

THE CATHOLIC RECORD.

2

LUKE DELMEGE.

BY THE REV. P. A. SHEEHAN, AUTHOR OF
"MY NEW CURATE," "GEOFFREY
AUSTIN: STUDENT," "THE
TRUMP OF FAILURE,"
"CITHARA MEA," ETC.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PARLIAMENTARY DINNER.

It was part of the programme that Luke should invite his brother priests to dine. He was one of the few curates who enjoyed the privilege of "separate maintenance," and the privilege entailed some responsibilities, and, amongst them, the initial one of giving a "house-warming." He had some nervous qualms and difficulties about it. His prim, cold, English manner had not made him a favorite with the brethren, whose quick, breezy volubility he disliked, and whose attempts at easy familiarity he rather resented. But he felt he should come down from the stilts, if he were to get on at all in this strange country, where every one seemed to live in a kind of indolent and easy unconsciousness.

"I hope, my dear young friend," said the gentle and kind old pastor, in that tone of urbane and deferential friendship which characterized him, "that you will not go to any extremes in this little entertainment. Your revenue here will be extremely limited; and, in any case, it is always well not to be singular."

"O, no, sir," said Luke. "I shall attempt nothing beyond what is usual on these occasions. To be very candid, indeed, I should just as soon not be obliged to hold these entertainments. I don't care much for them; and I have a lively horror of a dining-room and all its appliances."

"You know you must command everything you require here," said the old man. "If you would kindly send up your servant, my housekeeper will be most happy to send you any glass, or table linen, or cutlery you require."

"I am sure I'm most grateful, sir," said Luke. "We shall say 5 o'clock on Thursday."

The dinner passed off well. Even the stiff formality of the host could not subdue the vivacity of his younger guests, which effervescence and bubbled over in jest, and anecdote, and swift, subtle repartee. Nowhere on earth is there such wit and merriment as at a clerical dinner in Ireland. May it be always so, in this land of faith and frolic!

John was waiter; and John was gorgeous in white front and swallow-tailed coat. This idea of a waiter was rather an innovation, which some were disposed to resist; and it palled a little on their spirits; until there was a stumble, and a crash of broken glass in the hall, and the spell was broken. Luke flushed angrily. John was imperturbable. He explained afterwards: "Where's the use in talkin' 'em? Sure, things must be broke."

It was the calm philosophy of Celtic fatalism. Now, Luke, as he had once explained before, had made the most determined, cast-iron resolution never, under any circumstances, to be inveigled into a discussion on any subject, because, as he explained, it is impossible to conduct a debate on strictly parliamentary lines in Ireland. This, of course, was very chilling and unfriendly; but he thought it wiser and safer. As for human resolutions! What can a man do in Charybdis, but fling out his arms for succor?

"That reminds me," said a young curate, who had been classmate with Luke in Maynooth, "of a legend of our college days, of a student, who was strictly forbidden to enter the rooms of a professor, his uncle. He tried several stratagems, but in vain; for Jack was as cute as a fox. Then, on the plan of dragging the coal scuttle, and tumbling over it, just at Jack's door. And Jack should come out to see and help the poor servant in his emergency. And then—the warm fire, and the glass of wine."

"I don't see the application of your anecdote," said Luke, who was very much put about by the accident in the hall.

"Let me see," said the other. "I don't think I understand any application. But let me see! Oh, yes! I really would not have noticed that clever Ganyemede were it not for that crash in the hall. Accidents are required to develop genius."

"It is really interesting," said the old pastor, "to behold how easily our people fit into their surroundings. You can turn an Irishman into a waste material in Ireland, and turn it into all beautiful forms of utility and loveliness. I knew that poor fellow," said the old man, in his kind way, "when he nearly broke the heart of the archdeacon by his insobriety and untruthfulness. I never thought that you could transform him so rapidly."

The little complaint made Luke proud, and broke his cast-iron resolution into smithereens. He called for more hot water and coffee, and settled down to a pleasant academic discussion.

"Yes," he said, folding his napkin over his knees, "the Irish are a plastic race; but the mould in which they are newly cast should never be allowed to run cold. If it is so suffered, they are stereotyped forever. It is a land of cast-iron conservatism. You cannot break away from originality without becoming a monster. It is the land of the Pyramids and the Sphinxes, with all the newer races staring at it, and giving it up as a puzzle."

"It would no longer be a puzzle," said the young priest above mentioned, "if we were allowed to solve it in our own way. But, it has ever been our misfortune that a blind man is always called upon to solve a riddle."

"I'm not quite so sure of that," said Luke, tossing his sonant over his knees, with the old ecclesiastical department is not so much meddled with; and behold where we are!"

"And where are we?" said the other.

"I should say somewhere in mediaeval times," said Luke. "Compare our ideas of man's fitness or unfitness for a certain position, with those which obtain the wide world over. In every other department of life you ask, 'Is this man fit?' In our department, you ask, 'How long is he on the mission?' So, too, you never judge a man's actuality by the net amount of work he has done, or is capable of doing, but by what did he get? The meaning of which enigmas is, what prizes did he take in the days of his small clothes and his seminary?"

"You shouldn't complain, Father Delmège," said an old priest; "Maynooth has left its hall-mark upon you, and you cannot rub it off."

"Thank you, Father," said Luke; "but it is just as absurd to speak of it as a great theologian, because he gained a prize in theology thirty or forty years ago, as to speak of a man as a great warrior, because he was captain in a successful snowball sortie at Eton; or as a great artist in black and white, because he drew a caricature of his teacher on the blackboard of a country school."

"I often heard that Eton won Waterloo," said the other.

"One of the world's, or history's falsehoods," said Luke. "It was the starved commissariat of the French, and the treachery of Grouchy, that lost Waterloo, and the well-filled bellies of the British, and the help of Blucher, that won it. It was the victory of stupidity and roast beef over genius and starvation."

"Now, nonsense, De mège; every one admits that in the career of every great man his early triumphs are recorded as indications of his future."

"I have not noticed it," said Luke, "because all the great men of my acquaintance never cast their heroic shadows in the halls of a university; but this is Ireland all out. You attempt to nail the shadows on the grass, and then believe them realities."

Luke had scored. It was a Pyrrhic victory, and a dangerous one, for it flushed him. His cast-iron resolution was not flung to the winds.

"But to return," he said. "We are just passing through another transition stage, where the new moulding of our people's character is about to take place. Let us be careful that the new ideals are right, before the genius of the race is fixed forever."

"There are so many artists at the work now," said the young priest, "that they can hardly blunder."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Luke. "In a multitude of counsellors there is much wisdom, but that supposes that the counsellors can agree upon something. I see nothing before us but to accept the spirit of the century, and conform to the Anglo-Saxon ideal."

This was known to be Luke's pet hobby; but he had never formulated it before. The whole table flared up in an angry flame of protest.

"The Anglo-Saxon ideal? A civilization where Mammon is god, and every man sits with one eye on his ledger—the other on his liver!"

"The Anglo-Saxon ideal? A nation of dead souls, and crumbling bodies!"

"The Anglo-Saxon ideal? The young priest before mentioned was his feet, gesturing furiously, his hoarse, rasping voice drowning the angry protests of the brethren. Luke grew quite pale under the ecumenical he had excited.

"Yes," he said, "you have to face civilization for good or ill, or create a civilization of your own. The people are losing the poetry of the past—their belief in Celtic superstitions and customs. Can you create a new poetry for them? Can you fight, and beat back your invaders, except with their own weapons?"

"Better the whole race were swept into the Atlantic," said the young priest, "than that they should compromise all their traditions and their honour by accepting the devil's code of morals. One race after another has been annihilated in this fast, destiny for four thousand years. But they passed away with honour untarnished. So shall we!"

"Oh, my dear dear Father!" said Luke, "deprecatingly, 'if you are prepared to sit down and accept the inevitable, all right! There is no need for further argument. Let us fold our togas around us as we fall. But if the struggle is still to continue, there is no much use in kite-flying, in the hope that we are going to catch down the lightning of heaven on our opponents."

"I suppose 'tis Destiny," said the young fire-eater, resuming his seat. "But, better be exterminated a hundred times than turned into money grabbers and beef eaters."

"It's only the cyclical movement in all history, noticed by all great thinkers, and formulated by Vico and Campanella," said the young priest, "that the world is a *foceful*, 'the corse and ricorsi of all human progress; and there is one great luminous truth running through it all—that he who cannot govern himself must allow himself to be governed by another; and that the world will always be governed by those who are superior in nature."

It is a little thing that turns the Irish mind from anger or despair to laughter. "Would you please pass down the corse and ricorsi of that coffee and hot water?" said the young wit; and lo! the discussion ended in a roar of merriment.

Just then a sweet, clear, girlish voice, just outside the window, which was raised this warm, summer evening, sang softly, and with great feeling, the first lines of Lady Dufferin's pathetic ballad—

"I'm sitting on the stile, Mary, where we sat side by side."

It was so sweet and mournful, there in that Irish village, with the golden sun streaming over the landscape, and the air warmed and perfumed with the sweet odour of the honeysuckle that clambered around the window; and it seemed so appropriate, that the priests were hushed into silence. It wrapped in music the whole discussion, which had just terminated. It was the cooing of the Banshee over the fated race.

"I'm bidden you a long farewell, my Mary kind and true!"

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"I'm bidden you a long farewell, my Mary kind and true!"

But I'll not forget you, darlin', in the land I'm goin' to!"

They say there's bread and work for all, and the sun shines always there, But I'll not forget old Ireland, were it fifty times as fair.

Not a word was spoken at the dinner table till the singer concluded. It was the infinite pathos of Ireland! The girl came to the open window, and pleaded. She was a tall, slim young girl, dark as an Italian, the hood of her light, black shawl scarcely concealing the black curls that hung down on her forehead. The plate went round; and she held more silver that evening in her hands than she had ever seen in her life before.

"If Father Meade were here," said Dr. Keatinge with a smile, "he would say it was the ghost of Erin—the ghost of a departed people."

"I'll not forget you, darlin'," solicited the young priest, "but they do forget you, darlin'! And what is more, earth, or in the nether hell," he said vehemently, bringing his hand down heavily on the table, "a more contemptible being than he, who, seduced by the glitter and glare of foreign civilizations, has come to despise his motherland."

"Now, now, that song has excited you, Cole," said his neighbour, "I'm sure," he protested; "but I tell you, 'tisn't English steel, but foreign gold we fear."

"Never mind, Cole," said another, "the corse and ricorsi will swing around again in their cycles, and Ireland will come uppermost!"

"Yes!" he hissed, "if she does not forget her destiny."

"And what might be, Cole?" shouted one or two, laughing at his vehemence.

"What might that be? What would have been the destiny of the Jewish race if they had not rejected Christ?"

"Delmège, compose this fellow's nerves, and sing 'The Muster'."

But no! Luke had forgotten "The Muster"—he couldn't recall the words—it was many years since he sang it, etc. He sang:—

Oh! do not meet me like this make amends!

"I wouldn't doubt him," said the fire-eater. "He's the Canon's pupil, and an apt one."

The guests dispersed early; and Luke was alone and unhappy. What was the reason that he always felt miserable after much contact with men? And so, as he passed from the heated atmosphere of the dining room into the cool garden that was behind the house, he heard the soft patter of feet in the kitchen, and a low whistling sound. Both were faint and muffled, as if with an effort at concealment; and then the whistling broke out into articulate language:

(Forliss) "Well the sure, Riddy McGilre!"

(Adante) "Show them the little dear, Mary!"

(Forliss) "Yerra, dance to the music, ye divil!"

(Adante) "As the widow—McLan—an—ughlin's pa—as-a-arty!"

Then the dancing ceased.

"I'm tired 'at all the cookin' and slushin'."

"An ye did it well, Mary," said John, the musician; "I never saw a better dinner at the Archdayken."

"Wish I for the love of God, stop the 'Archdayken's,'" said Mary, who despised flattery; "it's nothin' but 'Archdayken' here, and 'Archdayken' there. Why didn't you stop him, when you were there?"

"Take that, John," said one of the boys, who had dropped in, with that easy familiarity which is common to the country.

"I didn't mane any harm," said John, humbly. "But it was a grand dinner, out an' out; I heard the priests say so."

"You'll have a nice pinny to pay for for all the glass you broke," said Mary.

"The master looked like a judge wid his black cap."

"Wasn't that made him mad," said John, "the little red priest from Lorrhaheen? Begor, he pitched into the master like mad."

"He met his match, then," said Mary. "I'd like to see wan of 'em, except the parish priest, who could hold a candle to him."

"What was it all about?" said one of the neighbors, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"No sayers out o' school. If you tell this 'purty boy,' he'll have it in all the public houses 'till the parish before Sunday," said Mary, the loyal.

"Wish, 'twasn't much," said John. "Twas all the old story of England and Ireland. The master said we must all be English, or be swept into the sea. The little was pitched the English to the devil, and said we're Irish or nothin'."

"And who got the best of it?" said the "purty boy."

"Hard to say," said John. "They were all talkin' together, and jumpin' up like Jack-in-the-Box, except the quiet old parish priest. And thin that girl came, and you'd think they wor all in their cradles."

"Begor, they're a quare lot," said the purty boy. "They're as like children as two paws. Get wan of 'em into a tancin' rampage about the drink, or a dance, or a bit of courtin'; and thin say a word about the Blessed Virgin, or our own land, and you have him quiet as a lamb in a minit."

"The English and the landlords would have aisy times but for 'em," said Mary.

"Thry that jig agin, Mary," said John. "I'll get the concertina."

"No," said Mary; "it's too war-rum."

"I'm thinkin', John," said the purty boy, "of gettin' me taylor to make a shawl for me, like that. What 'ud it cost?"

"More than iver you see in your life," said John, angrily.

"But we could get it secon'-hand, like yourself," said the other.

"Stop that," said Mary, peremptorily. She objected to a duel. "Remember where ye are. Get the concertina, John. The master won't mind."

"Fun, fighting, and praying," thought Luke. "The Lord never intended the Irish to work."

He strolled along the village street, the quiet, calm beauty of the evening stealing into the soul, and stilling the irritation and annoyance of that dinner table. The purple mountains in the distance seemed to contract and ex- upon them. The air was heavy with the odours of roses and woodbine, and yet cooled with the breezes that floated down from the hills, over whose sharp ridges were pencilled darker lines, as you see in the horizon lines of the sea.

The old men sat smoking their clay pipes leisurely. The old women pondered and meditated, with that air of resigned peace so peculiar to the Irish. A crowd of children were laughing and playing in the main street, gamboling in circles, and singing that folksong, that is common to the children of half the globe:

London bridge is broken down,
Grand said the little dear;
London bridge is broken down;
Faile Lade!

Build it up with lime and sand!
Grand said the little dear;
Build it up with lime and sand,
Faile Lade!

On the bridge were perched twenty or thirty young men, resting after the day's toil; and listening to the soft wailing of a flute, played by one of their number.

Luke passed swiftly through all. The old people arose, and courtesied, the men taking their pipes from their mouths. Luke said: "How d'ye do?" They did not understand. They were accustomed to something different from their kind old priests.

"Maurya! How are the pains?" said Luke. "How did you hear from the little girl in Boston?" "The Murphies are gettin' dry, Pat." "To be sure, man; send over for the saddle in the morning, and keep it as long as you like." "That's the finest cut of chickens I saw this year," etc., etc.

"He's a fine man, God bless him," said the women, as they resumed their seats. "But he's mighty proud."

The children ceased to play, as he approached, and ran to their mothers. The boys leaped from the bridge, and saluted. The player hid his flute. They all could tell where the curate lived; but oh! he was a thousand miles away from their hearts. He passed out into the country under the thick twilight of the beeches. The privet hedge threw out their white blossoms, heavy with the odours which the bees loved; the sweet woodbine twined in and out of the hawthorn and briar; and the white clover, stamped by the feet of the voluptuous kine, waited its sweetness to the passer-by. Far away some girls were singing an old Irish air; and as Luke stopped to listen, and watched the blue smoke curling upwards in a straight line from the cottages, he heard the flute again, wailing out another Irish theme, "The Confetti." Then, the voices of the children rose, clear and shrill again:

London bridge is broken down,
Grand said the little dear;
London bridge is broken down;
Faile Lade!

The problem of the inexorable present; and the prophecy of the inevitable future strangely blended again.

He went into the village church again, on returning. There was a deeper twilight here than without. He knelt to make his evening visit, and say his rosary. Here and there were scattered some of the pious villagers. You heard only their whispered prayers, and the rattle of their beads. At the altar rails, bowed in reverential love, was the old pastor, his head slightly inclined to one side. Luke envied him.

"I wish I were old," he said, "and done with these life enigmas. These old men seem to cast untroubled glances into eternity."

He stopped a moment at his cottage gate, before retiring for the night, and looked down upon the street, the neat cottages, outlined against the dark, deep bank of the thick foliage behind. It was very peaceful.

"A wise man would make up his mind to be happy here," he said. "The will is happy. And what can I do to preserve and extend it?" The problem and puzzle again.

"Anything that man can do, I'll do," he said vehemently, "to solve this dread enigma, and save this devoted people."

The following morning two letters lay on his breakfast table. One was from Amiel Lefevrill. It was one of many. And it was the wild and mad "Humility is incarnate in all great men in a supreme degree; the true Shechinah, says Chrysostom, is man. Every child of humanity is a transfigured type of humanity. We are immortal in the immortality of the race. Seek the divine in man, and help its development."

"There is a hidden element of truth in the jargon," said Luke. "Wonder we were never told it."

And Luke forgot that he had taken Amiel Lefevrill in Dogmatic Theology; and that he had held with vigour and success that "the revelation of God in man, through the lowly figure of Jesus of Nazareth, had a far-reaching object, apart from the immediate purpose of the Incarnation; and that was, to confound the pride of mortals in the perfectibility of the race."

"If we could only teach these poor people," he said, "that their lofty ambition: Seek ye the God in man, was once, and only once, realized, all would be well. But, then, they should become little children again; and Nicodemus said that was impossible."

The other letter was from Margery, asking for light and advice on a critical question, about which Father Tracey, who said he had no idea of theology or mysticism, was much concerned. "It would appear that one of their penitents, Sister

Mary of Magdala, who had been a great sinner, was now developing extraordinary sanctity; and Father Tracey craved light on one or two knotty points.

"Dear Luke" (the letter ran), "don't throw this aside in petulance or disgust. I know, and if I didn't, Father Tracey would convince me, that you are a profound theologian. But somehow I feel, too, that these things are profounder than I am, and let me know all you think on this most important matter. You have no idea of the peace of mind it will give us all, especially dear Father Tracey."

"Mother is not too well. Won't you go see her?"

"Well, well," said Luke; "is there any use in talking to nuns, at all?"

He wrote his little sister to say, that the veriest tyro in theology knew that these poor penitent girls were either subject very frequently to delusions, especially in the way of super-sensitivities; or, were unfortunately prone to simulation of virtue for the purposes of deception. He had no doubt, whatever, that the case submitted to him came under one of these two heads; and he would advise his sister not to get involved in any way in what would probably prove an imposture, which might also eventuate in a grave scandal. Father Tracey, he understood, was an excellent man; but rather prone to take unwise views about spiritual manifestations, on which the Church always looked with doubt and suspicion.

Clearly, Luke had become very practical. A good many years had gone by since he vowed his pilgrimage to the city to kiss this old man's feet.

He took up his sister's letter again; and read it in a puzzled manner.

"It is downright positivism," he declared; "Margery, too, sees the divine in man—this time, in a wretched penitent. Imagine—Amiel Lefevrill and Sister Eulalie arriving at the same conclusion from opposite poles of thought."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE STORY OF A CONVERSION.

In the last month of last year a sensational surprise was caused in French literary circles by the news that Adolphe Retté, a prominent "devo- uerists" and a leader of the irrelig- ious movement, had become converted to the Catholic faith.

The event gave great consolation to many Catholics in that trying time, to none more than J. K. Huysmans, who was justifying fully the sincerity of his own conversion by a patient and most exemplary endurance of the long and painful illness which carried him off last May. Retté had been among the foremost of those who attacked with blasphemous abuse the defection of Huysmans from the anti-Christian ranks. After his conversion, by the advice of his friends, Retté retired for a time to write a book of confessions describing the journey he had just made from atheism to be- lief, or as he somewhat sensationally describes it, from the devil to God.

That this work of expiation has been widely read is evidenced by the fact that it has already reached its twelfth edition. Its author is not one of those who, like the late F. Brunetiere or Paul Bourget, has returned to the Church of his infancy after a long neglect of its creed and practice. On the other hand, the Catholic faith which he now embraces with such enthusiasm is the only faith he has ever known.

He was an early agnostic, he was left to the chances of the world. The Protestantism which he learned at college was never a personal religion to him, and a life of debauchery soon ad- dressed whatever fragments of Christianity had filtered into his life. He became a soldier, then a journalist, and in the latter capacity the work which he took upon himself was the extinction of religion and moral ideas from the youth of France. But Divine Grace was seeking him, though he knew it not; it pursued