

VOLUME II

CHAPTER 6

“Sic.—How now, my masters, have you chose this man?
1st Cit.—He has our voices, Sir.
Bru.—We pray the Gods he may deserve your loves.”

—*Coriolanus.*

“Behold, these are the tribunes of the people.
The tongues of the commonwealth. I do despise them!
For they do prank them in authority
Against all noble sufferance.”

—*Idem.*

O'ROONEY HOGAN and Dicky started by the mail from the Kingsbridge terminus for Peatstown, a thriving market town and borough in one of the southern counties. The route lay through a dreary, uninteresting line of country,—flat and monotonous when once the Dublin mountains were left behind. And though the day was dry, a cold fog bounded the view from the windows.

Our two travellers talked and smoked for a fair portion of the time; but at last Hogan drew a sheaf of papers out of his travelling-bag, and Dicky was obliged to content himself with a newspaper. Late in the afternoon they came to a junction. The mail train, having kicked off a couple of carriages, proceeded snorting and shrieking on its way to meet the American steamer at Queenstown, and the barrister and his companion got out to walk up and down for ten minutes; then, after a short delay, the Peatstown train was announced, and scrambling in they found

themselves advancing at a much slower pace along a cross line, bounded on each side by the bog.

The winter day was fast closing in now. A tawny hue in the sky over the tops of a pine wood to the right showed where the sun was vanishing; a blue vapour rose from the dark pools where the peats had been cut; and here and there a tree, stunted and naked, held out bare skeleton-like limbs. Dicky opened the window a moment, and looked out, seeking some familiar landmark by which to guess the distance. But the cold mist and the still, lonely country outside were not inviting, so he shut it again, and stretched himself on the seat, well wrapped up, to try and doze. Hogan was not inclined to talk; he leaned his elbow on the cushioned arm of his seat, and mused for more than an hour in silence. In truth, now that he was away from Dublin, and that the lively, sanguine Saltasche was no longer at his elbow to goad him onward with his banter and encouragement, he felt a sort of reaction. Even the Bishop's half-hearted counsel and timid dissuasion, nerving him by its very bonelessness to more braced determination, now would have acted as a stimulant. He felt chilled and dull, and longed to reach their station, to get out and stamp life and warmth into his feet. Not a light could he see from the window. The sunset tints were gone, and blackness fell imperceptibly and swiftly over everything.

At last they slackened speed at a station not much larger than a cattle-shed; and Dicky, who had fallen asleep in his rugs, woke up, and almost jumped out, with sheer impatience. Before the train had stopped he was out on the platform in the midst of a group of frieze-coated men, and was shaking hands and exchanging noisy, hearty greetings with them. A rush was made in a moment up to the carriage, out of which Hogan and a porter were, by this time, pulling the rugs and bags.

"Mr. Shea, Mr. Hogan; Mr. Barney Shane, Mr. Hogan. This is Mr. Killeen: Mr. O'Rooney Hogan."

These and some more introductions were gone through by Mr. Dicky in such a hasty way that Hogan could not connect the names with the right individuals of the group of big men, all of whom grasped his hand and wrung it till the bones almost cracked. Mr. Killeen was the editor of the *Peatstown Torch*, and a very important personage; joining to his literary avocation the functions of weighmaster and butter-taster on fair days. The little crowd picked their way with difficulty out of the station, which was only lighted by a couple of flickering oil-lamps. Behind

stood in readiness an outside car with a fine blood-horse in the shafts. Dicky and his cousin Shea mounted on the driving side, Hogan and Killeen on the other; the rest of the party brought their own conveyances. Then the man, having turned the horse carefully, sprang out of its way, and off they started at a tearing rate.

“Yer soul, Dicky,” cried Shea, heartily, “but I’m glad to see you; the girls will all go mad with delight; we never thought of you till the holidays. You did well to send the telegram.”

“You have a splendid horse, Mr. Shea,” said Hogan, who was admiring the paces of the animal.

“He is. I sold him this morning to Lord Kilboggan’s steward for ninety guineas; bred him myself. So I must be careful of him,” returned Shea, who was looking out cautiously ahead. “We’ve five miles to go—four and a half to the town, and a half a mile beyond it to Mulla Castle.”

“Mulla Castle!” Hogan smiled at the promising title. “Is the railway four and a half miles away from the town?”

“It is, indeed; and a cruel loss it is to us, dragging to it up hill and down dale as we have to. When these railways were made they paid small heed to the convenience of the people along the lines.”

“Augh!” said Killeen, “Home Rule will settle everything for us; won’t it, Mr. Hogan?”

Hogan and Dicky both laughed heartily. Meantime the car dashed on fast, splashing through water and over stones without ever slackening. No sign of light showed as yet, and not a sound, save the distant bark of a cur dog, or the ghostly rustle of the bare branches overhead, broke the stillness around them.

“Look out before you, sir,” cried Killeen; “there’s the river!”

The horse slacked an instant in a “soft” spot—a perfect bed of mud and water at the foot of a rise in the road; and listening, Hogan could hear the swift running murmur of the stream behind the tall sedges that hid it from his sight. On a level almost with the top of the bank, and far below that of the road, he could now trace a row of wretched cabins. A faint gleam of light in one or two showed that the inmates had not all as yet gone to bed. But most of them were black and silent.

“Are they empty, then?” asked Hogan. “What wretched damp holes they must be!”

“Damp!” cried Killeen. Wait, sir, till to-morrow. They are mere ruins. And instead of repairing them he’s paying the people to come out of them till he pulls them down.”

“Best thing to do with them indeed,” said. Hogan.

“No, sir,” said Killeen; “it is not. The poorest dog-hole is better for a man than the workhouse.”

“The workhouse: why that? Are there no other cottages?”

“There are not; and Kilboggan won’t build them. He has to pay rates on them, and he’d rather see every one in the poorhouse than that.”

“There are now twelve hundred in that workhouse yonder,” said Killeen, nodding in the direction where the building lay, though the darkness did not permit it to be seen. And there are scores of able-bodied men, and their wives and families. We’ll show you the cottages he has pulled down. The people that have cabins here are letting lodgings. Yes, begad, sir, in those places we passed they get sixpence a week to let a man lie on the floor with a cock of straw or hay under his head,—men that could pay rent for a house, too, but can’t get one in the place.”

By this time they had reached the town itself. A good long main street, with comfortable-looking shops on both sides, flagged pathways, and a tolerably well-kept thorough-fare. The hotel, a large yellow house with green jalousies, and a high flight of steps, on which were lounging a number of people, stood at the top of the street. The hall doors were open, and the light and brightness were inviting. The Kilboggan arms were painted over the door. At the first sound of the wheels a general rush was made. All down the street the people sprang to their doors, and a crowd of spectators thronged, curious and open-eyed, out of the bye-streets and lanes. Every one was on the alert. But Shea whipped up his horse, and the sight-seers were disappointed. As they passed the hotel, he stooped forward and called to a man,—

“Hurry them on, Jack. Father Corkran’s above, and he waits for no one.” He pointed backwards with his whip, indicating the other cars, which he had distanced by a long stretch.

Hogan pricked up his ears at the name; and Dicky, who heard and noted it too, turned to Shea with a laugh.

“Father Jim’s to be in it, of course? I bet you we’ll fight. Will Father Desmond be down?”

“Aye,” replied Ned Shea, “and three or four more as well; just wait till you see. Be easy now, Dicky, with your tongue,” he added, “and don’t set ‘Jim’ against ——” and he jerked his head backward, indicating the candidate behind them.

They now reached a low swing-gate, painted white. A couple of men sprang, apparently out of the ditch, to open and hold it. They passed through, and on to what was like another road, only narrower than that which they had left, and running through a field. After a minute or two they turned a corner, and a huge square white house, well lighted up, stood at the top of a wide field before them. A little white railing ran on each side of the grass as they approached, and marked off the sweep before the door. As soon as the sound of the car was heard in the house, the hall door was thrown wide open, letting out a stream of light and noise, and mingled odours of all sorts, the basis of which was turf smoke; and a crowd rushed out to welcome the visitors. A half-dozen or more daughters, some grown up and others as yet in the chrysalis stage, seized on Dicky. Then they all bustled in; and in the hall, where was burning a huge fire of peats, Hogan was introduced to his hostess, a comely matron, with an amiable, good-humoured face,—a Kerry woman, as evidenced by her accent, and with the fine dark eyes and hair so often seen in that favoured district. Hogan and Dicky now followed a barefooted girl up to their rooms, which blazing turf fires made agreeable and home-like after the chilly journey. Hogan made a speedy toilet, and had sat down to warm his feet, when Dicky appeared at the door of communication, operating on his head with a pair of hair-brushes all the while.

“Are you hungry, Mr. Hogan?” asked he.

“Well, yes.”

“A good job: wait till you see the dinner you’ve to go through. Camacho’s wedding was a fly to it. Hurry, and let’s go down to the drawing-room.”

“Drawing-room!” echoed Hogan, staring at him.

“Yes, drawing-room; and as good a piano as ever you heard, too. Bless you, man! do you know what Shea is worth?”

“Indeed I don’t,” said the barrister, who was asking himself whether he ought not to have brought down a dress suit.

“His parish priest told me, one time I was here, that he had every copper of eighty thousand—value for it, you know.”

“God bless me!” said Hogan.

Then they went down to the drawing-room—a huge square room occupying the best part of the second floor. It was comfortably furnished, with plenty of stout rosewood and velvet chairs and sofas. A couple of round tables covered with red cloths, and on which were candles not yet lighted, had a business-like air. The piano was well piled with music; and vases of paper and wax flowers, and those wool-work performances which indicate the presence of convent-bred young ladies just as surely as anything can be indicated in this world.

Mrs. Shea, gorgeous in a green silk gown, invited Hogan to a seat beside her, after presenting to him in their various order about a dozen ladies, old and young, daughters, aunts, and cousins of the house—all jolly; and the young ones good-looking and clear-skinned damsels fresh from the convents, and on their promotion. A couple of priests were present: a Father Desmond from the mountains, who seemed with Dicky to absorb the attention of the ladies; and a heavy, but good-humoured looking curate belonging to Peatstown. The great man, the parish priest himself, had not yet come in. In a minute Shea, now dressed in his Sunday frock-coat, which showed his wiry, active figure to advantage, stormed into the room. He was a good-looking man, sunburnt and healthy, with merry blue eyes, and hair clustering in little curls over a white forehead, that contrasted strangely with the tanned cheeks below it. With him came all the stragglers: Barney Shane, a cousin, a gigantic, wild-looking fellow in a shooting costume of grey tweed; Killeen the editor, oily and meek of manner; three or four wealthy farmers, big and rough and healthy-looking; and in the midst of the throng the redoubtable Father Jim Corkran himself.

Mrs. Shea rose and presented Hogan to his reverence. Her manner in doing so struck the keen-eyed barrister as being some-what peculiar; there was a faint shade of trepidation in the tones of her voice, and she seemed to look with a sort of nervous deprecation at the domineering face of the priest, as if fearful of finding there some displeasure or disapprobation. Father Corkran bowed, muttering some half unintelligible words of greeting as he did so. Hogan was standing on the hearthrug, having deliberately chosen that position for the expected encounter; and while smiling blandly in return to his reverence’s remarks, was men-

tally taking observations, and making up his mind to face the situation boldly. Mrs. Shea's manner had given him unconsciously a valuable hint. The key of the position, her husband, must be secured at once, and pledged irredeemably to his side. So while talking all round with the off-hand, good-humoured way so peculiarly his own, he ran his eye over the person of his adversary,—for such, he felt convinced, was the *rôle* to be played by the parish priest.

A lubberly, coarse figure, bullet-headed, and with the prominent round forehead that tells of obstinacy and impetuosity, wiry black hair and brows which contrasted strangely with round light blue eyes, hard and ruthless, and with a fixed staring look most unpleasant to encounter, while the lips were scornful, and pursed out with pride and self-sufficiency. And with all this he was utterly devoid of dignity, either of manner or bearing. Those who feared him—and they were many—were servile and cringing before the bully; but those who, like Shea and the richer class of farmers, were independent of his good graces, spoke of him, irrespective of course of his saintly office, with a freedom which showed that the reverend Father Jim was valued at his proper rate by them. Dicky, being an outsider and independent, used to have wordy tilts with his reverence, in which the youth seldom came off second best; his cousin Shea, who had some private grudges against his parish priest, used to put Dicky up to many a sharp saying and innuendo that he dared not employ himself; and a bout between the two was a favourite after-dinner diversion at Mulla Castle.

Dicky, who had been hidden on an ottoman among a crowd of admiring girls, spied his old enemy on the sofa, and jumping up, advanced with a show of the greatest cordiality and affection to greet his reverence.

“Father Corkran—my dear sir!—and I not to have seen you till this minute!”

Father Corkran stretched out a grudging paw. “Well, little divelskin, so you're here again, are you?”

“Little!” repeated the youth. “By Jove, if I was as broad as I'm long I'd just fit your clothes—no more.”

Before his reverence could think of a suitable retort, the dinner was announced, and Mrs. Shea demanded his attentions; the pair headed the way,—the rest streamed after. Hogan took in Miss Shea, and Dicky seized a couple of willing damsels, who squeezed and giggled

downstairs abreast. A good number of the women of the party remained upstairs, as the dinner-table only accommodated twenty; and far more men than women sat down. A curt grace was pronounced by Father Corkran; and then, as Shea graphically described it, they “saw their dinner.” Hogan looked round him in undisguised wonder and amusement. At the head of the table, before Mrs. Shea, was a boiled turkey as big as a sheep; at the foot an entire sirloin, perhaps forty pounds in weight, of beef. A boiled leg of mutton and turnips claimed Hogan’s attention. Two dishes of fowls, a roast saddle of mutton, a boiled round of beef, a monstrous ham and a roast turkey, a meat pie and a chicken pie, occupied places before the gentlemen of the party. Vegetables were handed round by red-cheeked smiling servant-girls; and beer jugs, sherry decanters, and magnums of good champagne were in constant request to wash down the solids.

“What a superb turkey, Mrs. Shea!” said Hogan: “is that one of your own rearing, may I ask?”

“It is, Mr. Hogan,” replied the lady, who was carving with a skill and dexterity that evinced long practice.

“It must have taken a railway train to *draw* that fellow.”

This somewhat technical joke was welcomed by the hostess with a hearty laugh; but on the rest of the audience it fell flat. Father Corkran, who sat opposite, grunted a note of approval, but never raised his head from his plate or relaxed his operations, the intensity and fervour of which brought beads of perspiration out on his bald head. It was not the time for *jeux d’esprit*, as the barrister acknowledged when he looked round the table and noted the curious comportment of the guests, all solemnly engaged in the grand event of the day. “If they take in solids in this way,” he thought, “what will they stop at when it comes to the whiskey and hot water?” So he wisely determined to lay a substantial foundation by way of precaution. After about twenty minutes, Father Jim Corkran, who having been first on the road was the first to declare a halt, laying down his knife and fork, threw himself back in the chair and employed an interlude, or rather an armistice, of about five minutes in staring at Hogan. He then resumed his avocations, but with somewhat less assiduity; and in a minute or two conversation became general. In deference to the ladies’ presence the company eschewed politics, and local affairs were discussed until the end of the second course. Then came a formidable array of glasses, hot-water kettles and whiskey decanters.

Each man brewed for himself; and in a moment or two the foundation stone of every real Irish political discussion was laid: every disputant was provided with a tumbler of whiskey punch. O’Rooney Hogan filled his own glass with a mixture as weak as he dared to brew it, and instinctively girt up his loins for battle.

The moment was come. Ned Shea leaned forward in his chair, and looked all round the room. A silence unbroken, save for the clinking of busy ladles, reigned immediately amongst the guests.

“Your reverences and ladies and gentlemen,—this is my friend from Dublin, Mr. O’Rooney Hogan, and I’m right glad to see him amongst us. I hope you will all join me in drinking his health and success to his cause.”

“Hear, hear!” went round the table heartily; and all—the ladies, who were each provided with a wine-glass of steaming toddy, included—drank to the toast. Hogan got up and bowed; and then, a little nervously, he made a short speech, expressing his thanks for his host’s kindness, and concluded with a flowery compliment to his fair hearers.

After this, which was only the introduction, the ladies trooped off upstairs, and the real business began. Barney Shane, the stalwart tenant-farmer and cousin to the host, proposed in a stentorian voice the toast, “Success to the Cause!” This was barely drunk when the parish priest, who was now in fine fighting trim, planted one sturdy elbow on the table, and spoke in a loud grating voice,—

“I’d like to know, Barney Shane, and Ned Shea too, and Mr. O’Rooney Hogan,—I say, I’d like to know what’s the cause Mr. Hogan, no offence to him, has adopted?”—and he banged his great hand on the table, and flung himself back in his seat awaiting his reply.

The glove was thrown. Shea and his guests turned to Hogan with expectant eyes, solemn and inquiring; and feeling that the hour of trial was come, our hero jumped to his feet.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I am now called upon publicly to state with what political views I have presented myself to the voters of Peatstown. When I proposed to myself the honour of representing you in Parliament, I was fully aware of the magnitude and importance of the great questions now agitating this Empire; and were I to hesitate in declaring my principles concerning them for one moment, I should feel myself deserving of your heartiest condemnation. I will therefore proceed to read

to you my Parliamentary programme embodied in this." He held a strip of blue paper in his hand. I may remark that this address will appear in all the Dublin papers to-morrow; and Mr. Muldoon, my agent, will settle with Mr. Killeen for the printing and distribution of the same throughout the country to-morrow."

Mr. Killeen's countenance now took a pleasant expression: he had been sorely vexed as to whether the printing of the election papers was to be confided to him or not.

"Come on to the address," interpolated the impatient Father Jim.

"Certainly, Father Corkran," was the bland reply; and unrolling the strip of blue paper, Hogan cleared his throat, and in a fine full voice began as follows:—

"GENTLEMEN,—The duty devolves upon you now, owing to the death of your late lamented representative, Mr. Theodore Wyldoates" (a scornful laugh from Barney Shane made itself heard at this point), of electing a representative in his place. Never before did the task carry with it a greater responsibility.

"You are now called upon to determine whether the nationality of our country is slowly but surely to be crushed, or whether, the dark cloud of oppression having been lifted off, the glorious sunshine of freedom and emancipation is to be substituted, never more to be eclipsed. At this critical moment I offer you my services, and seek the honour of being your representative. In me you will find the most staunch of all the supporters of the principles of Home Rule. I will devote my energies and talents, such as I possess, to obtain for Ireland the most complete powers of self-government.

"I heartily concur (here he raised his voice perceptibly) in the views upon the Education Question entertained by the prelates and clergy of my Church. In me they will have a sincere and energetic supporter.

"On behalf of the Tenant Farmers, I hold and maintain that complete Fixity of Tenure at a fair rent is not only the inalienable natural right of the tiller of the soil, but is for the mutual benefit of owner and occupier.

"I hold it to be the duty of every Catholic to sustain our Holy Father the Pope against a most unjust spoliation; and if you return me as your

representative, my voice shall not be silent in his behalf.

“It is unnecessary for me to state that a full and complete amnesty should be granted to all political prisoners.

“I ask you, in conclusion, to entrust me with the duty, as your representative, of endeavouring to carry into effect these principles—sanctioned as they will be, I hope, by your votes. If entrusted with your confidence, I pledge myself to accept neither office nor favour, and to devote my best energies to the welfare and prosperity of our country.

“Gentlemen electors,

I have the honour to be

“Your faithful servant,

“JOHN O’ROONEY HOGAN.”

The applause was a little flat, although unanimous; and Hogan felt it. He repented having read the address,—a speech is so much better appreciated always. He handed the blue paper across to Killeen; and clearing his throat afresh, began to speak, determined to regain the ground he felt he had lost.

“Gentlemen, you have now my programme; and to-morrow, by Mr. Killeen’s kind agency, it will be in the hands of every one in the town and district. I have placed the portions of the programme in the order in which it seems to me they ought to come. First of all, Home Rule, the grand object for which every true Irishman is striving; then Education, pure and untainted by heresy and infidelity. Until we have the grand aim secured, never” (and here he raised his voice louder), “never will the ground-down peasants, the plundered farmers, the Sainted Martyr, or the poor caged prisoners, have their rights,—never, till Ireland be once more a nation!”

A roar of enthusiasm greeted this peroration; the table was thumped by the excited listeners until the glasses rang again. When the tumult had a little subsided, so that his strident voice could be heard, the parish priest leaned across the table, and fixing Hogan with his hard blue eyes, in which sparks of anger now shone, began,—

“I see, sir, how it is with you: Home Rule is the horse you want to ride in on—eh?”

“Never mind, Father Jim,” put in Dicky, in whose brain champagne and whiskey punch were beginning to hold divided sway; “what horses are you talking of now? If every man rode his own horse, you’d walk oftener than you do.”

“Well done, Dicky! Yer soul, Dicky, ye had him then. Bravo the Dublin boy! More power!” roared the company, in high delight at the allusion to a well-known jockeying trick played by his reverence. Father Jim laughed too: he could well afford it.

“Go on up to the ladies, ye jackeen!” he roared back; “where are ye prating here? Go on, I bid ye!”

“Catch me!” retorted the boy with a grimace.

Father Corkran returned to his charge with the candidate.

“I was talking to the Bishop,” he began in the pompous high voice people will assume when they mention their superiors, “the other day; and his lordship told me he doesn’t understand this new go at all, at all. What’s to come of it? and what do ye want, and what will ye do with it when ye have it? Peace and quietness, and every man look after his own: there’s me ideas, and there’s the Bishop’s.”

“You, and the likes of you,” broke in Barney Shane, in a truculent voice, “that have nothing to lose, may prate of your peace and quietness, and every man look after his own. We’ll look after our own,—and trust you to look after yours.” Here an assenting shout almost rent the ceiling. “Look at me,” he went on, smiting the table with a fist like Thor’s; “my lease will be out in two years’ time, and what will that gambling black-guard Kilboggan give me? The key of the street! and I born and reared in the place, and my father and grandfathers before me;” and the big man’s voice almost faltered as he spoke.

“Aye, and what will Home Rule do for that?” sneered the priest.

“I’ll try,” was the concise answer. “Ye have two years before ye,” added he, turning to Hogan; “an’ if it doesn’t—” He finished the sentence by the significant act of spitting in the palm of his hand.

“Right, my friend,” cried Hogan; “Heaven helps those who help themselves.’” This man could bring twenty voters or more, perhaps, with him; and Hogan felt his cause was winning. All this time the punch was being consumed fast and steadily. Ned Shea, the host, drained his fifth tum-

bler, and running one hand through his fine curly hair, he stretched out the other to Hogan.

“I have a lease for a couple of hundred years,” said he; “but ye have my support, sir, all the same. And there’s success to ye again, Mr. Hogan!” and he filled out a bumper of raw whiskey and tossed it off.

“And mine! and mine!” ran round the table, as the guests followed his example.

The priests at the table said but little, except the curate of the mountain parish, who drank every toast and sentiment with the rest. Father Corkran, who was vicar-general of the diocese, had been to see the Bishop the day before; and none of them knew as yet what course was to be taken with regard to the election, and especially with regard to the new party cry Home Rule, so they were careful not to commit themselves in any way.

As Ned Shea’s guests, they were bound to respect his friend; but they knew that Hogan was a loose fish of a Dublin barrister, who, of course, was doing the best he could for himself; and it rested with the Bishop as yet whether they were to support him or not. They all, too, had a pretty shrewd idea that the vicar-general had written or telegraphed to Nice, to the lord of the manor, for instructions as to whether there would be an opposition or not, and also concerning some other minor matters, important to clerical interests. The Kilboggans had a stake in the county—a vested interest,—and as well as Tories and bigots, they were aristocrats; and aristocracy, and all pertaining thereto, is dear to the clerical heart. And naturally:—are there not orders and degrees of aristocracy in the Church—cardinals, archbishops, bishops, parish priests, and curates? Father Corkran looked forward to being a bishop one day; and every curate has his eye on a fat parish. And though priests and people owed everything to the Whigs, in fundamental principles and in reality the first-named are far more adapted to Toryism. Home Rule had begun, somehow, too independently of the priests. The Protestants were entirely too much mixed up with it to please them. It seemed so unnatural, and so opposed to all precedent, to see Tories, Protestants, and gentlemen working hand in hand with the Catholic nationalists: it couldn’t be sound socially or politically. And now the Ultra party, the dregs of Fenianism, and those vile returned Americans, who of late swarmed everywhere, with their republican and democratic notions, were collecting themselves together under the name of Home Rulers. Al-

together, most of the clergy looked with distrust and disfavour on the movement—as yet, at all events—for they were careful not to commit themselves one way or the other.

Father Corkran sat sulky and silent, brooding over the turn events had taken. It was perfectly clear that every man in the room was going to follow this adventurer to the poll. In fact, the fellow himself was so sure of his success that he was taking a cool, in-dependent tone in speaking to him—Father Corkran, the administrator! And the Education Question, forsooth, was to be laid aside till Home Rule and Fixity of Tenure was got. It was a new experience indeed; and what a pass things must have come to, when a candidate might “cheek” the parish priest! No doubt he felt safe, with this new dodge the Ballot at his back. However, beyond a sulkiness in no way unusual or remarkable, his reverence showed no overt hostility. He dared not, indeed, tell the voters his own opinion of Home Rule: would that he could! The “cloth” had always been national; and the country having made Home Rule a national cry, the priests could not disown it completely,—at least not yet, for the trump might change, and pledges are awkward things. The best thing was to play out the present hand as skilfully as possible.

Ned Shea rose now, in obedience to a summons from above stairs, and his guests followed him up to tea. The piano was open, and Mr. Dicky was seized upon by the young ladies to play. However, Mr. Dicky had something better in view; and when tea had disappeared, seeing that Shea, Father Corkran and Hogan, with Barney Shane and a farmer named Hara, had seated themselves at one of the card-tables, he determined to follow their example, and speedily organized a game of “spoil five” with a couple of priests and Mrs. Shea. One of the daughters seated herself beside Dicky; and a mountain of coppers having been produced, they speedily set to work. At the other table a far more serious business was being done. Unlimited loo was proposed, and a shilling was placed by each in the pool to begin.

“Looed for the amount now, and the rigour of the game!” declared his reverence, who loved a hand of cards.”

He was the first to infringe his own law.

Shea dealt; and turning to Father Jim, who was on his left, he asked the formal question “Will you play?”

Father Jim inspected his three cards, and answering in the negative, dashed them into the middle of the table.

“You are looed, sir,” said Hogan politely. “No, I’m not,” was the gracious reply.

“You are looed,” cried Barney in delight. “You threw out before the time; and it was yourself made the rule for the strict game.”

“Pay down five shillings here this minute; pay down your money, and look pleasant over it,—come on;”and Shea held out the saucer in which the five shillings were.

There was no help for it; and glaring savagely at them, Father Jim gathered up the five shillings, leaving a half-sovereign instead. Hogan won the whole pool; so his reverence was consoled on seeing twenty shillings put down by the others. The stakes soon reached such a height that they proposed to limit the pool to two pounds ten, or in other words, the loo to ten shillings. It was anything but a quiet game: the eagerness of the priest, and the ferocity of Barney Shane, who glared at the others as if they were in a league to cheat him, and was far more watchful that they did not gain an unfair advantage than careful to play his own cards so as to win, were openly displayed. Hara was tricky, and on him Barney and Father Corkran concentrated their attention. Shea him-self, too lazy and good-humoured to care whether he won or lost, adjured the rest to take things easy. Hogan was too much a man of the world to show much feeling one way or the other; he had intended to lose twenty pounds to Father Jim, but as things were going, he thought he might as well win as lose. The pool was a full one when the deal came again to Father Corkran; and the whole sum fell to his reverence’s lot. Seizing the saucer, he emptied it on the table with a clatter that raised the ire of Barney Shane.

“It’s easy seen,” said he bitterly, “ye took care of yourself. Oh, begad, yes, I don’t like to see the dealer walking off with everything that way.”

“Don’t ye, be me sow!” was the scornful notice his reverence vouchsafed.

So they went on for an hour; until at last Father Desmond took Shea’s place, to let him sing one of Moore’s Melodies to his daughter’s accompaniment on the piano. Hogan had lost ten pounds—most of which had gone into his reverence’s pocket. After a few more rounds, Hogan called Dicky over to his place. Dicky, who guessed that high play was go-

ing on, from the loud, excited talk that had reached him, obeyed gladly. The girls wanted him to come and dance; but he refused, and they were left to the clumsy attentions of a couple of young farmers. They scarcely looked at Hogan, and answered him coldly when he addressed them; with the fine instinct of their sex they divined him, and estimated his worth pretty accurately. "Leave him where he is, Mary," said one shrewd damsel to another; "it's some grand Dublin lady, maybe a lord's daughter, he has his eye on; leave him where he is; he won't be much good to any one that gets him."

Then there was a rush to where Dicky was sitting—his high clear voice being heard in altercation with Father Jim.

"Have you any money—eh?" he asked of the priest, who was angry at his joining the set.

"Have I?" retorted he. "I've more than you ever saw, or ever will, my Dublin slieven."

"Do you know how to play loo?" asked Dicky imperiously.

"Oh, faith, we'll try that; so here's at you, now!" said Father Corkran, thoroughly nettled and slapping down the cards with fiery emphasis.

The luck was even for a few turns, but changed suddenly; and Dicky won a couple of pounds in a breath. Another "hand" was played, and he again took the pool.

"Now, Father Jim, how do you like that, hey?" And he stood up, holding the money in his hand, as if to move off with his gains.

"Look at him!" cried Father Jim in pathetic tones, "Oh, look at him now—walking off with the poor priest's money."

A shout of laughter greeted this appeal.

"Ho! ho! how poor you are! You got it easy, and it's gone easy," railed the youngster.

"If you ever worked half as hard in your life, you little Dublin jackeen!" retorted his reverence.

"Worked! With the knife and fork, you mean, I suppose?"

"Yah! you slieven, you jackeen." And then, with a funny change of tone, "Sure if I had any idea such a grand gentleman as yourself, Mr. Davoren," he continued, "was comin' down to our poor little place, I was

talkin' to the Bishop, then, and the O'Gorman Mulcahy, and sure I'd have asked them round to ait a bit ov dinner with ye, so I would."

"And if I'd any ideeah," mimicked Dicky, "Father Jim, that you were intimate with such grand people entirely, I'd—I'd—never have won your money."

This gibe finished the fragment of patience left to Father Jim.

"Come on out of that here, an' divel sweep you for an impident small crumb of humanity. Come on, and I'll play you double or quits."

Dicky, with a gambler's' prescience, feeling himself in the vein of luck, threw down his money on the table. Barney Shane seized and counted it.

"Twelve pounds between Dicky and Father Jim!" shouted he.

A rush was made from all parts; and facing each other, the opponents began.

"Two games out of three," said his reverence, "and cut for the deal."

Dicky's luck continued; he won the twelve pounds, to the delight of the room; and Father Corkran went off home declaring the youth's company to be neither sound nor saintly. After ten o'clock all the clerical party left. Shea caught the curate Desmond by the coat as he was going out of the room.

"Mr. Hogan and I will be in Ballinagad to-morrow in the afternoon. I think we'll sleep at Barney's."

"Come to me for dinner. I say, Shea," (he dropped his voice to a whisper,) "it won't be a walk-over. One of the nephews will be over at the end of the week."

"Sure! By gad, the rogues have stolen a march on us!"

"I won't say for certain; but there's something. Don't let on I told you, Ned, for any sake."

Dancing began, now that the restraint of the priest's presence was removed; and it was late when our two travellers retired, with weary limbs and aching heads, to their much-needed repose.