

"Why does he live here?" I asked.

"He's got some work in a seminary, where he goes every morning. He makes a good thing of it here, too, I should say."

"Well, can I see your Father Mactane, at any rate?" I asked.

"Mr. Irvin went to the telephone."

"Father Mactane is now coming downstairs," he said to me.

"In a minute the door opened and a great burly ecclesiastic entered the room. He wore a long soutane or cassock, with a little cape over his shoulders, and his hands were folded in front of him over a great breviary or prayerbook, from which hung a quantity of blue silk markers. The priest had a jolly red face and a pleasant twinkle in his eye that corresponded well with his Irish name. He spoke for the most part a pure enough English, but when interested or excited he lapsed into a fine brogue."

"Father Mactane," said the manager, "excuse me for bringing you down, but I want to introduce you to—in short, to—"

"An agent from Scotland Yard," I put in, understanding Mr. Irvin's desire that I should introduce myself after my own fashion. "In fact, Mr. Max."

"The great Mr. Max!" said the priest. "The right man in the right place, Mr. Irvin, the authorities have done the very best they could for you. You may look upon the unpleasant business which has worried us so they say over there—you'll pull us through."

"I am sure of it," said the manager, politely, "and I should like to explain to you the course we propose to adopt, and to ask you to give us your valuable co-operation."

"Bravo!" cried Father Mactane, enthusiastically, when Mr. Irvin had finished, "a magnificent idea. We've only got to work together, and we must nail the thafe. And what are we to call you, Mr. Max? Faith! I like the look of you, and if it were for my choosing it should be Pat. And that's the best compliment that I can pay you. But I suppose it wouldn't do; the more so as you can't speak the language. You'd better be John—just plain John."

"It was arranged like this, and Father Mactane left us."

"We'll pull you through," he said, "and he went out, and please the pigs!—as they say over there—you'll pull us through."

"I entered on my duties the same evening, and had soon taken all my bearings. Business was made for me all over the house, and, wherever I went, there it seemed to me was Father Mactane gliding noiselessly down the carpeted corridors, his eyes fixed on the ground and his hands folded over his fat breviary. As he passed, he would give me a wink more or less pronounced, according to circumstances. It appeared as if the thief or thieves had somehow got wind of the manoeuvres, for the robberies entirely ceased for some weeks."

"One morning, as I passed Father Mactane's room, he put his head out of the door, and asked me to come in. He locked the door behind me, and pointed to a waiter, whom I just knew by sight, standing in the middle of the room, morose and silent."

"I have asked you to step in, John," said Father Mactane to me, "as I wish to have a witness of what I am, reluctantly, obliged to do. One witness I must have for my own security, more I will not have for this fellow's sake. And you persist, William, in your denial?"

"The man nodded sulkily."

"I accuse this man," said Father Mactane, turning to me, "of having substituted a half-sovereign for a sovereign, which I purposely left on my table. The sovereign was marked, and I find it in his purse, which he has put into my hands. And you still deny, William?"

"The man nodded again."

"Then you must go," said the priest. "Unless you are out of the house in an hour I shall take legal proceedings."

"The man looked up."

"I must go then, in any case," he asked, "guilty or not guilty?"

"You must go," answered Father Mactane with a sigh.

"Then I'll trouble you," said William, boldly, "to give me back my half-sovereign, at any rate."

"Convicted out of his own mouth!" cried the priest. "You hear, John? Take your purse, you miserable William, and begone without one wur-rd."

"He looked rather fine as he stood there with his breviary in one hand and the other outstretched. William slunk away."

"How hard it is to be hard!" said Father Mactane to me. "But to tell you the truth, John, good, plain thavin'—honest thavin', so to speak—is not so repulsive to me as this wretched fancy work."

"This little incident would have made no impression on me had it not been for the fact that on that very same afternoon, when I was taking a constitutional, I saw Father Mactane and the fancy-thief in a hansom

cab, laughing together in a way which seemed to indicate that the priest's righteous indignation and William's abasement had melted into thin air."

"I returned at once to the hotel, and took the liberty of making a very thorough investigation of Father Mactane's rooms. There was little in them that was in the least degree compromising. As the net result of my search, I had no more than a pawn-ticket, which I discovered strayed into a corner between the lining and the cloth of the priest's overcoat. It seemed to me rather strange that a man who was always in funds and could live in a first-class hotel should be, or have been, a client of the three gilt balls. But that was little to base a theory on."

"That evening there was another

robbery in the hotel. A French marquise had missed a pearl brooch of value. Father Mactane, who was in spiritual relations with the marquise, and had the advantage of speaking her language fluently, was sent for."

"It's bewildering," he said, when he came down into the manager's room—"bewildering. The brooch has disappeared from madame's dressing-table—simply disappeared. She has not left her room to-day, and, except myself and her maid, she is sure that no one has been inside her door. What do you make of it? It rests between the maid and myself. The maid has been with the marquise all madame's life; and for myself, well—"

"He spread out a great red hand whimsically. He would have spread out both, but the other held his breviary."

"But it is black, my poor Mr. Irvin," he went on, "very black. The marquise will say nothing for the moment, but she only suspends her decision. Mr. Max, what are we to do?"

"I do not know what you are to do," I replied, "but I know what I am to do before I am much older, and that is to nail the thief."



Drawn by G. Butler.

"Could you give me five minutes in the office?"