

LUKE DELMEGE.

BY THE REV. F. A. SHEEHAN, AUTHOR OF "MY NEW COUNTRY," "GEOFFREY AUSTIN: STUDENT," "THE TRIUMPH OF FAILURE," "CITIZEN MRS.," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—CONTINUED.

A LECTURE ON BIOLOGY.

He did; but cost him a tremendous effort. He had trained himself so perfectly to self-restraint, particularly in his language, that his measured words fell, at first, on a cold and unsympathetic audience. He introduced the subject in connection with the great All Souls' Feast, which had just passed. He wished to prove that love for the dead was always a characteristic of the race, that soldiers prayed for dead comrades—ay, even for the enemy they had destroyed. Then he spoke of Cremona; of the two regiments, Dillon's (the old Mountcashel Brigade) and Burke's, that were quartered in the city. He drew a picture of the great French army, asleep in the famous Italian city—the stealthy approach of the enemy—their successful entry—their bivouac on the square while the garrison slept. The congregation was up at the old familiar names—Dillon, Burke, Mountcashel. The U. S. pensioner and the Crimean veteran rose in their seats. And as Luke went on to describe the revelle at midnight, the sleepers arose from dreams to the terrible cry: "The enemy is upon us!" The student, a valiant for arms, and then the mighty valor with which they pressed back to the very pronounced address, flung their arms unaided on the foe, and drove them beyond the walls, and then drove back at the bridge-gate that commanded the town entrance, and drove back charge after charge of the cuirassiers—and all this, while their marshal was in the hands of the enemy—his life itself gone, the emphasis of Celtic imagination the value of this remnant of the Irish Brigade. There was a broad smile on the face of the people as he spoke of the deshabille and unfinished toilettes of these Irish exiles; but when he went on to describe how, after the battle, the victors went out to bury the dead, and found some hundreds of their fellow countrymen amongst the American dead, who had fallen under their own fire, and how they knelt and prayed over the dead, and then built a mighty cross over their remains, Celtic fire yielded to Celtic sorrow; and for the first time in his life, Luke saw tears on the faces of his audience. He went on to speak of the Calvaries that were everywhere erected in Catholic countries on the Continent—by the wayside, on mountain summits, at the corners of streets; and he expressed great surprise that in a Catholic country like Ireland, such manifestations of faith and piety were almost unknown. He closed his discourse by a homily on Death—his own recent bereavement adding pathos to his words—and turned to the altar, with a full heart.

The first fruit of his sermon was visible in an excellent dinner. Mary's temper was variable; and her mood affected her cuisine. This day, she did not know whether to laugh or to cry. The picture of these Irish fellows rushing straight from their beds at the foe, and driving, half armed and unarmoured, four thousand Germans from the city, tickled her fancy. Then, the thought of Luke's mother (o whose death he had delicately alluded) subdued her; but she walked on air all that day; and Luke saw delicacies whose very names were unknown to him. And Mary told John confidentially: "I know the matter was always right; but priests can't talk out their minds, like common people."

There was a vast and sudden change, too, in the attitude of the great bulk of the parishioners. Instead of the shy, furtive looks—half-frightened, half-respectful—men walked up to him with a certain gay freedom, and a contented smile. "A fine day," said Luke. "And the women courted, and whispered: 'God bless your reverence every day you live!'"

The village butcher, who held very strong National principles, and who was usually taciturn, if not surly, towards Luke, grew suddenly familiar. And sweetbreads, and liver, and kidneys began to pour into Luke's larder. And from afar, women brought in their early turkeys, for which they could get ten shillings a pair, and the yard became melodious with the cackling. And now when he passed the young men on their Sunday walks, or going to work, instead of the silent, cold reverence of old with which they doffed their hats as they passed by, there was assumed a certain jaunty air of familiarity; and as they would say, "Well, your reverence, it was a good joke—that of those Irish sun-cultures, tearing like mad through the streets and squares of Cremona."

About a fortnight after, as Luke was going out to say last Mass, he thought he saw something unusual in the landscape. He rubbed his eyes, and scrutinized carefully every minute feature, now so well known to him. Beyond the red tiles of the village roofs stretched the precipitous slope of woodland and forest in which the Lodge nestled. The Lodge was hardly visible in summer, so thick was the foliage of beeches, and oaks, and elms. But there was always visible a white pencil of a flagstaff, crossed by a yardarm, and netted with white ropes. The gilt ball on its stem, and when the England gleamed like a red flag against the black foliage. Sometimes it was the Union Jack, sometimes the flag of an admiral of the high seas, sometimes one symbol, sometimes another; but always the flag of England. And some of the villagers passed it by unnoticed, and some stared at it curiously; and some, especially on days when the staff was guarded by all the flag signals in the British Navy, crested low and deep, at the symbol of their subjection. This day, it was a gleam of

red, against the deep umbers and ochres of the autumn woods; and right behind it, and cresting the summit of the hill, and clearly outlined against the gray sky, was an immense black cross. Luke rubbed his eyes again, and called Mary.

"Do you see anything strange there right over the Lodge?" he asked.

Where, your reverence?" said Mary, smiling, and looking everywhere but in the right direction. She had been in the secret for the last fortnight.

"There," said Luke, pointing. "There seems to be something unusual against the horizon line."

"Oh! so there is," said Mary, slowly making the discovery. "There's something like a cross."

Then Luke saw that Mary was smiling.

After Mass, Luke strolled around the road that swept through the village and ran behind the General's demesne even to the summit. On the highest point of the hill the road out of the demesne from the farms that were in the vicinity. And inside a Hawthorn hedge and beyond the General's, the demesne was a mighty maze of stone, moss-grown, and lichen-covered, and dating from Druid times. It was visible for miles around, and was still known as Knock-na-Coppaleen, the Little Hill of the Little Houses. No one dared touch it, though it was well known that gold was piled beneath; for didn't Farmer Mahony, a hard unbeliever, once remove a few stones from the cairn to repair a ditch, and wasn't he struck dead on the spot, and weren't the stones brought back to him by invisible hands? Yet it could hurt no one to place the all-conquering Sign there—and there it was, creating the cairn, an immense cross, with the spear and sponges, and a crown of real thorns hanging in the centre. Luke gazed long at the mighty symbol; then, turning round, he noticed that the turf or grass surface had been removed in regular patches on the face of the high slope. He moved down, far down, and then looked upward. Yes! unmistakably, in clear cut letters on the grassy swards, and so large that they might be read from the far hills of Clare, that to day looked near and threatening, were the words—

FRASED BE JESUS CHRIST, FOREVER!

It was fortunate for Luke Delmege that this momentary contact with the best side of human nature had softened his feelings towards men. Because he was just now face to face with that most deadly temptation—to despise and snrink from his kind, and to live in such solitariness of thought, that would barely allow a margin of time for the discharge of sacred duties. The mighty abstraction, Humanity, which he had worshipped in the high atmosphere of thought, had been rudely dispelled, and had left only the sordid precipitate of a few wrecked fragments of bones and dust. And in the awful revelations of the grave he read the utter insignificance of human life. He began to perceive, too, that his close observation of nature, that the same law was everywhere—life and death, the bosom of death, and then chased back into death again by the operations of some inexorable law. It was with infinite pity he saw how, in the springtime of the year, buds had scarcely unfolded themselves in tender, silky leaves, when frost, or cancer, or blight withered and dried up their infantine beauty; and, on the other hand, the leaves were hardly changed in color under October frosts, when tiny buds shot forth only to be paralysed and shrunk under the icy breath of winter. So, too, in the fairest child, death and decay made themselves manifest. Scarcely had life begun, when death stood by the cradle, his thousand-winged messenger of disease hovering around that infant form to arrest its growth and smother it. The curious teeth and girls affected lips of young boys and girls affected with all its sights and smells—its iodophor and creosote, and carbolic, the ill smelling wardens against decomposition and dissolution—made him sick. Death and decay haunted all Nature like a hideous spectre. So, too, in his reading, Luke gave up everything that was merely ephemeral. History he could not bear. What was it but the record of human passion and folly—the madman's theatricals of a race that most cheat time and ennui with its battles and diplomacy, and whose stage mimicry would be a tragedy, if its unimportance did not make it ludicrous? No. There was nothing lasting but the Idea and the Soul; and Luke turned away with loathing from his race and sought earth only in the sing of peace further inward on him. He was driven further inward on him by the attitude of his brethren towards him. They were kind, but critical. Their swift, impetuous ways, always seeking action, action—their emphatic principles, their intolerance of abstractions, and their insistence on facts; and all this coupled with an idealism that seemed to him utterly visionary and impractical, alienated his sympathies from them. He was always a minority in society, except, in the society of his beloved pastor, whose suave gentleness subdued all riotous questioning on his part. And he haunted the mountains, and the streams and the pine-woods, and came home happy from his association with the peace of Nature. A day on the lonely mountains, sitting over the rough bridge which spanned the yellow torrent, with the farnes and the bracken waving around him, and a hare leaping out to wonder at him, and the whir of the partridge over his head, and the fresh clean air wrapping him around like a cool garment on a fever patient, and the long lone vistas stretching away to the hazy hills that crowned the pathway of the lordly Shannon, was an un-pesakable pleasure. But it was forbidden. Not in action alone, or in thought alone, but in the interplay of thought and action, true life consists. And Luke was saved from this morbidity for a time by the opening up of men's hearts towards him. And when again he was driven back upon himself, this generous expansion

of his people's affections always protected him from the temptation of contempt. Immediately after the events narrated in the last chapter, he made two gallant attempts to get into touch with the outer world. He was stung into making an attempt by some un-blessed thing he had heard. They were but two simple phrases and they meant so much. "Sub nubes!" He only heard in a whisper; but oh! how much it signified! And that cruel and unjust saying of Lactantius: "Literati non habent fidem!" so untrue, yet so easily applicable on the lips of the un-charitable, cut him to the quick, as it magnified the episcopal warning into a grave censure, which might be removed by Mother Church but never by the world. He determined to assert himself—to come out into the arena, as he had so often stepped into the palm-leaf of his college, and show himself for all he was worth. There were two ways open to him, literature and the pulpit; two weapons, the voice and the pen.

He took down his books—some, alas! mildewed and damp from want of use—and set to work carefully. He gave himself full time for careful elaboration and in six weeks he had a paper ready for the press. They were the happiest six weeks he had spent since his return to Ireland. Blessed was the day that he wrote that labor of his days of his life! He got his essay carefully typewritten, though typing was a costly novelty at the time, and sent it to the editor of the great weekly, that was just then setting out boldly on his career as the organ of Science, Literature, Polemics and Art, for all that was cultured in the country. In a few weeks, alas! the little roll was returned, with this letter: "Office of The Indicator, April 6, 188—

"My Dear Luke—In compliance with your modest request, and the dictates of the editorial conscience, I read your paper from Alpha to Omega. Like the famous critic who opened 'The Ring and the Book' for the first time, the dreadful suspicion crossed my mind: Have I become suddenly demoralized? On the suggestion of my sub, we read the paper backwards; and then a great light dawned. Nothing could give me greater pleasure than to oblige an old schoolmate; but if I published your paper, there would be an immediate demand for auxiliary asylums all over the country; and the doctors would at last have a tangible cause for the increase in insanity. Instead of tracing it to that harmless drug, called tea. Accepting your theory, however, about the Ideality of Contradictories, I accept your paper; and in the same sense, you will hereby find enclosed a check for £20.

I am, dear Luke, yours etc.,

THE EDITOR.

"P. S.—You will pardon an editor's joke, for *avid lang syne's* sake. But, my dear Luke, you are a hundred years behind or a hundred years in advance of your age. Don't you know we are just now passing through the 'bread and butter' cycle? that we have hung up *Erin go Bragh*; and are taking Sidney Smith's advice about Erin-go-bread-and-butter—Erin-go-bread-without holes in them, etc. etc.?"

Write me something practical, though agricultural, such as the quantity of nitrogen in a cubic foot of solid guano, how to get sulphur out of turnips, and sugar of phosphorus out of apples, or anything that will help on the material prosperity of the country; but abstain from your idealism, and not only for a time, but forever. How I envy you!

O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norunt!

My only chance of exercise is on a piano stool, which is tipped; and on which I make conditionally three or four grand gallops every day. And you, on your gallant steed, springing the earth, and climbing the heavens! Ah me!"

Luke read the letter three or four times. He was disappointed; but he could not be angry. The good humour of his old classmate disarmed him. And certainly it was a good joke, that Luke Delmege, the practical, the realist, should be warned off from the dangers of a too exuberant imagination.

"There is no end to the human enigmas," he said, as he tied the roll and flung it into the recesses of his bookcase.

Some months after, he was invited to lecture at a great literary club in the city. The letter of invitation implied that Luke's estrangement from the active life of the Church among his admirers was a great loss to the cause of the sciences; and the disappointment of many who had been anticipating a great treat from Matthew's remarks on biology. But he came in late—he said purposely so—and was accommodated with a seat at the furthest end of the hall. He took his young man, took out his red silk handkerchief and folded it on his knee, leated slightly forward, folding his right hand over his ear, and listened. Luke was just saying that scientists had not yet fully determined whether man was a regenerate and fully-evolved anthropoid ape, or whether the anthropoid ape was a degenerate man; and he had just said that he had lately been in London on a certain mission, called Sally, who was made to count numerals up to ten by placing straws in her mouth. Matthew's face lengthened, as he listened with open mouth. He couldn't believe his ears. He looked around cautiously to see what effect these extraordinary statements would produce on the faces of the young men around him. They listened preternaturally solemn. He listened again. This time Luke was using manly, profane language. Matthew looked around. The boys shook their heads mournfully and nudged each other. They then looked to Matthew for a cue. "I thought so," he said, drawing in his breath sharply. "I knew my senses didn't deceive me. Did any mortal man ever hear the like from a priest before?" But, then, he was a more mistaken in yer life. Since the day I took the teetotal pledge for life from Father Matcha, me friend, don't there in the bowlin' green, exactly

whispered a young man, who read Matthew's mind as it were a book. "It's knowledge," he said, "that has made me uncharitable." Surely he hears an-hrines mysteries and secrets beyond the power of his own divination! His young spirits bowed back at this generous introduction; and he spoke under the intoxication of stimulated genius. His reception by the audience, too, was cordial, almost enthusiastic. His fine figure, a face animated with the glow of talent and the excitement of a novel experiment, his clear, well-modulated, ringing voice, that sounded quite musical even after the splendid chorus of the Orchestral Union of the society, seemed to awaken all present to the fact that his lecture was to be something quite unique in their experience. Nor were they disappointed. It was a clear, well-knit lecture, full of facts, as well as arguments; and when Luke completed a peroration in which he welcomed every form of modern science, every declaration that the cry of the Church in every age most of all in our own, is for "Light! more light! that all knowledge may finally expand and be lost in the Light Supernal,"—the audience, mostly young men, arose, and gave him an ovation that seemed to console him for all his years of enforced seclusion. One member, after another stood up to express his gratitude; and then, there—there—that "little rift within the lute," that was tingling so musically in the ears. For one member made a comic speech about the "blastoderms" and "gemmules" and "amœba" which Luke had introduced into his lecture; and another hinted the suspicion that it was fine, but was it sound? It was flushed angrily. The president intervened. He took Luke's part nobly; and, being a man of vast erudition and unimpeachable honour, his words were regarded as final. But the sting remained. And for many months did Luke puzzle himself with the enigma that the more closely he studied, and the more accurately he expressed himself, the more he was misunderstood. He spoke angrily on the subject once to a lively confrere.

"I'd advise you, Luke," said the latter, "to keep to Gratian and Theodosius, and not to touch a Republic, or a Was Napoleon a greater warrior than Wellington? You can't trip there."

"But I didn't trip," protested poor Luke.

"Of course not! of course not!" said the confrere.

But there was one member of the audience that amused evening who was utterly disgusted and dissatisfied. Matthew O'Shaughnessy was a retired merchant, who had accumulated a pretty fortune in the bacon and butter trade; he wisely determined to retire from business, and, with his excellent wife, to spend the twilight of their lives in peace. He was a very pious man; kind, and good, and charitable, almost to a fault. But he had one imperfection—only one; and that, very venial. He was critical, especially about matters affecting religion or the Church. He always raised his silk hat for he was a dreadful formalist and belonged to the old school—when passing a priest in the street; kindly, if he met an acquaintance; ostentatiously, if he met a stranger. But he would not salute a priest who was cycling. He thought it undignified and unbecoming.

He sat, on Sunday, a little distance from the pulpit; so that, being somewhat deaf, especially in the left ear, he might see him, and watch his expression and gestures. When the gospel of the day had been read, which Matthew followed word by word from his prayer book to see was it correctly rendered, he sat with the audience, but slightly turned towards the wall, and with his right hand on his forehead, and his left hand on his knee, he listened. He was struck by the preacher's plainness of expression and gestures. When the gospel of the day had been read, which Matthew followed word by word from his prayer book to see was it correctly rendered, he sat with the audience, but slightly turned towards the wall, and with his right hand on his forehead, and his left hand on his knee, he listened. He was struck by the preacher's plainness of expression and gestures. 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