

Three Western Tales

*Pictures from Ireland*

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A Gentleman Farmer.

Mr. Hyacinth O'Callaghan of Gurtnamona, or "Hycy," as he is called by his friends, has never repined at the fate that made him a farmer. From the day when, in accordance with his father's will, he took possession of the 150 acres surrounding the small house of Gurtnamona, he has known no real sorrows, nor felt the unhappiness of an unsatisfied ambition. Not that his ambition soared to heights unknown to the average farmer. He wants a good price for his horse ; a good profit on his heifers and sheep, and he has generally succeeded in obtaining both. When he entered into the occupation of Gurtnamona there was a considerable amount of tillage. But this did not suit Mr. O'Callaghan's tastes. He has no intention, nor has he ever had any, of being a slave to his business. He wants a roof over his head, enough to share with a friend or friends, as the case may be, and a good horse to ride to hounds. So long as Gurtnamona gives him all three he is satisfied. As to the difference in results between tillage and grazing, he has never gone into the matter closely, but has a general conviction that as tillage requires more outlay in labour and manure it must therefore be less profitable. Of questions as to the relative value of manures, the best rotation of crops, the crops suitable to particular lands, and the amount of money per acre necessary for their proper cultivation, he is as ignorant as is his brother Tom, who is with his regiment simmering on the plains of India. Hycy soon turned the farm into grass, retaining in tillage only so much as gives him potatoes, oats for the horses, and some turnips for winter feeding.

This system has a twofold advantage. It gets rid of the necessity for ready-money payments to labourers, and relieves him from the drudgery of superintendence. Not that Hycy O'Callaghan would under any circumstances have condemned himself to drudgery for the sake—as he puts it—of a few shillings more or less, but he feels that the farming that confines itself to the buying and selling of stock is in every way a more gentleman-like business. When Mr. O'Callaghan was left the farm of Gurtnamona he came in for the lease alone. His father had not considered it necessary to leave him any money for the purchase of stock, and the problem how to work the farm was not easy of solution. However, the bank was accommodating, and in return for the deposit of his lease in the bank-safe, he has been granted permission to over-draw his account permanently to an amount sufficient to stock the farm. From that day to this Mr. O'Callaghan has never quite known if he was solvent at any given moment ; but he has bought and sold, hunted, shot, taken his part as steward of the neighbouring race meeting, and generally carried himself with as light a heart as if Gurtnamona were his own and no half-yearly settlement of interest on overdrafts were ever entered in his bank-book.

Mr. O'Callaghan is a thorough sportsman. From the time when he escaped from the nursery he has devoted himself heartily to the destruction of fish, flesh, and fowl. He has caught everything from a "pinkeen" to a salmon, shot everything from a wren to a wild goose, and hunted everything from the mouse in the corn-stack to the fox in the gorse cover.

See him open the stomach of his first trout, and, placing the contents in a glass of clear water, note the fly most tempting for that day, and you can understand one of the elements of his success. He is a dead shot ; but as a shooting man his conduct is not above reproach, and his ideas about boundaries are hazy. A certain off-handed carelessness as to the sacredness of his neighbour's preserves has caused some irritation from time to time ; and when he exterminated the covey of thirteen partridges carefully preserved for Mr. Lloyd's friends, who were to shoot the following clay, that gentleman would have taken serious notice of the matter had a connection of his not been a candidate for the appointment of petty-sessions clerk and Mr. O'Callaghan's cousin one of the magistrates with whom the appointment rested.

But the true magnet that has drawn Mr. O'Callaghan and most of his friends towards the occupation of a stock farmer is the branch of his business connected with the making and selling of horses. Here he feels that his occupation is that of a gentleman. From the purchase of the two brown colts at Cahirmee fair to their sale two years after at Ballinasloe as trained hunters, the speculation has been an abiding source of pleasure. Their training was a pastime, and the profit on their sale more than sufficient to pay for his subscription to the county hounds, the pink that made so brave a show at the cover-side, and the incidental expenses of the hunting season.

At the fair of Ballinasloe Mr. O'Callaghan is seen in great force. Here his flock forms a portion of the acres of snowy wool through which crowds of buyers wend their way ; and the second day his cattle are to be found in the usual corner, among the many thousand with which the large fair-green is packed. Their sale is a matter of business, interesting only in its results, and the prices are settled in the main by the market quotations. But all his energies are devoted to the sale of the horses on the third day. Two years ago he bought that chestnut colt at Mullingar fair as a four-year-old for £80 ; now the question is what money to ask. Only for that suspicion—a mere suspicion—that his wind is not quite right, the horse ought to be worth £400 as a weight-carrying hunter. It will never do to ask a smaller sum for him, lest suspicion as to his soundness might be aroused ; and yet too large a margin between the upset price and the hundred and fifty guineas for which he would gladly turn the raking chestnut over to a buyer might peril the sale. This is a matter of too deep moment to be settled by himself ; so two or three brother sportsmen are taken into confidence and consultation, when crafty plans and wily combinations are arranged that must succeed, only that they have for their basis the guileless innocence of some wealthy horse-dealer. The quiet little man, rather like a respectable butler with Puritan tendencies, who stops the chestnut as Mr. O'Callaghan rides him up and down the green, is not taken in by the reproachful observations of Mr. O'Callaghan's trusty friend, Billy Mulcahy, who ranges alongside when the dealer stops the horse, saying — .

“ Hallo, Hycy ! Is that the horse you rode in the famous run from Corrig-na-sassenagh Gorse last Christmas ?”

“ Yes, Bill.”

“ Good heavens ! you are not going to sell the horse that jumped the canal at Ballytracy ?”

“ I am, indeed. I can't afford to keep so good a one.”

“ Well, I did not think money would tempt you to part with that horse. Good-bye.”

The pint of linseed oil given to the chestnut before he left the stable has not had the desired effect. Mr. O'Callaghan has been assured that for one day it will render detection of slightly broken wind impossible, but the placid dealer sees through it before the horse has galloped two hundred yards, and turns away saying he is too good for his money. Still, the horse is ultimately sold, on account of his jumping powers, at a figure that saves his owner from actual loss.

Mr. O'Callaghan is hospitable, and his friends, Kelly of Kelly's Grove, French of Clonlough, O'Malley of Stabletown, and three or four other gallant sportsmen of the same kidney, are always welcome, as he is to their houses. The grass that straggles over the neglected gravel of the approach, and the flowering dandelions that flourish upon it spite of passing cartwheels and horses' hoofs, show that neatness is not to be counted among his virtues. A scraggy cotoneaster, torn from its support against the wall, falls across the open hall door, but has been roughly hoisted to a level with the top by a piece of rope made fast to a wall-hook above. At the door lies Tiger, a good specimen of the bull-terrier, and two hand-some Gordon setters walk in and out at their own sweet will. Mr. O'Callaghan's friends understand the ways of the house, and, having left their horses in the yard, have no fear of the dogs, who know them all, but walk straight into the room that serves at once as drawing-room, dining-room, and smoking-room. On the walls hang some sporting prints and a lithograph copy of the portrait presented to the master of the hounds by the members of the hunt. On the side-board is a miscellaneous collection of old newspapers, almanacks, some railway novels, and a moth-eaten stuffed snipe of abnormal size. We will not look into the corners or behind the writing-desk, nor yet too closely under the dining-table; for, sooth to say, Mr. O'Callaghan is a careless man, and never observes the little heaps of dust and breadcrumbs in which each leg of the table is set. If he did, Bidy O'Shea, who cooks his unpretending dinners so satisfactorily and attends to his few household wants, would declare that he was "no better than a mean prying Scotch steward, to go throublin' his head about little things in the house, when her heart was broke with work intirely." As to the cookery, even Bidy declares that "the masther" is reasonable.

"My dear fellow," Mr. O'Callaghan always observes to a person invited to dine at Gurtnamona for the first time, "I don't go in for any of your new-fangled, nonsensical dishes. I'll give you a good piece of corn beef and a wisp of cabbage, or a boiled goose with onion-sauce. You shall have some ten-year-old Jameson's whisky, and we will have a jolly good song and a chorus after dinner. So if that won't tempt you, do not come."

Gurtnamona contains three bedrooms, two of which boast of four beds in each. This arrangement affords more accommodation than would be found in a coldly formal English house, and promotes friendly conversation after the party has retired to bed, besides offering many additional opportunities for a handicap or a less complicated bargain. Handicapping is nearly a lost art, but Mr. O'Callaghan's friends acknowledge that no man could more satisfactorily arrange an exchange. He undertakes to bring a racehorse and a clothes-horse together to the satisfaction of all parties, and had no hesitation in handicapping Browne's broken-winded mare with O'Connor's grey hunter up to 14st. Both owners placing a piece of money under the bedclothes, their host said rapidly—

"The mare gives the horse sixty pounds. The horse gives the mare ten pounds. The mare gives the horse seventy pounds. The horse gives the mare ninety pounds. The mare gives the horse thirty-five pounds. The horse gives the mare forty pounds—Draw."

And as each produced a piece of money indicating that the award was accepted, the bargain was declared struck. O'Connor was not satisfied when he found that out of the puzzle of big sums twenty-five pounds only with the broken-winded mare was the exchange for his horse ; but having drawn the money, he could no more declare off the bargain than if he had permitted a buyer at a fair to place mud on the back of his cattle after having named a price.

Mr. O'Callaghan is not a drunkard, though his brother Tom, when home on leave, warned him that he drank more than was good for him. He certainly is not anything like a total abstainer, and when he rode the Bellman colt up the steps of the " grand" stand at Liscannor races, his enemies hinted that that extremely dangerous performance was the consequence of the champagne he had previously imbibed at the luncheon table underneath. But many young ladies present refused to regard the frolic as anything but an evidence of cool courage, while the delighted multitude outside the enclosure greeted the daring feat with roars of delight. At Punchestown, where so many old friends are met, he shares a goodly number of glasses, and when the " Irish money" is on in the right direction at Liverpool, he pleads guilty to a " night of it" at his hotel in honour of the success.

How the farming pays with so very little supervision is a mystery to many. In reality it does not pay in the sense in which a hard-working farmer would use the word. The rent is low, and the profits enable Mr. O'Callaghan to live from hand to mouth. He has been told that high feeding on the grass will make the pasture much more valuable, and stall-feeding with more tillage would greatly increase his income ; but no cottier is really less progressive than he. Looking only for enough to afford him the beaten track of his amusements he does not contemplate any change that would entail greater trouble and possibly greater risk. He had some idea at one time of taking the farm at Croghan ; but the herd, who as a matter of course went with the farm, bore so bad a character that he would not have him, and to dismiss him meant a deliberate courting of peril from which Mr. O'Callaghan shrank ; so he gave up the idea. With the country people around he is a favourite : never interfering in local affairs or politics, always ready to give if possible a helping hand at a fair, and constantly looking about for young horses, he and the people are on the most friendly terms. He certainly got a bad beating returning one night from Knockfad, where he had been dining with the other members of the hunt. He was confined to bed for a week, and would have sworn informations only that in the handsomest manner some of the party who had waylaid him waited upon him and explained that they had mistaken him for young Mr. Blundel of Moyglass, who was to have driven home by that road but unfortunately went by another way. The explanation was quite satisfactory, and Mr. O'Callaghan declared that he bore no malice for the mistake. On the hill opposite to Gurtnamona a large bonfire blazed the night of the first day on which he left the house, and he duly appreciated the compliment.

Mr. O'Callaghan's politics are not very decided. However, his cousin twice removed, O'Callaghan of Derrypark, is the head of the family, and as he has always been a Conservative. Mr. O'Callaghan goes with him. On questions of home politics he is profoundly ignorant, but he has an idea that a war would be a good thing in many ways. It would, he thinks, raise the price of cattle, and might give his brother Tom promotion. He takes but little interest in the land question as a means to enable him to purchase his farm. He feels quite contented as he is, and would laugh at the person who gravely proposed an increase of ten or twenty per cent, to his rent for thirty-five years that he might find himself the owner in fee at the expiration of that time. Besides, Mr. O'Callaghan's passion is fox-hunting, and being convinced that peasant-proprietary is inimical to that noble sport, he is prepared to oppose it to the bitter end.

## A Successful Shopkeeper.

Mr. O'Dowd emerged from the quarter sessions court with a beaming face when the magistrates granted a publican's licence to him years ago. Hitherto he had struggled for a time as a draper, but found that his shop hardly paid its expenses, and offered no hope of ever securing an independence. But with the grant of a licence everything was changed. Mr. O'Dowd's friends and relations made it a point of honour to go in on market days and take a glass or two for the good of the house, and when Bidy Shea had taken a glass of raw young whisky she looked with different eyes at the shawl so temptingly offered for her acceptance on credit at the opposite counter. In a few years the shop was enlarged, and by degrees every branch of a shopkeeper's business was to be found within the ever-increasing area of Mr. O'Dowd's general store. The purchaser coming in to the market could there refresh himself with porter or whisky ; he could buy bread, bacon, cloth, calico, seeds, iron, and timber, without leaving O'Dowd's shop ; and as everything was done on a credit basis Mr. O'Dowd soon monopolized the business of his native town. The signboard was repainted, and " T. O'Dowd, licensed to sell spirits, beer, and porter for consumption on the premises," was changed to " T. O'Dowd, merchant," the necessary publican's notification being placed on a side door. From the first Mr. O'Dowd recognized the advantage to the shopkeeper of credit over cash, and the £300 brought into the business by his wife enabled him to tide over the difficulties of the start. His system answered so well that he has never changed it. No payment was asked, but 15 per cent, additional was added on to the price of each article. Then compound interest and half-yearly rests soon showed a sum due to him that enabled him to obtain a large amount of credit. After the first year the payments began, and a steady average was paid yearly, the account being never quite cleared off. At length Mr. O'Dowd found his business in so solvent a state that he was able to show by his books that on a particular day he was worth £10,000 more than the amount of his debts ; so he prudently settled that amount upon his wife, and come weal, come woe, that money was thenceforth safe. His creditors found this to their cost when he made his first coup in bankruptcy, and cleared off his liabilities by an arrangement with his creditors for four shillings in the pound. Good an investment as seems his trade, for any amount of money, Mr. O'Dowd has always felt that in landed property is the only real safety. As year by year small plots of properties in the neighbourhood came into the market he purchased them, and at last he was declared the owner of the Owenmackenna estate, on which there was a large number of poor tenants. The rents had not been raised for fifty years, and an average of two gales was always due.

Had the unbusinesslike owner made a clean sweep of the timber on the property, or increased the rents, or even insisted on the tenants clearing up the arrears, Mr. O'Dowd would never have found himself in possession of a property that would in his hands clear off the purchase money in ten years. When the tenants knew into whose hands they had fallen there was bitterness in Owenmackenna, and Mr. O'Dowd was not long permitted to remain in ignorance of the ultimatum, anonymously conveyed, that any increase of rent would be answered by a bullet. Mr. O'Dowd knew his position and his friends too well to mind that threat. One son was the Roman Catholic curate of an adjoining parish ; another the dispensary doctor of that district. Between them he was pretty safe to know if any real mischief was to be apprehended and from what quarter. A hard man is Mr. O'Dowd, and yet so plausible that even the victims of his system of bookkeeping and his proprietorial views say there is a great deal of good in him. " No, William O'Callaghan," he answered to that heavily rented tenant who with his wife came in to remonstrate against the increase imposed upon his

farm, “ I will not take one penny less than the value I put upon my land. If you don’t like it another will. But that is no reason why Mrs. O’Callaghan should be in want of a better cloak than the one she is wearing. Go down to the shop, Mrs. O’Callaghan, and get a good cloak for yourself ; you can pay me at your convenience. I hate to see any respectable woman wanting her rights in the way of dress.” Mrs. O’Callaghan has been thus duly inaugurated in the mysteries of credit, and in her Mr. O’Dowd has found for the time a staunch ally. Mr. O’Dowd declares that most of the land in the country is let below its value, and that the tenants are well able to pay double the amount if necessary. He instances the case of the townland of Bunnanubber, let in bulk to a village for £60 a year, and sublet in rundale, Michael Connor holding five acres in forty patches. Having striped the townland and settled each man’s holding at a given rent, the tenants found that they paid double the former amount, and complained bitterly. Mr. O’Dowd, knowing the Irishman’s hopeful view of the future, said he would not ask for any rent for six years, during which time any one of the tenants ought to be able to make money enough to take him to America ; but at the expiration of six years any one who remained must pay up the entire arrear. This seemed to the tenants a good offer. Six years was a long time, and God was good ! At the end of the time Mr. O’Dowd demanded all the arrears. The tenants said they were ruined ; but in two instalments the entire amount was paid, as well as the running gales of rent.

Mr. O’Dowd has not retired from trade, as so many would have done on the acquisition of so much property as he has bought. He is as keen a man of business as ever, and looks upon his property as a means for the increase of his business. When Paddy Miles was met wearing a new hat, which he had evidently bought in a rival establishment, Mr. O’Dowd ordered him to attend at the office at once and pay up his account for rent and goods. It was only by submitting to a fine of half a crown that Paddy escaped the threatened ruin, for to pay up his account was impossible ; and he has undertaken not again to break the rule of the property by buying anything in any other house than that of his landlord. It is unnecessary to say that the rents on Mr. O’Dowd’s properties are much higher than on properties belonging to the old landlords, yet no tenants in the country make a braver show at mass or market. Mr. O’Dowd holds that tenants will cultivate up to their necessities, and only so far. These necessities are rent, food, and clothing ; and the land, food, and clothes being supplied by him, he has a fair idea of the amount that can be borne by them. Tom Lahy complains of being charged 16s. a hundredweight for guano, instead of 12s. 6d., which is the price in the open market ; but as he will not have to pay for it for a year the neighbours do not think he has any cause for complaint. When he is asked to pay up an instalment of his account, he will have forgotten all about that item. Nor will he suspect that his twenty pounds’ weight of turnip seed really consisted of half that quantity, ten pounds being a cheap seed of another description, duly scalded and killed by the thoughtful seed merchant, that its germination might not expose the fraud. Mr. O’Dowd is strong on the innocence of the transaction ; for is it not a well-known fact that the people sow all seeds too thickly ? and the little plan only secures that seed be sown in the proportion advised by good farmers.

Mr. O’Dowd’s best customers are the women, whose adornments form the greater portion of their husbands’ bills, to the great injury of these patient spouses. When Paddy Malley sold his cow, and honestly determined to pay the four or five pounds that he thought his bill amounted to, he was sorely vexed to find he owed ten pounds ten, which was accounted for by the price of his wife’s new hat and shawl, and the finely trimmed dress with which his daughter dazzled the neighbours on Sundays. Mrs. Malley did not hesitate a moment in ordering on credit the green silk hat with blue flowers and feathers and pink strings for which twenty-five shillings was charged in the bill. Who knows what might not turn up before payment was asked ?

And had Bill Grogan's daughter been dependent upon the money in her purse she would have choked with envy before she allowed that passion to lead her into the extravagance of ordering a bonnet at thirty shillings that must have twice as many colours and much wider strings than Biddy Malley's hat.

Mr. O'Dowd is not a poor-law guardian. That position would deprive him of the advantage of contracting for the food and clothing required in the workhouse. He has many customers on the board, and can command the acceptance of his tenders. The representation of a division he regards as an empty honour, the command of the representative a solid advantage. After the partial failure of the potato crop of 1879 he soon read the signs of the times, and determined that if money was to be distributed his neighbourhood must have its share. He has adopted the stories of famine to the fullest extent. If money is to be obtained, there must be a high bid made for it in the competition of destitution. He is an active member of the local relief committee, and he declares the poverty of his tenants to be so great that special applications have been made by him in their behalf. Yet his offer of a reduction of rent had a curious ring to starving people. All the tenants on Owenmackenna who paid up the rent to the 1st of November were offered a reduction of 25 per cent. As Mr. O'Dowd says that the tenants owe him from two to five years' rent, the offer was a safe business transaction to him, and those who paid have not been neglected in the lavish supply of meal and seed from the different charitable funds. Michael Heffernan is one of the tenants Mr. O'Dowd declares to be five years in arrear. Michael stoutly denies it, but he has no receipt to show. Mr. O'Dowd's business system is not calculated to encourage in his tenant the independence of the village blacksmith, who "owes not any man." When Heffernan went at fairly regular intervals to pay his rent, he was directed to the office, where he was assured that the amount was credited in the book and no receipt was necessary. When he went to claim the abatement offered for punctual payment he found that his payments were all credited for the general account of shop goods and the deficit debited to his rent account. Heffernan is growing dangerous, and it has become a question whether Mr. O'Dowd will not give him the abatement.

Mr. O'Dowd has strong views about public works, and has spoken sternly on the impropriety of offering charity to people who are able and willing to work. A large drainage scheme would be worth many hundreds to him. The building of a fishing pier would materially benefit him. Of course the meal account is a paying business. But half the amount in ready money circulating in the district would yield him double the profit, as the contract price of meal is low. He has borrowed some thousands from the Board of Works to expend upon the Owenmackenna property ; and as he has let the drainage to the tenants, who are to be paid by wiping off their arrears due to him, the grant of money at 1 per cent, is a windfall making the years 1879 and 1880 not the least prosperous of the last decade.

Mr. O'Dowd is a strong opponent of the cry for fixity of tenure at fair rents ; but though a landlord he has thrown himself into the agitation for a peasant proprietary. While he was speaking at the nearest land meeting, an awkward statement was made that he had fifteen processes for non-payment of rent in the hands of the process-server. He explained that they owed him five years' rent, but forgot to say how the rent and shop accounts had been manipulated.

Mr. O'Dowd is prepared to stand up for the sacred rights of the people. A national Parliament and peasant proprietary are the two planks of his platform. Nothing less will satisfy him. "I am prepared to sell every farm on my property to my tenants to-morrow," he exclaimed, knowing how empty were the pockets of the tenantry. "The tiller of the soil,

rooted in the holding that he has made fertile by the sweat of his brow, is the end for which we struggle, and which we must attain." The cheering crowd does not give Mr. O'Dowd credit for as much sincerity as he deserves. A peasant proprietary would mean for him a ready purchase of property. He has too large an experience of the certainty of mortgages on small estates not to know that the acquisition of property by him will be materially assisted by the segregation of the larger properties around him. Besides, he owes a grudge to the landlords. Being, as he is, in a position to know who can pay, he refused to accept the plea of ruin put in by tenants on Sir George Baker's property. In due course they were served with processes and decrees were obtained ; but when the bailiffs went to execute the decrees they were confronted by notices from the landlord, who had not called for his rent, that the rent was due, and must first be paid before Mr. O'Dowd's debt could be considered. This Mr. O'Dowd stigmatizes as a shabby trick. A peasant proprietary would prevent such a plan for cheating the shopkeeper of his due, and Mr. O'Dowd would have no objection to even the compulsory sale to the tenants of the portion of his property not farmed by himself, if it were part of a scheme that would relieve him from the landlord's priority and give him a fair start for repurchase. The redistribution of property would mean increased security for his credit, and the certainty of an ultimate accumulation of real estate that would one day place the O'Dowds of Owenmackenna among the leading families of the county.

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#### A Western Tenant.

Mat Egan is considered by the neighbours to be a very snug man. His farm of twenty-five acres of arable land, with about fifty acres of bog attached, is known in the Ordnance Valuation Office as Lot 9 in the tenement valuation of the townland of Knockeenashinnagh, a name signifying the little hill of the fox. The valuation of the lot is £18 ; the rent paid by Egan £28, being calculated at £1 an acre for the arable land and £3 for the fifty acres of bog. About ten acres of the arable land is generally under crops. The remainder is in grass, the limestone rock cropping up in places, so that, stooping low, these parts seem only a mass of bare rock with tufts of herbage and fern peeping up here and there. This portion was valued by the Government valuers in 1851 at a very low rate, and the bog at a merely nominal figure, as all light lands and bog were valued at that time. But Mat Egan knows how surely his sheep will find their way to the rock fields where the sweet grasses spring from every cleft and crevice, and where they grow as quickly as if planted in forcing beds ; and how in winter the cattle will abandon the withered herbage of the coarse bottoms for the bog, where, gingerly drawing up the black rushes whose buried portions are white and succulent and from six to ten inches long, they feed upon the tender morsels and thrive better than upon the grass. From the bog, too, he obtains heather for bedding the two young colts and an ample store of fuel for his house. He has therefore not complained of the discrepancy between his rent and the Ordnance valuation.

The house and outhouses form three sides of a square, along the fourth side of which runs the rough bohereen, or lane, by which the house is approached from the high-road. The centre is half filled by a manure heap ; and in the green, stagnant water that occupies the remainder the ducks and geese find constant occupation. The manure heap so boldly planted in front of the door gives off no pungent smell, thanks to the deodorizing properties of the bog mould of which it is more than half composed. This has been collected through the winter months from the portion of the bog where the refuse of the turf-cutting has formed a disintegrated mass of peat. The patient asses, who sink half-way to the knees, carry it in panniers straight on to the manure heap, where the withdrawal of a stick allows the hinged bottoms of the panniers to

open, depositing the load without further trouble. Opposite to the house is the barn, whose door is never locked—for the crime of robbery is of rare occurrence, and a robber or thief would have but a poor chance of escape from detection. Beside the house is a stable for the cows and the horse, and at the end of it a shed has been made for the cart, the roof formed of a pile of turf which can be used as fuel if necessary.

The dwelling-house is a building of one story in the eave of whose thatched roof the sparrows pick out holes in spring and build their nests. The thatch is much more comfortable than slates, being warmer in winter and cooler in summer ; and though it has assumed a green shade from the moss that has begun to form on the old straw, it will keep out the rain well for the remainder of the ten years since the last coat was added to it. Of course the gable is graced by a plant of house-leek, which is the only insurance against fire that Mat Egan allows himself ; but everybody knows how excellent a preventive against fire is that precious plant, and how valuable a safeguard against the designs of bad fairies.

The door in the middle of the house opens into the kitchen and living-room. At one end is the room occupied by the two sons and the servant-boy, and at the other the apartment in which Mat Egan, his wife, and his three unmarried daughters sleep in two beds, the tops of whose arched roofs are the receptacles for the unused lumber of the female portion of the house. On the wall is hung a small delft altar surrounded by artificial flowers, and before this the inmates of the room devoutly pray. It must be confessed that on the window-shelf is kept the milk, and the butter that has been made for market. There is plenty of room in the barn, but the trouble of going there with the milk would be greater. In the middle of the kitchen is a long table at which all the family take their meals, consisting of stir-about and milk in the morning, with bread and tea for the heads of the house, and potatoes and milk for dinner, with eggs added in the summer and autumn. In one corner are the roosts for the fowls—for fowls must have warmth, and the kitchen is the most convenient place—and on the walls are hung two pyramidal nests made of plaited straw, that the hens may lay in comfort.

Egan's landlord made him a present of a range with an oven, which was anything but satisfactory, as the turf did not burn so well as it does on the ground ; but the oven has been useful for the hens to hatch in, and Egan has too great a regard for his landlord's good opinion to discard the unwelcome evidence of improvement. In every part of the house dirt reigns supreme, and a few panniers full of the absorbent turf mould thrown upon the mortar floor of the kitchen would materially sweeten the atmosphere of that apartment. Mrs. Egan would not consider it lucky to see the house unduly clean. She holds firmly by the old adage, " There's luck in muck," which is interpreted so literally by all the household that no member of the family would court ill fortune by washing face or hands before going in to market.

When Mat Egan succeeded to the farm he found it saddled with a charge of £200, being the fortunes payable to his two sisters on their marriage. When, the following Shrovetide, he found that the matchmaker of that neighbourhood had arranged a marriage for each, he was obliged to borrow the money from the bank in the neighbouring town. This compelled a Spartan simplicity in family arrangements, and precluded the possibility of indulging in animal food, except a little fat bacon with cabbage on Sunday. In time the debt was paid off, and the gradually diminishing bill was replaced in the bank by a deposit receipt, to which money has been constantly added, until now a considerable sum is placed to his credit. His style of living has never changed, except that within ten years he has added tea to his expenses, for which he pays 4s. a pound, that being the lowest price at which tea is procurable at the nearest grocer's.

In the entire farm there is not one straight fence. The arable land is curiously divided by tortuous banks, which, with the “grip” at each side, measure at least twelve feet across, the cart gaps being built up with loose stones when the crops are down. In one field are the remains of a similar bank now partially levelled ; but Egan has never thought of digging it entirely away and utilizing the ground for tillage. If all the banks were removed and walls built in their places more than an acre of valuable land would be added to the tillage, but Egan thinks the operation would be too much trouble. Nor does he consider it necessary to plough his potato soil or stubble after the crop has been gathered in autumn. His father never did it before him, and he does not see why he should be always trying new plans like those Scotch Protestants who have settled on so many large farms in the neighbourhood.

Every grip is filled with nettles and briars ; the growing oat crop struggles with the perennial thistle, dock, and prassia ; and the potatoes have a fight for existence with couch-grass, wild ranunculus, and other weeds of greater or lesser injury ; but Egan is of opinion that the expense of keeping these crops thoroughly free from weeds would be thrown away. In spring and harvest he hires five labourers to sow, reap, and dig ; but in the slack seasons he confines his attention to the tillage farm, to the collection of bog mould, which is done by one servant-boy ; while such of the labourers as are not small farmers hard by, return to the villages and towns, where they try to pull through the idle time with the aid of the union. Of course what remains of the circular rath, forty yards in diameter, in the middle of the potato-field, has never been disturbed by placing a crop in it. Egan knows too well how certainly such an indignity to the dwelling-place of the fairies—of whom he always speaks cautiously as “the good people”—would be resented. As surely as the killing of the magpie that builds its domed nest in the small tree close to the house would be avenged by the destruction of his chickens, or the death of a cricket followed by the ruin of woollen articles left near the fire, being eaten into holes by the infuriated survivors, so surely would the first interference with the rath be followed by some misfortune to his family.

Egan’s eldest daughter Kate was married last Shrovetide, an event that was for a time the cause of serious anxiety. Mary, the second girl, is more comely, and William Flaherty, meeting her at Mrs. Cullinan’s wake, fell in love with her, not more from her good looks than from her general sprightliness and gaiety at the post-mortem festivities. William Flaherty was an eligible husband in every way ; so the matchmaker flattered herself that in making the proposal she was certain of a favourable reply. But there was a difficulty in the matter. Egan determined that but one daughter must marry that Shrovetide ; and of course the marriage of the younger daughter would be an injustice to the elder. Everybody knows that if the eldest daughter is not married first, she receives a “blast” that may injure her future prospects. Kate feels that she would rather die than suffer the indignity of being chalked on “chalk Sunday”—the first Sunday in Lent—when the boys stand in rows at the chapel door, their hands well rubbed with chalk, and mercilessly clap the backs of the girls who have been passed over in the Shrovetide matchmaking, thereby branding them as rejected. So Kate must be married first. The situation was explained to Flaherty, and it was suggested that he should marry Kate instead of Mary. This he declined, and after much pressure by the matchmaker, assisted by the girl’s mother, Egan at length consented to the marriage, undertaking to give his daughter openly a fortune of fifty pounds and a second fifty secretly, of which the priest was to know nothing ; thereby cheating that worthy pastor of £2 10s., his ordinary percentage. Flaherty was also to have five head of cattle from a herd of thirty that Egan had on a farm taken by him as winterage. When the bargain was concluded, Egan said, “Now, William, of course I’ll stick to my bargain, though in all fairness Kate ought to be married first ; and a finer warrant to milk a cow or feed a pig you will not find in Connaught. But if you will change your mind and marry Kate, I will give you the pick of the cattle, and if you insist on taking Mary you

must be content with the culls." Flaherty gave no immediate answer, but consulted his friend Michael Scanlon, who, on considering the case, advised him to marry Kate. "For," he said, "believe me, William, when you come to marriage there is not the differ of a cow between one woman and another." So Mary now awaits her turn, which will come next Shrovetide.

Egan's life is by no means devoid of amusement. On fair days and at market he meets the neighbours and talks over local affairs. Holidays are rather a nuisance, as he is really industrious and does not like enforced idleness on a fine spring or harvest day. But a race meeting affords him the keenest enjoyment, and he looks forward anxiously to the annual steeple-chases about ten miles distant. As for flat-racing, he considers it a poor amusement, only fit for Englishmen ; but he will stand all day at a big fence on the chance of seeing a fall, and shout with delight as the horses sweep over it. Were his fences twenty times as good as they are, he would gladly see them broken by jumping horses, and does not grudge the trouble of remaking them when he has had the pleasure of seeing the foxhounds hunting and the excitement of watching the fencing of the pursuing field.

But perhaps no day in the year has for him a greater attraction than the day when at the baronial sessions he fights his battle for a road contract ; for, like his neighbours who possess horses, he is a road contractor, and thus secures work for his horse during the idle time. He wants to secure the contract for the repair of five hundred perches of the public road running past his farm, and he has left no stone unturned to effect that purpose. Not alone his landlord, but every magistrate who is entitled to sit at "road sessions" is canvassed, and the assistance of the parish priest is sought to influence the ratepayers who have been chosen by ballot to sit with the magistrates. He is prepared to accept the contract at 8*d.* a perch, so he puts in tenders at 13*d.*, the 3 being so formed that if no lower tender has been made he can declare the figure a 5. Then tenders at 11*d.*, 10*d.*, 9*d.*, and 8*d.* are put in. If any other tenders are made for that portion of the road he claims the contract on the proposal immediately below them, withdrawing any tender for a smaller sum. The competition is keen and exciting, and he delights in the exercise of his cunning. Indeed, the entire business is pleasant, affording, as it does, opportunity for staking his ingenuity against the observation of the county surveyor who might possibly pass as properly done some superficial repairs.

In years gone by Egan has listened night after night to the recital of fairy legends, having for their burden the rescue of some beautiful maiden ; or the adventures of some poor boy who leaves home to seek his fortune ; his mother's leave-taking being always the casting of a handful of feathers after him, while she cries—

" My blessing go high, my blessing go low,  
My blessing go with you wherever you go."

And how, after thrilling adventures, in which he succeeded as often by cunning as by valour, he returns in a year and a day, having wedded a lovely princess, the invariable ending of the recital being "and if they don't live happy, that you and I may."

Now these charming and highly coloured stories have been swept away by the flood of education, and Egan satisfies his desire for news and forms his politics from the columns of the *Weekly News*, which is read by the National schoolmaster at the fireside to an attentive audience every Friday evening. He was not certain that the English Government was such a curse to Ireland and the landlords such robbers until he heard the *Irish World* read, which interesting American paper informed him of atrocities committed in his own parish of which he had never heard before.

So far as his own landlord is concerned Mat Egan declares he has nothing of which he can complain. His rent remains what it was when his father first took the farm, and in many ways he has been assisted by the landlord. He has used these facts in his arguments with the National schoolmaster, whose political views are decidedly inimical to landlords. But he cannot deny that on the property at the other side of the road the rents have been twice raised, until they stand now 50 per cent, over what they were fifteen years ago. His two sons are enamoured of the doctrine of Socialism. They are quite content to share the farm equally if their father dies ; and one points out that, although their present landlord has not raised the rent, perhaps when his son, who is now in the army, succeeds him the rent may be increased.

Egan's two sons have been for some time a cause of anxiety to him. They are frequently out until two and three o'clock. He knows that the meetings of the society he dreads are generally held under the cloak of a dance, and he fears that sooner or later his sons will find themselves within the grasp of the law. He disapproves of the secret society, and was so angry when Ned Massy, who shot Mr. Brophy in the back when that gentleman was driving past the houses in the outskirts of the nearest town, spoke openly to his sons and daughters of his part in the murder as they sat by the fire one night, that he ordered Massy to leave his house. Of course he gave no information to the police. He does not consider the murder any of his business. Neither do the various people who were standing at their doors when Mr. Brophy was shot and saw the murder. And though £1500 has been offered as a reward for information Massy is perfectly safe.

Egan is not dissatisfied with the law, and regards with uneasiness any projected change. Fenianism he cordially distrusted, but his natural timidity made him cautious about expressing his opinions. The Fenians threatened to pike him if he would not join when the time came. The police intimated that any outrage would be visited by a police-tax, and Egan declares that it was like living with a pike at your back and a bayonet at your breast. Until the clergy joined the land agitation Egan distrusted that also. He is now, to a certain extent, carried away by his family, who have all, especially the women, entered into the combination heart and soul. So far he has paid his rent, though not until he was processed, as he knew the danger of appearing to pay it without pressure. The winter of 1879 has been a good one for him, as Father Mooney has kindly put his name on the list for relief, and thus saved him a considerable sum that he would otherwise have paid for meal. Father Mooney has not been forgotten in the Easter offering, and his kindness has borne fruit in increased dues. But for the landlord Egan will not produce more than half the rent at May, and he is beginning to yield to the influence of his wife and sons, who declare that even half the rent is too much to give to a tyrant, who in asking any rent at all is robbing honest labour of the land that God has made for the people.

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