

"It wasn't Sackwell?" cried Squire Bingham, fiercely.

"It was our illustrious neighbour, Mr. Artslade."

The squires fairly jumped from their seats in indignant astonishment.

"Of course you challenged the scoundrel, O'Dwyer?" asked Mr. Bingham, his eyes dancing in prospect of a fray.

O'Dwyer Garv smiled with quiet pride.

"*Him!*—scarcely. I told him if his employees meant to insult me, they might have come themselves to receive chastisement."

"By Jove! he must have smarted!"

"I think I've heard the last of the baronetcy and the twenty thousand, at any rate," said their host, laughingly. "Masses, that sherry must be abominable—you've hardly tasted it. Don't let the miseries of your country spoil your appetite, old fellow."

The little old gentleman addressed, who was already in his third bottle, chattered something pious about moderation, and dived into a fourth.

"Sackwell, I owe you an apology for even suspecting you," cried Squire Bingham, cordially.

"My dear sir, your suspicion is only an incident of public life," replied Sackwell, putting on the full smiling power of his highly gelatinous countenance to hide an uneasiness he could not quite smother.

"Nobody is above suspicion these times," said the Squire. "Perhaps I wasn't telling ye about the attempt on my own virtue?"

Most of them thought they had heard of it some dozen times before, but that did not hinder the Squire from proceeding:

"'Twas last month Castlereagh button-holed me in a quiet corner of the Coffee-Room, and, after nearly wringing my hand off, he says:

"'They say you're the best shot in Tipperary, Bingham.'

"'They flatter me, my lord,' says I.

"'I believe you're a loyal subject, Bingham,' says he.

"'I believe I am, my lord,' says I.

"'And I believe you're—ah—slightly in difficulties, Bingham?' says he.

"'I'm very sure I am, my lord,' says I.

"'Well, you see,' he went on, in the ghost of a whisper, 'those "patriots" are apt to be troublesome, now that we're going to take their trumpet-parliament away from them. Some of them will, most likely, show fight and—and loyal men must show fight, too—you understand me?'

"'Perfectly, my lord,' says I.

"'That's well,' said my lord rubbing his hands in glee. 'One of our couriers—Captain Holleston—will be down your way next week. If you rifle his portmanteau, we won't transport you.'

"'I'll be on the look-out for him, never fear, my lord,' says I.

"'Next week came and so did the courier. I had a few fellows to dinner when he called,'

"'You're Captain Holleston?'

"'I am, sir. Mr. Bingham, I presume?'

"'The same, sir,' says I. 'This is Mr. Downey, Captain Holleston—he'll be happy to act as your second. You can have your choice of those pistols, and I suppose you don't object to settling it across the table?'

"'Poor devil! I never saw such a picture of astonishment and horror. For a moment or two I thought he'd fall; but it seemed to strike him suddenly that he had fallen on a nest of highwaymen, for with cries of 'Murder!' he rushed to the door, fled to his horse, and galloped like mad across the country, shouting 'Murder!' and 'Thieves!' like a maniac. I didn't send a bullet after the poor wretch; I was nearly dead with laughing at his scare."

"'Did he ever learn the truth?'" asked the Colonel.

"'He did, faith, and vowed all sorts of vengeance; but Lord Castlereagh plainly thought the less said about it the better, for I never heard since from the captain. So there ended my official communication with the Ministry."

His hearers laughed heartily for the fiftieth time over the Squire's story.

"'If everybody did as I did,' said Mr. Bingham replenishing his tumbler, 'we'd hear no more of the Union."

"'A *foreible* view, certainly," said the Dublin Lawyer, "but I hope it need not come to that. The Government are still in a small minority, and it's no very bright augury of their chances that they have to fall back on Mr. Artslade as an instrument. Clearly there's not a *gentleman* in Tipperary on their side."

Mr. Sackwell felt miserably guilty.

"'If there was,' cried Squire Bingham. "By G—! he and I would have a score to settle!"

Mr. Sackwell was within a hair's breadth of upsetting another tumbler.

"'I'm not much of a politician," said the Colonel, "but I can't see for the life of me why you object to the Union. Anybody but school girls would think a union with a rich neighbour rather a jolly thing."

"'And I,' ventured the Hon. Mr. Crashington,