IRISH SKETCHES AND STORIES

(Bessie O'Kennedy, in New Ireland.)

Patrick O'Reilly was an uncommon small man. "Paddy the Dwarf" the neighbors christened him, and it was certainly very evident that there never was a more suitably applied nickname. His four feet ten inches caused him more worry and annoyance than if he had come into the world with two heads; and many a day and night he spent endeavoring to invent an apparatus by means of which he might add a few inches to his stature, in such a way as to delude the neighbors into the belief that it was solely the result of natural growth. For months and months he labored unsuccessfully, until at length one eventful morning saw the fulfilment of his hopes. He had constructed a wonderful piece of mechanism which, if it only worked as successfully as promised, would more than satisfy his most sanguine expectations. Inside his boots he had fitted a steel arrangement, which, by means of adjustable screws could be gradually raised higher and higher until it finally reached its culminating point four inches from the ground. Of course, boots would, henceforth, be an extravagant item, as special pairs would be required for his purpose, but O'Reilly was a bachelor by taste and by all pretensions.

He had been at work during the small hours of the morning, only completing his task as the first glimmerings of dawn appeared. Turning the screws so as to add half an inch to his height, he put his project to the test and was so overjoyed with the result that, after strutting up and down his room several times in excitement, he strolled down the road with a lordly air, to Johnny Flynn, the tailor's.

Now, Johnny and he had never been the best of friends, and were it not for the fact that the tailor's cattle was the pride of the neighborhood besides being the best catch from a marketable point of view, it is more than likely their friendship would long ago have ceased.

The tailor, who was well aware of O'Reilly's attachment to his daughter, was very averse to their marriage, and once when Patrick had proposed his suit, instead of yielding to the indignation he felt at such a preposterous proposal, he smothered his wrath by exclaiming, "She'd be your wife, Paddy, but the Lord bless you, sure, she's fully a head over you." It would never do for a woman to be looking down on her husband, Paddy, till ye're bothered one night, at least, an' I promise you it's myself that'll be only too glad to see the knot tied before ye."

No doubt, it was the above conversation that first stimulated O'Reilly to work at his strange invention.

Leaving pecuniary circumstances out of the question, he had a heartfelt affection for Kathleen, and she—well, he knew she was glad to see him in a corner of the fair.

Johnny Flynn, an early riser at all times, was just about to begin his day's work when his friend O'Reilly came in sight.

"God save you, John," said he in Irish, looking very pompous by reason of the slight addition to his height.

"God and Mary save you," responded the tailor, but he gave tongue an' isn't it yourself that's out early this cowld morning. I hope nothing's wrong?"

"Nothin's wrong! Can a man not come to visit his sweetheart without vaunt in his lifetime widout the neighbors asking the reason for it?" said O'Reilly, a little ruffled, and the tailor saw he was not in the humor for jokes.

"The truth is, little John," continued he softening a little, "it seems to me it's long enough I've been coortin' Kathleen, an' I thought I'd come down the road the night, an' said I to meself, I'd just walk round and ask Flynn's opinion on it."

"Well, certainly, now as you spake of it," said the tailor, "it's long I've been thinkin' you should look a little bigger than a man in your sweetheart's eyes, Paddy, an' I'm sure I'm willing to insinuate your case, but you know, when the rest of us is stopping in bed, it's a long time to cultivate their acquaintance, but I'll do what I can for you, Paddy, and I promise you I'll speak to Kathleen myself."

"What you know just as much about the matter as the man in the moon," said the angry lover, as he turned to leave the tailor's place. "The only thing I want you to do is to give me a fair chance, and that I can give you is, that, when I'm out of bed this mornin' I was a sight nearer the ceiling than I was the day before yesterday."

"Well, I'm sorry for you, Paddy," said the tailor, but I'm going to spring up of a sudden to open the door for the first customer I see."

"That is no matter, anyhow," replied Flynn, "an' betune ourselves, I don't half like the whole affair, for it strikes me the Good People have a hand in it. Sure, I was just thinkin' since I began, I've heard of a dwarf growing."

"You can [illegible] thought from your mind [illegible] there's not a thrace of [illegible] niver talk to the Fairies [illegible] be the last in the world [illegible] giddin' to him for aught [illegible]."

"No doubt, you're spakin' the truth but it's quare whativer."

"And now, Johnny," said O'Reilly, moving a step nearer his neighbor and lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "if you have no objection, I wud like to draw your attention to a matther of more importance to me than me height. Do you remember me coortin' your daughter a couple of months ago, an' how you told me she grew as high as her father? Do you still consider me too small?"

"Of course, Paddy, of course," replied Flynn, "I'll not contradict that. A promise is a promise, any day, notwithstanding O'Reilly's additional half inch, he would never be wanting in redeeming his pledge."

Time passed—to everybody so it does—and O'Reilly became more and more confident, gradually taller and taller, until finally he felt he could look down upon the tallest of his neighbors without any danger of dislocating his neck.

Meanwhile, he was not idle in other directions. Not a night passed but he was seen wending his way toward the Rath, and he became a familiar figure to the fairies, who, of course, knew his errand and were well pleased that he had recourse to the Good People. Report went even so far as to say that he paid periodical visits to the Rath, and that the King of the Fairies himself endowed him with an additional half-inch on the occasion of every visit.

The tailor, as was only natural, was greatly troubled in mind. There was certainly no doubt that O'Reilly was steadily growing, and, should this growth continue, in less time than he cared to imagine, he would be called upon to surrender his daughter. There was one way out of the difficulty, however, and that lay in his being able to prove the truth of these rumors, for he would never be expected to keep a bargain with a man who had achieved his ends by illegitimate means. Strange to say, nobody for a moment thought of associating O'Reilly directly with the author of his height, or ever imagined that beneath the long coat which reached to the ground, and which he had worn for years, winter and summer, lay a clue to the mystery.

Popular feeling grew daily stronger and stronger, until at length it was determined to hold a consultation at which the best means to adopt in order to set a watch on O'Reilly's proceedings would be decided. After much earnest discourse and as the outcome of a rather heated debate, it was unanimously agreed upon that the tailor with his companions should repair three consecutive night to the Fairy Rath. They were to be in their places by 12 o'clock and to remain in hiding until cock crow, thus making sure of discovering the culprit, should he come between the usual hours for consulting the Fay.

The first two nights of their watch passed off uneventfully. They had been in their places as agreed upon, had stared fixedly for a full three hours at the opening of the rath, and had received nothing but stiff limbs for their patience. Their disappointment at the failure of their plot was increase, and it was with much abated zeal they looked forward to the third night's visit to decide their luck.

It is a remarkable fact that, however secret a matter is kept, in spite of every precaution on the part of those concerned, it invariably leaks out, becoming in no time public property. A shoe of course, to such secrets as are shared by a number of persons, immediately whereon obtaining more than its secrecy exists.

By some means or another, O'Reilly learned the story of the tailor's nightly visits to the Rath, and he became filled with a desire to play a trick on his own. In the side of paving stone he fixed his seat, the tailor no longer noticed it, and he took care to walk round it a few times to ascertain if it had effected its purpose. It had, sure enough—there stood the tailor, glass in hand, singing the praises of his benefactor, and knowing that it was entirely owing to his generosity he was able to enjoy the company of his neighbors, and then, when silence reigned once more cautiously grouped his way to the opening.

The tailor, who had indulged over freely in the whiskey, in consequence, was half asleep when this strange apparition met his gaze, rubbed his eyes in stupid bewilderment, doubting as to whether he was in his right senses or not. For some moments he stared open-mouthed at the tiny fellow before him, until it suddenly dawned on him that the queer person he was so anxious to consult, no other than the King of Fay himself. Tremulously nudging his companions, but in whom were well on their way to dreamland, he directed their stupified gaze to the little fellow with the queer face and quaint dress.

For a full five minutes all three gazed wonderingly at O'Reilly, too terrified to stir, or make known their presence by word or act. Now that they had come face to face with this eerie personage, all their premeditated speeches went for naught, and had not O'Reilly, himself, broken the silence, it is more than likely they would have returned home not a whit the wiser of what they had come to ascertain.

"I knew ye all, ye connivers," said he, in deep guttural tones, "you, John Flynn, an' you Ned Byrne, an' you Thady Moran, an' be the same token I know well what brings ye here whin every honest man is in his bed. Ah! ye may well make the sign o' the cross an' ask forgiveness of yer sins, for let me tell ye, that a man that puts no thrust in his neighbor isn't worth a thrauneen, an' what's more he doesn't desarve to have luck. What brought ye here if it wasn't that ye had underhand work in yer sleeves? Ye thought, did ye, ye poor innocent believers, that ye'd find Paddy O'Reilly wid me. Whi, like an decent man, it's in his own house he'd be at this hour of night. Sure, he has a dale more sense than to be gallivantin' round the country, seekin' our advice, whin, be all accounts, no man wants it less! Ye thought, whin ye saw the rale growth of him, that it was as how I had put the comether on him. Well, go home an' learn sense, ye poor forsaken crathures, for ye might as well accuse me of puttin' the growth on Father Molowney, yer parish priest. An' now, before ye go, let me tell ye what, for yer own sakes, the laste ye say about yer seein' me the better, for be it known to ye that it reaches to O'Reilly's ears, he will soon find out the raison that brought ye, an' nothin' thin will satisfy him, but he has the law o' ye, for misleadin' an honest man's character. Go in wan of his Majesty's lodgin' houses ye'll be thin instead o' comin' here discoursin' wid me, I'm afraid. However, as I'm willing to forgive ye, I'll give ye a friendly piece of advice little as ye desarve it: Very wan knows that ye, Thady Flynn, had the most to say agin O'Reilly, an' that it was long wid the cudgel ye would be after giving him on his thrack, but I'm afraid, if I'd strongly advise you to give your daughter to him at wanst, for although he wudn't hesitate handin' you over to the police now, he'd die hinderly rather than see you married to anyone but his own son. Ye know, Johnny, that ye wid be sorry for the day ye'd make an enemy of him. I'll say no more to ye now, but let ye be off as quick as ye can, an' as partin' shot I hope it will be the last time ye'll trouble yerself about an honest man's affairs.

Thereupon O'Reilly, waving his hand to the astonished audience, disappeared stealthily into the darkness. The tailor, glad to escape so easily, was the first to recover from the effect of the interview. Not so his companions, the expression of fear and repentance on Flynn's particular face, for instance, was such that his words of advice were unanimously directed to him. Not a word was spoken by any of the party during the return journey, the last echo of O'Reilly's voice had died away in the distance, when the tailor's door was reached—in his case, it was home—he turned to his companions, and, with a "Good night, Campbell, Wm. Ingoldsby, Tommy" [illegible] disappeared within his own door.

It was with one little shriek he saw, on going into his workshop the morning, the tailor standing outside in the foot waiting to gain admittance.

"Good morning, Paddy," said he, in answer to O'Reilly's mute look of enquiry. "I came to thank you for that bottle of whiskey you sent round last night, an' also to say as how I haven't forgotten me promise about yourself an' Kathleen. She's a good callin', God bless her, an' it's herself that'll make the happy man of him that gets her. An' Paddy, woman knows better than yourself how hard it'll be for me to part wid her, but sure it was only last night I was thinkin' that, perhaps it was a sin against me to come between the two of ye, for misfortune has the way of it, that it's the unlikely thing happens most often. Sure, I'm willing to give you my daughter, an' her happiness, an' that is the best I can do, Paddy, for I'm not the man to interfere with the happiness of a good man. I hadn't any right to interfere. You're a lucky fellow, Paddy, for you're the only man she iver throubled her head about, an' rest assured yourself is the only man she'll iver get. Ye're in or about the wan height now, an' I was thinkin' if you'd name the day I'd see to ye havin' a nittin' weddin'."

O'Reilly, of course, was profuse in his thanks. There and then they arranged that the marriage should take place before the week was out.

Old zeal is only to be cozened by young hypocrisy.

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THE FIRST LOVE OF SIR HUMPHREY POTTER

Many persons considered that the time had come when Sir Humphrey Potter, with his wealth and his title should take a wife. Some of these had daughters. They were only anxious for the dear girls' happiness. No one, however, cared to speak to him on such subjects as love and marriage. He would have thought them frivolous.

He was never frivolous.

It was only possible to interest him in serious matters; business transactions for preference, politics on which he had decided views, and in his lighter moods, it was difficult to conceive him as a lover. His tall, portly form seemed always to reflure about it, the red mahogany and shining leather of his office. Laughter, while in conversation with Sir Humphrey, seemed out of place. It was, said an irreverent person, as the cracking of thorns under a Potter.

Mrs. Latimer had described him as portentous. She owned that the exact meaning of the word had escaped her for the moment, but she had an inner consciousness that it contained an exact description, and somehow it was not to be disproved by any dictionary person.

He was a self-made man. That was evident. No one else would have ventured to make him. Self-made, he argued to the contrary.

He was enormously rich, and had obtained a knighthood by judicious subscriptions. He paid good salaries to his clerks, but when a fund was started at the Mansion House he pressed nobly to the front. Pressing money for the poor people he felt was the best way to get on the Aldermanic Bench, and he was ambitious to be Lord Mayor of London. Sir Humphrey dropped his voice when he spoke of the poor, as he would have done if he had been addressing the blind and deaf. Nearly all his charities were connected with blind institutions, and he had a peculiar way of speaking of them as "poor souls" which was very consoling to the recipients.

Sir Humphrey was a bachelor, and a Benedick of the old school. He was well-to-do when he was in the T market. He had seen Miss Latimer first although he was a little shy of her. Superior old bachelors are apt to be afraid of a young woman, and Sir Humphrey cautiously lifted a corner of his bedroom blind and peered out. He was not curious to see Miss Latimer. He was a man of great dignity of presence this lady, to whom he had never had occasion to speak, had often told him so, but he felt he did not look his best at that particular time. His hair fell in a fringe over his forehead—which did not suit him—and his face shone with the perspiration engendered by a hot July night. It also required the gentle touch of a razor. The fat rows of man in the long white shirt (he clung to the old-fashions). With big bare feet and rumpled hair, was as ridiculous and unpleasant to the eye as Sir Humphrey Potter, an hour later, would be dignified and imposing.

It was not for the purpose of observing the beauties of Nature that he thus delayed his toilet, but rather that he might watch Miss Latimer, the daughter of his old friend and present host, and her cousin Clarissa, who were walking in the garden. They were enjoying the fresh morning air; Clarissa for the sake of the thousand delicate scents that mingled with it and the sweet, glad song of the birds; Miss Latimer chiefly for the sake of her complexion. She did not care much for the songs of the birds; she preferred music from the comic operas. And as for the delicate scents of the waking flowers—she had been known to purchase patchouli.

Miss Latimer's whole attention was at that period of her existence engrossed by her numerous love affairs. Her talk was of young men. Her great purpose was to obtain a husband; a young and handsome, so much the better, but the only indispensable adjunct was wealth. She was little, plump and pretty, with beautiful eyes that she could use effectively on very young men. Those walked with her, talked with her (she would giggle at remarks that should have been received with a cold silence), and flirted with her. She would allow no arm to steal round her waist in her parents' presence (not about). It was significant that the owner of the arm was equally willing to remove it should they appear. The young men did not propose a permanent engagement. They thought her good fun. A man rarely marries a girl he thinks "good fun."

She was called Flo. It seemed a necessary consequence. There are many homely, stately women in the world named Florence, but it would seem an insult to address them as "Flo." However, the name suited Miss Latimer to perfection.

And Clarissa?

A tall, slender girl, bearing herself with a queenly grace and dignity that little Flo, push herself out and pull herself in as she might, could never imitate. Mme. X., of Bond street, may make a figure well, that she cannot rule its movements. Nature can do both. But Clarissa, who had had no experience, [illegible] Miss Latimer's young men friends (she called them "the boys"), thought her cousin Clarissa stuck up. They told each other so. But a smile from her would have brought any one of them to her feet. For Clarissa, [illegible] the blind and deaf, considered studies and charities appeals strongly to masculine vanity. Clarissa was really beautiful and a nice girl, with a large fortune. Her gentlemen friends, who adored Flo, thought Clarissa "good form." But she was not popular with her sex. Her graduates and donors [illegible] society. But now she took [illegible] to show them how [illegible] Clarissa [illegible] Sir Humphrey [illegible] Latimer's business [illegible] Latimer [illegible] Sir Humphrey [illegible] Clarissa [illegible] Sir Humphrey [illegible] Clarissa [illegible] Sir Humphrey [illegible] Clarissa