

GIENANNAAR

A STORY OF IRISH LIFE

BY REV. CANON P. A. SHEEHAN, D.D., AUTHOR OF "MY NEW CURATE," "LOVE DELIVER," "UNDER THE CEDARS AND STARS," "LOST ANGEL OF A RUINED PARADISE," ETC.

CHAPTER I. "THE YANK."

He suddenly appeared in our village street, gorgeous, and caparisoned from head to heel in all kinds of sartorial splendor. He took away our breath with his grandeur; and people looked at him sideways, partly because of his dazzling equipment, and partly because he had a curious habit of looking one straight in the face, which is sometimes disconcerting. We did not like him at all, at all. By "we" I mean the villagers and myself. They did not like him, because he was stiff and standoffish; and they heard that he was critical and censorious about our ancient and amiable customs; and he steadily declined all advances toward that friendly familiarity which we like so dearly. He was also an impenetrable mystery to a very inquisitive people; and what greater crime could there be? He had gallantly attempted to get at the secret of his life. It was an interesting, and even exciting pastime to a people who, having no particular business of their own to mind, are charitably desirous to mind that of every one else. But no! He declined all familiarity. He would walk like a king, speak on all possible subjects but one; and leave the poor man as much as ever in the dark as to his own personality and antecedents. Nay, he was such a "naggar," he would not ask the companion who had lent him his society for the hour, "whether he had a moult on him." So he was decidedly unpopular. It was given out, after long search, and many kindly insinuations, that his name was "Fitzgerald," (our local interpretation of "Fitzgerald," but that was soon discarded as apocryphal and untenable. And so, at last, he came to be known as "The Yank." Once he was seen haunting an ancient moss-grown field, in which were two Danish barrows or forts; and the report immediately went abroad that he had dreamt three times running that a creak of gold was buried there; and he had come home to dig for the treasure. And more than once he was seen, some miles from the village, leaning sadly against an old, withered, leafless and gnarled white thorn, or smoking leisurely and contemplating the little square of grass-grown, nettle-covered field where faintly outlined the last traces of what was once a human habitation.

I cannot say that I liked him more than the villagers. He answered my salutation, "A fine day," rather gruffly, and once when I ventured a little further, and said cheerily: "Coming back to see the old land, I hope?" he looked me all over, and said, deep down in his chest, and without any attempt to disguise his irritation: "Great Scott!" Besides, it was not conducive to the peace of mind of our young villagers to see him, in languid ease, standing at the door of the hotel, morning, noon, and night. He was there at early dawn, when the mill hands went to work. He was there at noon, when they returned to dinner. He was there when the 6 o'clock bell tolled out for cessation of work in the evening, and the convent and church bells rang out melodiously the Angelus. And I know well, that when the old men, with reverent, uncloaked heads, as they peered the El Doyler of the Inn, passed by the hotel door, and saw "the Yank," so well dressed, with such heavy gold chains and seals, and such shining square-toe boots, they said sorrowfully to themselves: "Ah, if I had only crossed the water when I was a boy!" And I knew that the young men, seeing the same never-to-be-envied enough spectacle, made frantic resolutions, that as soon as they "gathered the passage money, they, too, would seek the El Doyler of the Inn, and in a little while I ceased to notice him, and set him down as a conceited, purple-pronged fellow, who had little love left for his faith and motherland. It was not the only occasion when I was mistaken in judging appearances; and in not seeing that there is a human heart beating in every breast, even though we cannot witness or count its pulsations.

It was a Sunday afternoon in the late summer. There was a tournament in the Park. In past times it used to be called a hurling-match, but we are going ahead in Ireland, and we call things now by their proper names. It was a big affair—the culmination and critical finish of all the many local trials of strength that had taken place in the past year. It was the final "try" for the County championship between the Cork "Shandons," and our own brave "Skirmishers." There was a mighty crowd assembled. Side cars, waggons, traps of every shape and hue and form, from the farmer's cart with the heavy quilt to the smart buggy of the merchant, brought in all the afternoon a great concourse of people, who were anxious to put down the Sunday evening in the best possible manner by witnessing this great joust of Irish athletes. We are no Sabbatarians in Ireland. Neither are we quite depleted yet. It would surprise any one familiar with all the modern, doleful jeremiads about the depopulation of Ireland to see such a smartly dressed, bright, intelligent crowd in a country village. And if he had any misgivings or doubts about the physique and pluck of "the fighting race," he had only to stand still, when the athletes stripped for the contest, and see in those clean-cut, well-built figures the nerve and muscle that go to build up an energetic and pushing race. The sun was shaded under banks of great clouds, and shed a pale, clear light on the landscape, without the inconvenience of much heat. The great

ball of brass to the west was just being dappled from its russet green by the first tints of approaching autumn. A light warm wind stirred their leaves. The cattle browsed calmly away upon the forest slopes. And there was a deep hush of expectancy over all these assembled thousands. It was to be a great trial of strength between two nearly matched gladiators, in which grit, and wind, and pluck, and muscle, and science were to be put to their final test.

At 3 o'clock the teams were called to their places by their respective captains. There was a brief consultation with the referee, a coin was flung into the air, sides were taken, the winners turning their backs to the wind, and in a moment, one could only see that ball tossed hither and thither in the struggle, and a confused mass of men and camans, as they fought fiercely for victory and the tide of the battle rolled uncertain here and there across the field. And the combatants were curiously silent. This, too, is a modern characteristic, and a wholesome one. Instead of the whoops and yells of older times, the roar of fierce encouragement or expostulation, the cry of victory, and the curse of defeat, one only saw the set faces and the flying figures, the victory snatched out of the hands of one, the defeat of the other retrieved, and the swift, tumultuous passion that swayed these young athletes as they strained every nerve in the all-important struggle for victory.

Not a word broke from that whirling mass, as the heavy ball leaped hither and thither, tossed by the camans from hand to hand, rolled swiftly over the level grass, as some young athlete, with the fleetness of a deer, tapped it on before him, until he brought it within reach of the coveted goal. You heard only the patter of feet, the light or heavy tap-tap-tap on the ball, the crack of the camans as they crossed in the air above or on the grass beneath; and now and again the screams of women and girls, who stamped wildly with their feet, and driven into their midst, and the fierce flying combatants, with heaving breasts and starting eyes, forgot their rivalry and carried their tumult of battle right in amongst their excited sisters. Indeed, the whole excitement seemed to be limited to the spectators, who cheered and lamented, encouraged or rebuked the silent athletes on whom the honor of the flag depended. One alone amidst the stolid composure of the field maintained a stoical composure, and that was "the Yank." He stood apart and watched the strife, as impassive as an Indian chief, apparently regardless as to which side victory swayed; and altogether taking but an academic and far-off interest in the entire affair.

At 4:30 the teams were almost on a tie, the "Skirmishers" having two goals to their credit, and the "Shandons" one goal and some points. The final toss was just about to come off, when it was announced that the local captain had been taken suddenly ill, and had been ordered off the field. There was consternation in the ranks of the "Skirmishers." Just on the point of victory, their hopes were dashed to the ground. They held a long and eager consultation; and finally decided to enlist one or other of the spectators, who had been members of the Club, but not picked men. These shook their heads. The issue was too important. They would not take the responsibility. Five o'clock was near; and the referee was about to give his final decision in favor of the strangers, when, to the astonishment of everyone, "the Yank," throwing away a half-burned cigar, and calmly divesting himself of coat and waist-coat, which he carefully rolled up and placed in the hands of a spectator, came forward, took up a caman, tested it, as if it were a Toledo blade, by leaning all his weight upon it, and said in an accent of cool indifference: "Let me take a hand: I guess I can manage it."

There was a general laugh. The "Shandons" were delighted. They noticed the grey hairs in his head and beard. The "Skirmishers" demurred; but one wise fellow, who had been studying the splendid build of "the Yank," winked and said: "Yes, we'll take him. Put him right inside the goal."

The excitement rose rapidly with this new event. The disabled Captain heard of it, and insisted upon being taken back to see the issue. No matter if he died on the field of battle! "Where can man die better?" etc., etc. The ball was once more tossed high, the victory swayed from one side to the other; the cheers rose wildly and volitionally from the adherents of both teams; until, at last, the "Shandons," pressing home for victory, drove the ball right under the Yank's legs. The foremost champion, rushing forward to get it through the goal, found himself, he knew not how, about twenty feet away from the ball; and then it seemed as if a cyclone had struck the field. At least, a straight path was cut through the swaying, confused mass of the combatants, who in some mysterious way yielded right and left. Disregarding all modern rules and regulations, the Yank had struck straight before him; and with his powerful arms and shoulders had cut his way as clean as a swathe of ripe corn is levelled by the teeth of the mowing machine in the early harvest time. He swept along quite close to where I was standing, and once I heard him panting: "Tainim an diabol." Then I knew he was Irish; and my heart went out to him. A few cries of "A foul a foul!" were raised; but they were hushed into ignominious silence by the plaintive of the crowd, whose feelings of respectful aversion were suddenly converted into a paroxysm of unstinted admiration. "Go it, Yank!" "Cheer for the 'Stars and Stripes!'" "Give them 'Hail Columbia,' old fellow!" echoed on every side, until the whole mad tumult culminated in a wild Irish cheer, as the ball flew swiftly over the heads of the rival combatants, and, despite the frantic efforts of the goal-keeper on the "Shandons'" side, passed over the "Shandons'" side, and gaily through the gates of the goal. Just as the "Yank" struck the ball the blow that gained the victory, there was a wild, mad rush toward him; and under its weight he was flung down, whilst the whole human mass squirmed over him. There was a wild shout of indignation from the field, for he had suddenly become their hero; and it seemed like revenge for defeat. When they were raised, one by one, "the Yank" was unable to lift himself. A hundred willing hands offered to help him; and there were some angry threats toward those who had helped him. A few distinctively Gaelic questions were also put: "You're not dead, are you?" "Wal, no," he said, leisurely, but with a gesture of pain, "but I guess there are broken bones somewhere, anyhow."

He was gently raised on a stretcher, and carried in triumph from the field. As the bearers were passing out the front gate, the captain of the local team came forward and proffered his thanks for the assistance given. He looked wretchedly ill, but he thought he had this duty to perform. "Wal," said the Yank, in his own cool way, "I guess we did lick them. But, young man, you go home, and liquor up as fast as you can."

Half-way down the street, an old man, looking side ways at the hero, said aloud: "Begob, there was nothin' seen like it since Casey the Hurler's time."

The Yank raised himself with difficulty, and fixing his eyes on the old man, he said: "Say that again, Mister!" "Say that again," repeated the old man, somewhat embarrassed now, "that there was nothin' seen like it since Terence Casey single-handed bated the parishes of Ardpatrick and Glenroe."

"That was a long time ago, I guess," said the Yank, leaning back helplessly again.

CHAPTER II. CONFIDENCES.

If for no other reason but because he got so gallantly saved the honor of our parish, I was bound to call on him. That little expression, too, "Tainim an diabol," that escaped from him in the heat of the contest, was eloquent of volcanic fire of Irish feeling under that cold crust of his American manner. Nature will break out and show itself in spite of every kind of artificial envelopment. But I felt, too, that there was something in the man above the common average. I have a decided partiality for those silent fellows, who never talk, but somehow cut in at decidedly critical moments, and by quick and unobtrusive, and by quiet and unobtrusive, or compel that stolid dame, Fortune, to change her mind, and that, too, without delay.

I called at the hotel. He was in bed, badly bruised, but he looked as calm and imperturbable as ever. He received me with his usual coldness, answered in brief interjections my solicitous inquiries, chilled me, in fact, to the very marrow of my bones, and was glad of the chance of getting away with an auspicious and whiskeys were more recent. I came again and again. We became fast friends.

Now, I had become much fascinated by the way that old man had said, on Casey the Hurler, because amongst my reminiscences of a thrice beloved curacy were continually recurring to lip and memory. The one was the chorus of a famous election ballad in those days when we had borough elections in Ireland; and when fun, fighting and whiskey were the order of the day. The other was a certain kind of Homeric effusion, chanted outside my windows in later years when I had a more appreciative sense of the value of ballad literature as enshrining the local history of the country. It was generally sung in strophes, and by two voices, male and female alternately both combining in the fourth and final line. It ran thus:

Then here's to bold young Casey, Like a lion did he chase you, From the Fucheson to the ancheon, Sure an' you'll never be the victor, When you'd your Casey's hurley, 'Tis a wild dancin' through the fray.

"Bold young Casey" became a dim demigod in my imagination, because being somewhat enthusiastic about Gaelic poetry, I felt that this athlete was great. A tall, unworldly, unworldly, unworldly, unrivalled in his own department, and that he was, in fact, a hero.

It was with no vulgar sense of a prudent and unobtrusive curiosity, therefore, that I introduced the subject to the invalid in one of our numerous friendly conferences by his bedside. I think that the man that picks secrets is a hundred times worse than the fellow who picks pockets; and, indeed, it was with a certain kind of alarm I ascertained that "the Yank" was none other than the redoubtable Casey himself. I had a certain awe of him, as you feel before a great personage who has hitherto been to you but a name; and I had also a dim presentiment that there was a story, perhaps a tragedy, behind this in-cognito. The secret leaked out in this wise.

He was complaining of the attendance at the hotel—that it was not all a sick man had a right to expect, etc.

"Wal," I said, "the waiter is a good fellow, except when he takes 'lim inside, which does not agree with him, because he says he has a 'wake' stomach; and the doctor told him to avoid anything sweet. But it seems to me, if you will pardon the suggestion; that you need a woman's hand around you here, to tidy up things a little, to get your drinks, etc."

"Wal, I was thinking, so, too, myself," he said. "But you see I don't like to offend those good people" (which showed that he was a gentleman in heart and feeling; ) "they have been

very kind in their own way. And then, well, your people, my good Father, are not quite—shall I say, methodical enough—"

"I guessed what he meant; and I flared up a little."

"As for that," I said, "I can get you as neat-handed and as tidy a little woman as you'll get in Chicago or Boston. She is a poor little widow with two of the sweetest children you'd see in a day's walk; and I guarantee that you'll like her."

"Widows are dangerous, Father," he said, smiling. "We've old Tony Weller's authority for that. But where is she from? From what parish?"

"No," I said, "not from here. I think she has come down from the hills over there near Glenassar."

I thought he looked frightened, because his eyes widened, and he got quite white beneath them. He said nothing for a while, but only shook his head. Then:—

"Let it drop, Father! It wouldn't do, nohow."

Now, I marvelled much at this. I knew that Glennassar was the valley of Slaughter, and that a terrific battle had been fought there several centuries before the Christian era between the Tuatha-de-Danaan and, I think, the Firbolgs. Is not the mountain stream, amber or wine-colored, the River of Slaughter, so they call it? But that could that have to do with a returned American in the very last decade of the nineteenth century? But I let it drop. He wished it so; and there was an end of the matter. But we did manage to tidy things up somehow, even without the help of the artistic waiter.

One day when he was nearly convalescent, I said to him: "You'll be prepared for an oration, my dear sir, when you are setting out for America. The people are so enthusiastic about your great feat that they will insist on inflicting on you some kind of popular demonstration to show your gratitude."

"I hope not," he replied. "I came over just to see things for myself and to remain quiet, and to return safe."

"That won't do, my dear fellow," I replied. "They're already chanting your praises by reviving an ancient ballad, styled 'The Life and Adventures of Terence Casey, the famous Hurler.'"

Again he was much disturbed, and looked in a pleading way at me. Then, he got suddenly angry:

"Why the d—!—!" he cried, "cannot they leave a fellow alone when he comes amongst them? I suppose now, some inquisitive fellow has been searching and raking up all my past; and it will be flung in my face again."

I marvelled much at this sudden explosion of fury from such a tranquil fellow. I marvelled much more at the illusion. He saw my perplexity, and dissolved it.

"Look here, Father," he said. "This young business to keep secrets, is it not?"

"Yes," I said, "some."

"All," he cried passionately. "If I thought a priest could blab about anything, I'd not trust him even in confession."

"That's quite true," I replied. "Whatever you entrust to us as a secret, will be inviolably preserved a secret, wherever it is spoken."

"So I thought," he replied. "Now, I want none of these folks to know who I am, or what I came here for. They have been ferreting around here the last couple of months to find out who I am. I can't see what the d—!— it is to them. They have bribed even the unfortunate waiter to tell them the name on my trunk and linen."

"That's going rather far," I replied. "I always gave them credit for drawing the line at a man's letters and his own revelations. Inside that, of course, curiosity is almost a virtue. It's a gift from benevolence."

"I can't understand that, nohow," he replied. "It seems to me that you folks would do better, if you would try to mind your own business."

"Now, that's all your American prejudice," I replied. "Or rather your Anglo-Saxon tradition; for you Americans, unknown to yourselves, are Anglo-Saxons. Why, I'm told that over there a man might be your next door neighbor for twenty years, and you mightn't know his name, or what he has for breakfast. Now, I call that downright selfishness. You must be awfully afraid of each other, when you look up every secret in that way. Now, look at us! If my mare casts a shoe, or develops a splint, every man, woman and child in the parish knows it in twenty-four hours. If I go up to Cork, everyone is asking where I'm gone, and how long I shall be remaining. And if I confess the least ignorance of what is going on in the parish, from Glennassar to Twopothens they won't scruple to tell me I am a hermit; and that I ought to be a Trappist monk. So, too, if a baby is born, we all want to know whether it is a boy or a girl, whether it is like the father or mother, when it will be baptized, what will be its name. And when a man dies, we all go to his funeral, and while away the time between our prayers by asking how much he left behind him, and who was to get it. Before he is settled in his coffin every old woman in the parish must have a look at him, and a pull at his habit to see if the hood straight; and when the coffin is lowered to its last resting-place, there is generally a hot dispute as to whether it is geometrically arranged. Then all take a last look at the breastplate to see how old he is; some shake their heads, as if even in his grave he was not quite candid about his age; then with a final valediction, 'He was an honest man; God rest him!' all depart satisfied with their own benevolence. Now, I call that Christian charity and kindness, not like your pagan exclusiveness."

"Wal," he said, lifting up his hands wearily after this homily, "I can't make it out. You are queer folks over here."

"Maybe we are," I said, a little nettled, for nothing angers me so much

as this affectation of superiority on the part of people whom we could teach for the next thousand years. "But I tell you, you have a lot to learn from us yet."

"Wal, to cut matters short," he said, "I'm Terence Casey."

"Casey, the Hurler?" I cried, amazed at this sudden impersonation of my ideal hero.

"Yes," he replied, "but you mustn't mention it even after I'm gone."

"Certainly," I replied, "your secret will be religiously respected. But—would you allow me to touch your hand?"

"For what?" he said, starting back.

"Only to satisfy my hero-worship," I said. "You must know, my dear fellow, that for over twenty years you have been associated in my mind with the gods of Grecian fable, with Ajax and Achilles, not to speak of the Mars or Hector of the ballad. Why, if it were known that you were Casey, I don't know what honors would be heaped on you. The band would be out every night to serenade you; you'd have had deputations from every Gaelic club in the country; and I'm quite sure you'd be presented with an illuminated address on your return to the 'Stars and Stripes.'"

He laughed.

"It is a good escape," he said. "But, Father, I bind you to your promise of secrecy. No one must know who I am, and why I am here."

"As to the first part," I said, "it's all right. No one knows who you are, or ever shall know, so far as I am concerned. As to the second clause of the secret, every man, woman and child in the village knows what you came for!"

"No!" he interjected with alarm. "What is it?"

"Why, what could it be," I said, "but to take back an Irish wit to the States? Why, every little colleen in the parish thinks that she will be your child."

"The Irish are the devil painted," he said, sinking into the pillows.

"That's a matter of opinion," I said. "My own impression is, that they're angels without the paint. At any rate, I can guarantee you a score of young colleens here, any one of whom would do credit to the finest brownstone mansion on the banks of the Hudson or the Mississippi. I'll go farther and declare that you might pick out one or two who would grace the parquetry floor of the White House itself."

"I've heard you saying these things, or something like them, off the altar, since I came home," he said. "But, of course, you exaggerate. You good Irish priests think Ireland the 'hub' of the universe. But these good people, have guessed rightly, but not in the way they think. I came to Ireland not to lose my heart, but to get rid of an image that's there these twenty years."

"The only way," I replied, "to manage that, is to paint another over it."

He shook his head.

"Many and many a fair picture has been painted over it," he said, "but 'tis of no use. That face will come up through all. 'Twill haunt me to my dying day. Unless—"

"Unless I can see it again, but that's not likely. I was hoping that she had changed, and that I might see the change, and be freed from the ghost of that face. Or, if there were no change, to make it mine own forever."

"Twenty years is a long time," I said. "Few are unchanged in so long a period."

"True," he replied. "That's why I despair."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE EASTER THURSDAY.

BY CHAS. L. O'DONNELL.

Mrs. McMullen stood humbly before her pastor. "Sure, you were once a boy yourself," she pleaded, though with a challenge in her eye. "Yes, and I'd never have been a man if I'd been up to the tricks of that lad of yours," retorted Father O'Rourke. "Such a devil would have been killed outright by the master in Kilbegs."

"But isn't it always better, Father," urged Mrs. McMullen, "to let the same give a chance to reform, and when Father Hugh, looking far away out of the window, only granted, she persuasively added: "One more chance, please, Father; he's determined to keep out of mischief this time, and for that matter, sure at heart he's the best—"

"All right," broke in the old priest, though it was the logic of memory rather than the mother's that brought him to this conclusion. "I'll let him go on again; but mind you," he thundered as Mrs. McMullen with smiles and bows and profuse thanks started to go, "if I find that boy at any more of his tricks around this church it's off the altar he'll go for good, and never—"

but the iron gate had already creaked behind Mrs. McMullen, and she was too happy to care about Father O'Rourke's threats now that Michael was to be reinstated in his old post among the servers at St. Aidan's.

"To think of it," indignantly muttered the venerable pastor as he re-lighted his old brown pipe, "burnin' rubber and assafetida in the brand new censor I bought for Easter; why the censorist smelt like a German meat market."

After a few minutes of meditative smoking, however, he broke out into a hearty laugh. "Poor Billy," he mused as the gray smoke drifted about his white head, "it's little but fun we thought of the night we tethered the calf to Dr. Donovan's door at Maynooth."

Mrs. McMullen was ambitious in an unworshipful sense; she had no daughters to "marry" successfully, no husband to goad on to high, or low, political offices—she had only one boy, Michael, and ever since he had come to her, with his angelic eyes, for all their wicked twinkle, it had been the sole wish of her life, her only desire on earth, that one day she might see him behind the chasuble; nor was this ambition of hers changed nor her faith shaken when Michael's father

left her eight years before. She would toll, and pinch and scrape. God would do the rest she was sure. No matter if Mickey was the terror of the parish, the abomination of all the mothers of "nice" boys; he was her boy, she loved every freckle on his face, and she had much to love.

She was going home happy now, wondering how she could best improve Mickey with the uncertainty of his tenure to a place as server at St. Aidan's; for though she knew that he was all right at heart and had, as she believed, a real vocation, there was no telling what moment he would break forth into some freak of devilry that would argue the want, to some the impossibility, of any seriousness in his character.

As Mrs. McMullen approached the house she heard children screaming in the rear of the woodshed. "You won't kill us, Mickey," was the terrified cry and a prompt "Just watch me," was the heartless answer. Quickening her step, Mrs. McMullen got behind the house seemingly just in time to prevent what might be a horrible slaughter. Tied together to the back door-step lay little Jimmie and Kattie Malone, their eyes protruding in horror, while off a few feet was the redoubtable Mickey, brandishing a hatchet and a saw as he did a waltz-dance, his face streaked and blotched with green and yellow paint, preparatory to executing his wrath on the children of the woodshed. As Mrs. McMullen appeared a war-whoop ended in a gasp of astonishment.

"Michael Paul McMullen—what in the name of Heaven are you up to?" demanded the disheartened mother with tears of vexation in her eyes.

"Nothing, ma," confessed the perspiring, though composed, aborigine, "only sawing the kids what it is not to have Christmas practices for the children of the woodshed. As Mrs. McMullen appeared a war-whoop ended in a gasp of astonishment."

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father would be pr... and then starting M... plete instructions a... carry the carefully... the busied herself... Mas. In fifteen... looked the house... gate, when she sto... to her head for a... heavily down to t... Malone, who was h... church, saw her fall... "God save us,"... her husband, "com... Millon has got her... "Get me Father... Mickey's mother, eyes, "and my boy... The scariest at... fire with suppress... almost bursting... slams. As the p... assembly opened a... in with the last v... been lighting the... "It's great," wh... acolyte; "and cand... "and lilles by p... partner.

A dozen