

VOLUME I

CHAPTER 8

“This was John Scotus Erigena, a very remarkable man, who, as his name imports, and as his contemporaries inform us, was an Irishman, and who appears to have led, for the most part, that life of a wandering scholar for which his country-men have always been famous. His keen wit, his great and varied genius, and his knowledge of Greek, soon gained him an immense reputation. This last acquirement was then extremely rare; but it had been kept up in the Irish monasteries some time after it had disappeared from the other seminaries of Europe.”

“Thus when, in the middle of the eighth century, an Irish saint named St. Virgilius, who was one of the very few men who then cultivated the profane sciences, ventured in Bavaria to assert the existence of the Antipodes, the whole religious world was thrown into a paroxysm of indignation—St. Boniface heading the attack, and Pope Zachary, at least for a time, encouraging it.”

—*Lecky*, “History of Rationalism.”

TWELVE O’CLOCK, or, as it is more often termed, “last” Mass, was greatly crowded on the occasion of Father O’Hea preaching the closing Advent sermon. The reverend father was one of the best preachers in Dublin—in Ireland, perhaps. He was one of the favoured few who are born with the real oratorical talent; and like most natural geniuses, let those theorists who pretend the divine spark is due to fortuitous circumstances say what they will, had found at an early age his special vocation. Culture and practice had enhanced the precious gift to the utmost; and Father O’Hea was perhaps at this period without a rival in any part of the world—as regarded his power of attracting hearers.

In a prominent seat near the High Altar was the Lady Mayoress, accompanied by her daughters and her husband's secretary. The Raffertys, gorgeous as usual, were not far removed; and the sanctuary was crowded with the *élite* of Father O'Hea's admirers and supporters. In a central seat were Dicky Davoren and Nellie, and with them Mr. Mulcahy, now one of Miss Davoren's devoted squires. The Brangans, the Muldoons, the Gogarties,—everywhere he turned his eyes Hogan saw some one whom he knew. Right opposite him was the Bishop; and from him our young friend, who had come in late, received a reproving glance.

High Mass was sung; and when the benediction had been pronounced and the silks and velvets had fluttered and rustled into their seats again, expectant eyes were turned on the vestry door. The organ finished a loud symphony, prayer-books were clasped noisily; and when at last the little door swung open, and the tall figure of the great orator, clad in the picturesque robes of his order, strode forth, a hush of breathless admiration filled the great building. After a moment of prayer before the High Altar rails the priest ascended the pulpit, and, having read the text, commenced his sermon. It was, as usual, a masterpiece. The person and bearing of the speaker lent an additional force to every powerful sentence. His was indeed a remarkable countenance. Burning black eyes looked out from beneath arched, deep-cut brows; eyes that looked all the blacker for the clear, pale olive of the cheeks and forehead; a large, well-shaped and flexible mouth; and hands so apt and skilled of movement that they seemed to speak in unison with the lips.

The greatest charm, however, the most effective weapon in all his well-burnished armoury, was his Irish brogue,—broad, rich, and resonant, lending itself to every mood; now rising loud in a passionate storm of denunciation, now sinking low as a whisper, yet distinct and clear as a silver bell. No tongue nor dialect, voice nor accent, has the power of an Irish brogue in persuasion or exhortation. At first, the variety of tones, the grotesque cadences and inflections, strike strangely upon an unaccustomed ear; but by degrees the earnest manner and language, the consummate skill with which the subject is presented, appeal to and draw away the attention, the novelty becomes dulled or forgotten, the sympathies are awakened and excited, and the all-embracing enthusiastic sweep of eloquence leads the mind captive.

Hogan, from beside a huge pillar against which he was leaning, looked admiringly at the speaker. Not a gesture escaped his appreciat-

ing eye. It was not without a touch of envy that he noted Father O'Hea's triumph. How thin and cold his own outpourings were as compared with this! He consoled himself by the reflection that the religious *genre* of oratory had its special advantages. The fervid burning adjurations of the priest to his flock would be out of place were the audience to consist of the dozen of thick-headed jurymen; and above all, reflected the barrister, there was nobody to pull him up in his gallop, no sharp-eyed counsel on the other side to interpose carpings and contradictions. And Hogan leaned back and surveyed the crowd of richly dressed people all intent on every word, the women now pale, now red, and many of them with tear-filled eyes. He ran his eye quickly along the benches in search of one particular face: up and down each end, beginning with the gas bracket at the top, down to the end at the wall, where hung a gaudy Station picture.

At last Dicky's roving eyes met his with a glance of recognition; and beside him, in full relief against the dark fur cloak of a lady next her, appeared the clear, cameo-like profile of Nellie Davoren. Her eyes were fixed intently on the preacher. Hogan rapidly noted her dress, in order not to lose sight of her in the crowd going out; and then, mindful of the Bishop's watchful grey eyes, resumed his pose of edified attentiveness. Father O'Hea's brilliant peroration fell on heedless ears in Hogan's case; if his eyes were riveted on his face, his ears were listening to other strains, and instead of the burning words of the preacher, the clear, low voice of Nellie Davoren in imaginative tones filled his whole being.

The sermon over, the entire congregation poured out of the benches and thronged the passages.

The Bishop of Secunderabad, who wanted to join his friend Mrs. Rafferty, executed a dexterous flank movement and came up with that lady's party before they had reached the main door. The Lady Mayoress, who in her turn was being pursued by Mrs. Rafferty, halted for a moment in the porch to greet her friends. Once outside the sanctuary, all tongues were loosened. Hogan and the Davorens joined the party; the Misses Malowney and Rafferty and their various satellites poured down the steps, laughing and chattering.

"Your ladyship is coming over to lunch with us? It's only just a step. Oh, me lord!—ah, now, Mr. Hogan, prevail on Dr. O'Rooney to come and take a glass of wine." So spoke Mrs. Rafferty, on hospitality intent.

The Bishop was easy enough to persuade, and stepped into the civic coach which was in readiness, accompanied by Mrs. Rafferty and

Mrs. Malowney. Hogan followed on foot with the young people, who all chose to walk; and the Raffertys' great green-and-gold liveried carriage drove off empty.

"Will you go down to the Pier to-day, Eily?" cried Miss Brangan, who rushed across the street to join her friends. She spoke *to* Miss Eily Rafferty, but *at* Mr. Dicky Davoren, the "young gentleman with the lovely humbuggin' eyes."

"No, Mary, we can't to-day; you know we must be at home for the people calling after the ball."

"Oh, sure, I forgot. How do you do, Mr. Davoren?"

Dicky had advanced, in gallant acknowledgment of the young lady's glances, to renew their acquaintance.

"How did you like the sermon to-day? Was it not splendid? I saw you were quite moved, Miss Brangan." The collegian had had his eyes about him, and had noted the young lady's total indifference to everything but the bonnets and "young gentlemen" of her vicinity.

"Yes, indeed," she answered, with charming candour; "wasn't he lovely? Such an angel as that Father O'Hea—Oh! I thought I'd ha' died."

"Oh dear! you oughtn't to let your susceptibilities run away with you like that. 'Pon my word, I was alarmed for you, Miss Brangan. Look: by Jove, there goes Father O'Hea himself."

An outside car passed at that moment, carrying the preacher across town to his monastery. He smiled and bowed to the pedestrians.

"He's coming to dinner with us to-day," said one of the Raffertys, in a boasting tone. "Oh gracious! I mustn't forget to practise the accompaniments to the melodies. I disgraced meself intirely last time I played the 'Minstrel Boy' for him."

"Here we are. Come in, Miss Brangan: where's your papa?" Mr. Rafferty led the way in, and the whole troop poured in and up to the drawing-room. Here they found those who had preceded them. Bishop O'Rooney and Mrs. Malowney were seated on a big sofa near the fire; a great many of the guests had also arrived, and conversation became general.

"I hope your ladyship wasn't fatigued after Tuesday night?" asked the lady of the house.

“Deed, no, then; I enjoyed meself so much. I’m never so wearied intirely as when I’ve got to go to them dinners at the Castle. Not but what their Excellencies is kindness itself, an’ everything lovely. Ye had an iligant ball, then, Mrs. Rafferty.”

“I’m really glad your ladyship liked it. I think everybody enjoyed it. It was the greatest pity but your lordship could honour us,” added Mrs. Rafferty jestingly, looking at the Bishop.

“My dancing days are over, ma’am,” returned Dr. O’Rooney, entering into the humor of her joke, with a mock sigh of regret, stretching one neat foot a little in advance. “We leave the young people to do that for us now. We must look on, just,”—and his lordship glanced at the chattering groups behind him. He honoured Miss Davoren with a keen scrutiny from under his brows, while offering a pinch of snuff to Mr. Rafferty. “Might I ask you who is the young lady in grey with the fur jacket?” he asked of his neighbour, dropping his voice discreetly.

“A Miss Davoren. She was here the other night.”

“Davoren?” repeated the Bishop, vainly trying to connect the name with some half-forgotten reminiscence.”

“Her father is in the Castle.”

Then the party were marshalled down to lunch, and the Bishop led off the mistress of the house, noting, as he did so, that his nephew was giving his arm to the young lady in grey with the fur jacket, instead of improving his opportunity with the Misses Malowney, Rafferty, or any other of the eligible and advantageous connections in the room.

“Did your ladyship observe the bride at mass?” asked some one of Mrs. Malowney, in the intervals of champagne popping.

“Beautifully dressed, was she not?” interposed a daughter of the house.

“I don’ know, thin,” said her ladyship deliberately. “I don’t fancy that violent coloured bonnet becomes her at all.”

“Violet! mamma,” shrieked Anastatia Eily, from the opposite side of the table.

“Vi’let, then,” repeated her ladyship, dutifully, but with a trace of asperity. “It’s all wan as the same.”

Hogan’s eyes sought Nellie’s for a moment; and in spite of her efforts to the contrary, a faint flash of amazement escaped hers. Dicky and

Mr. Mulcahy jogged each other's elbows and grinned convulsively; but whether it was due to stupidity or politeness, scarce a trace of consciousness was betrayed by the rest of the company.

"Malowney's gone over to London last night," said the Lady Mayor-ess, in reply to a question of the Bishop's. "Gone on wan of thim depitations."

"Oh yes, to be sure—the depitation. I was wanted to go," said Rafferty pompously.

"Tis well you were out of it," said his wife; "last night was so stormy and wild."

"Twas so: God keep us all," piously assented her ladyship. She then finished her *galantine*, and announced her intention of starting, as she had promised to visit a convent out of town.

Hogan, meantime, was dividing his attentions pretty equally between the Raffertys and Nellie Davoren.

"You danced immensely, Miss Malowney; but I really think, Miss Rafferty, *you* went ahead altogether. Poor Mr. Dooley!" Mr. Dooley was a brother of the gentleman who was to marry Miss Malowney.

"Oh! Aloysia Mary! oh, oh!" and the other young ladies giggled sympathetically.

"How many waltzes, now? just tell us, Miss ——" But here Hogan became aware, from the quick glance that ran round the bevy of girls, and the warning elevation of her eyebrows by the young lady addressed, that he was trespassing on dangerous ground; and he stopped suddenly. Miss Malowney laughed, and glanced up to the Bishop's end of the table; but his lordship was busy with Mr. Rafferty, and heard, or seemed to hear, nothing.

"What matter?" said Dicky Davoren; "we're not his penitents; and Mr. Hogan won't let him tell the 'Car'nal' on us."

"Tis no sin to dance fast," declared Miss Brangan, emphatically, "when you don't think it a sin; an' I don't."

"Yes; that's the only way to do," affirmed a Miss Malowney; "an' then you don't need to confess it. Father O'Flanagan himself told us he couldn't give us absolution for dancing fast, but if we did not consider it a sin we needn't confess it."

“Capital dodge!” said Dicky approvingly. “Mul., my boy, that’s a wrinkle for us. I’ll make short work of ‘scraping my kettle’ next time,”—and the collegians chuckled together.

“Ah!” laughed Hogan; “I must make a note of it too.”

Just then the Bishop rose; and Hogan, in duty bound, got up also to accompany him.

“Tell me, ladies, are any of you to be at the concert for the soldiers’ widows and orphans next week?” As he spoke, his eyes sought Nellie’s with a look of questioning and almost entreaty.

“We won’t be there, I don’t think,” said the eldest of the Raffertys: “isn’t it a Protestant concert?”

“What’s a Protestant concert?” asked Bishop O’Rooney, on his way to the door, looking questioningly at his nephew.

“I don’t know on earth,” replied Hogan, speaking to the young lady. “I only saw it advertised. But I fancy it is.”

“If the Lord Mayor goes we’ll be there,—not otherwise,” said Rafferty.

The Bishop and his nephew now left the party. When they got into the street the Bishop proposed a trip to Kingstown for a turn on the Pier before going to the Convent of St. Swithin, where he had to give Benediction, and to whose prioress Hogan owed a visit.

“Just two,” said his lordship, consulting his watch. “Let’s walk fast and catch the two o’clock; then we shall just have time for a constitutional, and I’ll be back by four for Benediction.”

They arrived at Kingstown in about half an hour; and taking his nephew’s arm, the Bishop started for a smart walk to the Lighthouse. It was a clear grey day—mild, as it sometimes is before Christmas; not a breath of wind curled the water, which lay steel-coloured under the murky sky. Scarce any ships were at anchor; half a dozen dun-coloured fishing-smacks hung windbound out under the cliffs of Howth. The man-of-war lay like “a painted ship upon a painted ocean,” and the mailboat getting her fires made down for the evening trip seemed the only thing that gave sign of life. The steam tugs were out in the bay, cruising for customers, Sunday as it was. It was yet too early for the regular promenaders to appear; except nursemaids and children, and a few

of the resident dowagers, who always come down early, to secure good seats, the pier was all but deserted.

They walked on in silence for ten minutes—striding along with the business-like air of men who are taking a walk for the good of their limbs.

Hogan was the first to speak.

“How do you like the Raffertys, sir?”

“Very well indeed,” replied the Bishop in a cordial tone,—“very well; fine house, good style altogether; they seem inclined to be very civil people. The young ladies are better than Assumption gave me to expect.”

“Hah! reverend Mother knows them, then?”

“Of course she does,” returned the Bishop. “She had them all there at school—at least, barring the last two years, when they were sent off to England somewhere. She was very angry at that.”

“The papa and mamma wanted them to get the accent, I suppose?” said Hogan. “They didn’t succeed, if my ears are good for anything: ha! ha!”

“No,” said his lordship, with a dry little laugh, “it isn’t everybody can improve his opportunities in this life.” And he sighed as if the weight of some of his own shortcomings oppressed him. “Assumption thought one of them likely to enter. That second girl—at least, she was when she had her—she told me she had strong hopes of her. ’Twould have been such a good connexion for the convent—and she’s a fine musician, I’m told; but that going over to England has changed her entirely.”

“Evidently,” said Hogan, laughing heartily.

“That little Miss Davoren, now, who’s she?” asked the Bishop, in an inquisitorial tone.

“A nice, ladylike little girl,” returned the barrister in his most careless voice, looking away across the harbour as he spoke.

“Some of them told me she never was at school at all,” went on the Bishop, in a doubting tone, as if that fact were incompatible with the account just given of the young lady by his nephew.

“She sings, and paints beautifully, all the same,” returned the young man, with the slightest touch of impatience. At least,” he added, offhandedly, “I’m told so by Mulcahy, who seems quite gone about her.”

To this the Bishop made no reply.

Afternoon service was going on as they passed the man-of-war; and the strains of a hymn, sung by some hundreds of men, reached their ears across the water. The Bishop had a musical ear, and but for the bad example of seeming to favour heretical ceremonies, would have stopped and listened for a minute to the fine harmony of the Old Hundredth; but he passed on without paying any attention. Climbing the steps to the top of the wall at the end of the pier, they stood and looked out seawards. Howth, save a faint, shadowy profile, was invisible, wrapped in a pale veil of sea mist. Killiney stood out bare and bleak, all its rocks looking red and cold. No green foliage or sunlight relieved the lines of white and yellow terraces along the bay. Everything seemed leaden, and the sullen rise and fall of the water on the rampart behind them struck with a monotonous iteration on their ears; a damp, chill breeze came across the bay from the north-east. Hogan buttoned up his coat, and stood a moment viewing the wintry sea before them.

“Time we faced about, my lord,” said he, taking out his watch.

“Tell me,” said the Bishop, when they had descended to the promenade again, “how goes it with your friend Saltasche? What’s he up to since?”

“Nothing particular since, sir. He’s getting up a company, with a capital of a hundred thousand, to work Lord Brayhead’s slate and granite quarries, somewhere about Leadmines, wherever that is. He wants me to be a director.”

“Hey! but the qualifications, sir?”

“Oh, well! a thousand or so is qualification, you see. And I have a precious amount of work to do for them, and may as well take payment in shares as not. That will help to make it up.”

“What are the shares issued at?”

“Not settled yet, sir. There’s some idea of a railway to be built in that direction. I expect the Bill will be passed next session. It’s to run parallel with that one.”

“Humbug! Where’s the traffic to come from? That region is almost a desert: I know it well, God knows; I spent ten or twelve years of my life in it.” And the Bishop heaved a regretful sigh.

“Whatever the slate company may do, the railway won’t obtain, I fear; at least, not in London,” said Hogan dubiously.

“No, you might bet upon that. Those English are so jealous of Irish undertakings, they never will subscribe a *sou*.”

“Ahem! You know, sir, they have it always to throw at us that we don’t manage our railways so as to pay any decent sort of dividend.”

“We ain’t up to their dodges? No, I suppose not,” retorted the inconsequent Bishop, who was incorrigible on some points.

Hogan let this pass. At any other time he would have diverted himself by holding a passage at arms with the old gentleman; but, having drunk two glasses of Mr. Rafferty’s excellent dry champagne, he felt the least bit drowsy and good-humoured, and so contented himself with an indolent movement of the chin that might have stood for assent or dissent. They walked on now in silence for a good stretch of the dry sandy reach. Everything looked dull and cheerless, and Hogan wished himself back at his work by the fireside in Canal Terrace. This was not to be, however; for the Lady Prioress of St. Swithin’s had to be visited after the Benediction, and after that came a dinner party at the Muldoons’, where there was to be, as usual, a collection of priests, and from which Mr. Hogan would not dare to absent himself.

“If we remain here much longer, my lord,” said Hogan, “we shall be encountering our friends; and then, how about the next express?”

“Come along,” said his lordship. “Last Sunday I was a full quarter late; an’ Assumption hates them to be kept waiting.”

They hastened on, and took their seats in a first-class compartment. Scarcely had they done so when a stout short man rushed in after them. “Me dear Bishop, how do ye do? Hogan, I’m delighted to see you. Taking a turn on the pier?” Without waiting for a word, he went on, “Meself was down calling on the O’Gorman Mulcahy; he’s at the Marine, in bad health, poor fellow!” Just then the speaker turned his jolly red face towards the platform, and, catching sight of some one, plunged half out of the window, roaring at the full pitch of his voice, “How are ye, Judge? Come in here, Judge! Room for ye here, Judge! ’Tis Judge Costelloe,” he explained in an aside to Hogan and the Bishop, drawing in his head as he did so. This momentary delay was fatal. Another attorney who had also stuck his head out of window to hail the great man was successful, and landed his prize on the seat beside him. Hogan was not sorry

for Mr. Muldoon's disappointment. The fellow would have kicked up a frightful row all the way; and Judge Costelloe, a most retiring, quiet man, would have been seriously annoyed. Besides, Hogan preferred to make the personal acquaintance of the Judge through a more aristocratic medium than Mr. Corney Muldoon.

"The Lord Mayor is in London," observed Hogan.

"Ay," said the attorney, "and a deputation with him. Nice little bill there'll be for that journey; and all for a humbug. Look at Lord Ramines: look! look!"

Hogan, who was now sitting at the window opposite Muldoon, cleverly caught the eye of the gentleman referred to, an aristocratic and very dissipated looking man, and was honoured with a nod of recognition as he hurriedly jumped in.

"Do you know him, Mr. Hogan?" asked the attorney, in quite a respectful tone.

The express train darted off with a jolt and scream that hindered Mr. Hogan's answer from being heard very intelligibly; and Muldoon engaged the Bishop in conversation until they reached Westland Row.

"They'll go down with a run, my lord, you may take my word for it," the attorney was saying, as the express slackened speed at the platform.

"You'd advise me sell at once," asked the Bishop in an eager whisper, "hey, Muldoon?"

"Sold me own yesterday afternoon. Stonelock says there's a fair demand yet."

"Hah," said the Bishop, nodding his head as he took the attorney's arm to get out.

At five minutes past four the Bishop and his nephew drove up to the wide green gate of St. Swithin's. The green gate had a sliding panel set in it; and after they had rung at one of the small doors by which it was flanked, the face of a nun appeared at this, and smiling pleasant recognition to the visitors, speedily unlocked and held open the door for them to pass in.

"Day, day, Veronica: how's your toothache?" said the Bishop. Sister Mary Veronica, a jolly-looking lay sister, plumped down on her knees and kissed the Bishop's ring before answering. She was the lay sister

whose duty it was to wait on him at breakfast, and open the hall door and the gate; consequently they were well acquainted with each other.

“Mr. Hogan, I’m very glad to see you. Reverend Mother will be so delighted!” And she laughed and chuckled as if she had uttered the best joke in the world. Then she turned and led the way across the front to the hall door.

How quiet and still and grey it all was! Hogan asked himself, could it be the same house that he had seen last summer? The big stone convent looked bleak and cold; the yellow blinds were all pulled down, no gas lighted yet, and only the red flickering of the fires showed at some of the ground-floor windows. A narrow grass plot, bordered by a walk which was planted with stiff evergreens and rows of chesnuts, was before the house. A double row of poplars, now bare and wintry-looking, in summer screened the wall which ran all round and kept out “the world” and all inquisitive eyes. Behind were the gardens, and another small patch, gravelled, but planted with trees, and furnished with swings and poles, which served as a recreation-ground for the children.

They reached the hall door, which was half glass and neatly curtained with white muslin. Veronica opened it, and ran off to announce their arrival and ring the bell for Benediction. His lordship plunged down a dark passage leading to the vestry; and Hogan, taking a tiny ivory-bound prayer-book out of his pocket, went by another route to the convent chapel.

A bell began to clang noisily. The scuffling and whispering of the boarders could be heard as they hastened to assemble in order of procession. Dark-robed figures flitted past in the dim twilight—the rattle of the huge rosaries alone betraying their presence. A little nun ran by, swinging a big thurible newly kindled from one of the parlour fires, and leaving a long stream of aromatic odour behind her. They had reached a big door set in a white sharp-pointed arch. Sister Veronica appeared with her office-book in her hand, and opened it; and Hogan entered. Beside the door, on the inside, stood a white-winged figure holding back with one hand a red velvet curtain which hung before the door, and in the other presenting a vase of holy water. Hogan dipped in a finger, and then, without turning an eye to the right or the left, took his place in the topmost of the three benches reserved for strangers.

The chapel, a small structure of Gothic style, and exactly proportioned, was exceedingly pretty; and the stained windows admitted a soft,

rich light which set out its beauties admirably. The walls were painted cream-colour. The gilded frames of the pictures, and the deep crimsons of the carpet, and the richly-worked *priedieu* chairs, gave it a warm and comfortable look. The altar, of Carrara marble, beautifully carved and inlaid, was decked with superb bronze candelabra, the gift of a wealthy convert. These were filled with wax candles, which the sacristan sister was busily lighting; vases of wax flowers filled the spaces between the candles, and the jewelled monstrance lay ready on the snowy altar-cloth. The Bishop's faldstool stood at one side; and an embroidered cushion marked the place of the officiant at the foot of the altar. The organ began the instant the vestry door opened, and the fresh voices of the nuns and children rose together in the hymn. A few old ladies who were boarding in the house were the only lay persons in the chapel—the children being sequestered in a gallery above the enclosure railed off for the nuns.

The little chapel was warm and close; and Hogan laid down his head on his hands and yawned to his heart's content. He could with difficulty keep his eyes open; and the thick white incense that rose from the thurible was almost stifling. The ceremony did not last long, however. The Bishop, though dignified in his movements, was anything but slow; and in something less than twelve minutes Hogan found himself in the reverend Mother Prioress's own private parlour. Here there was a magnificent fire blazing; and Sister Veronica fussily lighted the gaselier, and with vast clatter produced from a cupboard wine-glasses, decanters, and cake. The Bishop made his appearance ere long from an opposite door, and installed himself in a cozy easy-chair by the fireside.

"My word, Veronica," said he, rubbing his hands, "that is a fire you have!"

"And what an exquisite fireplace you keep, sister!" said Hogan, admiring the brilliancy of the cut-steel fittings: "not a speck of dirt, even in the corners."

"Dirty corners is velial sins," cackled Veronica, running to open the door for the reverend Mother, whose familiar footstep she heard outside.

"Hah! are they? I wish people 'in the world' thought so," returned Hogan, thinking of the contrast presented by his own fireplace.

The Mother Superior now entered. The cold weather agreed with her, and gave her a fine healthy colour. She was a tall woman, as we said before, and her trailing Sunday robes gave her an immense look of dig-

nity. She had a merry, cheerful face, with keen grey eyes—the O’Rooney eyes exactly; bushy brows, and large white teeth gleaming in a wide mouth, which seemed always smiling, but which could wear a determined look at times.

“My lord!” and down she too plumped on her knees: a most aggravating practice. “John, my dear child: ah now! and where were you this long time?” and the Prioress shook him by both hands affectionately. “Dear bless us—what a settled-looking man you’re growing!”

“Hard work! ma’am. You look very well; blooming, indeed.”

“Hum—thank God, I am. I haven’t time to be ill. A great school we have now. I got eight new pupils to-day,—all from the country. Three Miss Sheas, from Peatstown. It’s a great affair. They’re taking every extra.”

“Every extra—ho, ho!” said the Bishop approvingly; well knowing what a sum the innumerable list of accomplishments would total up.

“When are you going to take my advice, and make them all learn Latin and mathematics?” asked Hogan; “what will they do with wax flowers and the use of the globes down in Peatstown?”

“Latin, John!” returned her reverence with a little scream; “augh now, Jig Polthogue would be more in their line a great deal.”

“Indeed! why teach them Italian, then, ma’am?” returned he pertinently.

“Give them just what their parents want, I suppose,” said the Bishop curtly; “what business further is it of ours?”

“Their parents don’t know anything about it: how should they? And you, ma’am, ought to supply the best market value, and the most modern improvements you can hear of, in return for their money. You’ll be sorry for not doing it, some of these days. See if you are not.”

“Such trash as you talk, John!” interrupted the Bishop. “What do they want with all this education? What the better would one of them be for Latin, indeed? Let them say their prayers: plenty good enough for them.”

“If that’s so,” retorted Hogan, a little crossly, “why does Mother Assumption pretend to teach them anything but their prayers? It would certainly be cheaper for them.”

“Now, John dear, you’re talking of what you don’t know; ’pon my word you are,” began the Prioress gravely. “Father O’Hea himself told me our language classes were better than those of any other convent school in Dublin. And as for music, why, we are renowned for music. My dear boy, you don’t know what other schools are. And Protestant schools too. I assure you a great many of the best class Protestant schools are not nearly as good as we are.”

“Pardon me, ma’am,” said the barrister, laughing heartily, “you are entirely behind the times. How is it that the best-class Catholics are sending their daughters to these new Ladies’ Colleges and High Schools, to learn Latin, Greek, and mathematics, and sciences of all sorts? Why don’t *you* go in for South Kensington examinations and Trinity College classes? Why have the convents fallen from their old ideal? They used to be the homes of learning and culture. Your curriculum, ma’am, is little better than a swindle, and it will be a bad job for you when your supporters find that out.”

“I declare to goodness,” cried the Bishop, “this fellow has gone mad. Latin and Greek and mathematics for a pack of girls, indeed! What would the world come to then, I’d like to know?”

“Ah,” said the Prioress, good naturedly, “he doesn’t mean it. I got a new postulant last week, she continued: one of our own children come back to us.”

“Who?” asked Hogan.

“Mary Anne Kellett. She could not exist till she was let back to us, the darling child.”

“Is that Kellett’s daughter, of Rathboy Farm?” asked Hogan of the Bishop; “if so, she ought to have money.”

“Yes,—the same. I’m glad she came, poor thing. She never could be happy with them at home: a rough lot!”

“If her father and mother are rough, why should she be less rough? How comes that, Mother Assumption?”

“Because,” returned the Abbess, “she got a nice education, and was refined and improved; and she chose to enter instead of remaining at home.”

“Bah! ma’am; she had no business to be refined and improved beyond her station in life. You are doing the most horrid mischief through-

out the country. There's not a useful hard-working girl left, with your refining and improving them,—improving them off the face of the earth.”

“There's always women enough,” said the Bishop crossly; “and too many, for that matter. At the same time, I'll allow you carry off the best of them into the convents here. Anyhow, it's God's will, else they wouldn't think of it.”

“Of course it is,” assented the Prioress.

Between the Prioress and the Bishop there was this difference:—He considered that Catholic girls had a mission in life as well as being nuns. He held it right and suitable, in a religious as well as a social point of view, that they should marry—a certain number of them at least; although, of course, as a Churchman, he considered marriage to be an evil—a necessary evil—a concession made to the exigencies of poor fallen human nature. But the Prioress considered it to be an entirely unnecessary one, to be avoided as much as possible—a wholly inferior and condemnable state as compared with the religious life: in fact, the mere name of it was unfit to be breathed without a proper little shudder of revulsion—a little fluttering of the dove-like wings of immaculate and over-conscious purity. Mother Assumption, to do her justice, did indeed sometimes think of the institution of matrimony as being in some remote way connected with the perpetuation of her flourishing boarding-school. Like many another enormity, it tended, no doubt, to the furtherance of that scheme best expressed by the legend inscribed over her gates, “*Ad majorem Dei gloriam!*” and so was to be tolerated and almost condoned.

“How are you getting on, John?” asked she. “It was very thoughtful of you to send me the paper with that report of your speech in it. I never see a paper, you know, unless some one sends one with something in it of interest to the community.” Mother Assumption loved a newspaper—in secret.

Those modern luxuries are not generally allowed in convents. However, as they were not known at the periods when Saints Dominic, Bernard, Francis, Teresa, and other founders of communities flourished and drew up their respective rules and codes of observances, they escaped being placed on the index of forbidden indulgences. And consequently, if somewhat irregular, it is not an absolutely sinful relaxation for a nun to read one.

“I must send you a *Graphic*, ma’am,” returned the barrister. “Indeed, I ought to have done so before.”

“Ah! yes, now, for the Christmas holidays. The children will be so glad of the pictures.”

Her reverence did not add that she would be so glad of the stories which usually go with the said pictures. But her cousin was aware of her proclivities, and good-naturedly promised a stock of the usual Christmas effusions.

“Now, you promised to select a list of books for the library for me, John. There’s not a day but what I have girls here asking me, may they read this book or that book? and how am I to know what to recommend them? And of course, except the mistress of the schools, and she has no time, there’s nobody in the house knows anything about books but myself.”

“I’m sure, reverend Mother, I sent you a bundle not long ago. It seems to me you read them up like winking.”

“Read them, John! I am astonished at you! I only skim through them, just to see if they’ll do for the children.”

“Of course, Mother Assumption,” answered the barrister in the gravest of tones, nevertheless with a noticeable compression of his lips. “Well now, let us see,” proceeding to jot down in his pocket-book. “Let’s see: you have the first, second, and third of ‘Middle-march.’ How do you like that for the children?”

Mother Assumption paused.

“It’s a lovely book—oh, most lovely! But somehow the religious part doesn’t come out clear enough; an’ still, I don’t know—there’s many a worse and a more foolish book.”

“Well, yes,” agreed Hogan dryly; “I should say so. All the same, ma’am, I suppose I must send you the fourth volume?”

“Oh yes. John, if you please,” and the Abbess looked as if she would be pleased very much. “See, here’s a list I’ve been given; you might send those round at your convenience.”

“What’s ‘Middlemarch,’ eh?” asked the Bishop of Secunderabad, who was sipping his glass and warming his feet at the fire. “Eh! who’s it by?”

“George Eliot, sir,” replied Hogan.

“Hah!” said the Bishop, as if the name were quite familiar to him. “I don’t know any of his works.”

“Is it true the Prime Minister of England is going to be ‘received’?” asked the Prioress, changing the subject adroitly.

Hogan looked at her in utter amazement, almost doubting his ears; but the Bishop, who knew what was expected of them, replied quite seriously,—

“I heard, on very good authority, that he and all his family, barring the wife, were converted by Monsignor Capel; but it’s kept quiet just at present. It wouldn’t do, you know, to make it public, on account of Parliament being just going to sit.”

“Glory be to God!” ejaculated her reverence piously. “Now, would the most part of the House of Commons follow his example, if that turns out true?”

“Well,” said Hogan quite gravely, “they are very much attached to him: but I doubt if their affection goes quite so far as that. My lord, is it not time we were off?”

“Now don’t go yet,” entreated the Prioress; “it’s three months since I saw you. Ye never told me one word of the grand ball.”

“Ah!” replied her nephew laughing, “you know as much about it this minute as I do, Mother Assumption.”

“No such thing, indeed!” returned she, repudiating the allegation with scorn. “There were a few here, to be sure, that were at it.” She knew every dress that had been seen there perfectly. “But how did you get on?”

“First-rate, ma’am; grand affair.”

“Augh,” growled the Bishop, “don’t lose your time, Assumption, talking to him about low business people like the Lord Mayor of Dublin and that Rafferty lot. Mr. Hogan is got above them entirely, so he is. Nothin’ less than me Lord Ramines and me Lord Brayhead, the swaddler, will content him these times.”

Mother Assumption knew the origin and history of this little innuendo nearly three weeks back. The Bishop was chaplain to her convent; and every morning, while he ate breakfast in her parlour after eight o’clock mass, she came down to hear all the news and exchange information with his lordship. Veronica was first, she having the pleasant task of waiting on him; and by the time his lordship had finished his cutlet and

had poured out his second cup of tea, Reverend Mother had eaten her meagre breakfast in the refectory, and came to relieve Veronica and send her to the lay sisters' table.

She turned her big grey eyes with an expression of mock horror on her cousin. "Augh now, John dear—ah now!"

The gentleman thus adjured, seeing precisely the state of affairs, was ready to burst with laughter; but he wisely concealed his merriment, and shrugging his shoulders, made answer in a lackadaisical, helpless sort of tone.

"I can't help it, Mother Assumption. What would you have? I suppose the next thing to please his lordship and you will be that I am to refuse every brief I chance to be sent from a Protestant attorney's office. People like me can't pick and choose, my dear lady."

"Take a glass of sherry, sir," said his lordship, who had been helping himself not from the decanter of sherry, but from a queer-looking little roundabout glass jar, bearing on a silver chain and label fastened to its neck the inscription "whiskey."

"No, no. I must be off. I have to dress for dinner. Good-bye, reverend Mother! I won't forget 'Middlemarch' and the list at Kelly's." And Hogan, delighted to make his escape, rang the bell for the jocund Veronica and went his way.

"Dear, dear!" said the Bishop, mounting his neat feet on the fender; "how well he's getting on these times! I'm terribly afraid though, Assumption, those swell Protestants may be leading him into—ah, hum—God knows what."

"Surely your lordship has no fear of him losing his faith?" returned the reverend Mother, with a look of genuine anxiety on her face.

"Not that—not that alone; but he's making remarks and turning up his nose and fault-finding with these friends of yours, the Raffertys. Ye see that's always the way. If girls go into Protestant society, oh, nobody's so nice and genteel and refined as Protestant young gentlemen; and then here's John, the same: the refinements and the niceness of the Protestant young ladies!" And the Bishop pursed up his lips and shook his head in a melancholy foreboding way.

"Well, I'm sure he has no reason to fault-find with the Rafferty girls. They'd every extra and everything here, and then off in England

for the accent. What can he be thinking of, at all?" The Prioress spoke in an aggrieved, half-lachrymose tone. "Did he see Mary Brangan, now? She's a splendid girl, and so beautifully dressed!"

But the Bishop raised his eyebrows, and by a gesture of his face testified to the Prioress that even Miss Brangan had failed to impress his obdurate nephew. Then, after a pause, with the easy happy-go-lucky philosophy belonging to his disposition, he added, in a more cheerful tone,—

"God will provide. We must accept our lots, and just pray on. Anyhow," he added, "John had always a great taste for getting on in life."

"Indeed, then, 'twon't be for want of prayers. Sure that lamp is always on St. Gabriel's oratory for him—him and old Mrs. Doolin together," added the Prioress, who, though a good woman of business, certainly was scrupulous and conscientious. "He attends the *saw*crament regularly, doesn't he?" she added in an anxious tone.

"Oh yes," replied the Bishop; "though I believe it is *say*craments he calls them nowadays."

Who would believe the enormous difference that lies in the pronunciation of the first syllable of that word? By *sacrament* is understood the Protestant communion; while *sacrament* expresses the great fundamental dogma of the Catholic Church. Volumes would not suffice to recount the religious, social and nationalistic differences summed up in the mere accentuation of that one syllable.

Mother Prioress seemed to be impressed by this intelligence, as well she might. The bell rang now for Divine Office; and she took her leave, while the Bishop also departed to dine with a country family in Mountjoy Square.