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My New Curate

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hoofs. First come the footmen, with straight swords on their thighs and long battle-axes on their shoulders, men of great size with fierce and dour countenances, bare-kneed kilted warriors wearing mantles of many hues clasped with brooches; then unhorsed equestrians leading each a great steed, glossy and shining. Behind these, with a single companion, stalks with slow, long strides a noticeable figure, a tall man, a very tall man, clothed in a long black mantle descending to his rowelled heels, the pointed cowl of which conceals his head. One can guess that there is little spare flesh on this man that he is lean, lean but hard, great-boned, and of muscles like bands of interlacing steel. Is the draped figure a monk? No, the long firm stride, the clash of the rowelled heels declare an emphatic negative to that suggestion. The eyes of a warrior full surely are in that cowed head, and we may guess, too, of a king or some great territorial commander. And indeed that draped figure is amongst the foremost and most famous men of his time and country. He is Tiernan O'Rourke, King of Breffney, who has ruled all the waist of it—from sea to sea, from Drumcliff in the West to Inver Colpa at the mouth of the Boyne. There is nothing of the monk in this man, despite his inky vesture and the very evident ecclesiastic who, robed in brown, walks by his side but with unequal steps. He, with tonsured head, shuffles along by Tiernan's side and now and then casts alarmed looks at his formidable fellow-pedestrian. So together with a clear space in front and a clear space behind the ill-assorted pair cross the causeway, the monk's feet, shod in wood and iron, pattering on the timbers which quiver from end to end at every stride of that great gaunt figure draped in black. The King of Breffney, to judge by his singular vesture and his ecclesiastical companion, would seem to be bound upon some solemn journey. Yes; Tiernan is starting upon a pilgrimage, to Saint Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg, where they say is the mouth of a way leading into the world of the dead. Tiernan is mournfully suited, but his heels are rowelled and the pommel of his sword lifts his black mantle a little at the left hip.

Let us take our stand here at the bridge head and gain one good look, if we can, at the face of this famous warrior as he passes. We are seven centuries removed from the man, and he cannot hurt us. What a face! what an eye! one only, the left, for the other is sealed for ever; an eye large, black, and lustrous, full of menace and war, of sleepless activity, one would say too of endless resource, yet watchful too, wary, and circumspect. The face is long and lean with a long hooked nose predacious and acquisitive, but wide nostrilled. The brown hawklike visage is well seasoned by time and hardship and almost tattooed with scars and prints. It is the face of a man who has done and suffered much and is ready to do and suffer a great deal more ere all end, an indomitable, unconquerable sort of face, not passionate or cruel, yet sinister; the face of a fatalist; sarcastic too, as of a man who will accept good fortune and evil with a mock. As God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb so he has surrounded the soul of this 12th century Irish King with an invisible armour of adamant carelessness, such as that to which the Stoic philosophers aspired. And yet that adamant armour may be ruptured.

Wrongs and injuries of a hundred kinds have fallen from it with broken points, yet one haply may pierce through and quiver in the Stoic heart.

He is gone, yet at a word from his companion he looks round and waves a long arm and a hand gauntleted and glittering towards the crannogue where something white flutters from an upper casement. A lady there is signalling "adieu" and "good speed" to the martial pilgrim.

The lady is the beautiful Dervorgilla, daughter of Ireland's High King, and wife of Tiernan O'Rourke, King of the two Breffneys.

MY NEW CURATE.

(By the REV. P. A. SHEEHAN, P.P.)

"It is all my own fault, I was too free with my tongue," I said in a moment of bitterness. "What can a Bishop do with a parish priest? He's independent of him." It was not grammatical and it was not respectful. But the bad grammar and the impertinence were carried to his Lordship, and he answered: "What can I do? I can send him a curate who will break his heart in six weeks."

The new curate stayed with Father Dan, of Kilronan, for just one year, and in that time came near breaking his own heart in an effort to reform the place. Kilronan was a little sleepy fishing village where the people spoke Gaelic and were content to live as their fathers had done. The new curate wanted to build a pier, have a schooner for the fishing, and start a shirt factory to employ the girls of the village. He was a most energetic man, and though he did not get the pier he had a fishing smack built and a branch factory started. Then the luck which follows all reformers overtook him—the smack was sunk on her first trip and the factory girls went on strike! It is an old story, but Father Dan tells it in a garrulous, humorous, kindly fashion, which is very charming, and as he writes he reveals his own character, as it were, unconsciously, till we grow to love the good-hearted old scholar whom the children called "Daddy Dan."

Father Letheby is, of course, the hero; but he is by no means allowed to monopolise the reader's attention. There is Captain Campion, hard-swearing, irreverent, but approachable, as the curate found, on the subject of yachting; Ormsby, the agnostic who tries the "Kampaner Thal" as a remedy for unbelief and finds it less efficacious than the sight of suffering patiently borne, the little saint to whom he owes his conversion; and Jem Deady, king of the village loafers, the philosophic scamp who traps the obnoxious bailiffs so artistically. There are many other interesting people, in fact Kilronan is a village filled with the real Irish, richly dowered with the roguery, the delicacy, the laziness, the energy, and the Sphinx-like mystery which make the Celt at once a loadstone and a rock of offence to philanthropists.

The English of the book might be better. The sentences are often badly balanced and lacking in finish, but, as the story is supposed to be written by a careless old man, this is, perhaps, realism and intentional.

REPARATION.

By an accident some subscribers did not get No. 36. On receipt of a post card I shall be glad to rectify the omission.—ED.