

**OUR BOYS AND GIRLS.  
THE ROMANCE OF PHELIN  
RUADH**

Magdalen Rock in Benziger's Magazine.  
After we finished planting our own few patches of potatoes, I shouldered my sade one morning, before the larks preened their breast-feathers, and crossed the Binban Mountains to Gleann Mor, there to help our cousin, Denis MacDiarmaid, with his planting.

On the second day I wrought with Denis, as we spaded abreast up the South Slope field, camping—for Denis was late with his work this year, and wanted to get out of me, during the week he would have me, the most work he could—a lanky, ill-formed individual with dark red hair, spare countenance, and dressed in well-worn priest's clothes, came over the fields toward us.

"Good mornin', Denis Diarmaid," said he, when he reached us; and "Good mornin', stranger. Benediction an' welcome to ye."

Denis said: "Good mornin' Phelim Ruadh."

I said: "Good mornin' an' thanks kindly!" And I looked the curious fellow up and down.

He sat down, close by us, on a newly set ridge, and drew from some complicated corner of his clothing a very black clay pipe. He looked into the bowl of it, shook his head, and said: "Hew—ew—ew!"

"Is it emp'y, Phelim?" Denis queried.

"As emp'y, Denis, is Eamon Ward's pocket the mornin' he woke in the strange lodgin's in Glasgow."

"Here ye are," said Denis, flinging to him half a foot of twist. "Fill the pipe an' put a chunk in yer pocket."

Phelim seized the piece, and as he calmly examined it, said: "May yer shadow increase, Denis Diarmaid, an' yer days be long in the lan'!"

He fished up a stubby whitish-knife from a deep outer-pocket of his coat (his arm disappearing to the elbow in the act), tore off and teased in his palm as much tobacco as filled the pipe, and then cut—I was observing him closely and curiously—a rather modest piece from the roll. He put the piece into some hole in his clothing, and with profuse and hearty, if stilly spoken, thanks, returned to Denis the remainder.

Denis glanced at it and hastily proffered it back again. "Man dear," he said, "sure I wouldn't tell me name for all ye've tak. Why, man, ye didn't take any at all. Take double as much."

Phelim Ruadh courteously declined the privilege with a graceful wave of his hand. "I thank thee, Denis Diarmaid," he said. "Your generosity to overwhelm me. I have partial to satisfaction. And, Denis, you of course remember the words of the anshint philosopher that so appropriately bear upon the subject?"

"No, then, Phelim," Denis said apologetically, as he still plied the spade; "I'm afraid I don't. My education, as ye know, is a bit backward."

"It was Jalling Saiser, or Aristotle, or Pittytonne—I don't just at the present moment call to memory which—but anyhow, it was some wan or other iv me anshint frien's wife make use iv the aphorism—"Enough," he said, "is as good as a faist." Return thy tobacco to thy pocket, Denis Diarmaid. An' may yer fingers never fin' an emp'y pocket there."

"Very well, Phelim; ye were always too modest. Ye'll fin' a light at the fut iv the ridge."

At the foot of the ridge we had the usual half-a-dozen turf burning for this purpose.

Phelim took up a half-burned one and applied it to his pipe, pressing portions of the burning coal into the bowl and extracting from his mouth great puffs.

Between the puffs he said: "Denis, this me son, on the night ye depart this life (which God delay) may there be rows of winged white angels as quick as palm-sticks, with flamin' torches to light ye on the way to heaven!"

"Thanky, Phelim Ruadh, thanky; an' God reward ye iver for all ver good prayers."

"I have a long way afore me, this mornin' yet. I've to thramp to Gleannamadhu to ou'l Taigy Gildeas (Taigy's) near his last these days, poor man! to give him instructions for daith—an' from that I've to be up again at Meenahilla at nightfall, at Mary Mhor's to houl' a catechiz' class for the Menabilla chilidher that's preparin' for Confirmation. Father Charles tells me he b'lieves he'll be able to induce his Lordship to gi' me Minor Ordinries when he comes round in May." (I looked up at him here; but he was in sober earnest.) "So," said he, "I'll be a wishin' you, Denis Diarmaid, a good mornin' an' a blessin' on yer work. An' the same to you, stranger."

Then he was gone. His stride was long and loose, and not slow; his arms swung as loosely and awkwardly as those on a toy figure; a good rock of smoke floated backward over his left shoulder; his coat-tails sailed along after him. I leaned with folded arms on my spade-head and watched him disappear.

Denis was spading away industriously; after a minute he remarked, as if soliloquizing: "Poor Phelim Ruadh!"

I turned. "Who is Phelim Ruadh, Denis?"

"That's him—a poor half-wit! an' with more larvin' than would maybe bust a wise man's head."

"How did he come by the learning, Denis? He wasn't a half wit born, was he?"

"A half-wit born? No—no." In Denis' "No—no" there was a ring of deep feeling, and his head was shaken in sympathetic accompaniment. "Nor a half-wit breed, neither. No."

"Then what came over the poor fellow, Denis?"

"Ah—h—h!" Denis said, sadly drawing out the exclamation: "that's a story!"

During the two hours succeeding, I think Denis MacDiarmaid did not speak twice.

But he told me the story of Phelim Ruadh that night.

After we quitted work, which was not till the shades of evening were heavy, we supped a hearty meal of good oat stir-about with thick milk, and then we wandered out and down the cassaugh in the moonlight, with our pipes going smoothly, and out on to the road which we followed to the little bridge.

Denis and I sat upon the parapet wall with our legs dangling over the crooning streamlet which gilded beneath. And after we sat here many minutes, absorbing the peace and the beauty of the place and hour, Denis MacDiarmaid, with his plantin'.

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