Sally May is powerfully set on this play, more than I reckoned. It'll require to be a real live wedding to switch her off. Got a bridegroom?"

"Jamesy Casey is outside," said Father Roche.

"The bride doesn't seem to be very keen on the union," said Bobby. "Seems to me as if the prospect saddened her some. If Jamesy Casey isn't more eager I think one of you reverend gentlemen ought to keep an eye on him. He might escape."

"They're willing enough, the two of them," said Father Roche. "Stop your crying now, Onny. Isn't it your own fault? If you'd behaved yourself when you had the chance you wouldn't be here now."

Mrs. Dann came in leading Jamesy Casey by the arm.

"What's this, Phil?" she said. "This man seems to me to be frightened. What's he done? Why did you bring him up here?"

"He's going to be married," said Mr. Mervyn.

"To the girl beyond there," said Father Roche. "It was that brought us up to see you this morning. Will you stop crying, Onny Donovan, when I tell you?"

"Well," said Mrs. Dann, "I'm prepared to believe that a wedding is pretty big event in a community like this. You don't have too many of them, I expect, so it's natural that you should want to boast a bit whenever one occurs. But what I don't quite catch on to is

why you've brought them up here. Bobby and I are pretty fully occupied with the play."

"What occurred to us," said Father Roche, "to Mr. Mervyn and myself when we were talking matters over last night, was that you might take an interest in them."

Mrs. Dann looked inquiringly at her brother-in-law. She did not understand why she was expected to take special interest in the wedding of two people totally unknown to her. Mr. Mervyn felt that he must offer some kind of explanation.

"There are some curious customs in connection with weddings in the west of Ireland," he said desperately.

"Bobby," said Mrs. Dann, "take down what Phil says. I'm grateful to you, Phil, and I'm grateful to you, Father Roche, for thinking of it. Anything in the way of local colour has its value for purposes of advertisement. I attended a lecture once in New York on the marriage rites practised by the aboriginal inhabitants of Borneo. What that professor told us took my fancy. If you've anything of that sort to say, Phil, just buck right in. Bobby's practised in stenography. He'll take down every word you say."

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," said Jamesy Casey, "but if it's me and Onny Donovan you're speaking about, we'd be pleased to do anything your ladyship might wish so long as there'd be no objection to Father Roche marrying us decent in the chapel after."

"Be quiet now, Jamesy," said Father Roche. "What business of yours is it what the lady wants with you? What was in our mind, is that we might have some kind of an entertainment in the schoolroom, if you'd be willing to help us. It isn't every day we have a wedding and I wouldn't be against there being a dance now or the like, if you'd take an interest in it, and show us the way it ought to be done."

Mrs. Dann pondered the matter for a moment. Then she gave her verdict.

"As a side show," she said, "a native wedding would be an attraction. Folks would flock in. I'm grateful to you, Phil, for bringing the ceremony under my notice."

Father Roche took Mr. Mervyn by the arm.

"Come along out of this," he said. "It's waste of time talking to her."

Jamesy Casey followed them. Onny Donovan was weeping too bitterly to notice what was happening. She did not move from her position near the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

FATHER ROCHE was thoroughly angry.

"Did ever you hear such talk?" he said.

He still held Mr. Mervyn by the arm and was dragging him down the avenue of Druminawona House at a surprisingly rapid rate. Very fat men often possess a power of moving fast for a short distance.

"She's mad, so she is," said Father Roche, "or worse."

Mr. Mervyn said nothing at all. Father Roche said nothing more because he was beginning to feel the want of breath. Half a mile from the house he was panting heavily. A few yards farther on he was obliged to stop. There was, fortunately, the trunk of a fallen tree by the side of the avenue. Father Roche sat down on it. Mr. Mervyn, who was not so completely out of breath, stood and looked at him. Jamesy Casey had followed them at a little distance and overtook them when they stopped. He was not in the least out of breath for he had not been obliged to exert himself much in order to keep pace with the two clergymen. He took off his hat and addressed Father Roche.

"I beg your pardon, Father," he said, "but is it all settled about the wedding?"

Father Roche glared at him; but he was not yet able to speak without gasping, and he liked to preserve his dignity.

"For if it is," said Jamesy, "I'd be as glad if your reverence would speak to my mother about it."

"I don't care," said Father Roche, "if you never marry the girl, or for the matter of that any other girl."

"Whatever way your reverence wishes it to be, I'll be content," said Jamesy, "but I'm not against marrying the girl, only on account of the trouble there might be after."

Mr. Mervyn looked at him in some surprise. Incidents in the courtship, which had come under his notice, inclined him to think that Jamesy Casey was a lover of a somewhat ardent kind.

"Don't you want to marry her?" he said.

"I'd be willing enough myself," said Jamesy guardedly, "I haven't a word to say against the girl, for she's a good girl, and if I was to be married I'd as soon it was her as another; but my mother would be terrible vexed, so she would. Many's the time she's said to me, 'Jamesy,' says she, 'let you not be bringing a strange girl into my own house on top of me. Amn't I able to wash and mend for you, and what more do you want?' and that was true enough."

"Get along home with you," said Father Roche, "and don't be standing there talking. Can't you see I want to speak to Mr. Mervyn?"

"But why did you ask her to marry you," said Mr. Mervyn, "if you didn't want her?"

"What could I do only ask her," said Jamesy, "when his reverence here told me I was to? And I'd have done it too. I'd have married her if she and my mother were to lift the roof off the house on me after. Don't I know that there's no luck in going against the priest?"

Father Roche had by this time completely recovered his powers of speech.

"Go along home when I tell you, Jamesy," he said, "and mind this now. If I hear of any more goings on between you and Onny Donovan, I'll take a stick to you first, and denounce you off the altar after. We've had enough of that work. If you won't marry the girl——"

"Sure I will if I'm wanted to," said Jamesy.

Father Roche got up from his log. His appearance was threatening. Having driven up to Druminawona House in a motor-car he had not a stick with him; but in the excitement of the moment Jamesy did not notice this. He fled at once.

"What are we to do at all?" said Father Roche.

"I don't know," said Mr. Mervyn. "I really don't know what we can do."

Bobby Sebright, walking jauntily and smoking a cigarette, came towards them from the house.

"I could find it in my heart to wish," said Father Roche, "that that young fellow was dead and buried and Mrs. Dann in the coffin along with him, and the two of them in the same grave, and, what's more, I wouldn't greatly care if every other Yank was in the same place. There's little good ever comes from the likes of those ones."

"Gentlemen," said Bobby Sebright, "Sally May is interesting herself in that weeping bride, so I stepped down to sympathise. I'm downright sorry that things haven't worked out as you anticipated. I feel for your disappointment and I thought I'd like to speak a word of hope to you. Hope is a white-robed angel girt with glittering wings. That's not Wordsworth, Mr. Mervyn, but it's reminiscent of Milton. You'll find words to that effect in 'Comus.'"

This striking, but inaccurate, quotation impressed Father Roche. He was naturally an optimistic man and any mention of hope cheered him at once. It was impossible to suppose that Bobby Sebright would have spoken about an angel with glittering wings, unless he thought there was some real chance of Mrs. Dann dropping her Miracle Play.

"If she's interested the way you say," he said, "it might be that she'd forget about the play and the rest of the foolishness that goes along with it."

"Don't you take up any mistaken notion," said Bobby Sebright. "When I said she was interested in the bride, I meant you to understand that she's interested in the girl. I don't think she cares a cent about the wedding; but her heart was touched when she saw the girl crying. She's providing her with refreshments and sympathy at present. I agree with Sally May that the girl needed bucking up. She'd sort of wilted under the prospect of immediate matrimony."

"It was on account of her crying," said Father Roche, "that Mrs. Dann took an interest in her?"

"That's so," said Bobby Sebright. "Her heart was touched. Sally May has a sympathetic disposition."

"If I thought," said Father Roche, "that she'd go on interesting herself, I'd see to it that Onny Donovan didn't stop crying this side of Christmas. It could be done easy enough and I daresay it would be good for the girl in the latter end. Anyway it would do her no harm."

Mr. Mervyn murmured a protest. Onny Donovan, pending her marriage to Jamesy Casey or some one else, was his servant, and it would be very unpleasant for him if she cried, without intermission, for six months. But he was not thinking of himself, or his own comfort. Like Mrs. Dann he had a kind heart. He felt sorry for Onny Donovan.

"It wouldn't work," said Bobby Sebright. "I don't deny that you might do what you say. Considering your success this morning, I expect you'd be able to keep the tears flowing; but Sally May's interest in the cascade would be likely to cool off. Your first idea was better, gentlemen. A wedding is what you want."

"We've tried that," said Father Roche, "and it wasn't any good. And anyway the wedding's off."

"You surprise me," said Bobby Sebright.

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say it would be easy, but it might be managed. There's boys and girls in the place—you know some of them yourself, Mr. Mervyn—who'd be none the worse of settling down. What do you say to that now, Mr. Sebright? Would it distract her mind if we had five of them?"

"Weddings on an extended scale," said Bobby, "would be attractive, for sure, if there weren't too much sameness about them."

He paused, evidently thinking the matter over. It became clear, by degrees, that Father Roche's suggestion did not strike him as hopeful.

"Gentlemen," he said at last, "I'm as anxious as you are to divert Sally May's mind from her present pursuit. I find myself involved in this Miracle Play and I haven't time to work it properly. If I could wade in with an unoccupied mind and a proper knowledge of the position of the Ten Lost Tribes, I shouldn't mind taking on the job. But the way I'm fixed at present I can't do that. I mention this to show you that your interests and mine are identical."

"I'm pleased to hear you say that," said Father Roche.

"As a stranger in the locality I can't do much. But the suggestion I'm going to throw out, if acted on, would have the desired effect."

"If it isn't murder," said Father Roche, "we'll act on it."

"I'd do almost anything," said Mr. Mervyn, "to avoid the kind of public scandal to which a Miracle Play in Druminawona would give rise."

"Find a husband for Sally May herself."

"If we could do that," said Father Roche, "but sure we couldn't. Who'd marry the like of her?"

"There's no one here," said Mr. Mervyn, "who could possibly marry her."

"I was thinking," said Bobby, "that perhaps one of you two— After all she's quite a good-looking woman still, and you may take my word for it that the dollars are there. What do you say now, Father Roche?"

"Only for there being a rule of the church," said Father Roche, "that a priest can't marry, I'd do it to-morrow. But it's a good notion surely. And I don't see why Mr. Mervyn mightn't be glad enough "

"I can't," said Mr. Mervyn, "she's my sister-in-law."

"Well," said Bobby, "I must be getting back to my work. I haven't got half-way through the preliminary notices of your play, and Sally May wants them mailed to-morrow for sure. Just you think over that proposal of mine, and see if you can't settle it between yourselves."

He lit a fresh cigarette, nodded to the two clergymen, and walked briskly towards the house. Father Roche and Mr. Mervyn went together slowly in the opposite direction. For a while neither of them spoke. Father Roche glanced at his companion, from time to time, as if he expected some sign which would encourage him to reopen the discussion about finding a husband for Mrs. Dann. But Mr. Mervyn walked on with his eyes rigidly fixed on a point just ahead of him. It was not until they reached the high road that Father Roche spoke.

"A man might do worse than marry that one," he said, "supposing he was inclined to marry at all. And they tell me—I know nothing about it myself, of course, but they tell me a wife's a great comfort to a man when he's getting on in years."

Mr. Mervyn edged gradually away from Father Roche. He was walking along the edge of the ditch on the far side of the road when the priest spoke again.

"And that one's old enough to have sense," he said, "and it's likely that she would have sense if she had a husband that she had to look after. A man might do

worse, and that's a fact. If she was a young girl I wouldn't suggest it; but she's turned fifty if she's a day."

Mr. Mervyn was not inclined to discuss Mrs. Dann's merits as a wife. An argument on the subject, even if conducted in an impersonal way, seemed to him dangerous.

"There's no doubt," said Father Roche, "that if anyone was to marry her it would distract her mind. We'd hear no more of the play, nor the lost tribes, nor the soda water, if she was to be occupied in buying wedding dresses."

This was probably quite true, but Mr. Mervyn refused to express any opinion about it.

"Tell me now," said Father Roche, "wasn't there a law passed by Parliament that a man might marry his deceased wife's sister if he wanted to?"

Mr. Mervyn felt that he must in the end make some kind of reply to Father Roche. Like most meek men he was capable, when driven into a corner, of surprising audacity. He made a bold counter attack on Father Roche.

"So far as laws go," he said, "there's no law made by Parliament which forbids your marrying her. Why don't you?"

"There's the law of the church."

"Well," said Mr. Mervyn, "the law of my church doesn't allow me to marry my deceased wife's sister."

It struck him while he spoke that Mrs. Dann was not his deceased wife's sister. She was the widow of the brother of his deceased wife. He could not, at the moment, recollect whether a lady in such a position did, or did not, come within the table of forbidden degrees. The matter might be open to argument. He looked round, uneasily, hoping that Father Roche did not know exactly the relationship between him and Mrs. Dann. But the priest was unexpectedly well informed.

"Now that I come to think of it," he said, "she's not your deceased wife's sister. My own opinion is that she's no relation to you, either good or bad."

Mr. Mervyn took refuge in silence again.

"If you were to marry her," said Father Roche, "and I'm not saying now that you should; but supposing you were married to her it might be a very good thing for you."

"There's no use talking about that," said Mr. Mervyn, "I don't believe I could even if I wanted to. And I don't want to. I'd rather—I'd rather have the Miracle Play than that."

"She's a lady," said Father Roche, "with a wonderful way of getting what she wants done. There's few that would stand up against her. I'd say now that if she married a lawyer she'd have him made a judge before long. Or if it was a military man she fancied, he'd be a general before anyone would be able to stop it. If it happened to be a clergyman, like yourself now—not meaning anything personal by that—he'd be an archdeacon for certain, and very likely a bishop after that."

The prospect, an alluring one for many men, had no attraction for Mr. Mervyn. Life held trouble enough for a simple rector of a tiny country parish. Archdeacons and bishops have, of course, worse things to bear and are harder pressed by difficulties. It was not in vain that Mr. Mervyn had steeped himself in the philosophy of Wordsworth. He shrank from the responsibility of greatness with a genuine fear.

"I'd say too," said Father Roche, "that Miss Mervyn wouldn't have any objection to living in the house with Mrs. Dann. A young lady like her would be all the better of having somebody to look after her, and to take her here and there as might be required. It's balls and parties that they're looking for at that age, and small blame to them. It's little enough of such amusements

any young lady gets in Druminawona. I'm not blaming you, Mr. Mervyn, for I know it's not your fault. You can't give her what you haven't got. There's no young men about here that's her equals; and it's a pity, so it is, to see her wanting what she ought to have."

They reached the gate of the rectory. Mr. Mervyn held out his hand. Father Roche shook it heartily.

"You'll think over what I've been saying to you," he said.

"No," said Mr. Mervyn. "I can't. I can't even consider it. Besides I'm sure she'd never think of marrying me."

"I'd put in a good word for you," said Father Roche, "and Mr. Sebright would do the same. It would be a good thing for yourself, and for her, and for Miss Mervyn, and for the whole of us, if you could see your way to do it."

"Hush," said Mr. Mervyn.

He had good reason for wishing Father Roche to be silent. Delia was coming towards him.

"Will you look at her," said Father Roche. "Will you look well at her now, and tell me this: Isn't it a sin and a shame to keep a young lady like that in Druminawona? It's in the Lord Lieutenant's court she ought to be drinking tea with the highest in the land."

Delia deserved admiration. When her father had left her, carrying off Onny Donovan with him, she had gone to her room and dressed herself. Onny had, indeed, taken the smartest of the blouses, but there were others hardly less delightful. One after another Delia tried them on. There was a dress, a whole dress, bodice and skirt, made of pale pink silk, draped with swathes of delicately shaded chiffon. By great good luck it almost fitted her. The putting in of pins here and there, the ripping off and re-sewing of some hooks and eyes was a pleasure not a toil; and Delia, who for years had been

her own dressmaker, did it skilfully. A hat was found, one of nine hats, all beautiful, which suited the dress. It was white, trimmed with the daintiest lace, and pink roses clustered round it. Delia thrilled as she snipped the shop label off it. The price of it was five guineas. Before she put it on she loosened and re-arranged her hair, patted errant tresses into subjection, trained curling swathes over her ears. A hat which cost five guineas deserved a well-ordered resting-place. Laid out in a drawer were eighteen pairs of gloves, each pair deliciously wrapped in tissue paper. Delia turned them over pair by pair. There were pale grey gloves, fawn coloured, brown and white. They were of various lengths, wrist long, elbow long, and there was one pair which would have reached about to Delia's shoulder. She chose a white pair, with three buttons and a long, smooth space beyond the buttons. The sleeves of the dress were short. Delia wanted gloves to reach to the elbow. In a small box, all by themselves, were stockings. There were twelve pairs of them, all of silk. Delia drew them through her hands, delighting in the feel of them. She crushed a pair in her hand, holding it to her ear that she might listen to the curious creaking of the silk. In the end she chose a thick black pair to wear. She was troubled only about her shoes. There were no London shoes.

She set the looking glass on her dressing table at the proper angle, and propped it securely with a clothes brush. She turned round and round, with a small mirror in her hand, viewed herself from the front, the back and the sides, and dimpled with delight. She brought the looking glass from her father's room and set it on a chair. It gave her new and fuller views of the wonderful clothes. From the bottom of one of the boxes she took a parasol, lace trimmed, exquisitely white with a long handle of mother of pearl. She went downstairs and

out of doors. She felt that she must let the sun shine on her.

There is no doubt—all women and most men agree on the point—that expensive and fashionable clothes add greatly to the beauty of the wearer. Poets, and even novelists, sometimes write as if the simple frock of russet brown and such like garments are the truest adornments of a good figure and a pretty face. But their statements are not true, unless the lady of whom they write is particularly unsophisticated. Any woman, who has given thought to the subject of clothes, knows that fine raiment makes her look beautiful, and that home-made gowns of simple stuff do not. The particular form which is fashionable at the moment does not matter. Skirts may be flounced or tight as the sheaths of beech leaf buds, bellowed out all round with crinolines, or puffed in one particular spot with bustles, the only essential thing is that the garment should be fashionable. The truth is that no clothes, in themselves, whatever their shape, do much to set off the beauty of a beautiful girl or to disguise the plainness of a plain one. If there were any clothes which would do such things we should long ago have found out what they are, and women would never wear anything else. What good clothes do for a woman is to make her happy, and to increase the brightness of her eyes, add to her sense of self-respect, and so give grace and confidence to her pose. They bestow on her a feeling of superiority to other women, and therefore create in her a consciousness of queenliness which makes her movements charming. It is not a case of artistic drapings setting off a beautiful object. The drapings very seldom are artistic and almost always tend to destroy the natural beauty and grace of the wearer. This is the reason why no statue can be dressed in modern clothes without becoming ridiculous. Statues of women wear sheets if they

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grandest of the London blouses. But Delia, magnanimous now, would have forgiven her for the sake of hearing her rapturous gasps of surprise and admiration. But Onny was not there. Nor was her father. There remained the possibility that Æneas Sweeny might, contrary to his habit, be working in the garden.

Delia went round to the garden, stepping delicately, the pink skirt lifted daintily lest grass or gravel should touch it, the sunshade held proudly above her hat. Æneas was sitting, wrapped in deep thought, on a corner of the wheelbarrow. Past experience taught him that Delia was likely to upbraid him for idleness. He stood up ready to produce plausible excuses as soon as she spoke. But a single glance convinced him that this time, at all events, Delia would see nothing wrong about sitting on a wheelbarrow. She was too radiantly happy to find fault with anyone. Æneas was quick to sympathise.

"Begging your pardon, miss, for making so free," he said, "but that's the finest dress that ever I seen, and the hat along with it beats all."

This was what Delia wanted. Æneas had not the educated eye which discerns excellence of detail, but his praise sounded absolutely sincere. She paraded slowly along the garden path, passed Æneas, turned and passed him again. The back of the dress was as effective as the front.

"The Queen of Spain's daughter," said Æneas, "wouldn't be finer, nor half as fine."

The daughter of the present Queen of Spain is, of course, a mere infant, and cannot be expected to parade garden paths in pink frocks. Æneas was not thinking of her, nor of any other actual daughter of any queen. He had inherited from a long line of ancestors a dim, legendary conception of Spain as the greatest of the world powers. All splendour was hers when her galleons brought unimaginable wealth from the Americas, and she

landed steel-clad men-at-arms on Irish soil to test their strength in battle against the buccaneers of Queen Elizabeth. A daughter of the royal house might then be fitly conceived of as beautiful exceedingly, and clad in cloth of gold. It was to her that he compared Delia, and, partly understanding him, she was pleased. She closed the sunshade, and allowed him to admire the mother-of-pearl handle, and the great gilt knob at the end of it.

"Jewels," he said fervently, "jewels out of gold mines. Now what might the like of that umbrella cost, Miss Delia?"

"Pounds," said Delia, "I don't quite know how many. The hat cost five."

"Glory be to God!" said Æneas, "but I'll say this. There isn't one in Ireland has a better right to wear it, for there isn't one it would look better on than yourself. And to think of Onny Donovan having the brazen impudence to be wearing some of them clothes. It's bet she ought to be instead of married; but there's some that doesn't get what they deserve."

Delia did not want to hear more about Onny and her blouse. It is foolish to allow annoying thoughts to spoil the emotion of a glorious hour. Besides Æneas had said all that any man could be expected to say in the way of compliment. When you have been compared favourably to the Queen of Spain's daughter, and have been assured that no one in Ireland can look better than you do, there is no further admiration possible. Delia left the garden, picked her way trippingly to the front of the house again, and went down to the gate at the end of the drive. There she came upon her father and the priest.

"I was just saying to your father," said Father Roche, "that it's in Dublin you ought to be, driving up and down Grafton Street in a motor-car, with a bouquet of lilies in your hand and two of the aides-de-camp of the Lord Lieutenant sitting the one on each side of you."

Delia smiled delightedly. She had not expected compliments from Father Roche.

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Mervyn, "that there's not much chance——"

"There's every chance," said Father Roche, "and it's a fine match she'd make, God bless her, if you did your duty by her and gave her the opportunities she ought to have. There's many a lady now sitting in her castle, with a maid attending on her, that wouldn't be there at all if the man who married her had seen Miss Mervyn before he did it. Will you think it over, Mr. Mervyn?"

This time Mr. Mervyn said good-bye, firmly. Father Roche went on towards the village. Delia and her father went up to the rectory together.

"Delia," said Mr. Mervyn, "I hope——"

"Father," she said, "you're not vexed with me, are you?"

The tone in which he spoke told her that he was troubled and perplexed.

"They're only the things Aunt Sally May gave me," she said. "It isn't wrong to wear them."

"No, no, Delia. It's quite right of you to wear them. I don't want to deprive you of any little pleasure—indeed, I wish I could give you more. But I hope all those fine things won't make you discontented with your home, Delia. We've always been very happy here together!"

Delia sighed. The rectory at Druminawona is not a very lively home. The daily task of harassing Onny Donovan was dull and wearing. But Delia was loyal.

"But I am quite happy, father," she said. "I don't want any other home, only I do like wearing nice things when I get them."

Mr. Mervyn went into his study. He took up a prayer book and turned to the last page of it. He was desperately anxious to find that the table of forbidden degrees is definite about the illegality of a man marrying

his deceased wife's brother's widow. But the table of forbidden degrees is puzzling. It begins simply enough. A grandmother is unmistakable. Farther it becomes difficult to keep track of the exact relations who are banned. "17. Wife's sister. 18. Brother's wife." Was Mrs. Dann the sister of Mrs. Mervyn in the eye of the Church? Was Nathan P. Dann, looked at ecclesiastically, Mr. Mervyn's brother? These are hard questions. Mr. Mervyn wished he could be sure about the answer to them.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Mr. Mervyn and Father Roche left her house Mrs. Dann stared after them in amazement. She found it difficult to realise at first that they had actually gone. She felt annoyed with them for going because she wanted to talk over several points connected with the Miracle Play, and since the day on which she interviewed them in the presbytery she had found it hard to catch either one or other of them. Then she began to wonder why they had gone so suddenly.

"Say, Bobby," she said, "Phil and the priest seemed to me to bolt rather unexpectedly."

"That's so," said Bobby; "it struck me in the same light."

"Do you think that Phil was riled? I'd be sorry to say anything to get his back up. I didn't mean to; but the artistic nature—Phil's an artist, Bobby, don't you forget that, and the more I study on the artistic nature the less I seem to be able to calculate exactly when it will erupt."

"Seems to me," said Bobby, "that it wasn't so much the Reverend Theophilus as the other clergyman who misunderstood you."

"I don't altogether get on to intimate terms with his soul either," said Mrs. Dann. "I expect it's religion in his case that keeps us apart. I'm not so much at home in religion as I ought to be, Bobby, in spite of your papa. I didn't get a chance of practising sympathy along those lines with poor Nathan. If that priest's a religious man —and he's not artistic, so it can't be anything else—I'm not altogether surprised that I lacerate his nervous sys-

tem now and then without meaning it. But I thought I spoke with great respect of the marriage tie. You don't think I underrated its sanctity, Bobby?"

At this point Onny Donovan sobbed. She had been crying quietly and unobtrusively ever since she had entered the house. She was beginning to regain confidence and to hope that nothing very terrible was going to be done to her. She felt that she had better call attention to her presence. She sobbed again, quite loudly. Mrs. Dann turned round and saw her.

"They've left the weeping orphan behind them," she said.

"The bride," said Bobby Sebright.

Mrs. Dann went over to Onny and looked at her carefully. Her attention was caught and held by Onny's blouse.

"I kind of recognise that shirt waist," she said.

"She gave it to me," said Onny. "Miss Delia gave it to me."

Then she burst into tears again, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed convulsively.

"Well," said Mrs. Dann, "Delia's got as good a right as anyone to do what she likes with her property. I'm not inclined to blame you. No girl need refuse a present when it's offered her. So don't you cry any more about that."

She spoke kindly, so kindly that Onny's courage and presence of mind returned to her.

"What Miss Delia said was this," said Onny. "She says, standing as it might be where your ladyship is standing now: 'You may have the best of them blouses for yourself, Onny, for you're a good girl and you're going to be married, and I hope you'll live long to enjoy it and that it may be more use to you than ever it was to me.' That's what she said, and it's the truth I'm telling you. Miss Delia was always a real lady."

"I've seen girls," said Mrs. Dann, "that looked brighter at the prospect of getting married than you do. I don't remember shedding any tears when the late Nathan P. Dann took me to Europe for our wedding journey. But I expect you're modest."

"I am not," said Onny. "Why would I? Isn't Jamesy Casey a decent, well-living boy? And didn't the priest tell him he was to marry me?"

"The priest told him to marry you! Do you hear that, Bobby?"

"Sure he wouldn't do it," said Onny, "if it wasn't that Father Roche said he must. What would he want with a wife when he has his mother to do for him?"

Mrs. Dann was shocked and horrified. She was a woman of keen business instincts, but she was intensely sentimental. It is a very curious thing that business capacity and sentimentalism generally go together. The English are businesslike and at the same time such lovers of stories in which there is a tender love interest that the editors of their magazines cry out for them. The most usual occupation in England is money-making, and the most popular poem is "Casabianca," by Mrs. Hemans. The Americans are more sentimental even than the English. They are also keen men of business. The Germans are rapidly coming to the front as the world's most efficient clerks, and the Germans, while drinking beer, weep over love poetry and squander their souls in singing tunes like "The Lorelei." Onny Donovan, on the other hand, could not be taught to work methodically, but she had no illusions whatever about love and marriage. The wife "did for" her husband, washed his clothes and cooked for him. He earned enough to feed and clothe her.

"Are you going to marry a man," said Mrs. Dann, "who wouldn't marry you unless he was told to?"

"I am, of course," said Onny. "What else would I do?"

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days when country gentlemen were able to entertain their friends very hospitably because there was no need to consider where guests were to sleep. They had as many people as they liked to dinner even in very remote country houses, for they knew that all but a few survivors would spend the early morning hours under the table. The houses of that time had huge dining-rooms and comparatively few bedrooms. Halls of this kind are unsuited to maidenly confessions. Mrs. Dann felt this, and retreated to the housekeeper's room. Her household was not yet completely organised, and the housekeeper's room, though fully furnished, was not yet used by anyone. It was therefore a good place for a confidential talk, and Onny felt that she had a right to be there.

Mrs. Dann herself brought tea. By way of establishing perfect confidence she filled two cups. It was pleasant to see that Onny drank hers eagerly. She had been through a trying morning. She had received, within an hour of each other, a proposal of marriage and a severe lecture for misappropriating a blouse of great magnificence. She had been taken, for the first time in her life, for a drive in a motor-car, and had crouched at the feet of two clergymen, who, if they had not intentionally kicked her, had certainly wiped their boots on her clothes every time the car jolted. She had been set by herself in a corner of a large hall, and had felt that all her misdeeds, her use of the blouse and others, were likely to be brought up against her. Onny was not a young woman of highly strung or very sensitive nerves, but after such experiences the tea was comforting. She had also cried a good deal, and crying, like other forms of exercise which rob the body of its moisture, induces thirst. Mrs. Dann placed the sugar bowl within easy reach. Onny helped herself freely and enjoyed her tea.

"Say now," said Mrs. Dann, "about this young man of yours, you love him some, don't you?"

"He's a decent, quiet kind of a boy," said Onny.

"I'm sure he loves you quite considerable," said Mrs. Dann.

Onny was embarrassed. She bent her head down and covered one of her eyes with her left hand. Kisses are supposed to be, sometimes actually are, pledges of affection. Onny did not want to talk about her kisses.

"I wouldn't like to be talking of them things," she said.

"There was a philosopher lecturing in New York two years ago," said Mrs. Dann, "whose name I have forgotten, but he was a big man from one of the universities on this side, German I think. His subject was the psychology of sex. Some of our society leaders didn't think his talk quite correct for mixed audiences, and I admit it went rather over the outside edge of our notion of female propriety. We're rather strong on delicacy of language over our side, though we admire the Bible. I didn't attend any more after the first discourse; but I don't forget that he said some things about the value in the evolutionary process of the reserve of militant maidenhood. If he was right about that I expect you'll be an inestimable kind of ancestor for the flying man of future ages to look back to. I can't remember that I ever met anyone with more reserve."

"I don't know will I be all that," said Onny, "though I might of course. Them things weren't taught when I was going to school."

"But I don't see that you need be ashamed to own up to a middling warm affection for your future husband."

"He's a decent boy," said Onny, "and he has a nice place to take any girl home to if it wasn't for his mother."

"You oughtn't to marry him," said Mrs. Dann explosively.

"Is it on account of his mother? I was thinking that myself."

"No, no. It does not matter about his mother."

"It's all very fine to be talking," said Onny, "but it's me that'll have to live with her."

Mrs. Dann was moved to high emotion. It seemed to her horrible that a young girl could thus weigh the advantages and disadvantages of what should be life's great romantic adventure. It was not in this spirit that she had entered upon her union with Nathan P. Dann, nor had she ever allowed the early glamour of her love for her Irish husband to die completely away. On birthdays and anniversaries of every kind she had reminded him by gifts, often accompanied with poetical quotations, that love was worth more than gold, that even the passage of many years could not quench it. Nathan had always been slightly bored, often as seriously embarrassed as Onny Donovan. He did not indeed, as she did, cover his eye with his hand or hang his head. He either changed the subject rapidly or left the room. But Mrs. Dann never doubted him. She explained to him—when he gave her the opportunity—that his apparent coldness was in reality the cloak of deep, unutteraable feeling, that it was the reticence characteristic of strong, virile natures.

This excuse would not fit the case of Onny Donovan. Young girls have no right to be virile, and extreme reticence is not admirable in any woman who has just been wooed and won.

"You ought not to marry him," said Mrs. Dann, "indeed you ought not, unless you love him and he loves you."

Her voice was usually high pitched, but it dropped a whole tone when she reached the word "love." She said "he loves you" in a deep contralto, almost religious in its suggestion, eloquent of confidential intensity.

Onny, strengthened and cheered with tea, was becoming self-confident, and the conviction was gaining in her mind that Mrs. Dann was not quite sane.

"Talk sense, can't you?" she said.

"Sense," said Mrs. Dann, "isn't natural in a girl in your position, and what's not natural is wrong."

It is not likely that Onny knew what Mrs. Dann meant. If she had known she would certainly have protested strongly against being blamed for running counter to nature. Onny was Irish, and Ireland is an island of saints. It is the leading characteristic of saints that they despise and defeat nature. If they merely followed it they would not be saints. Onny had, indeed, yielded to the blandishments of nature when she hid behind a laurel bush with Jamesy Casey, and when she had received him in the rectory kitchen. But, so far from glorying in being natural, she was deeply ashamed of herself afterwards—so deeply ashamed that she went to bed in all her clothes in the hope of concealing her lapse.

"It's not natural," said Mrs. Dann again despairingly.

Then Michael Staunton entered the room. He had a cigarette in his mouth and a copy of a weekly journal of the motor trade in his hands.

The position of a chauffeur in society is a difficult one. He refuses to regard himself as, strictly speaking, a servant, holding, very properly, that he is a scientific expert. On the other hand, he is a new man; and domestics of old-established position, butlers, housekeepers and lady's-maids, will not admit him to the rigidly defined circle of upper servants. To them he is no more than the successor of the discarded coachman. And the coachman never dined in the housekeeper's room. Michael Staunton had been in several situations and was aware that his position was a delicate one. He consented to dine in

the kitchen on the day of his arrival at Druminawona House, partly because he was very hungry and wanted to dine somewhere as soon as possible, partly because he thought it wise to be on good terms with the cook. But he did not wish to sit in the kitchen afterwards. He said that he wanted to smoke, and suggested that the smell of tobacco might be disagreeable to the cook and the other ladies present. The cook directed him to the housekeeper's room. She did not want him in the kitchen, suspecting that he might distract the scullerymaid from her duties by flirting with her. The housekeeper's room was unoccupied, and the cook, though she might have called herself cook-housekeeper, had the soul of a democrat. She had no objection to a chauffeur using a room which she did not want herself.

Michael Staunton took his cigarette out of his mouth when he saw Mrs. Dann. He was not, and knew he was not, entitled to sit and smoke in the housekeeper's room. On the other hand, Mrs. Dann had certainly much less right to be there than he had. No lady, who understood what was due to her household and herself, would drink tea with a strange maid in the housekeeper's room in the middle of the day. But Michael Staunton had good manners. He tried to make Mrs. Dann feel that he, and not she, was the intruder.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said.

All good servants say "madam" rather than "ma'am." The abbreviation is a vulgarism, and is used now only by the higher nobility and favoured courtiers when addressing the queen.

Mrs. Dann rose at once. She had failed to make any impression on Onny Donovan, and was glad of some excuse for getting out of the room.

"I hope you've had your dinner," she said. "I guessed you'd be hungry when you arrived, and I just told the

cook to give you a proper dinner right away without waiting for the regular hour."

"Thank you, madam," said Michael Staunton. "Most kind of you."

"You might have a fancy for a cup of tea," said Mrs. Dann. "If so there's the teapot, and there's quite a complete service of china in the cupboard behind the door. When you've finished just you wind up that automobile and take this young lady down to the rectory. She'll be wanted there. But don't be in a hurry about starting. I'll send you down a letter which you can deliver to my niece."

"Yes, madam," said Michael Staunton.

Mrs. Dann found Bobby Sebright finishing a cigarette on the steps outside the hall door. It was the same cigarette he had lit when he left Mr. Mervyn and Father Roche. He had just got back to the house after his interview with them.

"Bobby," she said, "that girl's got no heart. She's not like any mortal girl I've ever met. I'm sorry for the man that marries her. He has an unhappy life before him for sure."

"The young man," said Bobby, "won't suffer any. He's been let off. Your reverend brother-in-law told me that that particular wedding wasn't going to eventuate."

"I'm right down glad to hear it."

"Seems to have been a mistake right the whole way along," said Bobby. "Prospective bride in tears; husband elect not enthused; parish priest regretful of having misapprehended situation with the intention of benevolence. Life's chock full of tragedies arising out of good intentions. According to recent scientific research, all criminals are bubbling over with good intentions, though mistaken."

"Bobby," said Mrs. Dann, "I'm going to write a note this minute to Delia Mervyn, asking her to come up here and spend the rest of the day with me. I want the society of a properly-minded, natural girl to restore my faith in human nature. And Delia's that. Theophilus may be a bit high-toned, but Delia's natural. It gratified me to see her going wild over the outfit I had sent along from London. You'll take that note down to the chauffeur, Bobby, and tell him to bring Delia back with him. I own up that I'm a little shy of that chauffeur. His manners are European, and I'm not accustomed to them yet."

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of any young man whom she had ever known intimately; but they struck her as pleasant. Michael Staunton bowed again and offered her a cigarette.

"Most ladies smoke now," he said. "It's quite the thing after dinner in good society."

If he expected to startle Onny Donovan, or to impress her with his knowledge of a fast and fashionable world, he was mistaken. There was nothing shocking to her in the idea of a woman smoking. Her own mother smoked, not cigarettes, but a short clay pipe. A great many other women whom she knew smoked habitually, rubbing the black twist tobacco to shreds in the palms of their hands as shamelessly as the most hardened man.

"I don't know would I like it," she said.

"Try," said Michael Staunton; "it's very soothing to the nerves."

Onny took the cigarette, and put one end of it well into her mouth. Michael Staunton lit a match and held it for her. She puffed experimentally, keeping the smoke in her mouth for as short a time as possible and blowing it away from her face vigorously. Michael Staunton sat down on the table beside her. He talked most politely, and Onny was more and more impressed by his wide knowledge of the world and evident superiority to other young men. At first he told her about his own experiences and she was not obliged to do anything except wonder and admire. Then he began to insinuate personal questions. He wanted to know whether she was thinking of becoming lady's-maid to Mrs. Dann. Onny did not intend, if she could help it, to lose the respect of this brilliant young man. She was unwilling to confess that she was no more than a general servant in a very inferior position. She succeeded without much effort in leaving him under the impression that she was Miss Mervyn's personal maid. Æneas Sweeny, so Michael gathered

from the conversation, was butler at the rectory. He found no difficulty in believing either statement. He was a highly-educated young man, and he knew that the blouse which Onny wore had originally been expensive. It looked to him well worn, quite the sort of blouse which might have been passed on from an opulent mistress to a favourite maid. He felt that he might, without loss of dignity, flirt with Onny Donovan. She was a pretty girl, with peculiar, bright red hair, and amber-coloured eyes of a kind which he had never seen before. She had chewed away half of her cigarette and smoked a quarter of it. He offered her another. But Onny did not like the taste of the shreds of tobacco which were clinging to her tongue and lips. She declined to eat any more cigarette.

"Do," said Michael Staunton persuasively. "A young lady never looks prettier than when she's smoking."

"Get out," said Onny delightedly.

Then Bobby Sebright came into the room. Michael Staunton jumped down off the table and stood rigidly upright. He understood that Bobby had brought the letter of which Mrs. Dann had spoken.

"Shall I start at once, sir?" he said.

"Well," said Bobby, "unless this young lady feels shy about finishing her cigarette in the open air, we may as well be getting along. I'll have my coat on when you bring the car around to the door."

Onny dropped the mangled remains of her cigarette and put her foot on them. Michael Staunton was unembarrassed.

"You're coming with us, sir?" he said. "Very good, sir."

"I shall drive," said Bobby. "You can look after the young lady."

He left the room. Michael Staunton turned to Onny and noticed that she was blushing.

"*Bien entendu,*" he said, with a fascinating smile. He had once driven a motor-car through France and was familiar with the language of that country. Onny was not.

"I'm sorry now," she said, "that I didn't learn the Irish when I had the chance. My mother talks it grand."

Mrs. Dann helped Bobby on with his overcoat.

"You bring Delia back with you for sure," she said. "I want her, and anyway it's not good for her to be shut up too long alone with Theophilus. I admire him. There are times when I could kiss him on account of the beautiful simplicity of his nature. But he's trying for Delia. It's not natural for a young girl to love Wordsworth all day."

"The weeping bride is more natural than you think," said Bobby. "I reckon you're mistaken about her. Her conduct with your chauffeur is normal. I didn't think to knock at the door before interrupting, so I know."

"Don't tell me!" said Mrs. Dann. "Bobby, you don't mean that she's going to marry the young man with the European manners? I'd never have dared."

"I don't go so far as to say they've fixed the wedding day," said Bobby, "but she'd eaten half a cigarette to please him, and that strikes me as a reliable token of affection and respect. Very few girls on our side would do as much."

"That girl interests me," said Mrs. Dann. "I couldn't get her to confide, but I may have been mistaken in saying she had no heart. I'll ask Delia about her. Delia will be sure to know. She has me beat, Bobby. I expect a girl like that would have upset Nathan. The Ten Lost Tribes wouldn't have accounted for her."

The mention of the Ten Tribes reminded Bobby of the Miracle Play. The floor of the hall was still strewn with the preliminary notices he had written before

Mr. Mervyn and Father Roche burst in to disturb his work.

"We shan't be able to mail those notices to-day," he said. "I haven't written out more than half of them, and it might cause jealousy if we supplied the other half of the organs of public opinion with the news a day late. It won't pay us to rile any important editor by want of proper respect."

"They can stand over," said Mrs. Dann. "I'll tidy up the litter when you're gone. The Miracle Play is a good idea, but it won't spoil by being kept waiting. No one else is likely to cut in."

Bobby was smiling when he got into the motor-car. Mrs. Dann was less eager about her play than she had been when she set him to work in the morning. The intricacies of Onny Donovan's nature were exciting her. He was glad that he had undertaken to drive the car. Michael Staunton, sitting with Onny in the tonneau, would have opportunities for developing still further the normal side of the girl's character.

Unfortunately Michael would not, perhaps could not, use his chances. Onny settled herself in her corner of the tonneau and smiled at him in an encouraging way. But in Michael Staunton the scientist was stronger than the natural man. He could not treat Onny kindly while Bobby Sebright was dealing with the motor-car in a way calculated to injure its delicate mechanism. Michael Staunton leaned forward in his seat, and watched Bobby anxiously. It was plain to him before they had gone three hundred yards that Bobby knew very little about motors. A little further on anxiety about the car gave way to nervousness about his own safety. Bobby liked speed, and the Druminawona House avenue is not only narrow but has many corners. The wheels of the car often cut deep ruts in the grass at the sides of the avenue, and Bobby's way of getting back to the avenue was

abrupt. The gates lay close ahead of them. Michael Staunton leaned further forward and ventured to touch Bobby's arm.

"I call this fine," said Bobby without looking round.

They rushed through the gate, just grazing it with one of the mud-guards. The car swept round into the road with two wheels in the air. Michael Staunton was flung into Onny's lap. She appeared to be enjoying the fun. Michael was in a sweat of miserable apprehension. The car was running at well over thirty miles an hour and there was a steep hill in front of them.

"Glory be to God!" said Onny in fervent delight.

The road was very rough and she was bumping up and down on the springy seat. The sensation was the most delightful she had ever experienced. Michael Staunton clutched the back of the driver's seat with his hands, and stared at the road before them with glassy eyes. His face was damp and cold. He realised that a cart, a cow, or a flock of sheep on the road meant disaster. In his experience there generally were carts or cows or sheep on Irish roads. But Fate is kindest to those who least deserve her favours. The road was quite empty and Bobby swept through the rectory gate without doing anything worse than crushing out of shape one of his mud-guards. He stopped the car with a jerk which shot Onny forward from her seat and left her sprawling against the front of the tonneau. She picked herself up and crowed with joy.

"Did ever you see the like?" she said. "Isn't he the grand gentleman?"

"I'll be damned," said Michael firmly, "if ever I sit in a car again when he's driving it."

"I guess," said Bobby, "we did that drive in record time."

Delia, radiant in her pink dress, stood at the door of

the rectory. She had seen the car pass through the gate. Bobby took off his cap to her.

"Miss Mervyn," he said, "I have an invitation for you to spend the rest of the day restoring Sally May's confidence in human nature. It's been shattered by the excessive virtue of the young lady your papa fetched up this morning."

"Are you going to drive?" said Delia, smiling.

She was at heart quite as adventurous as Onny, and would have enjoyed dragging the rectory gate off its hinges; but she felt that the pink dress gave her the right to tease Bobby.

Michael Staunton was standing beside the ruined mud-guard, looking at it angrily. He spoke before Bobby could answer Delia's question.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but I can't agree to your driving the car."

Bobby looked at him for a moment with twinkling eyes. Then he turned to Onny.

"Say," he said, "how did you soften him? Mrs. Dann quails on account of his manners, which come straight from the highest European courts, and I'm cowed. There's no bounce left in me."

"The way you drive, sir," said Michael Staunton, "is dangerous."

"Miss Mervyn," said Bobby, "shall we sit at the back of the car and play we're going to a funeral with this baron propelling the hearse? Or would we get there quicker if we walked?"

"I must tell father before we start," said Delia.

"Take me with you," said Bobby. "If I'm left alone with this nobleman I'll be flattened out."

Æneas Sweeny had watched the arrival of the party from the yard gate. When Delia and Bobby Sebright went into the house he strolled up to the car. Michael

Staunton was dragging at the mud-guard with his hands. It was crushed against the side of the wheel and it was absolutely necessary to straighten it.

"There was a fellow one time," Æneas said, "coming through that same gate with a load of turf, and before he knew what had happened him the wheel was off the cart."

Michael Staunton looked up and scowled.

"There was another time," said Æneas Sweeny, "that Father Roche's mare came down opposite the police barrack and very near had the front kicked out of the trap before they got her on her legs again. But it was the sergeant's fault the damage was done. He's no good with a horse, that sergeant. Tell me now, would a hammer be of any use to you?"

Onny Donovan giggled convulsively. Æneas turned on her.

"Get in with you now, Onny Donovan," he said, "and let you be getting on with your work."

Onny glanced at Michael Staunton. He had been very polite to her earlier in the day. She hoped that he might defend her against attack. But Michael was in a very bad temper. His nerve had been shaken by Bobby's driving, and his dignity outraged by Bobby's taunts. He would not even look at Onny. She tossed her head and went into the house.

"If a bit of rope would be any good to you," said Æneas, "I've a long piece handy in the cow-house." Michael Staunton did not want rope. He had succeeded in forcing back the mud-guard so that it no longer pressed against the wheel. He stood up and rubbed the dust off his hands.

"Tell me this," said Æneas in an easy conversational tone, "did you hear any talk up at the big house about play-acting or the like of that?"

"No," said Michael shortly.

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"For a what?"

"An engagement? A job as an actor, you know."

Michael Staunton enjoyed poking fun at a helplessly ignorant creature like Æneas. It gave him a most agreeable sense of superiority. Æneas did not seem put out. He answered calmly.

"I have a job of the kind got," he said, "and if the pay's what you say it is I don't care how long I go on at it."

For a moment Michael was startled. Then he jumped to the conclusion that Æneas must have been asked to play a part in some village dramatic entertainment. He began to explain that the position of the casual amateur is very different from that of a leading professional. He was interrupted by Onny Donovan. She appeared at the door and delivered a message.

"The gentleman bid me tell you," she said, "that you're to take the car home the best way you can, for himself is going to walk with Miss Delia."

Michael Staunton, his temper restored, remembered his gallantry.

"Can I have the pleasure," he said, "of taking you for a drive?"

"You cannot," said Æneas. "Is it that one? Get along out of that, Onny Donovan, and attend to your work."

"Let you attend to your own," she said, "instead of giving orders to me. It would suit you better."

Michael Staunton looked after her as she went into the house.

"A good-looking young lady," he said, "and quite ready for a little fun."

"If it's carrying on you mean," said Æneas, "I wouldn't put it past her."

Michael Staunton winked suggestively. He meant to

convey to Æneas the idea that he had found Onny quite ready to "carry on."

"When I tell Jamesy Casey," said Æneas, "what you're after telling me, he'll not be so set on marrying her."

"Oh, don't let anything I've said spoil her chances," said Michael.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. MERVYN sat in his study and gazed in puzzled perplexity at the table of Forbidden Degrees in his Prayer Book. It occurred to him after a while that he had somewhere, among the books bequeathed to him by his father, two volumes of ecclesiastical law. He found them, fat quartos bound in brown leather, squeezed in beside the many works of John Owen. Their title gave him hope. "Ecclesiastical Law of the Church of Ireland, Methodically Digested under Proper Heads" by Ed: Bullingbrooke, Doctor of Laws, Vicar General of His Grace the Lord Primate of All Ireland." The date of the publication of the treatise was 1770, but Mr. Mervyn knew that ecclesiastical law was a stable thing. It altered very little in a century and a half.

He opened the first volume and discovered that Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke devoted 66 pages, divided into 20 chapters, to the great subject of "Matrimony; how it is duely solemnised and dissolved." The first chapter dealt with the prohibited degrees. It occupied thirteen pages. The Prayer Book erred on the side of being too concise. Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke ran into the opposite extreme and seemed inclined to excessive prolixity; and a great deal of what he had to say was in Latin. Mr. Mervyn laid the book before him, got a dictionary, and sat down to master at least the first chapter.

"Tit: XXII., Chapter I.," began Dr. Bullingbrooke, pursuing his plan of methodically digesting under proper heads the laws of the Church. "Tit:" puzzled Mr.

Mervyn, but he did not linger over it. The three letters could not, he felt, contain any essential information. "By a constitution of John Stratford; we ordain by the authority of this Council, that they who, from this time forward, contract or solemnise marriage, while they know or have probable suspicion of any canonical impediment do incur the sentence of the greater excommunication *ipso facto*. Lyndw: 275."

Mr. Mervyn rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. There might or might not be a canonical impediment to his marriage with Mrs. Dann. He would discover that later on. There was no doubt that he had a "probable suspicion" on the subject. That fact alone settled the matter. The major excommunication was a dreadful penalty, but not, he felt, an ounce too heavy for the offence. No one, not even Father Roche, would ask him to incur it; and he would incur it, *ipso facto,* if he married in the teeth of his reasonable suspicion. He wished, indeed, that some punishment of a more tangible kind had been threatened: a fine, for instance, or a period of imprisonment with hard labour. Something of the sort would have been more effective in argument with Bobby Sebright. He suspected that Bobby Sebright might underestimate the terror of the major excommunication, even if incurred *ipso facto.* But Father Roche would appreciate it. There was great comfort in that thought. He turned to Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke's article on Excommunication (Tit: XLVI., chap. 5) in order to make himself thoroughly familiar with the subject; but the article was long and there was another appended to it on the "Denouncing of Excommunicates." He put off reading it and went back to Matrimony.

Then a doubt assailed him. Was Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke to be relied on implicitly? He quoted John Stratford as his authority, but Mr. Mervyn did not know who

John Stratford was. The cryptic note at the end of the paragraph, "Lyndw: 275," gave him no help. There was a reassuring majesty about the words "We ordain." Only editors and kings speak in this way. If there had been no more than the simple "We ordain" Mr. Mervyn might have taken John Stratford at his own valuation and accepted him as a final authority. But the man was half-hearted after all. "We ordain," he said, "by the authority of the Council" and then he omitted to give name or date of the Council. This shifting of the responsibility for his statements from his own shoulders to those of an undefined Council made Mr. Mervyn suspicious. Still Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke believed in this John Stratford, put his dictum in the very front of his long treatise on forbidden degrees, and Ed: Bullingbrooke was a doctor of laws, and Vicar General of His Grace the Lord Primate of All Ireland. Such a man must know what he was talking about. If he had been caught blundering the Lord Primate of All Ireland would have made short work of him. He would not have enjoyed for very long the dignity of being a Vicar General. And after all there was the statement, unmistakably plain, "A probable suspicion of any canonical impediment." The phrase seemed framed to meet Mr. Mervyn's case.

He turned to the next page and read on. He found neither hope nor discouragement. The language in which the jurists who were quoted discussed marriage was uncompromisingly plain. Mr. Mervyn, who was constitutionally delicate minded, skipped a good deal of it. He came upon cases cited, no doubt, as examples of evil-doing. He read of men, in the reigns of Charles I and Charles II, who had tried to brazen out their iniquity by going into court to defend their marriages with deceased wives' sisters and such persons. But no one, so far as he could discover, had ever been cited be-

fore a spiritual or civil court for marrying his deceased wife's brother's widow. Either it had never occurred to anyone to do such a thing, or else it was a thing which might be done with impunity. With all his prolixity and his immense parade of learning, Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke had no clear light to throw on Mr. Mervyn's case. The dictum of John Stratford was all he had to rely on.

He passed on, without much hope, to the next chapter of "Tit: XXII." It dealt with Precontracts and it appeared that some of them had a way of disannulling, others of not disannulling marriages. These were of little use to him. He felt hopeless of being able to make the right kind of precontract in time to save himself from being driven into marriage with Mrs. Dann.

It was while he was trying to understand the case of Collins and Jesset, a young couple who had got into trouble over a contract *per verba de praesenti* in the third year of Queen Anne ("Annae," as Dr. Bullingbrooke somewhat familiarly called her) that Bobby Sebright and Delia entered his study.

"Father," said Delia, "Aunt Sally May wants me to go up to her. Do you mind if I do? I'll tell Onny to get everything for you as if I was here."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly," said Mr. Mervyn.

Father Roche's words had made an impression on him.

He did not see his way to taking Delia up to Dublin, and seating her in a motor-car between two of the viceregal aides-de-camp. But he wished to give her as much pleasure as he could without outraging his conscience by marrying Mrs. Dann.

"You're sure you won't want me, father?"

"No, no, Delia. I—I shall be very busy. It would be dull for you here. Run away and amuse yourself."

A plan lay half-formed at the back of Mr. Mervyn's

mind. It would, if he finally decided on it, be easier to carry out if his daughter were not in the house with him. Delia looked round at Bobby Sebright, smiling joyously.

"I'll just run and get a wrap," she said, "and then we can start."

The garment she had in mind was a long boa made of ostrich feathers. She went up to her room to get it. Bobby Sebright stood beside Mr. Mervyn.

Now, Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke had a sense of the dignity of ecclesiastical law, and he belonged to an age in which books were much rarer than they are at present and therefore produced with more pomp. Mr. Boulter Grierson of the city of Dublin, who was printer to the king's most excellent majesty in 1770, possessed several fonts of large type. Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke made full use of these. Across the top of every left-hand page ran in impressive letters the words "Matrimony: how it is duely." Across the top of the opposite, the right-hand page, it was possible, even for one standing at some distance, to read "Solemnized and Dissolved." Mr. Mervyn, when Bobby and Delia entered the room, had instinctively tried to conceal what he was reading. He laid his hand and part of his arm across the book. But Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke had given his treatise to the world in large quarto volumes. Mr. Mervyn's arm only covered the left-hand page. Bobby Sebright had no desire to pry, but Mr. Boulter Grierson's fine letters caught his eye. "Solemnized and Dissolved" he read. There are several things in the world which are solemnised and several other things, including, according to St. Peter, the world itself, which may be dissolved. But there is only one thing which is both solemnised and dissolved. Bobby Sebright came to the conclusion that Mr. Mervyn was looking up the subject of Matrimony.

"I don't take any pride," said Bobby, "in being an ex-

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This prospect of ultimate escape did not in the least reconcile Mr. Mervyn to the love-making. He found a difficulty in bringing his mind to bear upon the situation; but he was vaguely conscious that it would be an extremely dishonourable thing for him to make love to a lady when he fully intended to avoid marrying her in the end. He rubbed his hands helplessly up and down the pages of Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke's book. That Vicar General of the Primate of All Ireland had gone pretty fully into the theory of precontracts, but he had never contemplated anything like the iniquity which Bobby Sebright was suggesting. Even in the third year of Queen Ann (3 Annae) such things were not done.

Before Mr. Mervyn made the protest he meant to make, Delia flitted into the room. She wore the ostrich feather boa. She carried over her arm a long pale grey coat, made of very thin material, lined with silk of a delicate mauve colour. Bobby took it from her and held it out that she might slip her arms into it. Delia unhooked the boa and flung it on the table. It fell across the pages of Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke's learned tome. It covered up utterly the cautious sagacity of John Stratford, obscured the mysterious "Lyndw:" and turned the solemnity of "Tit: XXII. Chap. I." into ridicule with its airy fluffiness. A scent from it reached Mr. Mervyn, drowning the rusty odour of old leather and damp paper. The sunlight streamed through the window. Beneath the white glistening of the feathers the page showed feebly yellow mottled with blots of brown, and the pencil-marks of some forgotten student seemed no more than faint, purposeless meanderings. So fails the wisdom of old sages, however painfully wrought out. So womanhood, redolent, frivolous, gay, wins its triumphs, and life laughs in the face of philosophy.

Mr. Mervyn stood by the window and watched them

go, Delia gallant in her braveries and new self-confidence, Bobby beside her, debonair, gaily stepping, all his movements rich with suggestion of vitality. They passed through the green shadow of the trees and out to the road beyond. Mr. Mervyn turned with a sigh and closed the book of Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke.

He had decided upon a desperate course. Even before Bobby Sebright made his last and most profoundly immoral suggestion Mr. Mervyn's mind was made up. He determined to lay the whole appalling difficulty before his bishop. To clergymen who love peace, and all clergymen ought to love peace, bishops are a danger. An appeal to one in time of trouble may indeed bring immediate relief, but in the end fresh trouble will assuredly ensue. A bishop will generally let a parish and its clergyman alone unless his attention is in some way directed to them. Once he is forced to notice them he begins to make inquiries into all sorts of things and to suggest ridiculous reforms or new kinds of activity harassing to everyone.

There was once a clergyman who lived very quietly and happily until, in an unfortunate moment, he asked his bishop's advice about a new pulpit. The bishop had forgotten all about him until he got the letter about the pulpit. Then he suddenly became active, and for years he worried that clergyman and his people because they had neither a "Boys' Brigade," a "Mothers' Union," or a "Girls' Friendly Society" in the parish. It is possible that more of those people went to heaven in the end, but it is certain that they were far from comfortable while on earth. Mr. Mervyn understood the risk he ran in appealing to his bishop; but his circumstances were desperate. It would, he felt, be better for him to be forced to mould the three sons of Sergeant Ginty into a battalion of the Boys' Brigade, to turn Delia into a Branch of the Girls' Friendly Society, and to make Mrs.

Ginty a United Mother, than to marry or, like a scandalous Don Juan, make love to Mrs. Dann.

He searched out Æneas Sweeny and told him to harness Biddy at once. He packed some necessary garments in a small black bag, and at the last moment stuffed a volume of John Owen in on top of them. His natural impulse was to take his Wordsworth, but he realised that his will might need stiffening when the critical moment came. John Owen was a deep well of moral strength. He took him to read in the train. Mr. Mervyn's bishop lived a long way from Druminawona. It was necessary first to drive two miles to a railway station. Then there was a train journey of four hours. One hour and twenty minutes were spent actually in the train. The remaining two hours and forty minutes were given to waiting for trains at two different junctions.

Mr. Mervyn, physically hungry, but spiritually replete with John Owen, arrived at the little town in which his bishop lived, at nine o'clock. It is never wise to approach a bishop without warning after nine o'clock at night, on diocesan business. Like other men, bishops have a right to regard their day's work as over at that hour; and though, on account of their peculiar position, they cannot express their feelings as plainly as other men do, they hate being disturbed. Mr. Mervyn, not being a fool, determined to go to the hotel for the night. There had been a pig fair in the town during the day, and numbers of swine were roaming through the streets. They were all in highly irritable moods; some of them, which had not been bought, because their attractiveness had been slighted or undervalued during the day; others, which had been bought, because they knew they were going to be killed, and this, even if you are a pig, is a distressing prospect. It was very hard to get to the hotel. It was still harder to get in. The buyers of the

pigs, strangers from all the great centres of the bacon industry, were congregated in the narrow hall. They filled every room. They reduced the hotel servants to imbecility by clamorous demands for food, whisky, and beds.

Not until nearly ten o'clock did Mr. Mervyn get a scanty meal of bacon and eggs. At a quarter past ten what remained of it was swept away from him. A mattress was laid on the table at which he sat. Then other mattresses were spread on the floor. Three pig-buyers, he was told, were to sleep in that room. Mr. Mervyn was invited to lie down on the fourth mattress. The patriarch Jacob was better off at Luz. A stone is indeed a slightly harder pillow than a volume of John Owen, but there is fresh air on a mountainside. In a small room occupied by three slumbering pig-buyers there is none. The very bleakness of Luz was an advantage in some ways. There was no one there to snore. The pig-buyers round Mr. Mervyn snored raucously all night.

There was little difficulty in the morning about dressing because no one had undressed very much. Pig-buyers are a hardy race, and their collars are not the worse for being worn in bed. No collar which has been round the neck of a stout man during a pig fair on a hot day, when prices are eagerly disputed, can be made worse by any treatment. There might have been trouble about washing if the three pig-buyers had wanted to wash. Being sensible men, they did not. It is merely silly to wash in the morning when the whole day is to be spent among pigs. Mr. Mervyn had the sole use of a tin basin and a jug of cold water. The basin was set on a chair in a corner of the room. He knelt down so as to get at it.

At eleven o'clock he went to the bishop's palace. The appearance of it daunted him, and he stood for some

time looking at it before he ventured to ring the bell. The palaces of the bishops of the Irish Church are survivals of the days when Irish sees were very richly endowed. They were designed for men who occupied the position of wealthy nobles, and their grandeur, even now, has the effect of daunting humble souls. But Mr. Mervyn conquered his misgivings. He reflected that his need was great, and that he had endured a sleepless night. He would not be frightened by a frowning frontage of grey stone or the carved image of a mitre which crowned the door.

He waited a long time after ringing the bell, so long that, greatly daring, he rang it again. A man-servant in his shirt-sleeves, with a long white apron covering all but his head, his arms, and his feet, opened the door. He told Mr. Mervyn that the bishop was in Dublin.

"We're expecting his lordship home to-morrow or the day after," he added.

Mr. Mervyn went back to the hotel. The pig-buyers had all gone away. The proprietor apologised to Mr. Mervyn for the bad treatment he had endured the night before. He promised every kind of amendment. Mr. Mervyn should have a bedroom entirely to himself. He might order luncheon at any hour he pleased. A chicken, two if he thought he could eat two chickens, would be cooked for his dinner. The whole staff of the hotel would wait on him obsequiously.

"Unless it might be a couple of commercial gentlemen," said the proprietor, "or maybe an inspector or two, there'll be no one in the house to-day."

Mr. Mervyn thought of his pleasant rectory; but he also thought of Mrs. Dann. He reminded himself that the bishop would be home the next day. He thought of Father Roche unscrupulously anxious to provide fresh interests for Mrs. Dann, eager to turn her mind from the Miracle Play at any cost. He thought of Bobby Se-

bright fertile in fresh suggestions, each more horrible than the one that went before it. He made up his mind to stay where he was. Whether the bishop returned at once or not, he was safer under the shadow even of a bishop's palace than he would be in Druminawona.

One of the pig-buyers, unexpectedly a man of literary tastes, had left behind him a copy of a weekly magazine, full of short stories, poems, and articles on such subjects as the proper use of leisure hours and the dangers of English Sunday newspapers. Mr. Mervyn held it in his hands and went to sleep till luncheon time. After luncheon he tried John Owen and went to sleep again. In the evening he tried the pig-buyer's paper for the second time and got half-way through a poem about an Irish exile who had found a home in Chicago. It was a very affecting poem, but he went to sleep again before he had finished it. The first eight lines were particularly touching:

"Oh, holy Ireland, island of the sea,
How sad my spirit and my heart do be
To feel that I must wear the shamrock green
So far away from Ballaghadereen.

The cruel landlords chased me o'er the sea
By asking for the rent I could not pay;
But now I hear they are no longer seen.
They have been chased from Ballaghadereen."

CHAPTER XXII

ÆNEAS SWEENY left Mr. Mervyn at the railway station and then turned homewards. The way was hilly and the road bad, but Biddy accomplished the journey in a little less than an hour and a half. Æneas kept her to her work. He was thirsty and he had no money. If he had owned a shilling, or if he could have commanded credit anywhere except in Druminawona, Biddy might have had a rest before she made her return journey. But Æneas had no money, so Biddy trotted home faster than she wanted to. But the desire for a drink was not the only thing which made Æneas use his whip. He had a duty to perform, and he wanted to get to the doing of it as soon as possible. It is to the credit of Æneas that he did the duty before he got the drink.

He pulled up at the gate of the presbytery yard and called for Jamesy Casey.

"Jamesy, my poor boy," he said, "is it true what they tell me, that they have you as good as married to Onny Donovan?"

Jamesy was surprised at the sympathetic and affectionate tone in which he spoke. He and Æneas were not on good terms. He had heard many tales from Onny, none of them to the credit of her fellow-servant, and the little intercourse he had with Æneas inclined him to believe that the worst of the tales were true. He answered cautiously.

"There was talk of it," he said.

"I'm sorry for it," said Æneas.

Jamesy did not attach much importance to anything

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"Well, and if he did, couldn't he unsay it again?"

"If that's the way of it," said Æneas, "I'm sorry I spoke, but it was for your own good I did it. A girl that would carry on with one man would carry on with another."

"She wouldn't."

"She did, anyway. And what's more, the fellow was grinning and winking to me about it. Would he do that if the girl hadn't said something to him, more or less? She's a nice one, so she is."

Father Roche, looking out of the window of his study, saw Biddy standing patiently near his door. Since he reached home in the morning he had thought of several other excellent reasons why Mr. Mervyn should marry Mrs. Dann. It occurred to him that it would be a good thing to go up to the rectory and explain them. He put on his hat, went to the door, and called Æneas Sweeny.

"Is it home you're going with the pony?" he said.

"It is, your reverence."

This was true. Æneas meant to go home in the end. It seemed unnecessary to explain that he intended to drink several glasses of whisky on the way.

"Then you may as well take me with you," said Father Roche.

"I will, of course, Father," said Æneas, "and there's nobody would be more pleased than Mr. Mervyn when I tell him that you've been using the old pony."

"I'll tell him myself," said Father Roche. "I'm going up to see him."

"You'll not do that, Father," said Æneas respectfully, "not to-day anyway, though you might some other day."

"Why not?"

"Because he's away out of this in the train."

Father Roche was very greatly surprised. Mr.

Mervyn rarely went away from Druminawona. He had, apparently, no intention of travelling when Father Roche parted from him in the morning.

"Where has he gone to?"

"What he told me," said Æneas, careful not to commit himself to any opinion about the truth of Mr. Mervyn's statement, "was that he was going to the bishop."

Father Roche was still more surprised. He knew Mr. Mervyn's dread of any kind of bishop.

"Are you sure of that?" he said.

"It's what he told me. Won't you sit up into the phaeton, your reverence? for I ought to be starting."

"I will not," said Father Roche. "What sense would there be in my going to the rectory when Mr. Mervyn's not there?"

Æneas was very well pleased. There was nothing now to prevent his drinking as long as his credit lasted. He stepped into the phaeton and laid his whip across Biddy's shoulders. Father Roche went into the presbytery. Jamesy Casey, his hat in his hand, his face wrinkled with perplexity, followed the priest.

"Well," said Father Roche, "what do you want now, Jamesy?"

"If it wouldn't be troubling your reverence too much," said Jamesy, "there's a question I'd like to ask you."

"Be quick about it then, for I haven't all day to be talking to you."

Jamesy sank his voice to a whisper.

"Would it be any harm," he said, "if I was to marry Onny Donovan after all?"

"Marry her if you like, and it'll be a good thing if you do; but I thought you said you didn't want to?"

"I did not say that, Father. What I said was that my mother would be terrible vexed if I was to bring a strange girl into the house on top of her."

"Has anything happened since this morning to make your mother change her mind?"

"There is not," said Jamesy Casey, "not a thing; but something might."

"Well, settle it your own way. If you can arrange it with your mother there's no reason that I can see why you shouldn't marry the girl."

"What I was thinking of asking your reverence—but maybe it would be expecting too much from you—"

Jamesy hesitated and looked dubiously at the priest.

"Go on," said Father Roche.

"If you'd speak to my mother," said Jamesy, "she'd think more of a word from you than she would of what I might say if I was to be talking to her from this till Christmas."

"Tell me this. What's made you change your mind since this morning? You weren't very willing to marry the girl the last time I was speaking to you about it. What's come over you?"

"I'll not tell your reverence any lies."

"You'd better not," said Father Roche.

"It's on account of what Æneas Sweeny is just after telling me this minute. Not that I believe a word that blackguard would say, for everybody knows he has a spite against Onny, and I wouldn't take any notice of him if he swore it on his oath, for a bigger liar than Æneas Sweeny—"

"You're right there. But what did he say?"

"I'd be ashamed to be repeating the like to your reverence. But what he said had reference to the behaviour of Onny Donovan and the young fellow that does be driving the motor-car for the American lady."

"Oh, that's the way of it, is it? Well, I wouldn't believe it."

"I don't," said Jamesy, "but I thought it might be as well if I was to marry her. It would be better for the

both of us than if she was to go off and marry a stranger that nobody ever heard tell of. So, if your reverence will be so kind as to say a word to my mother, the way she won't be raising objections—"

An idea, novel and brilliant, came suddenly to Father Roche. A man cannot be a priest, even in a lonely village like Druminawona, without coming to have some understanding of human nature. The workings of Jamesy Casey's mind were, of course, simple and perfectly plain to him. The young man had been prepared to postpone his marriage with Onny Donovan indefinitely so long as he felt pretty sure of getting her in the end. The hint of the existence of a dangerous rival made him anxious and eager. Father Roche took no credit to himself for understanding that. He had known men of the type of Jamesy Casey for years, and known them intimately. But Mrs. Dann was strange to him. For a long time he had not understood her at all. He had set her down as one of the reckless philanthropists with whom we are all very familiar in Ireland. He had recognised in her a force of character, a capacity for persistence, which made it very difficult for sensible men to baulk her schemes. Then, taking a hint from Bobby Sebright's talk, he came to see her as a very simple-minded woman, full of anxiety to do kindly things, and passionately romantic. The chance of doing good to other people would always appeal to her. The chance of doing good romantically would draw her irresistibly.

"Listen to me now, Jamesy Casey," he said; "do you go straight up to the big house and tell Mrs. Dann that you're dying of love for Onny Donovan."

"I'd be ashamed to say the like."

"Ashamed or not," said Father Roche, "it's what you're going to say to her; and what's more, you'll repeat poetry about it. It's a pity now Mr. Mervyn's not here, for he'd have told us some good poetry; but we'll

have to do the best we can without him. When you've said you're in love with her—and you can put it strong, Jamesy, and don't be bashful about it—just you give a kind of sigh and say 'Kathleen Mavourneen, agus asthore,' making it so as it will sound as near to the tune of the song as you can manage."

"Sure I couldn't do that," said Jamesy. "Isn't her name Onny, and not Kathleen?"

"It doesn't matter a pin about the name when it's poetry you're saying."

"You're reverence is right, of course," said Jamesy, "but I wouldn't like it if it came out in the end that I was married to the wrong girl."

"You won't be if you do what I bid you. When you've quoted the poetry you'll tell her that the one thing there is between you and the girl is your mother, and that you're afraid maybe another man will get her unless your mother is pacified some way or another. Are you attending to me now?"

"I am surely. I'm to tell her that the young fellow that drives her motor—"

"You'd better not mention his name or tell her who he is. But you'll ask her if she'll go down and talk to your mother for you."

"She'll never do it. Why would she?"

"She will if you put it to her properly, the way I tell you. I'll go up later on myself and say a word to her about it."

"If your reverence does that it'll be all right; but it's too much trouble for you entirely. Wouldn't it be easier for you to say a word to my mother, who's living convenient to you, and not to be going all that long way? It would be the same thing in the end."

It would, so far as Jamesy Casey's marriage was concerned, have been exactly the same thing; but Father Roche, a true ecclesiastic, had behind his obvious plan

another one which he did not publicly declare. According to Bobby Sebright, the love affairs of Jamesy Casey and Onny Donovan as originally presented to Mrs. Dann were too commonplace to be effective in attracting her attention. Now they were enriched by difficulties and took a glow of romantic light from the opposition of a stern parent. Is it not the obstacles, stern parents or others, which give their interest to all love stories? No one would care to read "Romeo and Juliet," if the Montagues and Capulets had not been at feud. The fine passion of Abelard and Heloïse would only make us yawn if monastic vows had not got between them like barbed wire entanglements. Surely Mrs. Dann would leap at the chance of playing fairy godmother. Surely a tale of hopeless passion, illustrated with appropriate poetical quotations, would absorb her. Father Roche told Jamesy that he would not interfere in the matter at all except through Mrs. Dann.

"Whatever your reverence says is right," said Jamesy. "I'll be going up there to-morrow."

"You'll go to-day," said Father Roche.

"What I was thinking," said Jamesy, "was that if I was to tell my mother to-night what your reverence is after saying, and how the strange lady is to be set at her, she might see that it would be well for her to give in first as last, and that would be a great saving of trouble for the whole of us. It's what my mother wouldn't care for would be to have the American lady driving down to her in the motor-car."

"You'll go to-day," said Father Roche; "and what's more, you'll go at once. Do you want to marry the girl or do you not?"

"I do, of course."

"I wouldn't trust you. And what's more, I won't trust you. Go now and put the mare between the shafts of the car and I'll go up along with you, so as I'll see you do go."

CHAPTER XXIII

OPPOSITE the main door of Druminawona House there is a broad lawn, once, in the days when the house was regularly inhabited, adorned with flower-beds, still pleasantly shaded by great lime trees. Here, because the day was hot, Mrs. Dann had chairs and a table. Here she was sitting at tea with Delia and Bobby Sebright, when Father Roche and Jamesy Casey drove up.

"Bobby," said Mrs. Dann, "that reverend father seems to be getting into the habit of paying pretty frequent visits here; but I wouldn't like him to feel he's not welcome. You go and take him by the hand."

Bobby set his teacup on the ground at Delia's feet. He crossed the gravel sweep and took off his hat gravely to the priest. Father Roche shook his hand heartily. Then he turned to Jamesy Casey.

"Do you take the mare round to the yard, Jamesy," he said, "and as soon as ever you have her put up come back here at once. You'll be wanted."

"If it was pleasing to your reverence," said Jamesy, "I'd as soon stay in the yard till you've finished speaking to the lady."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. How do you suppose I can be arranging for your marriage and you not there?"

Jamesy drove off slowly. Now that it came to the point he found that he disliked the idea of quoting "Kathleen Mavourneen." To say the poem privately to Mrs. Dann would be bad enough. To recite it to an audience of four would be much worse. He doubted

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Bobby will explain to him while he's along with me he'll have to earn his keep."

"When you've heard what I'm going to tell you," said Father Roche, "you may be wanting to go down in the motor-car yourself."

"Phil's not ill?" said Mrs. Dann. "Don't tell me that Phil's ill, and you're breaking it to us gently by saying he's gone away."

"He is not ill; and it's not him I came to speak to you about, but Jamesy Casey."

"The bridegroom," said Bobby Sebright, "who's opposed to the idea of marrying the weeping bride."

"He's not opposed to her now," said Father Roche. "He's heart-scalded wanting her. It was only this minute, just before I came up to see you, that I went into the stable and there was the poor fellow with his arms round the mare's neck and him singing 'Kathleen Mavourneen, the grey dawn is breaking,' and 'The snowy-breasted pearl.' I felt sorry for him, and so would you if you heard him."

Father Roche spoke these last words to Delia, and he spoke them reproachfully. Delia was looking at him in a way that made him feel uncomfortable. At first her eyes expressed no more than a lively interest in Jamesy Casey's condition of love-sickness. Then, when she heard of his performance in the stable, she seemed greatly surprised. The look of surprise passed quickly and was succeeded by a merry twinkling of her eyes. It was plain to Father Roche that Delia was either greatly amused at the thought of Jamesy Casey singing "Kathleen Mavourneen" to a brown mare, or that she did not believe he had done it.

"I'd be better able to speak plain," said Father Roche severely, "if Miss Mervyn was out of this. There are some subjects that ought not to be mentioned before young ladies."

"Bobby," said Mrs. Dann, "take Delia with you and wind up the automobile."

Delia's position was a difficult one. She wanted very much to hear how Father Roche's mare had behaved when Jamesy sang love-songs to it. She was also greatly interested in Onny Donovan's prospects of getting married. But it is a delicate matter for a young girl to stay where she is when a clergyman hints plainly that he is going to tell improper stories. Stories of this kind are always much worse when told by ladies or men officially committed to strict propriety, than they are under ordinary circumstances. When they get into the kind of histories which are circulated by select libraries they are worst of all. Delia got up and walked away with an offended air. Bobby Sebright followed her.

"I'm grateful to you for respecting Delia's feelings," said Mrs. Dann, "and I'm prepared to blush some."

"The poor fellow's in love with the girl," said Father Roche, "and what's more, she's in love with him! But here he is coming from the yard now, and he'll tell you the way of it now."

"I'm not bashful to any excess," said Mrs. Dann, "and I've studied the history of the European monarchs quite a bit, as well as giving support and encouragement to the more artistic kind of serious drama, when presented on the New York stage, but I'd rather hear the story from you than the young man himself. I have a kind of shrinking from the purest kinds of realism."

"If you think," said Father Roche, "that I'd ask you to listen to anything that a lady ought not to hear you're mistaken. Come here now, Jamesy Casey."

Jamesy Casey, his cap held tightly with both hands, his face remarkably purple, sidled across the lawn and stood about ten yards from Father Roche and Mrs. Dann.

"Tell me now, Jamesy," said the priest, "are you in love with Onny Donovan or are you not?"

"I am," said Jamesy, "and many's the time I do be saying to myself 'Kathleen Mavourneen, agus asthore.' That would be," he added, "when I thought there was no one listening to me that would take it up wrong. For it's Onny they call her, and not Kathleen."

"There you are now," said Father Roche. "What did I tell you? And is she in love with you?"

"She is," said Jamesy.

"She wouldn't confide any in me," said Mrs. Dann. "All she'd say was that you were a decent, quiet boy."

"Sure if she said that much she meant the other," said Jamesy. "You wouldn't be expecting her to say more!"

"And if that's the way of it with you," said Father Roche, "why don't you marry her?"

"On account of my mother."

"And what is it that brings you up here?" said Father Roche. "What do you want with Mrs. Dann?"

"If it would be pleasing to your ladyship," said Jamesy, "to speak a word to my mother any time that might be convenient to you; it's too much to ask, surely; but my mother would be pleased and proud to see your ladyship in the inside of our little houseen, and what you'd say would be what she'd listen to."

"Is that all?" said Mrs. Dann.

"That's all," said Father Roche. "You can go now, Jamesy."

"I've always considered," said Mrs. Dann, "that we were at the North Pole of civilisation in the way of delicacy of feeling for the female sex, but you have us beat to a frazzle. It never would have occurred to me that Delia would have blushed any at listening to that confession."

Father Roche watched Jamesy as he retreated towards the stable. He was not inclined to discuss the disappointing absence of any impropriety in the statements he had just dragged from Jamesy. That seemed to him to be a side issue. He wished to fix Mrs. Dann's attention on the main love interest of the situation.

"It's a pity of the two of them, so it is," he said, "and a fine young couple they'd make."

"I don't see why they don't marry," said Mrs. Dann.

"It's on account of his mother. Didn't he tell you that? But maybe you weren't listening at the time."

"In America," said Mrs. Dann, "we reverence the Ten Commandments quite a bit, and we don't undervalue the fifth any more than we do the other nine. But it doesn't do to make an idol of the Decalogue, Father Roche. Those two tables of stone weren't meant to be worshipped, and I reckon you're inclined in this country to overestimate the importance of the fifth."

"It's not so much that—though I don't deny that Jamesy has a respect for his mother; but it's not so much that as the thought of the life the old woman would lead Onny if she got married in spite of her, and the way Onny would behave to her, for there's no telling what a girl like that would do when her temper was up; and the time poor Jamesy would have between the two of them; at it night and morning, hammer and tongs. That's what has him frightened. But if you would speak to the old lady—"

"I don't reckon my speaking would be much use."

"It would. Believe you me, if you spoke to her she'd be afraid to open her mouth after."

"Well, I'll do it."

Father Roche was a little disappointed. He had, indeed, carried his point. Mrs. Dann would pay a visit to old Mrs. Casey. But she did not seem nearly so much interested in the marriage as he had hoped. The

romance of it did not sweep her into the region of strong emotion. She ought, he felt, to be more sympathetic with Jamesy, more sorry for Onny than she appeared to be. But she had not said a word about the Miracle Play. That gave him some encouragement. He determined to make a further appeal to her along somewhat different lines. After all, a number of small interests, taken in the aggregate, might be just as distracting as a single large one.

"That fellow Æneas Sweeny is a terrible blackguard," he said.

"What would you expect? He's the live image of Judas Iscariot."

Father Roche winced. The mention of Judas Iscariot might well lead on to the subject he dreaded.

"You'd hardly believe it," he said hurriedly, "that this very day he was taking away Onny Donovan's character, telling stories about her that weren't true, nor near true."

"Seems to me," said Mrs. Dann, "that your parishioners want a lot of looking after."

"I wish somebody would regulate Æneas Sweeny," said Father Roche. "When he's not robbing Mr. Mervyn, who's an innocent kind of man and suspects nobody, he's drinking whisky, and when he's not at that he's either quarrelling with the police sergeant or spreading stories about Onny Donovan. What we want in this place is a lady—one like yourself now—who would be living here and could take an interest in the lives of the people, seeing to it that the ones who ought to be married were married and the rest of them kept decent as far as could be."

He was inviting Mrs. Dann to interfere freely in the affairs of the parish. It was a desperate thing to do, and might have consequences of unimaginable kinds; but the risk of future trouble seemed to him preferable

to an immediate Miracle Play. Yet, the risks being what they were, he felt it right to hedge a little.

"Seconding the efforts of the clergy of course," he added.

Mrs. Dann sat silent for a minute. Father Roche could see that she was thinking deeply.

"When I was studying the mediæval history of Europe," she said, "I came up against the Feudal System, a most remarkable kind of constitution, though unsuited to the modern democratic state."

"There were worse things than that same Feudal System."

"I don't deny," said Mrs. Dann, "that the feudal baron had his uses in the society of that day, and there may be places even in the twentieth century of this era where a nobleman of that kind would be an advantage to the public. It suggests itself to me that Druminawona is one of them."

"It might be," said Father Roche.

He was not quite sure where this line of thought might lead; but it did not seem likely to end in a Miracle Play. He felt justified in giving a cautious assent to what Mrs. Dann said.

"It was that flavour of the Middle Ages," said Mrs. Dann, "which led me to suggest a Miracle Play, that and the likeness of Phil's hired man to Judas Iscariot."

"Miracle Plays would be no good here," said Father Roche.

"Not at first," said Mrs. Dann. "Not right away. I see that now. What your people want is to be gradually trained into the Feudal System. The Miracle Play would drop in of itself later on."

"In a year or two maybe," said Father Roche, "there'd be no objection to it."

"But just now," said Mrs. Dann, "what you want is a feudal baron, and it seems to me I might fill the situa-

tion. Now is that a business proposition, Father Roche? Do you mean it straight?"

"If you'd undertake to regulate Æneas Sweeny," said Father Roche, "and talk sense to old Mrs. Casey, and see that Onny Donovan is safely married before she gets into mischief—seconding the efforts of the clergy, Mr. Mervyn's and my own."

"I'll have my hands full," said Mrs. Dann, "but I expect I'll be equal to the work."

"There isn't one ever I met," said Father Roche, "would do it better."

"Well, I'll take it on. I expect poor Nathan P. Dann will be pleased when he hears that I'm doing the Queen of Sheba to the Ten Lost Tribes."

Father Roche was, on the whole, well satisfied with his success. Mrs. Dann's fondness for the Ten Lost Tribes puzzled him and made him slightly uneasy. He would have felt happier if she had not dragged them and the Queen of Sheba into her conversation. Any allusion to Old Testament history might lead back to the Miracle Play. On the other hand, Onny Donovan's affairs would certainly occupy her for a few days, and anyone who attempted the reformation of Æneas Sweeny had a long and arduous task. Human energy, even Mrs. Dann's, is subject to a process of exhaustion. You cannot use it freely and keep its original vigour unimpaired.

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his Sunday at the Black Bear in Darlington, nobody talked much and mine host carved his buttock of beef sulkily. It is to Sir Walter Scott, and not to the actual Quitams or Mixits, that we owe the delightful talk which we get. Why cannot our novelists do something to enliven the modern hotel?

There are still chances of travel which bring strange companies together. Snowstorms, of course, are rare, and night nowadays does not come on us unexpectedly or stop our journeying when its does come. But trains quite frequently miss their connections and leave us stranded at strange junctions. The untimely arrival of Sunday, still, as of old, forces men to sleep in places where they do not want to sleep, for simple lack of trains to travel by. And surely the modern man might be as interesting, if properly handled, as his great-grandfather. The gentlemen who listen to school songs all day must have their curious experiences, must develop in time a characteristic outlook upon life. The commercial traveller is no swashbuckler, but he is a soldier of fortune in his more peaceable way. Seen with eyes open to the romantic possibilities of his calling, he ought to be a great figure. We may suppose that even a Congested Districts Board Inspector has his great moments, long long thoughts of Parish Councils in the new Jerusalem, dreams of vast continents mapped into economic holdings till they look like giant chessboards, across which officials hop like nimble knights and mitred bishops run sideways at incredible speed.

A century hence these people will take their places among the world's great romantic figures. Elderly maidens with library subscriptions will sigh for the days when it was possible for Mr. Mervyn to drink tea and share a loaf with men who tug crates of drapery goods about the country, spend innocent hours among singing children, or plan stark cottages and estimate the value

of potato plots. It is the fault of our novelists that we fail to appreciate our opportunities. Meals in provincial hotels are dull, but no duller than the meals in the old inns really were. It is because we lack imagination that they are not glorified.

Mr. Mervyn, though he was a man of more than commonly philosophic mind, was glad when one by one his companions lit their pipes and left the room. At eleven o'clock he went up to the palace again. He was again unfortunate. The bishop had not returned from Dublin; would not return, so the servant said, until the following week. Mr. Mervyn went sadly away. It was Saturday. It was not possible for him to wait for the bishop any longer. The church in Druminawona could not be left untended on a Sunday. His private affairs might be troublesome and his prospects in life gloomy, but Sergeant Ginty must receive his weekly exhortation from the pulpit. There was a train at one o'clock.

A tall ecclesiastic was walking up and down the platform when Mr. Mervyn reached the station. He had the air of a well-fed, well-satisfied man, one accustomed to find his way clear before him when he walked, capable, no doubt, of brushing obstacles aside if any obstacles, human or inanimate, were there. So much was plain to see while the strange clergyman still walked up the platform away from Mr. Mervyn. When he turned and walked the other way it was obvious that he had every right to be self-confident. He had bright eyes which peered out under shaggy grey eyebrows, a heavy jaw, and he wore the kind of purple silk chest protector affected by high dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. He was a bishop. Perhaps his strength and capacity had made him a bishop. Perhaps the fact of being a bishop gave him his arrogant self-confidence. Mr. Mervyn gazed at him with a fascinated dread. It was quite possible that this was Father Roche's bishop

and that he was on his way to Druminawona. The bishop took only one glance at Mr. Mervyn. The humble presbyter of a different Church cannot expect to be stared at by a bishop.

Mr. Mervyn watched the stately bishop get into a first-class compartment. He himself travelled third-class.

At the first of the two junctions Mr. Mervyn got out. The bishop also got out. For half an hour they both walked up and down the platform while the driver of the engine which was to drag their train played a pleasant game with the man in the signal-box. He drove his engine rapidly along the lines out of the station for about two hundred yards. Then he stopped it abruptly and made it whistle. The man in the signal-box pulled a lever, and the driver ran his engine backwards into the station again along a different set of lines. Then he made the engine whistle again, another lever was pulled, and the engine had to run along a third set of lines. The game is not unlike that played on a chessboard with a single knight. The player aims at making the knight hop on every square on the board without hopping on any square twice. In the railway game the object is to run the engine over every pair of lines in the vicinity of the station with the smallest possible number of alterations of the points. If the man in the signal-box accomplishes his task in "bogey," which varies, of course, at different junctions just as it does on different golf links, he wins the game. If he gives the engine an unnecessary run, or gets it into the same siding twice, he loses. The game is immensely popular with Irish railway-men, and it is generally understood that their union, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, insists that time shall be allowed to play it through three times at every junction before the departure of any train. Whether this is so or not we cannot be quite sure, but the game is always played three times at least, generally five or six times.

Passengers who have not often seen it are greatly interested. Mr. Mervyn, for instance, who travelled seldom, watched it eagerly. He did not thoroughly understand the rules; but it was easy to see when the driver scored a point against his opponent. Whenever he did so he allowed his engine to whistle twice with triumphant shrillness. When, on the other hand, the signal-man was doing well, the engine, evidently in full sympathy with the driver, did little more than snort. Even Mr. Mervyn, though nothing of a sportsman, understood the sounds. The bishop took no notice of the game. It is the duty of a bishop to travel frequently, and this particular bishop was a conscientious man. He had seen the railway game played thousands of times at every junction in his diocese, and he no longer cared to watch it. He read a small, fat book as he paced up and down, but every time he came to the end of a paragraph he raised his eyes and looked at Mr. Mervyn. He was evidently more interested in him than he had been when he first saw him. Mr. Mervyn had laid his bag down on a seat. The bishop, at the end of one of his walks, stopped and looked at it. There was no label on Mr. Mervyn's bag. The bishop went on with his walk and his reading, unsatisfied.

The driver and the signal-man finished their game and hooked the engine on to the train. The stationmaster, who had been acting as umpire, pranced haughtily along the platform. It was his custom at this point to hustle the passengers into their carriages, impressing on them by his manner that it was they who had kept the train from starting and that he was going to stand their dawdling ways no more. But there were no passengers except the bishop and Mr. Mervyn. The stationmaster, a man of much wisdom, knew that he would get into serious trouble if he hustled a bishop, and that it was not safe to speak sharply even to a simple clergyman. Out of respect for the Church—any Church deserves respect

—he put Mr. Mervyn into a second-class compartment. The bishop, of course, still travelled first.

The second junction is much larger than the first. It is indeed one of the most important in the west of Ireland. No less than five different trains meet there, two which go east and west, two which go north and south, and another which goes on a little line of its own, south-west and back again. At one splendid moment every day three of the trains are at the junction at once, and the other two are standing just outside, waiting for their chance of getting in. It will easily be understood that such traffic requires a very large number of lines of rails, and that this junction is a favourite course with all players of the railway game. Passengers have to wait an hour and ten minutes here while the game is played. The railway company, which is most anxious about the comfort and convenience of its passengers, has provided a refreshment-room. It is possible to get tea in the refreshment-room, but it requires a man of strong character to do it. The tousle-headed girl who stands behind the counter likes giving large tumblers of frothy porter to guards, porters, and commercial gentlemen. She likes talking to them while they drink. She despises mild men who ask for tea, regarding them as little better than women. Unless they are able to terrify her by strange oaths or otherwise, she will not give them tea. It is suspected that this girl shares the religious convictions of the Plymouth Brethren. She treats all clergymen with contempt.

Mr. Mervyn, after watching the railway game for half an hour, went into the refreshment-room and asked for tea. The tousle-headed girl had no customer at the moment who wanted porter, but she was not inclined to make tea for an insignificant-looking old gentleman like Mr. Mervyn. She blew her nose scornfully, using a corner of her apron as a pocket-handkerchief, and began

to build little castles out of chocolate-boxes. After waiting ten minutes Mr. Mervyn again asked for tea. The girl turned her back on him and re-arranged her hair, looking into a large mirror which bore an advertisement of whisky on its surface.

The bishop entered the refreshment-room. The girl saw him reflected in the mirror, and must have known by his purple stock that he was a bishop. But she took no notice of him. She pulled a large semicircular comb out of her hair and polished it with her apron. Then she put it into her hair again and patted her head all over. The bishop cleared his throat loudly. The girl looked round.

It is not, of course, possible for a bishop to swear, nor can he use really strong language except when drawing up official documents or recommending to the faithful the decrees of his Church. But the kind of man who would, if he were not a bishop, be a fluent and impressive swearer is often able to produce all the effect he wants by clearing his throat or speaking quite innocent words in a blasphemous way. The tousle-headed girl recognised at once that this bishop was a man who would get tea if he wanted it. But she was not inclined to be respectful if she could help it.

"Is it tea you want?" she said.

"Tea," said the bishop sternly.

The girl turned at once and hurried towards a door at the end of the counter. Beyond it was a room in which she made tea when she had to.

"And some tea for me, please," said Mr. Mervyn.

The girl took no notice of him, and it is not likely that she would have brought him any tea if the bishop had not spoken again.

"Girl," he said, "come back."

She had passed through the door and shut it behind her, but she heard the bishop distinctly. It was difficult not

to hear that bishop when he spoke. She opened the door again and stood sulkily on the threshold.

"Tea for two," said the bishop, "and be quick about getting it."

Then he turned to Mr. Mervyn.

"There's only one way," he said, "of dealing with girls like that. But they like it. That's one comfort."

It is said—Mr. Mervyn had often heard it—that nowadays Ireland is governed from Maynooth, that the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, not the English Cabinet Ministers, decide what is or is not to be done. At that moment Mr. Mervyn was quite prepared to believe that they governed England also. It seemed plain that the man who talked to him might govern anybody.

The bishop drew a letter from his pocket, turned over the pages of it rapidly, and read the last one.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will allow me to ask whether you are Mr. Mervyn of Druminawona."

"Yes," said Mr. Mervyn, "I am."

The bishop read a little more of the letter.

"This," he said, "is a letter from Father Roche, the parish priest. I understand that you know what it is about."

"The Miracle Play," said Mr. Mervyn.

"Exactly, and Father Roche informs me that you quite agree with him that—"

"Quite," said Mr. Mervyn, "yes. Quite."

"A Miracle Play's impossible," said the bishop. "I shouldn't dream of sanctioning it. I'm surprised that it's been allowed to go so far."

Mr. Mervyn was not accountable for his actions to this bishop, nor was he in any way called upon to defend himself or make excuses for not having put a stop to Mrs. Dann's plans at once. Yet it was in a tone of apology that he spoke.

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"Well, you see," said Mr. Mervyn, "you don't know Mrs. Dann yet."

"I shall see her to-morrow."

"You'll understand our difficulties better then."

"She'll understand that I won't tolerate anything of the sort in my diocese."

"Besides, the people were all in favour of the play," said Mr. Mervyn.

"The people can't be in favour of what their priest disapproves of."

"We thought—that is to say, they thought—Mrs. Dann said and everybody thought that money could be made out of it. That's what made it so hard for Father Roche. And the people are very poor; a little money—"

"They're no poorer than they deserve to be," said the bishop, "and whatever money is good for them the bishops and priests will get for them. We're the proper persons to look after their interests, and we can't have American women interfering with the business of the Church."

During the earlier part of the conversation Mr. Mervyn felt himself completely overpowered by this masterful ecclesiastic. But the spirit of Protestantism is a virile thing. He gradually recovered his courage and began to resent the domineering tone of the bishop. He recalled many sayings of John Owen. That great divine could hector too. Mr. Mervyn was not spiritually near akin to the fighting Puritans of the seventeenth century, but he was not utterly submissive. He did not indeed dare to reply, but, sipping his tea silently, he found a pleasure in thinking of the interview between Mrs. Dann and this masterful bishop. He pictured Bobby Sebright standing by, alert, his notebook in his hand, rapidly planning articles of a vivid kind for the New York papers. There would be local colour enough and to spare when the

bishop laid down the law about the proper attitude of the people to their priests.

Then he realised suddenly that the bishop had paid for both cups of tea. To a man of Mr. Mervyn's sensitive conscience there seemed to be something dishonourable about gloating over the future discomfort of a man while drinking the tea he had paid for. He felt in his pocket and produced six pennies. The bishop waved them aside.

"Don't say a word about that, Mr. Mervyn," he said, "not a word. I wish you'd come to my house some day and have tea with me there. I'd give you something better to eat."

The guard came into the refreshment-room and told the bishop that the train was ready to start.

"We're a bit late already," he said, "on account of the shunting. There was a powerful lot of wagons to be shunted."

"Shunting" is the official name of the game played by the engine-drivers and signal-men. Its use is a concession to the ridiculous opinion held by some people that railway servants ought not to amuse themselves until the trains under their charge have reached their destinations.

The bishop opened the door of the only first-class compartment in the train.

"Come in here," he said to Mr. Mervyn.

"But," said Mr. Mervyn, "I've only got a third-class ticket."

"I'd like to see the porter on this line," said the bishop, "who'd ask you to pay a penny extra when you're along with me."

CHAPTER XXV

THE train started, and the bishop, settling himself in a corner of the carriage, began to read again. Mr. Mervyn got John Owen out of his bag. In discussion the bishop might overcrow him, but he meant to show that he too was a man of learning. The work of John Owen, considered as material for thought, was at least equal to anything likely to be in the fat little book, with a brass cross on the cover, which the bishop read.

"A Vindication of the Animadversions on 'Fiat Lux.'" The title itself was enough to restore self-respect to a man who had been intellectually battered, and the pages bristled with short quotations from Latin poets. Could the bishop quote offhand from Juvenal and Horace? Mr. Mervyn doubted it. John Owen could and did. Was it likely that the bishop knew an author described as "Stat: Theb:"? Mr. Mervyn could not guess at his full name. John Owen cited four entire hexameters from his works. The author of "Fiat Lux," the original man against whose work John Owen had animadverted, who had apparently ventured to reply, who afterwards suffered under a "Vindication of the Animadversions"—this man was a Papist. John Owen not only bombarded him with Latin quotations and heavy argument. He subjected him to a kind of ponderous chaffing. Mr. Mervyn glanced at the bishop. John Owen would, no doubt, have chaffed him also. "If you ever debated this procedure with yourself," chuckled John Owen, "had I been present with you when you said with him in the poet"—how that Papist must have writhed—"'*Dubius sum quid faciam. Tene relinquam an rem,*' I

should have replied with him '*Me sodes.*'" Mr. Mervyn did not catch the point; but no doubt it pricked the author of "Fiat Lux" in a tender place. The way he behaved afterwards showed that. "But you were otherwise minded and are gone before." If the man had been able to think of any reply to the "*Me sodes,*" he would not have run away and left John Owen to pursue him, as John Owen immediately did, with a line and a half from one of Horace's satires.

The bishop closed his little book with a sigh of satisfaction. Mr. Mervyn had some thought of offering him John Owen, but before he had nerved himself to do so the train began to slow down. Mr. Mervyn remembered that the bishop had paid for his tea, thought, with a thrill of gratitude, that it was the bishop who had brought him into this comfortably-cushioned compartment, rescuing him from the bare boards of the third-class carriage in which he ought to have been. For these benefits he owed some small return.

"I'm expecting my pony to meet me at the station," he said. "If you haven't ordered a car—or if Father Roche isn't coming to meet you—"

"Thank you," said the bishop. "Father Roche is not expecting me."

There was a hint of grimness in the way he spoke. Mr. Mervyn suspected him of having planned a surprise visit to Father Roche, perhaps with malicious intent.

"I could drive you to Druminawona," said Mr. Mervyn. "Biddy—that's my pony—isn't very fast, and it's fully ten miles; but if you haven't ordered a car—"

"Thank you," said the bishop; "I shall feel very much obliged to you if you can leave me at the presbytery."

Biddy was not at the station. Instead of the phaeton, Mrs. Dann's motor-car was waiting. Michael Staunton explained that Mr. Mervyn was to go straight to Druminawona House without stopping at the rectory.

"Perhaps—" said Mr. Mervyn to the bishop. "It is not my motor-car, but I am sure Mrs. Dann would wish —won't you get in?"

For a ten miles' drive at eight o'clock at night a motor-car is very much to be preferred to a pony trap. The bishop recognised this and took his seat in the tonneau. Mr. Mervyn followed him. Michael Staunton, two great acetylene lamps showing a long bright stretch in front of him, made short work of the hilly road. Mr. Mervyn and the bishop clung to their hats and bumped into each other when the car leaped the culvert ridges at the bottoms of the hills. There was no possibility of conversation. In half an hour the lights of Druminawona were twinkling in front of them. Mr. Mervyn leaned forward and touched Michael Staunton on the arm.

"Please stop at the presbytery," he said; "the bishop is going to see Father Roche."

"Father Roche is at Druminawona House," said Michael Staunton. "I drove him up there before I went to the station to meet you."

"What's that?" said the bishop.

"I think," said Mr. Mervyn, "that Father Roche must be dining with Mrs. Dann."

"Oh," said the bishop.

Mr. Mervyn felt very sorry for Father Roche. It was plain from the bishop's tone that Father Roche had no right to dine with Mrs. Dann under the circumstances.

"But we can stop at the presbytery," said Mr. Mervyn. "I'm sure his housekeeper will do everything she can to make you comfortable."

"I should prefer," said the bishop, "to see Father Roche at once."

The car sped through the village, passed across the bridge which spanned the river, swept through the gates of Druminawona Demesne and up the long avenue. A neat parlourmaid opened the door as the car drew up.

She led Mr. Mervyn and the bishop to the dining-room.

There was a party of four at the table. Mrs. Dann, splendid in a purple velvet gown and decked with many diamonds, sat at one end. Delia was opposite her. She wore a white frock, the first genuinely evening frock she had ever possessed. Round her neck hung a string of pearls, and more pearls were twined in her hair. Bobby Sebright sat at one side of the table. At the other, with his back to the door, was Father Roche. He was standing. In his hand, raised to the level of his forehead, he held a glass of champagne.

"It is a pleasure to me," he said, "to propose the health of a young lady as beautiful as Miss Delia Mervyn. You may go where you like, Mr. Sebright, you may go to America or you may go to France, but you will not see any young lady that's more beautiful, or nicer dressed."

He bowed to Mrs. Dann when he mentioned Delia's clothes. Then he stopped abruptly. Mrs. Dann was not looking at him. Her eyes were on the door. Father Roche turned round. He saw Mr. Mervyn and the bishop. His face flushed deeply. He lowered his hand slowly and set the champagne glass on the table. Then he sat down heavily.

"Phil," said Mrs. Dann, standing up, "I'm delighted. You're just in time to drink Delia's health. Father Roche insists—But introduce your friend, Phil."

Mr. Mervyn was greatly astonished at the scene before him. He had never in his life seen anything so gorgeous as Mrs. Dann's dress. The glittering of her diamonds dazzled him. Delia seemed to him utterly changed. He did not know and could not guess at the value of the pearls she wore, but he felt that she was no longer in the least like the Lucy who dwelt beside the streams of Dove, a maiden very dear to him. So unaccustomed was he to scenes of festivity that even Bobby Sebright's shin-

ing shirt-front increased his bewilderment. He answered Mrs. Dann incoherently.

"He's not my friend," he said, "at least, not exactly. He's a bishop. He's Father Roche's bishop."

"Bishop," said Mrs. Dann, "you're welcome. I can't boast of having entertained many bishops, but I'm proud to have one at my table. Bobby, ring the bell. Phil and the bishop will dine."

"Madam," said the bishop, "I thank you for your hospitality, but I have come to talk to Father Roche. He and I—"

"Now that won't do," said Mrs. Dann. "You and Father Roche can talk to-morrow. Just you sit down now, right here, beside me. Bobby, take the bishop's hat and coat. Phil, you sit on my other side."

Mrs. Dann laid actual hands on the bishop while she spoke. She grasped him by the elbow and pulled at him. When he did not stir from the doorway she put her arm round his waist. Never, since he first entered Maynooth College, had the bishop been treated in this way. He was taken absolutely by surprise. He had not, indeed, expected Mrs. Dann to curtsey to him or to kiss his ring. He understood that she was a Protestant of some kind, and therefore unlikely to behave with perfect propriety. But he was amazed at being embraced and dragged across the room as if he were a partner in some kind of a rowdy dance. And Bobby Sebright was no more respectful. He took the bishop's hat out of his hand, and, with unhallowed levity, pulled at his overcoat. Father Roche was scandalised.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, "but the bishop—"

"You leave me to manage the bishop," said Mrs. Dann. "I reckon he wants his dinner same as any other man. Don't tell me, Father Roche. Sanctity is a first-rate thing, and I appreciate it when present in unusual quan-

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dress. All the same, bishop, I don't call it polite of you to faint off at the suggestion."

The bishop took the wineglass in his own hand and finished the wine in two gulps. Then his eyes rested on Delia. She was recovering from her fright and blushed very prettily. Even bishops can appreciate, though of course only in a detached and impersonal way, the blushes of girls who look like Greuze pictures come to life. Bobby refilled the wineglass. Mrs. Dann, taking a dish from the parlourmaid, put veal cutlets covered with jelly on to his plate.

Delia, blushing more deeply than ever, ran to Mr. Mervyn and flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh father," she said, "I'm so happy, and I am glad you're back. I want to tell you all about it."

"My lord," said Father Roche, "I'm pleased to be able to inform you that the subject of my letter isn't of importance any longer. The Miracle Play is given up."

"For the present," said Mrs. Dann.

"I should have forbidden it," said the bishop.

He did not speak nearly so firmly as before. No man can be very stern when he is eating veal cutlets with quivering jelly all over them, and delicious morsels of truffle which meet the teeth unexpectedly. He had, besides, taken a sip or two out of his second glass of champagne.

"Now don't get riled," said Mrs. Dann. "Dignity's all right, of course. I respect dignity, though I knew a senator once who overdid it. But it's not polite to get riled. Come to think of it, bad temper isn't Christian, and bishops are kind of bound to set a high standard of religious conduct. I won't say a word more about the play. It's an opportunity wasted, and I've always hated waste. Nathan P. Dann never wasted chances, and I don't deny that it pleased me to think of him looking down from his new home among the stars, noting that I

was making something out of the Ten Lost Tribes. But Phil was always against the notion on artistic grounds, and I realise now that it jarred some on Father Roche's religious feelings; so I've dropped the project."

She jumped up and changed the bishop's plate while she spoke. The parlourmaid had left a dish of meringues on the sideboard. Mrs. Dann took it. While she was at the other side of the room Father Roche leaned across the table and whispered to Mr. Mervyn.

"It was Mr. Sebright distracted her mind," he said, "him and Miss Delia between them."

There was no time to say more. Mr. Mervyn was left in gaping astonishment, while Mrs. Dann gave three meringues each to him and to the bishop. Delia had gone back to her seat. Mr. Mervyn could not ask her what Father Roche meant. He turned to Bobby Sebright, who sat beside him.

"What is this all about?" he said. "What does Father Roche mean? Why are you all so excited?"

"Sir," said Bobby Sebright, "you're liable to complain that we should have cabled to you. I admit you had a right to expect it. But Delia and I only fixed it up this afternoon. We might have sent a message to the railway station. Delia was inclined for that course. But Sally May wouldn't have it. Sally May has a taste for the dramatic. She wanted the paternal benediction given in the limelight."

"What have you and Delia arranged?" said Mr. Mervyn. "Surely not—"

"Partnership for life," said Bobby Sebright, "based upon sincere affection on both sides."

"Do you mean you want to marry her?"

"Yes, sir," said Bobby, "and we count on your approval."

Father Roche stretched far across the table, leaning on

his elbows and pushing his head in far among the flower vases. Mrs. Dann was talking eagerly to the bishop. He felt safe in whispering hoarsely.

"It's my opinion, Mr. Mervyn, that you ought to be thankful to Mr. Sebright. Whether you like the wedding he's proposing or not, you ought to be thankful to him. Only for him you might have had to do something of the sort yourself." He nodded sideways to Mrs. Dann, reminding Mr. Mervyn of the fate from which Delia and Bobby Sebright had saved him. "We'd have had to do something surely, the one or the other of us, to distract her mind. You see the way the bishop took it. But Mr Sebright saw what was wanted and did it."

"Father Roche, you're mistaken about my motive," said Bobby Sebright. "I assure you, Mr. Mervyn, that it wasn't the idea of diverting Sally May's mind from the Miracle Play which led me to approach Miss Mervyn."

"I hope not," said Mr. Mervyn, "I hope not."

"Phil," said Mrs. Dann, speaking with shrill distinctness, "I've been talking to the bishop. I've laid before him a business proposition. I'm prepared to sign a total abstinence pledge against Miracle Plays and to give up the situation offered me by Father Roche as mediæval baroness of Druminawona if the bishop will agree to perform the ceremony. I have a strong feeling that this wedding ought to be done in first-rate style, and I don't know any man who'd do the principal part with more genuine sacerdotal emphasis than the prelate you brought here to-night. But the bishop has misgivings. He thinks that you wouldn't like it, on account of the misunderstandings there have been in the past between your Church and his. That's not so, Phil, is it?"

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Mervyn, "that there would be difficulties. The law of the Church—"

He wondered vaguely what Dr. Ed: Bullingbrooke would say about such a proposal.

"The bishop agrees to perform the ceremony in your church, Phil."

The bishop's heart was softened. It was, indeed, softer than it had been for many years. Whipped cream is a cloying and enervating kind of food, destructive of the will power. The bishop had eaten three large meringues full of it. But he had not entirely lost his sense of right and wrong.

"I can't promise that," he said. "You have misunderstood me, madam. I never undertook—"

"Now, bish," said Mrs. Dann, "don't go back on it. My heart is set on having you to—"

"Canon law," said the bishop, "is quite decisive—"

"I won't have anyone to marry me except father," said Delia.

"I guess that settles it," said Bobby Sebright.

"Bish," said Mrs. Dann, "I'm sorry, for I know you're disappointed."

"Not at all," said the bishop politely.

"You disguise it," said Mrs. Dann, "but you are disappointed."

"It would never have done," said Mr. Mervyn. "It couldn't have been managed."

"But the bishop shall perform the other ceremony," said Mrs. Dann. "We'll have them both on the same day, with triumphal arches, brass bands, and other trimmings."

The bishop looked round him helplessly. There was no one else in the room who seemed likely to be a bridegroom or a bride.

"Have you another wedding?" he asked.

"I spent this morning," said Mrs. Dann, "and the greater part of the afternoon, impressing on Mrs. Casey the advantage of having Onny Donovan for a daughter-in-law. I don't regret the time spent, because it gave Bobby Sebright the opportunity of explaining the extent

of his affection to Delia; but I might have settled it with Mrs. Casey prompter than I did. Nathan P. Dann always used to tell me that there is one argument which everybody understands. I recollected that in the end. It cost me fifty dollars to reconcile Mrs. Casey, and I paid up. I reckon now I've bought the right to ask the bishop to perform the ceremony."

"They're Catholics," said Father Roche, "both the two of them."

"Bobby," said Mrs. Dann, "my glass is empty, and Father Roche is going on with the oration he'd just begun when Phil and the bishop came in."

Father Roche looked doubtfully at the bishop. Then he rose slowly to his feet. The bishop tapped sharply on the table with his knuckles. Father Roche sat down abruptly. The bishop himself rose, smiling, to his feet. He held his half-filled glass of champagne to his lips. He bowed graciously to Delia.

"I wish good health and long life and all happiness to Miss Mervyn," he said.

THE END