

ADVENTURERS
OF THE NIGHT
G.A. Birmingham

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ADVENTURERS OF THE NIGHT

G. A. BIRMINGHAM

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ADVENTURERS OF THE NIGHT

UP, THE REBELS!

OUR CASUALTY AND OTHER STORIES

THE ISLAND MYSTERY

GOSSAMER

MINNIE'S BISHOP AND OTHER STORIES

GENERAL JOHN REGAN

THE LOST TRIBES

SPANISH GOLD

LALAGE'S LOVERS

THE SEARCH PARTY

THE SIMPKINS PLOT

THE MAJOR'S NIECE

PRISCILLA'S SPIES

THE RED HAND OF ULSTER

THE ADVENTURES OF DR. WHITTY

THE SEETHING POT

THE BAD TIMES

HYACINTH

FROM DUBLIN TO CHICAGO

NEW YORK : GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

ADVENTURERS OF THE NIGHT

BY

G. A. BIRMINGHAM

*Author of "Up, the Rebels!" "Our
Casualty,"
"Spanish Gold," "The
Island Mystery," etc.*

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ADVENTURERS OF THE NIGHT

Adventurers of the Night

CHAPTER I

A country parson has no right to expect adventures. When he is sixty years of age he has certainly no right to enjoy adventures when they come. Yet, in spite of some hours of discomfort and some moments of anxiety I got a great deal of pleasure out of the happenings of last summer. I have been for twenty years rector of Carrigahooly, and I rather prided myself on finding the satisfaction of peace in the unbroken monotony of my life. Now, in spite of my sixty years, I know that I was wrong in preferring quietness to excitement. I ask for nothing better now than more adventures. I want to be shaken up out of the placid life into which I am already beginning to settle down again. Alas! my one adventure only lasted, from start to finish, for three days, far too short a time, and I am not at all likely ever to be mixed up again in such an affair.

The story begins on the day of the July fair in Dunally. Dunally is a small town of no particular importance, and fairs are held there once a quarter, on the last Tuesdays of July, October, and so forth. I went there by the early train to buy a cow. I wasted my day. There were very few cows for sale and they fetched prices far beyond my modest means. The business of the day was over so far as I was

concerned at ten o'clock in the morning, when a little Kerry cow which I liked was sold to a Dublin dealer for three pounds more than I was prepared to give. After that I had nothing whatever to do till four o'clock in the afternoon. Dunally is ten miles from Carrigahooly, too far for me to walk, and there is only one train each way in the day.

When there is only one train in the day people are careful not to miss it. The Carrigahooly people who had been to the fair began to walk up towards the station at about three o'clock. When I got there at half-past three there was a small crowd on the platform. I live on very good terms with the people of Carrigahooly, though I am a clergyman of the Church of Ireland, and ninety-eight per cent of them are Roman Catholics. I spent the first half-hour of my wait pleasantly enough, chatting to one farmer or another about the price of stock, a matter which interests them--and me--much more than the state of the country or the prospects of establishing an Irish Republic. Indeed, the only person who made any remark about current affairs was Mrs. Maher, the owner and manager of the "Imperial" Hotel in Carrigahooly. She held a copy of the "Irish Independent" in her hand when I greeted her, and she had evidently been slightly impressed by the big letters in which that morning's tragedy was announced.

"It's a pity, now," she said, "to be shooting the police the way they are. But, of course, it's hard to blame the boys that does it with the way things are going on at the present time."

Having expressed that opinion in a detached and slightly bored tone, she went on to discuss with animation and great acuteness the amazing rise in the cost of feeding stuffs for pigs. I keep a pig myself, and Mrs. Maher keeps three, so we got on very well together till four o'clock. Then Patterson came into the station. He is the inspector of police in our district, and he lives in Carrigahooly. He is a young man, and I find him both pleasant and friendly. I left Mrs. Maher and went over to him.

I had time for quite a long chat with him, for the train was half-an-hour late. No one, not even Patterson, though he is an Englishman, was surprised or annoyed at the train's failure to be up to time. We all expected it to be later than it was, and we should not have been surprised if it had not got to Dunally till five o'clock. It comes all the way from Dublin, a matter of 180 miles or so, and it has to stop at seventeen stations before it gets to Dunally, so it cannot possibly be punctual. Patterson and I talked about mackerel fishing.

I own a five-ton boat called the "Aurora," the only pleasure boat in Carrigahooly Bay, and I am always glad to lend her to Patterson, or to take him out with me. Indeed, I think that he uses the boat more than I do myself in the course of the

summer. I feel that Patterson has a sort of claim on the "Aurora," for I bought her from his predecessor, who had in his turn bought her from a still earlier district inspector of police. Thus she has been connected with the police for ten or fifteen years, and it was rather hard on Patterson that I should have stepped in and bought her just before he arrived in Carrigahooly. She is a good, seaworthy boat, but some of her gear is old, and prices being what they are nowadays, I am not in a position to replace things. Patterson was explaining to me that the jib sheets were really in a very bad state when the train bumped over the points outside the station and drew up at the platform.

It was then that we caught our first glimpse of Molly Floyd. She was leaning out of the window of a third-class carriage. She wore, I remember, a bright blue cotton blouse and no hat. Her hair was blown about and her face had several large smuts on it. She must, I imagine, have kept her head out of the window a good deal during the nine hours of the journey. But in spite of the smuts and the tousled hair, she looked remarkably pretty.

I suppose that an elderly country parson ought to turn away his eyes from the vanity of pretty faces. I did no such thing. I looked at Molly as the train came in, and I was conscious of a little thrill of pleasure. Pretty girls are common enough in the west of Ireland, and I see three or four every day of my life; but Molly was more than simply pretty. Her eyes sparkled, and there was something about her mouth and the set of her head which suggested that she was full of animation, quite prepared to enjoy whatever life brought her. I did not consciously determine to travel with her, but while the crowd from the fair scrambled for seats elsewhere I found myself with my hand on the door of her compartment. She smiled in the friendliest way when she stood aside to let me get in.

There was far more excuse for Patterson than there was for me. He was scarcely thirty years old, and at that age a man ought to be affected by a pretty face. I have no doubt that he, too, wanted to travel in Molly's company, to sit opposite her and look at her pretty face. But there were difficulties in his way. Patterson had been on duty all day and wore uniform, the uniform of a district inspector of police, which gives a man rank as an officer and a gentleman. There are regulations governing the conduct of men in this position. They must, while they are actually wearing uniform, travel in first-class carriages. I suppose that the King, or whoever makes these rules, thinks that people will respect officers more if they buy unnecessarily expensive railway tickets. Perhaps that does happen in England. Here, in Ireland, we would not respect officers or gentlemen even if they travelled in specially designed *trains de luxe*.

Patterson, with the return half of a first-class ticket in his pocket, walked with determined strides to a smoking carriage further up the train. But he did not get into it. Inclination triumphed over his sense of duty. He came back to Molly's compartment, and when he got into it pretended that he had come to finish what he was saying to me about the "Aurora's" jib sheets.

Molly was not travelling alone. In the far corner of the compartment was an elderly man whom she addressed as "Father." He seemed to me an inoffensive gentleman, and I should have guessed him to be a professor in some university--a minor kind of professor with a subject which few people want to know anything about. Patterson looked at him with some suspicion. It is the duty of an Irish policeman to look suspiciously at anyone whom he knows nothing about--and, of course, with still more suspicion at most people he knows all about. Patterson, though he had ventured into a third-class carriage, was still conscious of his duty. He looked at Molly a good deal, but I noticed that he eyed the old gentleman in the corner sharply from time to time. A regard for his own personal safety keeps a man alert, and Patterson could not afford to give all his attention to any girl, however pretty, unless he were quite satisfied about her father.

Nowadays, landlords being nearly an extinct species, the police afford almost the only big game shooting in Ireland, and we are a sporting people. It is only natural that men like Patterson become exceedingly wary. Deer on Scottish moors have, I am told, a way of raising their heads and sniffing the air when they are conscious of anything unusual in their neighbourhood. Irish policemen are acquiring a protective instinct of the same sort.

It appeared, when the train reached Carrigahooly, that Patterson and I were not the only people in Dunally who had noticed Molly Floyd leaning out of the window. I suppose, indeed, that everybody noticed her, but Mrs. Maher had looked at her with interest. Mrs. Maher, who is a middle-aged, acute business woman, did not care in the least whether the girl's face were pretty or plain. What attracted her was the fact that Molly and her father were strangers. She saw the father, for she came to the window of the carriage and looked in before the train left Dunally. I have no doubt that she made up her mind then and there that there was a chance of profit for her.

At Carrigahooly the train stops finally. It cannot go any further, for beyond Carrigahooly there is nothing but the Atlantic Ocean, and Inisheeny Island eight miles off the coast. It was, therefore, plain to Mrs. Maher that the Floyds must be going to get out at Carrigahooly, and, since there was no train back to Dublin till the next day, must mean to stay there.

On the platform, when we all got out, Mrs. Maher came up to Molly Floyd.

"I beg your pardon, miss," she said, "but are you thinking of staying in the hotel?"

"Yes, we are," said Molly. "We want to stay there for a night, or perhaps more. Do you know where it is? Can we get a car to drive us there?"

Her father pulled out a note book from his pocket and referred to it. He was evidently one of those men who cannot trust their memories, and have to keep everything written down.

"The 'Imperial' Hotel," he said.

"There's no other hotel in the place only the Imperial," said Mrs. Maher; "but you'll not find a more comfortable house in Ireland, wherever you go. His Reverence will tell you that, and so will Mr. Patterson."

She looked round at Patterson and me as she spoke, drawing us into the conversation in the pleasant, friendly way common in the west of Ireland. I was quite prepared to support the first part of her statement. Hers is the only hotel in Carrigahooly. But I was not prepared to say that there is no more comfortable hotel in Ireland. I have never had to stay there, but judging by what I have heard of it there cannot possibly be many less comfortable hotels.

"I expect," I said, "that Mrs. Maher will put you up all right."

That was as much as I could say. Patterson would not even say that. He stayed a fortnight with Mrs. Maher when he first came to Carrigahooly and he knows all about her hotel. He said nothing at all. Considering that he is a very honest man, and therefore fond of blurting out unpleasant truths, it was kind of him to keep silence. I suppose he has been long enough in Ireland to learn that it is never right to speak the truth to a neighbour's injury. And, whatever Mrs. Maher's hotel was like, there was nowhere else for the Floyds to go.

"I've Jimmy outside with the ass-cart," said Mrs. Maher; "for I've two young pigs that I bought in the fair, and he'll be bringing them down for me. So if you've any luggage, Miss----"

"We haven't much," said Molly. "There's a small trunk in the van and a bundle done up in green canvas; and there are two bags in the carriage."

"I'll tell Jimmy to see after them," said Mrs. Maher.

Patterson and I had no reason for lingering in the station. We went on, leaving Mrs. Maher and Jimmy to deal with the Floyds, the small trunk, the bundle, the bags, and the two young pigs.

CHAPTER II

When I had finished tea--tea, and not dinner, is the meal which my housekeeper gives me in the evening--I lit my pipe and went out to the garden to spray a pear tree. I was anxious about that tree because its leaves were curling up in a curious way. I thought that a washing with soapy water might do it good.

I took my nephew, Tommy Graham, with me to do the actual work. Tommy is my sister Jane's eldest boy. He is between sixteen and seventeen years of age, and has reached the fifth form--the lower fifth, I think--at Haileybury. This year, owing to an outbreak of measles among his sisters, he is spending his summer holidays with me. Jane hinted that I might find time to read a little Latin--or, better still, a little Greek--with him every morning. I do not attempt this. I have a high opinion of the classical knowledge of the fifth form public school boy. I am inclined to think that Tommy would lose all respect for me if I attempted to read Plautus with him. I am quite sure that I should come to grief badly over a chorus of "Euripides." But I do something for Tommy's education, I taught him a little about sailing boats last time he was here, and I am going on with the course this year. I have also taught him how to look after bees, and I mean to teach him how to spray pear trees. If Tommy is as intelligent and active at his Greek as he is at sailing and bee-keeping he ought to be in the upper sixth very soon.

I sat on a garden seat at a safe distance and gave orders while Tommy wet himself and the pear tree with soapy water squirted out of a syringe.

Patterson found us engaged in this way when he walked into my garden about nine o'clock. He insisted on my stopping my part of the work and going into the house with him.

"I want to talk to you, Rector," he said.

"Tommy," I said, "go on with the pear tree like a good man. You can't give it too much. When you've finished----"

"Right-o," said Tommy. "I'll do the next one, too. And, I say, Uncle Terence, I suppose I can have that thriller about the man who murdered the Prime Minister to read in bed? I shall have to go to bed early if you and Mr. Patterson are going to talk secrets."

I wanted that thriller myself. It had just come from the library, and detective fiction is my favourite kind of reading. But when Tommy actually proposed to go to bed rather than interrupt Patterson and me. I felt that he had a good claim on the book. Tommy is a very tactful boy and is seldom in the way. I fancy that my talks

with Patterson do not interest him much. I dare say he would rather go to bed than sit listening to us. Still, he ought to have the book.

Patterson made a sort of apology for dragging me away from Tommy and the pear tree.

"There's nobody except you in this infernal place that I can talk to," he said.

That, I think, is very nearly true. A police officer leads a lonely life in a small Irish town nowadays; and Carrigahooly never was a centre of social life. Under normal circumstances Patterson would probably have made friends with the doctor and with Farrelly, our only solicitor. But the doctor, besides being a very busy man, is a strong Sinn Feiner, which, of course, cuts him off from the police. Farrelly is a Sinn Feiner, too, and made a speech the other day in which he said that the soldiers and the police are members of a murder club. Farrelly is a nice, pleasant-mannered young fellow, and I do not suppose he really meant what he said. But having committed himself to a statement of that kind he cannot well invite Patterson to his house to play cards in the evening. Patterson, who was a soldier before he became a police officer, was hit, so to speak, on both sides of the head by the murder club accusation, and he declined to have anything more to do with Farrelly. I tried to explain to him that a solicitor is dependent for his living on the public, and must say the sort of things people want said. Patterson, unfortunately, cannot understand this point of view. He insists on thinking that Farrelly accused him of planning secret assassinations.

Shut off from the friendship of men of his own class, Patterson might have taken to what is called "low society"--in my opinion the most amusing society there is. He might have made friends with Quin, who won for himself the name of Poacher Quin in the days when there was any game left to poach in this part of the country. Quin is the only man in Carrigahooly who still manages to secure enough whisky to make him drunk, and he is an outcast from Sinn Fein circles. He would not, as he once explained to me, obey the laws when the gentry made them; so it is not to be expected that he would obey laws made by men no better than himself. An independent rebel of this kind finds himself up against Sinn Fein and organised Labour nowadays exactly as he was up against Lord Maghera and his friends before they sold their property and cleared out of the country. Quin would have no objection to associating with a police officer now when a police officer is his fellow outlaw. But Patterson never took to Quin. Nor does he care to go in for an illicit love affair with Quin's daughter Sabina. The girl, though her face is seldom clean, is quite good-looking. She is a servant in Mrs. Maher's "Imperial" Hotel; but she spends a great deal of her time in Patterson's kitchen. She goes there to see her aunt, Mrs. Dever, who is Patterson's housekeeper. She has all her father's dislike of law and

contempt for public opinion, so she would quite willingly associate with a policeman or a soldier. But Patterson never speaks to her.

It is not priggishness or any undue preference for respectability which keeps Patterson from making friends with the Quins. It is simply that he doesn't understand the people of this country. He thinks that because Quin is thoroughly disreputable he must be a dangerous rebel, and because Sabina is a wild, ungovernable girl, she is sure to be mixed up with some murder gang. I have tried, but quite vainly, to explain that the genuine Sinn Feiner is respectable to the point of actual primness, and generally a strict teetotaler, no more likely than the secretary of a Y.M.C.A. to be associated with Quin or his daughter. Patterson cannot see this. He absolutely declines to make friends with Quin, and even persecutes the poor man by setting the police on his track and arresting him from time to time for all sorts of trivial offences, such as breaking windows when drunk.

Thus it comes that Patterson leads a lonely life in Carrigahooly, and is driven to seek my society. If he were not very lonely indeed, he would not have made friends with me or have taken to spending three evenings a week in my house. I have neither wife nor daughter to make the house agreeable to him, and I cannot suppose that there is much about a stupid and respectable old country parson to attract a young man who was once at Oxford, afterwards in a cavalry regiment, and is now an officer of police.

Patterson went into my study through the open window, and sat down in my only comfortable chair. I followed him and offered him tobacco. When his pipe was lit he began to talk.

"What do you think of those people who came here in the train to-day?" he asked. "The old man and his daughter--if she is his daughter."

I had not, so far, thought about the Floyds at all. But when Patterson asked me his question I began to see that their visit to Carrigahooly was a matter about which it was possible to speculate.

"What brings them here?" said Patterson.

Ten years ago I should have answered that question without a moment's hesitation. A man with a face like a professor would plainly have been an expert of some sort sent out by the Government to improve the pigs, the poultry, the people, or, perhaps, the soil of Ireland. He might possibly have brought his little daughter with him "to bear him company," as the skipper of the "Hesperus" did, though I do not remember ever meeting an expert with a good-looking daughter. Nowadays, the man could not be an expert, because the Government has given up trying to improve Ireland--in despair, I suppose--and no expert would come to Carrigahooly unless he

were sent.

"Perhaps," I said, "they're simply tourists on a holiday."

I knew, even while I said it, that this was absurd. Anyone who has seen even the outside of Mrs. Maher's hotel would know that Carrigahooly is no place for tourist traffic. Patterson very properly ignored the suggestion.

"You saw the man's face," he said. "What did you think of it?"

"Well," I said, "he's evidently a learned man--a professor, I should think. But it's difficult to say exactly what his subject is. Conchology, perhaps, or Arabic. Something rather recondite that isn't much use for Civil Service exams."

"He looks to me like an Intellectual," said Patterson; "one of the *Intelligentsia*, quite the most dangerous class in the community. Those fellows--they're mostly poets--are at the bottom of half the crime in the country, though they keep their own skins safe enough. It's always the same. Look at the French Revolution. Look at Russia to-day."

The part taken by Intellectuals in revolutions is a favourite subject with Patterson. I've known him talk about it for two hours without stopping, and I do not deny that he has a good deal to say for his point of view. He knows a lot about the French Revolution, which seems to have been a popular study in the Oxford History Schools before the war. And he says he knows all about Russia. He is quite interesting when he works out the connection between the writings of Russian novelists with difficult names and the actual performances of the Bolsheviks. But I had heard it all before, several times, and I did not want to hear it again.

"The girl," I said, "seemed to me quite pretty. And she did not look in the least as if she wrote plays."

"She's good-looking enough," said Patterson. "But lots of these revolutionary women are, to start with, anyhow. They go off a bit in the matter of appearance after a year or two of that racket."

With the memory of some recent heroines of Irish Nationalism fresh in my mind I could scarcely argue that pretty ladies are never revolutionaries. But I put in a word for the girl we had met in the railway carriage.

"She looked to me," I said, "as if she was out simply to enjoy herself."

I thought that Patterson would go on talking about the girl and that I should get off listening to a scathing denunciation of the unfortunate Intellectuals. But Patterson is not easily switched off his subject.

"People in places like this," he said, "are quiet enough if they're let alone. They form clubs, of course, and sing songs and wave flags. But----"

"Mrs. Maher," I said, "keeps a Sinn Fein flag flying day and night over the door

of her hotel."

"Exactly," said Patterson. "But she doesn't mean anything by it. Nor does anyone else down here. But sooner or later somebody will come down from Dublin, one of their damned Intellectuals--excuse my swearing, won't you, Rector?"

I waved an acceptance of his apology for saying "damn." The word, after all, is in the Prayer Book, and if our Irish Intellectuals are as bad as Patterson thinks them they deserve it--and more.

"One of them will come down from Dublin," said Patterson, "and ask why they haven't shot the sergeant or me. Then they will shoot us, just to preserve their self-respect and to keep up the good name of the town."

"And you think," I said, "that the old gentleman in the railway carriage----"

"Floyd is his name," said Patterson; "and you're quite right about his being a professor. Celtic Archæology is what he goes in for."

I know that Patterson is deeply suspicious of anything Celtic.

"He's an LL.D., too," Patterson went on. "I sent a man down to the hotel to inquire about him."

"If he's really an LL.D.," I said, "he ought to have some respect for law."

I did not really think this. That particular degree is--like the O.B.E.--a distinction given for almost any reason. I knew a man once who was given it *honoris causa* by an appreciative university because he had made an exhaustive study of the habits of the Soudanese, a subject utterly unconnected with any law. Indeed, almost the only people who are never presented with the degree of LL.D. are lawyers.

"First thing he did after arriving this evening, or rather the first thing the girl did, was to start making inquiries about how to get out to Inisheeny. Now, what do you think they want to go there for?"

I could not think of any reason why the Floyds, or anybody else, should want to go to Inisheeny. It is a thoroughly uninteresting island, which lies eight miles out from Carrigahooly, across the mouth of our bay. It possesses no attractions in the way of scenery, being almost flat, so flat that I often wonder the ocean does not sweep over it during the winter and make a sandbank of it. It is inhabited by six families of Flanagans, who grow potatoes, own a few lean cattle, and fish. They make a little money out of lobsters, which Mrs. Maher buys from them. They are all related to each other by complicated and repeated intermarriages, and my friend Poacher Quin belongs to their clan. His mother came from the island and married a small farmer near Carrigahooly. Poacher Quin still owns the farm, but has never managed to do well with it. I daresay it is the island blood in him which makes it so difficult for him to adapt himself to the higher civilisation of the mainland.

Inisheeny lies within Patterson's jurisdiction, and he is, I know, deeply suspicious of the island and its inhabitants. He has an idea that the place is used by some foreign foe--Russian Bolsheviks, perhaps--for landing arms intended for use in our next full-dress rebellion.

"There's something going on in that island," said Patterson; "and I've never been able to get at the bottom of it. These Floyds, whoever they are, are evidently in it. They must be up to some mischief or they wouldn't want to go there. Nobody ever went to Inisheeny for pleasure."

"Oh, come now," I said, "I go there myself three or four times every summer. I was there last week."

"Oh, you! You don't go for pleasure. You go to buy lobsters."

"Lobsters are a pleasure to me," I said; "and you seem to like them when you get them."

By buying lobsters a couple of dozen at a time direct from the islanders I get them a great deal cheaper than I should by waiting till Mrs. Maher bought them and made her profit. And I like sailing out to the island. The "Aurora," in spite of what Patterson says about her jib sheets, is a good, safe sea-boat, and there is secure anchorage in the bay on the east side of Inisheeny. I sometimes go and return on the same day. Sometimes I spend the night there. There was a time--not so very many years ago--when I sailed the "Aurora" single-handed. Lately I have begun to find the ground tackle rather heavy for me and the working of the head sail-sheets a bit tiring in a beat to windward so I generally take Poacher Quin with me now. He is excellent company, and is glad of the chance of visiting his relatives on the island. I can scarcely call him a paid hand, for he makes no charge for his services. I allow him to bring back creels of lobsters packed with seaweed, and sometimes boxes of mackerel or herrings, which he disposes of to Mrs. Maher. In this way my "Aurora" serves a useful purpose in developing the trade of the island, and I am able to feel that my sails are not mere pleasure trips.

"Anyhow," I said, "if the Floyds want to go to the island you can't stop them."

Patterson bit at his pipe viciously, and his face wore a very determined expression. I began to think that he meant to arrest the Floyds.

"I know you police have large powers nowadays," I said, "and I suppose if you choose to raid Mrs. Maher's hotel to-night and carry off the Floyds you can, but I hope you won't. We are all living peaceably and quietly down here, and if you do a thing like that you'll stir up all sorts of bad feeling."

"I'm not going to do that," said Patterson, "but I am going to keep my eye on them, especially if they go out to Inisheeny. I suppose you won't mind lending me the

'Aurora' in case I want to go after them?"

"I'll lend you the 'Aurora' with pleasure," I said, "any time you want her. But do remember that she's not a battleship. The jib sheets may not be as bad as you say---"

"They're rotten."

"Even so, they won't be improved, nor will the rest of the gear, if you get up a sea-fight with the Flanagans. They'd swarm round you in their currachs, you know, and think nothing of slashing every rope in her with knives."

"Oh, I'm not going to fight anyone," said Patterson. "I'm simply going to watch those people to see what they're at."

"Very well," I said, "you can have her; but I don't think I'll go with you."

Patterson can sail the "Aurora" perfectly well by himself, and he has, as I happen to know, at least one policeman under his command who knows something about boats. So I felt that there was no need for anxiety.

We talked on, chiefly about revolutions and secret societies, till the clock on my study chimney-piece struck ten. Then Patterson knocked the ashes out of his pipe and went home.

Taking into consideration the hour of summer time which has been imposed on us, the half-hour of Irish time which was filched from us without our noticing it during the war, and the fact that Carrigahooly is nearly two hundred miles west of Dublin, I reckoned that it was in reality only about eight o'clock when the clock struck ten. I suppose I might have gone on spraying my pear tree, but Tommy had gone to bed, and I did not feel inclined to splash about in soap-suds by myself. I read the newspaper till eleven o'clock. By that time I thought Tommy must have gone to sleep and I might get the detective story. I went very cautiously into his room. The murder of the Prime Minister cannot have been as exciting as he expected. The book lay on the floor beside his bed. He was sleeping profoundly.

I sat up till one o'clock and finished the story. The Prime Minister was not murdered after all--only kidnapped--but the work of the detective, an amateur of course, who brought the villain to justice, was thoroughly satisfying. After following up the slenderest and most unlikely clues for two hours I felt inclined to agree with Patterson that Floyd and his pretty daughter were plotters of a dark and dangerous kind. The man who kidnapped the Prime Minister was a professor--medical--and he had a beautiful daughter with "sinister eyes." Molly's eyes could not be called sinister, but otherwise Patterson was evidently justified in his suspicions.

CHAPTER III

Patterson was perfectly right about one thing. The Floyds really did want to go to Inisheeny. Molly began to inquire how to get there before she was an hour in Carrigahooly. She started with Mrs. Maher; naturally enough, for an hotel keeper is usually willing and anxious to give that sort of information to guests. Mrs. Maher owns an excellent boat, one of the best of our little fishing fleet. She is not fitted out as a yacht, and is therefore not particularly comfortable for pleasure sailing. But the passage to Inisheeny is not a long one, and might perfectly well be made in the "Seven Daughters." That is the name of Mrs. Maher's boat. It comes from a Holy Well near the ruins of Kildoyne Abbey, which is called the Well of the Seven Daughters of the King of Britain. But any allusion to the father of the girls has to be left out in naming the boat. It does not do in Carrigahooly to be suspected of the slightest tendency towards loyalty.

Mrs. Maher did not offer to lend or hire her boat to the Floyds. This surprised me when I heard it. I should have expected her to offer the boat at once--at a high price--and to provide a crew--also at a high price. She could easily have done so. Her stable boy is an amphibious animal who often goes fishing, and Poacher Quin is always ready for a trip to the island.

Instead of earning money by making it easy for the Floyds to go to Inisheeny, Mrs. Maher did her best to persuade Molly that it was impossible to go to Inisheeny at all, and very undesirable even if it could be done. She adopted the tone of a benevolent mother, anxious about Molly's welfare. Dr. Floyd, I understand, took no part in the discussion. He sat in the abominable chamber which Mrs. Maher calls a coffee room, and read papers--not newspapers, but piles of manuscript.

After her failure with Mrs. Maher, Molly did nothing more that night, but she got to work early the next morning. That is scarcely to be wondered at, even if there were no truth in Patterson's suspicions. A supper, a bed, and a breakfast in Mrs. Maher's hotel would make anyone eager to sleep somewhere else the next night. I can quite understand a stranger feeling that Inisheeny must be a more comfortable place to stay.

After breakfast Dr. Floyd settled down again to his MS. Molly, who was evidently in command of the expedition, went out. She left the hotel, according to Mrs. Maher, at half-past eight. Before eleven o'clock she had talked to everyone of any importance in Carrigahooly except Patterson and me. There are eight people in the place, besides Mrs. Maher, who own fishing boats. Molly Floyd got at them all.

She found some of them standing on the pier with their hands in their pockets, putting in their eight hours' day. Others she tracked to their houses, and one man she found in bed. They were curiously unanimous in their refusal to take Molly and her father out to Inisheeny on any terms. Refusal is perhaps the wrong word to use. No one definitely refused; but every one of the men pointed out that the difficulties in the way of going to Inisheeny were insuperable. The men on the pier agreed that the tides in Carrigahooly Bay made sailing impossible. Ever since the Congested Districts Board had built the pier on which they stood, the tides had gone wrong, so they said, and nobody could calculate from hour to hour what would happen. The men whom Molly found in their houses were less unanimous, and none of them blamed the tide. One of them said that it was impossible to land at Inisheeny except with an east wind, and that the wind was never east except in May. Another mentioned a school of whales which had established themselves in the bay, and smashed up any boats which ventured out, by flapping their tails. The man whom Molly found in bed was, perhaps, too sleepy to be imaginative. He said simply that there was a large hole in the bottom of his boat, which he could not get mended on account of a recent strike organised by the Transport Workers' Union.

Molly did not believe a word the men said to her; though she understood that they would not take her and her father out to Inisheeny. But she saw the "Aurora" lying at her moorings, and made up her mind that, since fishing boats were not to be had, she must put up with a yacht. She called on Dr. Redington, thinking that he might be the owner of the "Aurora." He received her coldly, disappointed, perhaps, that she was not a patient with a fee in her pocket. He did not even tell her who the "Aurora" belonged to.

She next went to the office of Farrelly, the solicitor, and found him there. This was a stroke of luck, for Farrelly is very seldom to be found in his office. He somehow manages to conduct a lucrative business without tying himself down to any regular hours of work. But Farrelly did not help her. She seems to have asked him at once for the name of the owner of the "Aurora," and Farrelly is far too good a lawyer to give a straight answer to a direct question of that kind. The consequence of answering questions may be serious and unpleasant, whereas no harm can come of not answering them. Lawyers, all over the world, understand that. In the west of Ireland, everybody else understands it too. So Molly's chances of getting information from Farrelly were exceedingly small.

She went down to the quay again after leaving Farrelly's office, and found my nephew, Tommy, there, putting off to the "Aurora" in the dinghy. When Tommy has nothing particular to do, and cannot persuade either me or Patterson to go out

sailing, he goes off to the boat and spends a few hours quite happily playing about with the sails and gear.

Molly shouted to him, and Tommy, who has excellent manners, rowed back to the pier to find out what she wanted. They seem to have made friends at once. It must have been Molly's gaiety and cheerfulness which won his heart. He is hardly old enough to be fascinated by a pretty face. He told Molly that the "Aurora" belonged to me, and promised without the slightest hesitation that I would lend her for an expedition to Inisheeny. I can hardly blame him for that. I am always willing to lend the boat, and Tommy did not know that I had already promised her to Patterson. Besides, he saw a good chance of a day's sailing for himself. His idea was that he and Poacher Quin should manage the boat. Molly was, of course, delighted. She and Tommy left the harbour together to make arrangements for the expedition.

At eleven o'clock I strolled down to the village. I meant to go to the hotel, and I had a very good excuse for going there. I wanted some tobacco, and Mrs. Maher keeps a supply of the kind I smoke. But the tobacco, as I knew perfectly well, was only an excuse. What I really wanted was to gossip with Mrs. Maher, and to hear all she could tell me about the Floyds.

As I passed down the street Tommy rushed out of Mahony's shop and caught me by the arm. Mahony's is our chief shop and a very excellent one. You can buy anything there from a bicycle to a pot of jam. Tommy, I supposed, was in search of sweets, or perhaps, cigarettes, which he has lately taken to.

"Uncle Terence," he said, "I suppose it's all right for me to take out the 'Aurora' if I get Quin to come with me?"

"I'm sorry, Tommy," I said; "but you can't have the 'Aurora.' I've promised her to Patterson."

Tommy's face fell. I could see that he was really disappointed.

"That's a pity," he said. "I was frightfully keen on getting the boat to-day. In fact---"

He paused, and looked so dejected that I felt very sorry for him. After all Tommy has rather a dull time of it with me. Spraying pear trees is hardly a schoolboy's idea of amusement. There is no cricket, and hardly any tennis in Carrigahooly. If he could not use the "Aurora"----

"Perhaps Patterson won't want her to-day," he suggested. "Anyhow, he might put off whatever he wants her for. Next week ought to do him quite well. Don't you think so?"

He looked at me pleadingly, and Tommy has nice brown eyes, like a setter's.

"Now if I can't have her to-day," he said, "it will be no use my having her at all."

"Nonsense, Tommy," I said. "The mackerel have only just come into the bay. There'll be more of them next week."

I still thought he wanted to go fishing, and I could not understand why he was in such a hurry.

"I'm not going to fish," he said. "At least, I may, but that's not what I want the boat for. The fact is, I promised----"

He stopped there and did not go on, though I waited some time. I tried to help him out.

"Promised what?" I asked.

"Oh, well. I promised to take her out to Inisheeny."

I suppose I was stupid, but I thought Tommy meant the boat by "her." I had not the least idea, up to that moment, that there was a girl in the affair.

"Who did you promise to?" I asked.

Tommy was a little embarrassed.

"The fact is, Uncle Terence," he said, "that I don't know her name. I never thought of asking. But she wants to go out to Inisheeny--she and her father--and I promised you'd lend them the Aurora."

"I don't see how I can keep your promise to her," I said, "without breaking my own to Patterson."

I felt pretty sure who Tommy's girl must be. I remembered what Patterson had said to me the night before about the Floyds wanting to go to Inisheeny. If they were the sort of people he thought them I was certainly not going to lend them my yacht. And I did not like the idea of my nephew ferrying revolutionaries off to remote islands.

"She's an awfully nice girl," said Tommy, "a real good sort, you know, just the kind of girl that you wouldn't think was a girl when she's talking to you. Much more like a boy."

Tommy is still young. In another four years or so, the "awfully nice" girls will be those who are more or less like girls. There was something so refreshingly boyish in his appreciation of Molly Floyd that I felt it harder than ever to disappoint him.

"All right," I said. "I don't really mind which of you has the boat. Speak to Patterson yourself, and arrange it any way you like between you."

I felt pretty certain that Patterson would not surrender the "Aurora" if he knew that she was to be used for taking the Floyds out to Inisheeny. But the unpleasantness of refusing Tommy would be his, not mine.

"I wish you'd ask him," said Tommy. "He'd be much more likely to give her up if you asked him."

That was true. Indeed Patterson could not well refuse me the use of my own boat if I asked for it. But I was not going to do any such thing. I hardened my heart.

"No, no," I said. "I can't spend my time running round and round after Patterson. If you want the boat you must ask him for it."

I left Tommy there, feeling very sorry for him, and walked down to the hotel. I found Mrs. Maher doing accounts in the little room she calls her office. She got the tobacco I wanted at once. Then she began to talk.

"That's a nice young lady you sent me," she said. "And her father is a very quiet sort of a gentleman."

"I'm glad you like them," I said, "but you needn't thank me for sending them. I hadn't anything to do with their coming here. I never spoke to either of them in my life."

"Well, now, think of that!" said Mrs. Maher. "I made sure they were friends of yours and Mr. Patterson's when I saw the way you were running to get into the train along with them at Dunally yesterday."

I knew that Mrs. Maher did not suspect me of chasing a girl's pretty face at a railway station. She knows me too well to think that of me. But I also knew that she did not believe me when I said that I knew nothing about the Floyds.

"It was only this minute," said Mrs. Maher, "that she was telling me about how you were lending her your boat to go out to Inisheeny. And to tell you the truth, I was rather wondering at your doing the like, for the father doesn't look as if he knew much about boats, and the young lady is hardly one that I'd care to be trusting on the sea by herself."

"I don't know what she meant by saying that," I said. "I'm not lending her the boat. As a matter of fact I've lent her to Mr. Patterson."

"That'll be it, then," said Mrs. Maher. "Mr. Patterson will be taking the young lady out to Inisheeny."

She had evidently absolved me of all connexion with the Floyds, and made up her mind that they were friends of Mr. Patterson's. I knew, of course, that Patterson had not the least intention of taking them out to Inisheeny, that he was, in fact, most anxious to keep them away from the island. I said as much to Mrs. Maher, but she did not believe me; she thought, perhaps, that Patterson had kept his intention secret from me and borrowed the boat without mentioning the Floyds. But she had no doubt that he had brought them down to Carrigahooly with the intention of taking them out to Inisheeny. It was evident that Mrs. Maher did not recognise them as emissaries of any secret society. I began to think that Patterson must be wrong about that.

"The young lady was at me last night," said Mrs. Maher, "for the lend of my boat to go out to the island. But she didn't get it."

"Why not?" I asked.

Mrs. Maher did not answer that question.

"And she was out this morning," she went on, "galloping and chasing round the town to try could she get e'er a boat at all. But there wasn't one in the place would listen to her."

"Why not?" I asked again.

Mrs. Maher looked at me, and I could discern, as it were, behind her eyes, a message which she seemed to think I should be able to read. But I did not understand in the least what she meant. All she said was:

"Inisheeny is no place for a young lady like her, nor yet for an old gentleman."

That, of course, is quite true. Even Mrs. Maher's own hotel would be far more comfortable than any of the houses on Inisheeny, but that was plainly not what was in Mrs. Maher's mind. I got the impression that she was afraid that the visit might be inconvenient, not to the Floyds, but to the islanders.

"And what would they be wanting there, anyway?" said Mrs. Maher.

I did not know that; any more than I knew why Mrs. Maher and all the Carrigahooly fishermen declined to earn good money by hiring out their boats.

"And what does Mr. Patterson want to be taking them there for? Tell me that."

Again the look of secret intelligence appeared in Mrs. Maher's green eyes. Again I totally failed to understand it.

"Mr. Patterson doesn't want to take them there," I said. "He told me so himself."

"Them police," said Mrs. Maher, "is terrible liars. But, sure, I suppose they can't help it. Only I don't think they should be deceiving a man like your Reverence, who'd believe anything anyone might say to him."

Telling lies to a simple, innocent man like me was evidently, in Mrs. Maher's opinion, an unsporting act, like shooting a sitting bird; something Patterson ought to be ashamed of. I found myself a little puzzled. The Floyds, father and daughter, had come to Carrigahooly and wanted to go to Inisheeny. Patterson thought he knew why. They were, in his opinion, agents of some revolutionary society concerned with the landing of arms on the island, and were anxious to murder the police. Mrs. Maher, an ardent Sinn Feiner, if one can judge by the flag she flies over her hotel, also thought she knew why the Floyds wanted to go to Inisheeny. She did not confide her idea to me, but she certainly believed that they were in close touch with the police, perhaps spies from Dublin Castle. For some reason she and every fisherman in Carrigahooly were specially anxious, just as anxious as Patterson was,

to keep them out of Inisheeny. I do not believe, though Patterson does, that Mrs. Maher is mixed up in any treasonable conspiracy. She seems to me too sensible a woman to take politics seriously, except as a means of making money. And there is no money to be made by going to extremes and defying the law. I was quite in the dark about her motives. The only thing I really understood was Tommy's wish to go out sailing with an "awfully nice" girl, the kind of girl you wouldn't think was a girl when she was talking to you. It was easy to see that such a companion might be very attractive.

I knew more about Molly's attractiveness and her force of character half an hour later.

CHAPTER IV

I left Mrs. Maher's room with my tobacco in my pocket. I had a half-pound packet which, as things turned out, was very fortunate for me. In the hall of the hotel, I came on Molly Floyd and Tommy. They were talking earnestly. I supposed that he was telling her that he could not get the boat. That is what he should have been telling her; but I am inclined to think that he was doing nothing of the sort. He was planning how he and she could best induce me to alter my decision and break my promise to Patterson.

The moment Molly saw me she came over to me with an outstretched hand, and a most engaging smile. Tommy was plainly a little ashamed of himself. He slipped quietly out of the door and disappeared, though he did not go very far away.

"I was just going up to your house to see you," she said, "so it's great luck meeting you here. Tommy tells me you've lent your boat."

Tommy, when I was speaking to him half an hour before, did not know her name. She had evidently got hold of his and was on the friendliest terms with him.

"Unfortunately," I said, "I promised the boat to Mr. Patterson yesterday."

"Is that the young man who travelled in the train with us?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then I'm sure he'll let us have the boat. He looked quite nice--not at all what you call a curmudgeon. A curmudgeon is the right word, isn't it? For a dog in the manger kind of person?"

Curmudgeon is the right word; but I fancy Molly was a little confused about the derivation, though a dog in the manger is no doubt a cur.

"You'll ask him to let us have the boat, won't you?" said Molly. "He'd do it if you asked him."

I thought I might wiggle out of a difficult position by paying Molly a little compliment. She deserved it, for she was looking even prettier than she looked the day before.

"He'd be far more likely to do it if you asked him," I said.

"There isn't another boat to be got," said Molly. "I've tried and tried. But all the men who have boats tell me silly stories that aren't a bit true. And we simply must get to Inisheeny. Now don't you think you ought to help us? As a clergyman, I mean. It's the duty of all clergymen to succour those in distress, by being Good Samaritans."

Molly was misusing a parable. The priest passed by on the other side, and the main point about the Samaritan was that he was not a clergyman. But I let that pass.

She was smiling at me again in such a way that I felt for a moment as if it were part of a clergyman's ordinary duty to lend boats to young ladies whose characters were under general suspicion. But my reason--a faculty on which one can rely at sixty years of age--came to my help.

"Why do you want to go to Inisheeny?"

"I don't," she said. "At least, I do rather, but only for the fun of desert islanding. I've always wanted to desert island, and this is the first time I've ever had the chance. But it's father who really wants to go."

"But why?" I asked.

She looked at me very doubtfully. Tommy appeared suddenly from round a corner, and put his head and shoulders through the open door. Molly signalled to him to go away. Then she sank her voice into a whisper, as if she had something very private to say to me.

"Are you interested in crannogs?" she asked.

The question was entirely unexpected. For a moment or two, such was my surprise, I could not recollect what sort of thing a crannog is. Even if I had stopped to think I could not then and there have given any clear description of a crannog, though I know a lot about the things now. Startled as I was by Molly's question I could not feel sure of anything except that crannogs are Irish and Ancient. They might be songs, crosses, shrines, bells, brooches, or ornamental designs. But I was very much afraid of putting an abrupt stop to Molly's confidences if I allowed it to appear that I was unsympathetic about crannogs.

"I'm not exactly an expert on the subject," I said. "But I'm interested. Every educated man must be more or less interested in crannogs."

I saw at once that I had said the wrong thing. Molly stopped smiling and looked slightly depressed.

"That's a pity," she said. "If you're interested in crannogs I simply can't tell you why father wants to go to Inisheeny. He'd be furious if I did. Father is a perfect darling in every way, and I love him. But he's liable to get a bit ratty if he thinks anybody else is after his thing, especially a crannog. You know what I mean, don't you?"

With a nephew like Tommy in my house I am kept in touch with the later developments of the English language. I know that "ratty" means irritable. The rest of Molly's meaning was still a little obscure to me.

"Just like a dog with a bone," Molly went on. "He doesn't mind a cow or a sheep, because he knows they won't take his bone, but if another dog comes along--- Well, that's father. I wonder if you'd mind pretending not to know or care anything

about crannogs, when you're taking us out to Inisheeny in your boat, I mean."

Again Molly startled me abominably. She took a great deal for granted. I had not, at that time, even promised to lend her the "Aurora." I had certainly not said that I was going out to Inisheeny myself.

"You needn't actually tell a lie," said Molly. "All you have to do is just not talk about crannogs. That'll give father the impression that you know nothing about them. I'd hardly call that deceit, would you?"

"Oh, no," I said. "That wouldn't be deceit. In fact I don't think it would be deceit if I said straight out that I know nothing at all about crannogs."

"That's all right then," said Molly. "Your conscience will be quite clear, and what I always say is, that so long as your conscience is clear nothing else really matters. We'd better start at once, hadn't we?"

I am a weak-willed old man, I suppose--easily turned and driven. My enemies, if I have any, may say that a pretty girl can wind me round her finger. But I honestly believe that I was less influenced by Molly's pretty face than by her astonishing impudence. I made but a feeble defence.

"I'm not sure," I said, "about starting at all. You see I promised Mr. Patterson----

"

"Did you really and truly promise?" said Molly.

"I almost swore it," I said. "So you see----"

"Well, then," said Molly, "if I were you----" she came over quite close to me, laid her hand on my arm, and looked up at me. "I'd be jolly careful to keep out of his way till afterwards. That's why I said we'd better start at once."

"I see that," I said. "If we're going to start the sooner we do it the better."

Molly ran to the door of the hotel and called Tommy.

"It's all right," she said, "your uncle is going to take us out to Inisheeny in his yacht. Isn't it sweet of him?"

I could not quite hear what Tommy said in reply. I think his words were "Good egg."

"He's coming himself," said Molly, "which will be far nicer for father." (I was sorry she added "for father.") "And we're going to start at once."

"I must go home first to change my clothes," I said, "but I won't be long."

"Right," said Molly, "I'll have father down at the pier in half an hour. You'll be there, won't you, Tommy, and bring the things I told you to get? You settled about that, I suppose."

"Rather," said Tommy.

I took no special notice of what she was saying to him. It did not even occur to

me that they must have calculated on my complete surrender since they had arranged beforehand what things they were going to take to the island. I did not, even then, understand the sort of expedition I was in for. I went back to the rectory, walking hurriedly and rather nervously through the town. I was very much afraid of meeting Patterson. I had no good excuse to make for failing to keep the promise I had made him, and I knew that he would not believe in Dr. Floyd's passion for crannogs. He would regard that as a very suspicious way of covering up the real object of his visit to the island. Fortunately, I did not meet Patterson, though I ran into Sergeant Morris, who was lounging about outside the hotel. He was probably engaged in keeping an eye on the Floyds, by Patterson's order.

I got out of my clerical clothes as quickly as I could, putting on a very old coat, a fisherman's jersey, and a pair of grey flannel trousers. There is nothing which interferes with the pleasure of boating so effectively as good clothes, even clothes only as good as my every-day suit. Then I spent ten minutes in my study--all the time I could spare--searching my shelves for some book which would tell me plainly what a crannog is. "A Guide to the Antiquarian Exhibits of the National Museum" was my best find; but it was unsatisfactory. The author assumed that his readers must know the elementary facts. All I gathered was that there are a good many crannogs in Ireland--eight or ten of them were named though there was no mention of one on Inisheeny. They have been, according to this author, "opened" from time to time, and found to contain a great variety of interesting things, such as swords, carved bones, and canoes. That was all I was able to find out from that book, and I did not look for another because I was unwilling to keep Molly waiting. I did not even take that book with me. I was afraid that Dr. Floyd might turn "ratty" if he saw a learned work dealing with crannogs in my pocket.

When I reached the pier I found that our expedition was creating much popular interest. All the Carrigahooly fishermen, even the man who had been in bed, were there, staring silently at Molly and her father. Mrs. Maher was there, apparently expostulating with Molly. Sergeant Morris was standing, dignified and aloof, at the end of the pier, keeping his eye on Dr. Floyd. The small travelling trunk, the two handbags, and the large green canvas bundle which the Floyds had brought with them in the train, were lying together at the top of the flight of stone steps which leads down to the water. This gave me rather a shock. I had supposed that we were to sail out to the island and come back again in the evening. It looked to me as if the Floyds meant to stay there. I was quite clear on one point. They could not possibly sleep on my yacht. The "Aurora," a five-ton boat, has a small cabin opening off the cockpit, and a large sail locker forward, covered by a hatch. I have often slept on

the boat myself; and once or twice Poacher Quin has coiled himself up along with my spare jib and the anchor chain in the locker forward. But an elderly professor--no doubt, a man of sedentary habits and accustomed to modest comfort--would be utterly out of place on a boat of the sort. A girl, even an active and cheerful girl like Molly, would be simply impossible.

Tommy was already on the deck of the "Aurora," hoisting the mainsail. He finished the work as I reached the pier, hauled the dinghy alongside and jumped into her.

Molly ran up to me. Mrs. Maher followed her, still expostulating.

"Mrs. Maher is telling me," said Molly, "that we can't possibly sleep on the island. But we can, can't we?"

"You certainly can't sleep on the boat," I said. "She's not big enough."

"I don't want to sleep on the boat. I want to sleep in one of the cottages on the island."

Mrs. Maher, who does not move as quickly as Molly, reached me then.

"I'm after telling the young lady," she said, "that there's no place for the like of her in any of the houses on Inisheeny, and what's more, if she sleeps in one of them beds she'll be sorry for it after, for----"

Molly stamped her foot.

"Don't say that disgusting thing again," she said.

Mrs. Maher did say it again; but she had some respect for Molly's feelings. She said it in a very low tone, with her mouth close to my ear. I caught her point at once. I could hardly have failed to do so, for she gave the insects--several of them--their very plainest names.

"I don't think you'd better try it," I said to Molly. "Mrs. Maher is sure to be right. And we can easily come back to-night. But you can't possibly sleep on the boat. Remember that."

I thought it well to be perfectly firm on that point.

"Oh, well!" said Molly. "We have a small tent. Lucky I brought it, isn't it?"

I glanced at the green canvas bundle. It could not be or contain a tent of any considerable size; but that was Molly's concern, not mine.

"Father meant to sleep in it," she said, "and I meant to sleep in a cottage; but if I can't, I can't. So I'll have the tent and father will sleep on the yacht. There'll be lots of room for him, won't there?"

There is not lots of room for anyone on a five-ton boat; but if Floyd chose to sleep on board he could have the seat along one side of the cabin. That would mean the sail locker for Tommy, which would do him no harm. But I was doubtful about

Floyd. I do not resent discomfort myself; but it was likely that he would very much dislike a night in the "Aurora's" cabin. The man was, by his daughter's account, inclined to be "ratty" about trifles. I was afraid that I was in for an unpleasant time.

Tommy, who had been rowing rapidly, reached the steps and hailed me. I went down to him at once.

"Tommy," I said, "did you understand that we're going to spend a night at Inisheeny?"

"Rather," he said.

"Then I think you ought to have told me," I said.

I suppose he saw the justice of that complaint; for he told me something more at once.

"We'll be there about a week," he said.

"No, we won't," I said. "This is Tuesday, and whatever happens I mean to be back for Sunday, even if I have to take the 'Aurora' and leave the rest of you marooned there."

"Right-o!" said Tommy.

I do not think that either he or Molly would have minded much if I had left them on the island; but I hoped that Floyd would object.

"I don't believe there's a thing to eat on board," I said, "except a couple of tinned tongues. You finished the biscuits last day you were out and I never thought of ordering another box."

"That's all right," said Tommy, "I got a whole packing case full of food at Mahony's this morning. Molly said I was to. It's in the cabin now, and anyway there are always lots of lobsters and potatoes on Inisheeny. What more can anyone possibly want?"

"And I've brought a pound of tea," said Molly.

She was halfway down the steps when she spoke, and was holding on to the small trunk. It seemed inclined to make a rush for the dinghy on its own account. It was resting on the slippery part of the steps where the seaweed grows, and would have come down fast if it had started at all.

"China tea," said Molly. "Father isn't allowed to drink Indian tea on account of his digestion."

I began to feel seriously annoyed. A man who is particular about tea, and knows the meaning of the word digestion, ought not to be taken out to sea in a small boat. He would certainly be very ill, and therefore very bad tempered, after feeding for two days on tinned food from Mahony's shop. A diet of lobsters and potatoes would probably kill him.

My only consolation was that I had my half-pound of tobacco in my pocket, and an unopened bottle of whisky in the "Aurora's" locker. I also had on board plenty of methylated spirit for the "Primus" stove.

CHAPTER V

Tommy and I packed the trunk, the two small bags, and the bundle into the dinghy. She is a small boat, designed originally to hold three people. I was very doubtful about the wisdom of taking four people and some heavy luggage in her, though we had only a short way to go to reach the "Aurora." However, Tommy seemed sure that he could manage it, and I felt that if we did sink no great harm would be done. There were plenty of people on the pier to rescue us, and a wetting might perhaps cool off the Floyds' determination to go to Inisheeny.

We nearly did sink at the very start, for Dr. Floyd turned out to be one of those men who are awkward in boats. We perched Molly in the bow. Tommy took the oars and sat on the forward thwart. We stowed the luggage amidships and I sat on one side of the stern sheets. The other side was left clear for Floyd, and he had nothing to do but step in and sit down gently. Instead of stepping he fell, or jumped into the boat and sat down with such a heavy thump that the water lipped over the gunwale and wet him. Many men, indeed most men, very much dislike getting the seats of their trousers wet. I could have excused Floyd if he had got angry and abused me, though the accident was his own fault. But he took the wetting quite good-temperedly. He might get "ratty," as Molly warned me, about crannogs. In other ways he was evidently a good tempered man. I began to hope that he would not be an impossible companion in the "Aurora's" cabin.

Tommy pushed off cautiously, and paddled out towards the "Aurora" with short easy strokes. We were badly down by the head, and if he had rowed at all hard he would have driven the boat's nose under. Then Molly would have got as wet as her father in much the same way. As we passed the end of the pier I saw Sergeant Morris staring at us solemnly. He evidently meant to keep his eye on us up to the last possible moment. After that he would, no doubt, go and make his report to Patterson, who would realise my perfidy.

We started, after suffering more than the usual fuss and discomfort. My idea was to pack the Floyds into the cabin until we were well under way; but that proved to be impossible. The tent, the trunk, the two bags, and the packing-case from Mahony's shop filled the cabin; and, in any case, Molly was determined to help Tommy and me. She displayed great activity and a talent for entangling herself in sheets and halyards. Her father was much easier to manage. After he had been hit on the head by the boom once, he was content to sit on the floor of the cockpit, and did not complain when we walked on him in our effort to get the ropes we wanted clear

of Molly. I began to feel some respect and a good deal of liking for Floyd.

Our sail, once we got clear of the harbour, was a very pleasant one. The breeze, which had been easterly early in the day, had followed the sun round and was southerly when we started. This gave us a free reach for Inisheeny. We had to take a pull on our sheets later on as the breeze got westerly. But except for that we had nothing to do but sit still and look about us. The sea was perfectly calm, so there was no excuse for getting seasick. Tommy took Molly forward, and they sat on the deck with their feet dangling in the sail locker. From the scraps of their talk, which I overheard, I fancy he gave her an exhaustive lecture on the rigging and gear of a cutter. Floyd, when I allowed him to get up from the floor of the cockpit, sat quietly beside me and said he was enjoying himself. He seemed to be a placid, singularly gentle man. But I kept off the subject of crannogs. There is no use taking risks, and if there is a raw spot in a man's temper it is foolish to go poking at it.

We had, indeed, no difficulty in finding things to talk about. Floyd is in or about my own age, and I soon discovered that we were both Trinity men, though he had been a year junior to me. We launched into reminiscences, and I found that Floyd had taken a minor part in a "rag" which I have always been proud of having organised. We chuckled together over our success in driving a bullock up two flights of stairs and tying it to the door of the Junior Dean's rooms. Floyd, by his own confession, had done little except look on and cheer, but it pleased me to think he had done even that. I felt sure then that Patterson was quite wrong in supposing him to be one of those Intellectuals who inspire revolutions. Trinity College, Dublin, has its faults and failings as a university, but no one who has really shared the spirit of the place ever becomes either an Intellectual or a Revolutionary. The whole genius of Trinity is inimical to that kind of portentous solemnity which is a necessary part of the character of all reformers. And Floyd had been not merely in but of the College. A man who had taken a part, even a small part, in pushing a bullock upstairs, could not afterwards take any of our great movements of thought quite seriously. And how can a man be an intellectual leader if he is not quite sure of the gravity of the times and of his own immense importance?

This consideration cheered me. I felt I could give a satisfactory account of myself to Patterson. If the Floyds were not, as I was convinced, emissaries of a secret society, Patterson would have no object in following them about and chasing them out to Inisheeny in my boat. I was further cheered by a hail from Tommy.

"I say, Uncle Terence," he said, "what about a bit of lunch?"

It was after two o'clock, and quite time that we ate something. But I had nothing to offer my guests except the two tinned tongues and the whisky. There was not

even any water on board, so Molly's pound of tea would be no use to her. We were entirely dependent on the contents of Mahony's packing-case.

"What did you get at Mahony's?" I asked. "I hope you thought of bread."

Bread was just the sort of common-place, essential thing which a boy like Tommy would forget if left to himself. Many people, much older than Tommy, go through life with the idea that bread, potatoes, and other ordinary foods are always there, naturally, and of their own accord; that in catering one may ignore them and concentrate one's attention on butter and jam, or seakale and asparagus. Tommy's answer to my question did not reassure me much.

"I don't know whether there's bread or not," he said. "I told Mahony to pack up a good-sized case of miscellaneous eatables. I meant to choose the things myself, but just as I was going to begin I saw you passing the shop and I had to bolt out and catch you. Afterwards there wasn't time to talk to Mahony. I had to do a sprint down to the quay to tell Molly what you said about the boat. But I expect Mahony will have put in everything we want. It's a good big case and very heavy."

"Well," I said, "you'd better open it and let us know the worst."

He and Molly crept aft.

"I call this exciting," she said. "I do love not knowing what I'm going to get to eat. I do the housekeeping at home," she explained to me, "and so I always do know. Otherwise there wouldn't be anything, and that would be worse than there being something that you know. Besides being very hard on father."

She and Tommy crept into the cabin. I heard them hammering at the packing-case. I do not know what instrument they used, but it was evidently quite ineffective. Tommy came out in a few minutes and fished a marlin spike out of a locker at my feet. It seemed to help them. At all events they stopped banging the packing case about.

I do not think that Mahony was deliberately malicious. I am sure that he is not given to playing practical jokes on his customers. He must have gathered an entirely wrong idea from Tommy's order for miscellaneous eatables. Either he thought that Tommy wanted to supply a tuck box to take back to school, or else he realised that the order gave him a splendid opportunity for getting rid of surplus stock which had been hanging on his hands. The case contained six pots of jam, made in Ireland, and labelled, "Quince and Peach," ten tins of golden syrup, two pounds of large round white sweets which Tommy said were peppermint creams, and a seven-pound tin of biscuits called Orange Sandwich Wafers, and twelve bottles of lemonade.

Molly, if she really enjoyed not knowing what she was going to get to eat, ought to have been greatly pleased. I can hardly think of a more unexpected luncheon. I

am bound to say for her and Tommy that they took Mahony's miscellaneous eatables as a joke, and Floyd did not seem to mind having to lunch on sweet biscuits and golden syrup. Indeed, I was, I am ashamed to say, the only one of the party whose temper was at all ruffled. However, I made Tommy get me out my own tinned tongue and I made the lemonade drinkable by lacing it with whisky; so I did not do badly, and recovered my temper in the end.

Floyd shared the tinned tongue with me, hacking chunks of it out with his penknife. He said he did not care what he ate and was quite ready to satisfy himself with quince and peach jam. But I had some pity on him. I was getting to like him more and more. His cheerful indifference to discomfort and his extreme amiability made me regard him as an excellent companion for a prolonged picnic. Molly and Tommy lunched quite contentedly on Orange Sandwich biscuits dipped in golden syrup. Now and then they took a peppermint cream or two, and they drank three bottles of lemonade between them. They actually seemed to enjoy the diet, for they went on eating until I had to stop them.

We had made a good passage and were off the entrance to the bay at the east side of Inisheeny. I sent Tommy forward to take the foresail off the boat, and to get the anchor and chain on deck. Molly very obligingly packed the remains of Mahony's miscellaneous eatables into the case in the cabin. She did not offer to swab up the smears of golden syrup which she and Tommy left on the seat of the cockpit.

I never tow a dinghy out to Inisheeny with me, for I can always calculate on one of the island inhabitants putting off to take me ashore. I was not surprised to see a man launching a curragh when we entered the bay. I was rather surprised, when I rounded up the "Aurora" and gave Tommy the word to let go the anchor, to see that the man who came out to us was Poacher Quin. He seldom goes to the island except when I take him or when he is required to sail Mrs. Maher's "Seven Daughters." I had seen him the day before at Dunally fair. I realised that he must have left Carrigahooly late that night or very early the next morning in order to reach Inisheeny before us. I did not understand why he should do either the one or the other.

Molly was as eager to go ashore as sailors are who arrive at tropical islands after months of voyaging, and see bananas hanging from the branches of banana trees. Tommy, of course, wanted to go with her, and I had not the heart to keep him in the boat though he ought to have helped me to make up the sails. Dr. Floyd became exceedingly restless as soon as the anchor was dropped. I could see that he did not want to stay on the "Aurora" a moment longer than he need. I was glad

enough to get rid of him. He would have been very much in my way.

Quin appeared to be unwilling to take such a large party, though the curragh would have held four easily. He began to make excuses when he saw that he would have to take a lot of luggage as well as three passengers. Molly's tent had to go, of course, and one of the two handbags. When Tommy hauled the trunk on deck I reminded Floyd that he was to sleep on the yacht, and had better unpack anything he wanted before the trunk went ashore. This was a troublesome business, for all his clothes were at the bottom of the trunk, and Molly's on top. However, we succeeded in the end in getting out a suit of pyjamas, a pair of boots, a sponge, various brushes, and a razor. Then we packed Molly's belongings again and passed the trunk over the side to Quin. He received it, the tent, the bag, and Dr. Floyd with growls of protest. I could not make out what was the matter with the man. He is generally most good-tempered and helpful. At the last moment Molly dived into the cabin and came up with a tin of golden syrup, a parcel of biscuits, and a few dozen peppermint creams. She said she felt sure that she would be hungry again before long.

As the curragh pushed off I shouted to Quin to bring me back a loaf of bread, a can of water, and some eggs. Then I set to work to tidy the "Aurora."

CHAPTER VI

I had just stowed the jib in the locker, and I was getting the cover on the mainsail when I saw Poacher Quin rowing out again. It surprised me to see him so soon. I had told him to get me eggs, a loaf of bread, and some water. The water he might have got at once, but I felt sure he would have to visit three or four houses before he collected a dozen eggs, and the bread would have to be baked for me. Inisheeny is not an island like Jersey or Malta. You cannot walk into a shop and ask for a loaf of bread, because there are no shops to walk into, and no island woman bakes more loaves than she wants for her own family. I expected that it would take Quin three or four hours to get what I wanted.

He had another man with him in the curragh whom I recognised as Peter Flanagan, known as Peter Flanagan Tom to distinguish him from his cousin, Peter Flanagan Pat. I had at one time or another bought lobsters from both Peter Flanagans, and I knew them well.

The curragh slipped neatly alongside. Poacher Quin, grasping the "Aurora's" gunwale with one hand, performed an unnecessary introduction.

"It's my cousin Peter Flanagan," he said, nodding towards the man who sat in the stern of the curragh, "the same that they do be calling Peter Flanagan Tom, and he'd be thankful if he could have a word with you at any time that might be convenient to your Reverence."

"One time is much the same to me as another," I said. "I'm here for three or four days at least. Come on board, won't you?"

Peter Flanagan Tom stepped with quiet dignity on to the deck of the "Aurora." He stood near the mast, a tall grave man. He was barefooted and dressed in clothes which were tattered where they were not patched. His face was bristly with a three days' growth of black beard. He removed his hat and stood bareheaded. I saw that his hair was long, uncombed and tangled. But he had the air and bearing of an aristocrat. It is one of the peculiarities of these western islanders, men with Spanish as well as Celtic blood in their veins, that they are all gentlemen. They may be and often are extremely poor; but they retain a certain romantic personal dignity and they never fail in the outward observances of courtesy. They have had a poor time of it for the last century or so, in a world which supposed that money made a gentleman, and that only those with large banking accounts could claim the title. They are likely to have a still poorer time in the fine new world of democracy which is building itself up on the belief that there is no such thing as a gentleman at all.

Poacher Quin slipped on board and let his curragh drop astern to the length of her painter. He took from my hands the lace of the sail-cover at which I was working and left me free to talk to his cousin.

"I hope," said Peter Flanagan, "that I see your Reverence well? Good health is above all things, surely, and if it's the will of God that a man keeps his health there's nothing else that need trouble him."

That is, no doubt, perfectly true; but I did not suppose that my guest had come all the way from his island home to tell me so. Yet for a while he said no more. I got out my pipe and tobacco pouch. I offered Peter Flanagan a fill of the excellent mixture which I smoke. He shook his head gravely and drew a small cake of black plug tobacco from the ragged pocket of his trousers. There was something regal in his refusal to rush into the business which had brought him out. Kings, at all events Oriental kings, whose subjects pray that they may live for ever, can afford to be contemptuous of time. So can people who live on islands like Inisheeny. It was Poacher Quin, a man spoiled by his association with the degraded civilisation of the mainland, who brought us to the point. He had finished lacing the mainsail cover and was swabbing the smears of golden syrup with a rag. I felt grateful to him. I had rather shrunk from the job of cleaning out the cockpit.

"It's about them ones," he said, "that my cousin Peter wants to speak to you."

He nodded over his shoulder towards the shore. I looked and saw Molly and Tommy engaged in a confused struggle with the tent. They were pitching it in a small field below one of the cottages, and two calves were entangling themselves in the guy ropes. A large number of young Flanagans--all the Flanagans under thirteen years of age--were looking on.

"Any friends of your Reverence's," said Peter Flanagan Tom, "is welcome to Inisheeny, and anything there is on the island--though God knows there's not much--would be given, and a welcome along with it to anyone you might bring out here in your yacht. For we know that your Reverence has always been a good friend to the people of Inisheeny, and any lady or gentleman that is friends of yours is friends of ours."

This was well said, and as an expression of confidence in me was deeply touching. But I was not prepared to go security for the Floyds. I thought Molly a charming girl, and her father seemed to me an inoffensive man with no malice about him; but I did not care for the responsibility of seeing the whole island handed over to them merely because they came out in my boat.

"They're not exactly intimate friends of mine," I said; "that is to say, the old gentleman and the young lady aren't. I know my own nephew, of course, and I'll

answer for him."

"Sure, nobody minds him," said Poacher Quin. "What is he; only a lad with less sense than most? He might be running to and fro round the island for the rest of his life, and who'd care?"

"Exactly," I said; "and as for the other two, Dr. Floyd and his daughter----"

"What do they want out here?" said Poacher Quin. "That's what we'd like to know."

"Anything we have," said Peter Flanagan, "they're welcome to, being friends of your Reverence. Only----"

"I don't know what they want," I said. "I know no more about them than you do. The only hint I've had--look here, are there any crannogs on Inisheeny?"

Flanagan and Quin looked at each other doubtfully. I saw at once that neither one nor other of them had ever heard the word "crannog" before. But they were not going to own up to such ignorance.

"Crannogs?" said Poacher Quin. "I don't know did ever I hear of anyone in Inisheeny catching one of them. Did ever you come across a crannog, Peter Tom?"

"I did not," said Peter Flanagan. "I'm not saying there never was any. There might have been in my father's time or before him. However, if there was, they've died out now. However, if the gentleman and the young lady wants to be hunting the like there's no harm in it, and there won't be a word said. Only----"

He paused there, and I knew that we were at last getting to the matter which had brought him out to the "Aurora." Dr. Floyd and Molly were to be made free of the island, but there was to be some limit to their liberty. I waited anxiously to hear what it was.

"You know the bit of a bog at the back of my house?" said Peter Flanagan.

I knew it well, though I should not have called it a bog. There are bits of firm ground in most bogs. That particular piece of ground at the back of Peter Flanagan's cottage was more like a lake. There were no dry patches in it at all. But it was not exactly a lake either. It was covered with reeds, rushes, and had patches of a deceitful kind of bright green vegetation that looked firm, but sank under the lightest pressure of a foot.

"It would be as well," said Peter Flanagan, "if the gentleman and the young lady didn't go there."

I felt relieved. It seemed extremely unlikely that either of the Floyds would want to spend their time wading about in slimy mud. I was wiser than the Flanagans in one matter. I knew that crannogs are neither birds nor fish. I knew that people dig things out of them. It is clearly impossible to dig in the dilapidated lake at the back of Peter

Flanagan's house, so I naturally supposed that there could not be any crannogs there.

"It isn't only my Cousin Peter that minds," said Poacher Quin. "There's not one in the island but would be vexed if them ones were to go meddling with the bog. I'd be angry myself, so I would."

"I'll tell them not to go near it," I said; "and I think I can safely promise that they won't."

"I'm thankful to your Reverence," said Peter Flanagan Tom; "and I needn't say that if there's anything we can do in the way of making your friends comfortable--such as a couple of lobsters now, or a crab--I've heard that there's people that eats crabs, though I'd be sorry to do the like myself."

He had a chance of making good his promise sooner than either he or I expected. Tommy came alongside in another curragh while Flanagan was speaking. He jumped on deck.

"Catch hold of that curragh for a minute," he said to Poacher Quin.

He pushed past me and dived into the cabin. He came out a minute later with one of the seat cushions and a blanket in his arms.

"Hullo," I said, "what are you going to do with that cushion?"

"I'm taking it ashore for Molly to sleep on," he said.

It seemed to me that I must make some sort of protest. I had allowed myself to be hustled into an expedition to Inisheeny which I did not want to make. I had been let in for spending a night--perhaps several nights--on the "Aurora," when I meant to go home and sleep comfortably in my own bed. But it was Molly who had got the better of me. And Molly is a very pretty girl. My self-respect revolted against being bullied by my own nephew, a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, whose house-master ought to cane him oftener than he does. Besides, there are only two cushions in the "Aurora's" cabin. If Tommy carried off one of them---

"That's all very well," I said; "but if you take that cushion what's her father to sleep on? Or, rather, what am I to sleep on, for I'll have to let him have the other cushion? I don't mind doing without the blanket. The nights aren't cold. But I really cannot sleep on bare boards."

"I don't see how Molly can sleep on the ground," said Tommy. "She must have something under her."

I suppose I am unchivalrous and lacking in proper consideration for the weaker sex. But I am an oldish man and Molly is a young girl. I felt that she was better able to do without the cushion than I was. And the ground, especially nice, grassy ground, is much softer than the bare boards which form the seats of the "Aurora's"

cabin.

"What the young lady ought to have," said Poacher Quin, "is an armful of hay under her. Is there e'er a lock of hay on the island, Peter Tom?"

"There is," said Peter Flanagan. "There's two ass loads of nice hay in Peter Pat's cow-house; and the young lady will be welcome to it."

"There's worse beds than a wisp of hay," said Poacher Quin. "Many's the time I've slept on it. I'd rather sleep on it any time than on the like of that."

He glanced scornfully at my cushion which Tommy still held in his arms.

"And you needn't be taking the blanket with you either," said Poacher Quin. "What is there to hinder the young lady getting in under the hay if you lay it out thick for her?"

"So you can just put that cushion back where you got it, Tommy," I said.

He obeyed me; but I could see that he was not altogether satisfied. He was still less satisfied after Poacher Quin's next remark.

"She'll be as snug as a bug in a rug," he said, "when she has an armful of hay out of Peter Pat's cow-house."

There was no question about a rug in or on Molly's bed. I was not quite so sure about the bug. Nor was Tommy. Hay taken straight out of Peter Flanagan Pat's cow byre might have anything in it. Mrs. Maher had assured us before we left Carrigahooly that something of the sort might be expected.

Peter Flanagan hauled the curragh alongside and prepared to go ashore.

"I may as well be going, too," said Tommy. "I'd like to see about that hay, unless you want me for anything, Uncle Terence?"

Poacher Quin had cleaned up the "Aurora" and put everything in its place. I did not want Tommy in the least. Indeed, there was no point in my staying on board when I might be stretching my legs on shore.

"I don't want you now," I said, "though you'd have been some use to me an hour ago. I think I'll go ashore with you. I've a message for Dr. Floyd. I suppose I'll find him in the tent."

"No," said Tommy. "He's not there. At least he wasn't when I left. In fact, he never was there at all. He went off by himself directly we got on shore."

He had evidently begun his search for crannogs; but I was not in the least uneasy. It was very unlikely that he would go to the bog behind Peter Flanagan Tom's house, and still more unlikely that he would walk into it if he got there.

We rowed ashore together, Peter Flanagan and Quin leading in one curragh, Tommy rowing me in the other. We landed at a rude causeway of large stones which gives a sort of shelter to the island curraghs when the sea is making in the bay. It is a

very rough piece of work and it gets washed away nearly every winter. There is no Government pier at Inisheeny. It is, I believe, the only place in the west of Ireland where the Government have not built a pier. Many places have two and even three of these structures, and I have signed six petitions to different Chief Secretaries, making marks for all the Flanagans below my own name, asking for a pier. I do not suppose that the thing will ever be done now. The epoch of pier-building has passed, and we are not likely to get back to anything like it in my time. The philosophic historian will, some day, seek to explain the waves of building energy which have passed over Ireland. There was first the craze for building round towers. I suppose the man who built them must have meant them to be of some use. Then came church-building, which up to a point was useful, but was plainly overdone. Ireland, to-day, is littered with ruined churches. Then we--or some of our conquerors--built castles which must have been almost as uncomfortable to live in as the round towers. Later on we built country houses for the gentry, grandiose and rather ugly mansions, most of them so big that their owners could not afford to live in them. Then, in my own time, we took to piers. Some day I daresay we shall have removed all the stones from the surface of Ireland and built them into structures which will fall into ruins. The next thing will probably be prisons. Our present Governments--the official one in the Castle, and the unofficial Republican one--are both bent on putting us all into prison, moved, no doubt, by a desire to improve our morals. The Republican Government has no jails ready to hand, so it must build. The other Government must build, too, for it has not nearly jails enough.

Tommy went off with Peter Flanagan to get the wisp of hay for Molly's bed. Quin set out on his search for the eggs and the bread I wanted. I walked up to the tent to see how Molly was getting on. I found her entirely surrounded by young Flanagans, who stood with their mouths open like chickens with the pip. Molly was feeding them with golden syrup which she scooped out of the tin with a scollop shell.

"Aren't they darlings?" she said. "I never saw anything so sweet as that one."

She pointed out a small chubby boy. He certainly would have been sweet to the taste if anyone had bitten him, for he had golden syrup all over him. I would not have touched him for half-a-crown. I would not, indeed, have cared to touch Molly either. No one can scoop golden syrup out of a tin with a scollop shell without letting a little of it trickle down.

"His name's Flanagan," she said. "In fact, all their names seem to be Flanagan."

"There are six families on the island," I said, "all Flanagans. There's Peter Flanagan Tom, with his wife, and Peter Flanagan Pat, and Mike Flanagan Tom, and Mike Flanagan Mike, and John Flanagan, and----"

"Why is he only John?" said Molly. "Oughtn't he to have some other name tacked on when all the rest have?"

"It's not necessary in his case," I said, "for, oddly enough, he's the only John there is. There are two Peters, you see, and two Mikes, so to keep them distinguished from each other we have to tack on the father's Christian name."

"How lovely!" said Molly. "I think I'll call myself Molly Floyd George while I'm here. George is father's name, you know."

That reminded me that I ought to deliver Peter Flanagan's message to Dr. Floyd.

"By the way," I said, "where is your father?"

"Gone to look for his crannogs, I expect," said Molly. "That's what he came here for, you know."

"I wish," I said, "that you'd tell me exactly what a crannog is."

"I thought you said that you were deeply interested in them."

"I did say that; and I am, of course. That's why I'm asking you what they are. If I wasn't interested I wouldn't be looking for information."

"I don't know," said Molly, "that I can tell you exactly what they are; but they're prehistoric. That's the word, isn't it?"

"It's certainly a word," I said, "and I daresay it's the right one to use about crannogs, but I don't know."

"They're built on piles," said Molly. "Perhaps you understand what that means. I don't. And they're found in lakes."

"Found where?" I asked.

I was disturbed by this last piece of information. There are no lakes on Inisheeny. But the bog at the back of Peter Flanagan Tom's house might once have been a small lake. I sincerely hoped that Dr. Floyd's crannog was not there. It is the one place in the island which is forbidden to explorers.

"Lakes," said Molly; "not large lakes, you know; but, well, rather disused lakes. I suppose that the people who built them chose lakes which weren't much good for anything else? I say, do you think you could chase these children away? They're darlings, but I've had enough of them."

"There's no chance of their going," I said, "as long as there's any of the golden syrup left."

Molly glanced at the tin. It was still half full. She handed it to the small chubby boy whom she had picked out as the sweetest of the children.

"Now," she said, "be off home, all of you."

The small boy fled at once, and the rest of the children followed him. I thought it likely that there would be a fight--a very sticky fight--outside the tent. But the

chubby boy was fleetier than he looked. He kept the short lead that he had, and the whole party disappeared into the next field. What happened there did not matter to me.

Tommy and Peter Flanagan appeared, carrying large bundles of hay on their shoulders. I made up my mind to go in search of Dr. Floyd at once. After hearing what Molly told me about crannogs I felt fairly certain that the professor had gone straight to the bog. I was anxious if I could lure him away before Peter Flanagan found him there. I did not like the task at all. Molly had warned me that her father was likely to turn "ratty" if anyone came between him and a crannog. But I had made a definite promise to the Flanagans, and they are old friends of mine. Dr. Floyd is barely an acquaintance. Besides, after all, the Flanagans have right on their side. The island is theirs, and no one ought to poke about part of it which they want to keep to themselves.

I hoped very much that Floyd would take a reasonable and proper view of the Flanagans' rights. But I feared he might take the line that crannogs are a national possession from which selfish proprietors must not be allowed to shut off the scientific public. The Flanagans would probably regard such a doctrine as Socialistic--if they knew the word--and would certainly resent it whether they called it Socialistic or not. As a strong individualist, convinced of the necessity of defending the rights of private property, my sympathies were all with the Flanagans, and the more so because I am not much interested in the things that are dug out of crannogs.

CHAPTER VII

Lakes and pools in the west of Ireland are generally to be found on the tops of hills, not, as elsewhere in the world, in valleys and hollows. There is nothing really surprising about this to anyone who knows Ireland. It is simply an illustration of the truth that nothing in Ireland obeys ordinary laws. Water is supposed to settle down--does actually in England and France and other countries settle down--in the lowest place it can find. In Ireland, especially west of the Shannon, which is the most Irish part of Ireland, water climbs hills and forms lakes on top. My way, when I went in search of Floyd, lay up hill. There is, I know, a kind of rough track which leads from the landing place to Peter Flanagan's house. But it winds round the island, touching at all the other houses on its way. I was in a hurry, for I wanted to get Floyd away from the bog before Peter Flanagan found him there, and I could not count on Peter Flanagan spending more than a quarter-of-an-hour arranging Molly's bed of hay for her. I felt bound to take the most direct route even if it were not the easiest. So I struck across country. I had only about a mile and a half to go, and I ought to have done it easily in half an hour, even allowing for the hill. It took me very nearly an hour, and I should have saved time if I had gone by the track.

The island of Inisheeny is divided up into an amazing number of small fields, and they are separated from each other by walls built of loose stones. I do not suppose that the Flanagans actually find it convenient to work in fields the size of largish, pocket handkerchiefs; but they have to get rid somehow of the stones with which their island is strewed. It would be a very laborious business to carry all the stones down to the beach and to throw them into the sea. The only other way of treating them is to build them into walls, and when there are millions of stones there must be a great many walls with very small spaces between them. I did not actually count them, but I guessed that I crossed at least fifty loose stone walls on my way from Molly's tent to the bog. Even a young and active man must cross a loose stone wall carefully, if he does not want to get badly bruised by bringing it down on his own legs and feet. I am, alas! neither young nor active. I climbed the walls very cautiously. I was exceedingly hot and slightly out of breath when I reached the cottage.

Mrs. Peter Flanagan, with a baby in her arms, was standing at her door when I reached her house. I greeted her as I passed.

"Good-day to you, Mrs. Flanagan," I said. "You're looking well, and the baby is growing into a fine boy. Did you see a strange gentleman wandering about here?"

"There's a strange gentleman out on the bog this minute," she said, "and I'd be as well pleased if he'd go off and play himself somewhere else. Peter will be angry, so he will, if he finds him on the bog. There's nothing vexes Peter like seeing anyone next or nigh that bog."

I hurried past the house and climbed the wall of the Flanagans' haggard. I saw Floyd. He was not merely at the bog. He was very nearly in the middle of it. He had taken off his shoes and socks, and rolled his trousers up above his knees. He had a long stick in his hand which he poked into the mud and water in front of him like a blind man feeling his way along a strange road. It surprised me to see that the water came very little above his ankles. I have some experiences of various sorts of bog, gained in the days when I used to go snipe-shooting. I know that a bog like Flanagan's has no firm bottom to it. A man who is fool enough to venture in simply sinks, unless he has friends at hand to pull him out. But Floyd was not sinking.

Mrs. Flanagan shouted to me. She had followed me round the house and stood in the haggard looking over the wall.

"Without you get him away out of that," she said, "there'll be murder done when Peter comes home. It's what vexes Peter terrible, when e'er a one goes near that bog."

I hoped it would not come to murder; but I quite understood that Peter liked to keep the bog to himself; and I knew him to be a most determined man. There would certainly be unpleasantness, even if Floyd were not actually killed. I hurried down to the edge of the bog.

"Floyd," I shouted. "Floyd, come back at once."

He looked round at me with an amiable smile.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm going very carefully. There's nothing to be anxious about."

He evidently thought that I was afraid he would drown himself.

"Come back," I shouted again.

"I tell you it's all right," said Floyd. "The causeway is perfect so far."

That more or less explained why Floyd was not up to his neck in mud and water. He was feeling his way along what he called a causeway. It surprised me a good deal to hear that there was a submerged bridge across the Flanagans' bog. But there evidently was something of the sort. And Floyd was feeling his way along it. That accounted for his poking about with a stick in front of him. I almost wished he would step over the edge of it.

"It's a splendid causeway," said Floyd cheerfully. "But don't venture out. It doesn't run straight. I have come on two sharp angles already."

I felt a touch on my arm and looked round. Mrs. Flanagan, carrying her baby with her, had climbed the wall of the haggard and followed me to the edge of the bog.

"There'll be murder done when Peter comes home," she said; "murder and maybe worse, unless you take the strange gentleman away out of that."

It was all very well for Mrs. Flanagan to go on threatening me with murder, but I saw no way of getting Floyd to come back. I was not going to risk a wetting by trying to cross the causeway, and even if I got to him I could not drag the man back by the collar.

"Take him out of it yourself," I said. "It's your bog, not mine."

"Sure, I would if I could," said Mrs. Flanagan; "but how can I with a baby in my arms?"

I should have offered to hold the baby if I had thought that Mrs. Flanagan, with her arms free, could have done anything with Floyd. But I did not see that she could do much more than I could, even if she were relieved of the baby.

"Why did you let him go there?" I asked.

"Is it me let him go? I did no such thing; but I told him he'd be drowned if he tried. What more could I tell him?"

She might have told him, as she had told me, that if he escaped drowning he would be murdered. I do not suppose that Floyd would have believed her. But it was plainly no use wrangling with Mrs. Flanagan. My business was to get Floyd out of the bog and I did not see how I was going to do it.

He was advancing slowly but steadily towards the middle of the bog. His causeway seemed to be leading to a small clump of bushes--a sort of island. I had never looked with any particular interest at Flanagan's bog, and I do not remember noticing the island before. But it was there, and Floyd was making for it.

"Floyd," I shouted, "come back. I want to talk to you about your daughter. I'm uneasy about her."

I thought that might bring him back. It was the only way of alarming him that I could think of at the moment. It did not seem to disturb him in the least.

"Molly's all right," he said. "Molly's always all right. Molly can take care of herself."

That was certainly quite true. But a man ought to take some interest in his daughter even if she happens to be a thoroughly competent girl like Molly.

"It's serious," I said, despairingly, "extremely serious. I'm really anxious about her. You must come back."

I do not believe he would have come back just then if I had told him that tribes

of wild Flanagans were dragging Molly limb from limb. He reached the island while I spoke. I call it an island, though it was not really an island in any proper sense of the word. Nothing that could be called dry land appeared among the bushes which seemed to be growing in shallow water. But Floyd stepped forward confidently, pushing aside the branches in front of him. A moment later he gave a loud cry. I fully expected to see him begin to sink, slowly, as men sink who are sucked down in bogs. I could have done nothing whatever to save him. I do not suppose that I could even have recovered his body afterwards.

"Glory be to God!" said Mrs. Flanagan. "He's gone."

She did not seem particularly shocked or horrified. I daresay she was rather pleased. From her point of view it was better that Floyd should be drowned than that he should come safe to land and be murdered by her husband. But Floyd was not being drowned. His cry was a cry of anger, not of agony. He turned his back on the island and came splashing towards the shore. He was not nearly so careful this time as he had been going out, and at one time he stepped over the edge of the causeway, and I thought he would be unable to get back. He actually sank up to his waist before he managed to get on to firm ground again. When he reached the shore he was very wet and muddy; but he was not in the least cool. I do not think I ever saw an elderly man in such a rage, and, what struck me as very odd, he was angry with me.

At first he did nothing but swear at me. I should not have supposed beforehand that a gentle-looking old man like Floyd could have known half the words he used. Mrs. Flanagan's baby began to cry. Mrs. Flanagan herself kept her head pretty well.

"There'll be murder done surely," she said.

Then she turned and went back to her house. I suppose she did not object to murder when her husband was neither the murderer nor the victim. After a few minutes' terrific blasphemy Floyd became more or less articulate.

"You've played me a dastardly trick," he said.

My conscience was perfectly clear. I had played no trick of any sort on Floyd. I patted him gently on the shoulder with my hand, with the idea of soothing him.

"Try and be calm, Floyd," I said. "I haven't done anything."

"It must have been you," he said. "Nobody else would do it. Nobody else would know it was worth doing. Why didn't you tell me you'd done it? That would have been bad enough; but not so bad as this."

"If you'll tell me what's been done," I said, "I might be able to help you to find out who did it."

"The crannog has been opened," said Floyd.

Well, I had been fairly warned. Molly told me that her father was liable to become "ratty" when anything went wrong with a crannog. Now I saw that "ratty" was a very mild word to use. "Tigery" would have described his temper better.

"I give you my solemn word of honour, Floyd," I said, "I'll take an oath if you like, that I never opened a crannog in my life, and I don't in the least want to. In fact, I don't really know what a crannog is. I daresay you'll think very little of me when I make a confession like that; but it's perfectly true."

Floyd looked at me steadily without speaking, and I did my best to meet his gaze, though that was not an easy thing to do, and I did not find that a good conscience made it any easier. Gradually the glary look disappeared from his eyes, and I could see that he was beginning to believe me.

"The truth is, Floyd," I said, "that if you gave me a present of the best crannog in Ireland tomorrow, offered to set it up complete in my garden, I should not know what to do with it."

Floyd's anger died away rapidly, and he began to give way to extreme dejection. He sat down on the ground, covered his face with his hands and refused to answer when I spoke to him. I went away and fetched his shoes and socks. I was still very anxious to get him away before Peter Flanagan came back. I spoke to him kindly. I tried firmness. I even shook him. He remained silent, taking no notice of me. Whatever had happened to the crannog was evidently very serious.

Mrs. Flanagan, convinced that there was no further risk of a duel to the death between me and Floyd, came back.

"It would be well," she said, "if you could get the strange gentleman out of this before Peter comes back."

I was rather tired of hearing Mrs. Flanagan say that. She had said it several times before, and I required no convincing.

"How can I?" I said. "He won't even put on his shoes."

Mrs. Flanagan was ready to deal with that difficulty, even if she could do nothing else. She handed the baby to me, knelt down and put Floyd's socks and shoes on his feet. That seemed to rouse him. Before she had time to lace his second shoe he was on his feet striding at a rapid rate along the track which led to the landing-place. I thrust the baby into Mrs. Flanagan's arms and went after him. I felt easier in my mind now that he was safe away from the neighbourhood of the bog; but I did not know what might happen if he met Peter Flanagan. The crannog had evidently been opened by someone, and I could not help fearing that Floyd would accuse Peter Flanagan of the crime now that I had cleared myself. I was afraid that even Flanagan's aristocratic calm and dignity would break down under a storm of bad

language like that with which Floyd had assailed me.

Fortunately we did not meet Flanagan. He must have gone home by the short way across the stone walls. His wife would tell him about Floyd's visit, of course, but I hoped he would not be seriously annoyed. No real harm had been done to his bog. A night's rest on the "Aurora" would, no doubt, soothe Floyd, and in the morning he would be able to regard his misfortune, whatever it was, more calmly.

We found Molly and Tommy waiting for us at the landing-place. They were hungry and wanted their evening meal. Sugary biscuits dipped in golden syrup are a satisfying food in so far as they deprive the eater of further appetite, but something more sustaining is required by young people who have spent a long day on and near the sea.

Poacher Quin was also at the landing-place, seated by himself on a rock. He had done far better than I hoped in foraging for provisions. He had a large home-made loaf, a jug of milk and a dozen mackerel. He put us off to the "Aurora" in a curragh, and I proposed that we should have our evening meal at once.

Floyd did not seem to care whether he ever ate anything again or not. He went into the cabin and sat with his face turned away like Ahab, when he was disappointed about Naboth's vineyard. Tommy washed my few plates in a bucketful of salt water. They were as clean before he began as he was at all likely to make them. But I did not mind his washing them as much as he liked. They are enamelled metal plates, almost impossible for him to break. Molly cut slices of bread and spread butter on them. I kept my eye on her to see that she did not spread golden syrup, too. I fried the mackerel myself. It was not by any means the first time that I had fried mackerel over a "Primus" stove. I was sure that I could do it well. I was not sure that either Molly or Tommy could do it at all.

It was a beautifully fine evening, so we had our meal in the open air sitting round the cockpit. It was not so difficult as I expected to get Floyd to come out and eat. The smell of frying fish reached him in the cabin, and he must have been as hungry as the rest of us in spite of the crannog disaster. I had only three plates, but Tommy did not object to eating his mackerel off the frying pan. He and Molly finished off the meal with bread soaked in golden syrup eaten off teaspoons. They said it was far better than most of the puddings commonly met with.

We drank three or four cups of tea each, tea strong enough to keep us awake for hours afterwards. But we had hardly finished washing up when Molly and Tommy began to yawn. It was plain that they would both be much better in bed, though the beds that awaited them were not luxurious. I hailed Poacher Quin, who was sitting patiently on his rock at the landing-place. He came off to take Molly

ashore. She is a remarkably plucky girl. I do not know any other young woman who would care to go off by herself to sleep in a tent on an island inhabited, so far as she knew, by savage people and greedy children. But she bade us good-night without a sign of nervousness. Poacher Quin said he would do the best he could to secure a peaceful night for her.

"I've druv away the two young bullocks that was in the field," he said, "for fear they might be upsetting the tent in the night. And I've built up the gap in the wall so that they won't find it easy to get back again. And I've told Delia Flanagan, the one that was called John's Delia before she married Antony Tom, to shut up her hens, so that they wouldn't be sitting on the young lady's bed and disturbing her in the morning. I don't know now that there's anything will go near her, unless it might be the young black pig that belongs to Michael. He's a terror, that pig, and no wall will keep him away from any place he's a mind to go to."

Shakespeare seemed to think that a parson would sleep more pleasantly if he dreamed that his nose were being tickled by a tithe pig's tail. He had an immense knowledge of human nature, but I cannot help thinking he is wrong about that. I should hate to feel that a pig of any sort could get near me when I was in bed, even in a dream. Molly seemed to think that a visit from Michael Flanagan's black pig would be rather amusing. She waved a cheery farewell to us as she rowed ashore.

Then I sent Tommy to his sail locker.

"There are three jibs and a foresail there," I said. "And I think the remains of my old trisail are there still; so you ought to be able to make yourself fairly comfortable. You can't stretch your legs straight out, but lots of people sleep curled up, so that won't do you any harm."

Tommy is a good tempered and cheerful boy. He went and lay down in the sail locker without a grumble.

Floyd, though still depressed, was not nearly so melancholy as he was when he first made the awful discovery about the crannog. Fried mackerel and strong tea had restored him to something like his normal temper. I gave him some whisky and water, a stiffish dose, and that improved him still more. I offered him tobacco, but he said he had not smoked for thirty-five years, so I did not urge him to begin again. The wind had completely died away, and the water lay quite calm around us. It was still warm though it was ten o'clock by my watch. The sun, ignoring our legislation, does not set in Inisheeny, till nearly ten o'clock at the end of July. The calm, and the gentle swish of the water against the boat's side and the glow of the sunset above the island, all helped to soothe Floyd.

We sat in silence for about twenty minutes, and then he made me an apology for

his outbreak during the afternoon.

"I am sorry," he said, "that I lost my temper. It was childish of me, and I ought not to have abused you the way I did. But it was a bitter disappointment to me to find that the crannog had been opened."

"I'm sure it was," I said. "But after all, that can't be the only crannog in Ireland. There must be others."

I offered this consolation rather doubtfully. I was still very much in the dark about crannogs. They might, for all I knew, be exceedingly rare things. Floyd sighed heavily, but he did not contradict me. I went on.

"There are better fish in the sea than ever came out of it," I said. "We'll look out for another crannog that hasn't been opened."

"You don't understand," said Floyd.

I did not understand. He was quite right there. I do not, even now, when I have heard all that Floyd had to say for himself, understand why he should get into a violent passion because someone else had been before him in digging useless things out of a patch of mud. I did my best, however, to look sympathetic. I must have succeeded, for Floyd suddenly made up his mind to trust me with his whole secret. Without saying another word, he dived into the cabin and dragged out his small brown handbag. He opened it and groped about among the papers it contained. So far as I could see it contained nothing else except papers. He came on what he wanted after a short search, and handed me a bundle of manuscript. I looked at it, turning over the pages one after another. They were all closely written over and the handwriting was both small and crabbed.

"Am I to read it?" I asked.

"You needn't read it all," said Floyd, "though it's very interesting, absorbingly interesting. You'll find the most important part on page six."

I turned to page six, the last page but one of the MS. with a sense of relief. But I found I could not read a word of it. It was Latin. I once could read Latin fairly fluently. I still can and occasionally do read an ode of Horace. But this was a Latin MS., a very different thing from a clearly printed book, and it had been written by someone who availed himself of every possible contraction. It seemed to me, too, that the scribe, or copyist, had kept a hair in his pen all the time he was at work.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I've left my spectacles at home. I can't manage without them."

Sir Walter Scott mentions--I think in "Ivanhoe"--that priests in the reign of Richard I. were often a little deaf in their Latin ear. I saw no reason to be ashamed of being a little blind in my Latin eye. And it was perfectly true that I had left my

spectacles at home. Floyd accepted this excuse and took back his MS.

"I made this copy myself," he said, "from a MS. belonging originally to one of the Irish monasteries in Italy. I came across it in a library in Rome."

"I suppose," I said, vaguely, "that there are thousands of MSS. there, which nobody ever look at."

"This," said Floyd, "is part of the diary of an Irish monk called Salmacius. I don't know how it got to Italy. Perhaps Salmacius fled there after the sack of his monastery, which seems to have taken place in 976."

He paused at this point and referred to the MS., turning over page after page. He may have been gloating over poor Salmacius' misfortune, or he may have been refreshing his recollection of some details. He paused so long that I thought he must want me to say something.

"Ireland seems actually to have been in a worse state than it is now," I said, "though we're always grumbling. After all it isn't nearly so bad to blow up a police barrack as to sack a monastery."

"Salmacius fled for his life in the middle of the night," said Floyd.

"And he was a monk! That proves what I say. The only people who have to fly in the middle of the night now are policemen's wives."

Floyd took no notice of these comments of mine, though I think they ought to have interested him. What use is history unless it teaches us to take a cheerful view of our own time?

"Here," said Floyd, "is what Salmacius says: 'Deinde, clamore perterritus, dum fratres concurrunt in ecclesiam----'"

"I wish," I said, "you'd translate for me. I told you I'd left my spectacles at home."

"Perhaps I ought to tell you first," said Floyd, "that Salmacius was Abbot of Kildoyne. It took me some time to find that out, for the MS. is imperfect, and gave me no information on the point. Then I had to inquire where Kildoyne is."

"I could have told you that," I said. "Kildoyne is a ruin a couple of miles out of Carrigahooly. I always heard it was a castle, but no doubt you are right."

"It was a monastery," said Floyd, "and Salmacius was Abbot of it, the last abbot."

He paused again, and I ventured on a word of sympathy.

"The sack of the monastery seems to have been quite unexpected," Floyd went on, still referring to the MS.

"Does he say who sacked it?"

"No," said Floyd, "at least there's nothing about that in the surviving half of the

MS."

"Perhaps he didn't know," I said. "The sackers probably wore masks. But I expect the Coroner's Jury said it was the police or the Lord Lieutenant. It doesn't matter now any way."

"The only things which the Abbot was able to take with him in his flight," said Floyd, "were a cope, a chalice and a sword, which he says was kept behind the high altar, a relic, I suppose. It was the sword of Cormaccius Scæva Rex. The use of the word Scæva is interesting. He explains it as "vulgo kithogue," that is to say----"

"Oh, I understand that all right," I said, "King Cormac the left-handed."

"With these things hidden under his cloak," said Floyd, "he fled to Inisheeny-- 'trans mare in scapha'--by which we may understand----"

"A curragh," I said. "He couldn't have got across this particular bit of sea in anything else then."

"He buried the sword and the chalice in the crannog," said Floyd. "He doesn't say what he did with the cope."

"The islanders probably looted that," I said. "But are you sure about the crannog? How did he know there was one?"

"He tells us exactly where it was," said Floyd. "In the middle of the lake, situated on the highest point of the island, and he tells us how he got there. He was guided across the causeway by a man whom he describes as 'vir senex insulanus.'"

"An old islander," I said, "one of the Flanagans of course. It's wonderful how far back these old Irish families go."

"He buried the chalice and the sword," said Floyd, "'prima luce,' early in the morning. The cope seems to have disappeared hopelessly."

So apparently had the chalice and the sword of the left-handed Cormac. I could quite understand Floyd's disappointment. It is not given to every antiquary to light on a MS. which tells exactly where to find such treasures as ancient chalices and swords.

"I suppose you're quite sure they're gone," I said.

"Quite," said Floyd. "The moment I stepped on to the Island I saw that the crannog had been opened. The ground had been dug into. There was an open hole, half filled with water which had oozed in, and two other places where the mud had been shovelled in and the holes filled up again. Oh, it was very thoroughly done."

He rose stiffly from the corner of the cockpit in which he was sitting and crept into the cabin. I heard him a few minutes later bumping his head against the skylight. It is not easy to get out of a shirt and into a suit of pyjamas in the cabin of a small yacht. I generally dress and undress in the cockpit, unless it is raining hard.

"Good night," said Floyd at last. "I'm going to try to sleep."

"Before you drop off," I said, "I wish you'd tell me how the Abbot Salmacius managed with the name Inisheeny. Cormaccius is good, though fairly obvious, and scæva is quite classical for kithogue. But how did he Latinize Inisheeny?"

"He didn't," said Floyd. "He simply said 'insula parva occidentalis.' But as soon as I found out where Kildoyne was, I studied the map and saw at once that his island was Inisheeny. It must have been, for there's no other island anywhere near."

CHAPTER VIII

I sat smoking pipe after pipe after Floyd disappeared, and lay, as I hoped, sound asleep. The glow of the sunset faded slowly from the sky above Inisheeny. The island became a grey blur instead of a sharply cut black silhouette. The sea, which had been a glowing purple, grew slowly black, and began to move restlessly as the sea does at night, even at its calmest. The prophet Jeremiah must have been sitting on the shore on a still summer night when he wrote that line of his about sorrow on the sea. Yet I am not sure that he interpreted this restlessness aright. It seems to me that there is something more than sorrow in the vague movements and sobbings of calm water, and the strange sucking kisses with which it woos the shore. I feel that the whole sea is possessed by a great, unsatisfied desire, as if it longs for what the land has: warmth, and men's habitations, and the passing of ploughs across its surface. Or else, as if the sea is like the heart of man in which God has placed eternity, "yet so as he cannot find it out."

I am a foolish old man and lonely. I suppose it is natural enough that I should let my mind drift about among sentimentalities when I sit by myself at night on the "Aurora." But that night I was roused before my dreamings were half finished. There was a sound of men's voices on shore and the rattling of oars flung into a boat; very plainly audible to me on the "Aurora." Five men put off in a curragh and pulled out into the bay. I could make out who they were when they got near the yacht. Poacher Quin was one of them. The other four were Flanagans, whom I knew well. They caught sight of me as they passed and lay on their oars.

"We're thinking of taking a scrape of the net in the South Bay," said Poacher Quin. "Would your Reverence like to come with us?"

A man of sixty, if he is wise, goes to bed at night and sleeps. I am not wise, and I accepted the Flanagans' invitation. It was not by any means the first time that I had gone fishing with these men. I think they like to take me, having a theory that I bring them luck; and fishing is, of all occupations, that in which luck counts for most. I like to think, too, that I am some use. I can still haul on a rope, and when there is much hauling to be done, six men are better than five.

There is no more primitive boat in the world than the curragh of the western Irish islanders. Salmacius' *scapha*, in which he made his midnight voyage a thousand years ago, must have been just such a boat as the Flanagans use now. Then, no doubt, she was made of skins. Now she is a frail structure of laths and tarred canvas. But the form and the peculiar qualities of the boat have not changed at all. It

was in just such waterproof baskets that the earliest mariners of our race first ventured out to sea, centuries before history began. Now, in the twentieth century, the curragh survives, almost unimproved, and, a strange thing, unimprovable for certain kinds of work. It is still the best boat there is in surf round rocks or among the long breakers on a sandy shore. There was a time, many years ago, when I first went fishing from Inisheeny, when I used to suspect the Flanagans of taking risks in the hope of frightening me. I know now that they are only going their ordinary way when they row into places where swift disaster would overwhelm any ordinary boat.

Poacher Quin and I sat together in the stern. The other four men pulled, one of them with two oars. It seems strange that a curragh should pull five oars, with the odd one on the windward side, but these are curious craft. To manage a curragh a man must begin by inverting most of the ordinary rules of seamanship, and make up his mind to do exactly what he is not to do in any other boat. Perhaps if our statesmen spent a few weeks fishing in curraghs before trying to govern Ireland they would get on better than they do. They would learn, at all events, the wisdom of discarding all the fruits of experience gathered in the governing of other lands.

We pulled clear of the east bay of the island, and crept as closely as possible round the shore, passing so near to the jagged rocks that we were sometimes floating in the foamy backwash of the breaking waves. Once we passed through a passage between two masses of rock. It was so narrow that an active man might have leaped across it. The waves surged into one end of it, climbed the rocks, drew back to meet the surge advancing from the other end, and were buffeted into steep crests. The whole surface of the water in the passage was a mass of swirling, seething foam. Once, by stretching out my hand, I could have touched a flat, limpet-covered shelf of rock, flecked with the spume of rushing water. Our four rowers steadied the curragh and then swept her forward. No words passed between them. Each man acted for himself, but all seemed moved by a common purpose. They possessed an incredible kind of instinctive skill.

We came at length to our bay, a narrow deep inlet with rocky sides, and a shore of hard sand at the end of it. Outside the sea was calm, almost as calm as in the sheltered east bay where the "Aurora" lay. But all along the coast we had passed, and in this bay, with its entrance facing the Atlantic, the ocean surges rose mysteriously near the land. Great round-topped, black billows appeared suddenly, curled over and broke, foaming among the rocks, crashing on the sand. We landed on the rocks on the west side of the bay and the work of the night began. The net lay stored in a forlorn ruin of a hut built on a grassy bank above high-tide mark. We hauled it out, dragged it down to the rocks and piled it in the stern of the curragh.

Two men went aboard of her, and one of them, working with two oars, backed her slowly towards the sandy beach. He held her a few feet from the shore among the curling wave crests and long reaching rivers of foam. Sometimes she reared like a frightened horse, and stood for an instant on her curved stern with her bow pointing to the sky. The rower, his oars outstretched in the air, balanced without effort on his seat, waited till she fell forward and he could grip the water again. The other man, standing in the stern beside the piled net, flung a rope to us on the shore. Then the curragh moved away from us, rearing among the breakers, shooting forward over the smooth spaces between. And all the while the man in the stern paid out the rope to us until he came to the end of it, where it is made fast to the net. After that, hand-over-hand, he flung the net into the sea, and we dimly discerned the curved line of its floating corks. The curragh made a wide circle and dropped two hundred yards of net, weighted and floated, as she went. She returned to the shore about fifty yards from where we stood.

Then came the slow work of hauling. Poacher Quin and Peter Flanagan and I were together on one rope. We dragged it shoreward, foot by foot, with heavy toil. We gripped the rope, passed it behind our backs, and, with perceptible pauses between our steps, plodded up the sand. We were six or eight yards apart, and as each man reached the line of stones which fringed the beach he dropped the rope and walked down again to the water's edge, went ankle deep into the water, gripped the rope again and again began the slow ascent. As the net came home we edged over towards our fellow-labourers who hauled the rope at the other end. At first we could only see them dimly, black figures against a grey background, so sloped in their pulling that it seemed as if they must fall. The rope on which they leaned was not visible, and their slow crawling up the sand looked grotesque. At last we came together, and the net itself was in our hands. Standing in shallow water we pulled it in, we saw the splashing fish in the bag of it. We gathered it all in at last, and stood with our booty flapping against our legs and feet--white trout, sole, plaice, turbot, codling, broad-headed spiky gurnet, and scores of coal fish. Also, because the weighted bottom of the net had scraped along the sand, there were many crabs and jagged star-fish, and round sea urchins.

"Didn't I say all along," said Poacher Quin, "that his Reverence would bring us luck?"

Peter Flanagan was of the same opinion about the value of my presence. He came over to me and held out his hand, a hand slimy with fish scales, damp and cold. I placed mine in it and felt the firm grasp of friendship. But Peter was less voluble than Poacher Quin. He did not speak a word.

Then came the long and tiresome business of getting the net ready for a fresh cast. The fish were gathered into heaps and packed into two sacks, fetched from the hut where the net was stored. A few dog-fish were flung far up the beach and left to die. Star-fish, sea urchins, and tangles of torn weed were dragged out of the net and thrown aside. It was impossible to disentangle the crabs from the meshes. They were trodden to pulp by the men's boots. Then the net and all its gear, heavy with seawater, was gathered into piles or coiled. This was hard work, as hard as the hauling, and much more wetting. I had no great skill at it, and the ordering of the ropes and floats and weights of a tangled net is confusing work in the dark. Besides, I was tired. I moved up the beach and sat on a stone by myself.

Below me, moving silently in the dim darkness of the summer night, were the toiling men. Below them the waves broke, slowly, heavily, on the sand, making a broadening and narrowing belt of grey-white foam. Beyond lay the calm, black sea.

I fell to wondering how the economic doctrines of our new Labour Party would work out when men like the Inisheeny islanders come to apply them to the conditions of their lives. Knowledge and ideas spread slowly, but sooner or later my friends the Flanagans will learn the truths which their toiling brethren in the great English industrial districts have discovered, on which our brave new world is to be built up. Already it is beginning to be understood, even on Inisheeny, that work is an evil thing. No man, however ignorant, can regard hauling the wet ropes of a heavy net as good or pleasant, especially if the hauling is done at night. Some day the Flanagans will learn that work is not only an evil, but a wholly unnecessary evil, imposed on poor man by capitalism and other tyrannous powers. They will find out, as the labouring masses have found out everywhere else, that work can be diminished, and in the end totally abolished by a wise system of doing as little as possible, and by breaking out once a month or so into the total idleness of strikes. Reactionary economists, seated comfortably in their well-warmed rooms, will say that the people of Inisheeny are too close to nature to practise the "ca' canny" system of work, or to strike with any hope of success. How, these wise fools will ask, can men fight natural laws? Will the soil and the sea be intimidated by the threat of a general strike? Such arguments sound plausible, but are fundamentally unsound. The history of man's life on this planet is the history of his gradual triumph over these same powerful, seemingly immutable laws of nature. Will Labour, catching the torch from the failing hands of capitalists, fail to run the race to its triumphant end? Doubtless, the Flanagans will suffer, as all pioneers must suffer, martyrs to the new faith. But they will win through. They, or their children after them, will make it plain to the sea that they are not content to be toiling slaves, and to the tyrannous earth that it

cannot for ever be watered by their sweat. Then the fish will of their own accord come swimming to the land, and there will be no more tugging at wet ropes. Then potatoes will grow spontaneously, in untilled ground, without being sowed.

So, more foolish than when I sentimentalised on the deck of the "Aurora," I sat on my stone, an uninspired and soulless sceptic, and questioned the glowing spirit of my time. I must have dropped into a half-dose, for I did not notice that the net was cleared, piled into the stern of the curragh, and that the work of casting was begun again. I awoke to find that I was not the only one of the party who was shirking his fair share of the work. Poacher Quin had left the fishing and was working a little further up the beach at the easy task of making a fire.

Poacher Quin can work when he chooses, but long continued effort is not a thing he likes, and he manages to live without it, as he manages, somehow, to live without paying much attention to the laws and rules which society makes for its own security and comfort. In the old days we used to put the Quins into prison occasionally. But we had a kindly tolerance for them, so long as they did not make too many converts to their creed. I wonder what the new world of organised, rule-fettered unions will do with Poacher Quin and his like. I rose and went to where he knelt, kindling his chipped driftwood to a blaze. It will, at all events, be a long time before the new civilisation reaches Inisheeny. Perhaps Poacher Quin will be dead before it comes. The old civilisation never got there at all.

The fire burned up suddenly. Quin set two cans on it, balancing them carefully on stones arranged among the burning sticks.

"The boys," he said, "will be glad of a drop of tea when they've made another scrape with the net."

That was his excuse for himself, but it was no excuse for me. The men below us were hauling on their ropes again, walking, as we had walked, slowly up the beach. But there were only two men now on each rope. I felt that I ought to go down to them and take my part. Quin read my thoughts. He looked up and the fire-light played on a smile on his mouth.

"Isn't it enough for your Reverence to be bringing us luck?" he said. "Why would you be breaking your back when there's plenty without you?"

A mascot, after all, plays a useful part in the affairs of men, especially of fishermen. Besides I was glad of the chance of a quiet talk with Poacher Quin. I understood quite well now why the Floyds had come to Carrigahooly and why they insisted on being taken out to Inisheeny. To an enthusiastic antiquary the sword of left-handed King Cormac was a prize worth going far to win. And the chalice of Salmacius--silver work of the 10th century or earlier--was a treasure which would

make the finder famous in every museum in Ireland. The Ardagh chalice is a vessel of which even the unlearned have heard. What honour might await the man who dug up Salmacius' chalice and wrote a paper about it, such a paper as Dr. Floyd would write? That was all plain to me.

Equally plain was the absurdity of Patterson's theory. I knew and felt that I could convince even Sergeant Morris that the Floyds were not emissaries of a secret society. What still puzzled me was the attitude of the people of Carrigahooly, and especially of Mrs. Maher. Why did they object to a harmless antiquary visiting Inisheeny? And why did Peter Flanagan threaten to murder anyone who went near the bog behind his house?

I was puzzled; but not so puzzled as to be unable to make a guess, and I wanted to have my guess established by information from Poacher Quin.

Patterson was convinced that something was going on in the island, something hidden and lawless. So far, as I began to think, he was right. But he was wrong, hopelessly wrong, in thinking that the Flanagans were engaged in any plot to smuggle arms into the country. I thought I knew. Poacher Quin is one of the few men in Ireland who still manages to get drunk occasionally. The people of Carrigahooly do not grumble about the difficulty of obtaining whisky, though whisky has risen in price to monstrous heights.

I stood over Quin as he knelt beside his fire.

"Why," I asked, "are you so anxious to keep Dr. Floyd off the bog at the back of Peter's house?"

Quin looked up at me. A flame shot up in the fire, and I could see his face plainly. There was on it a look of confidential cunning. He was trusting me with a secret, a secret which, if not dishonourable, was certainly dangerous.

"If you don't know that, your Reverence," he said, "you must be the only man in Carrigahooly that doesn't, barring the police, of course. But sure you do, well enough."

I did know; but I was not very comfortable with my knowledge. The distilling of whisky without legal authority, and the sale of it without paying duty, are serious things, even in Ireland. The Government cannot be expected to stand them. Shooting policemen, landing arms, burning houses, and driving cattle are crimes of course. But the police who are shot, the houses which are burned, and the harried cows are all Irish. Statesmen at Westminster, and their masters, the great English democracy, are not much affected by the things we do to each other here. But the defrauding of the revenue is a different matter. That reacts directly on the English taxpayer, and he will not put up with it. I do not wonder that Mrs. Maher and the Carrigahooly fishermen

and Poacher Quin and all the Flanagans are determined to keep strangers far from Inisheeny. Now that I knew the secret I began to feel nervous myself.

Poacher Quin had answered my question sufficiently, though he had not put his answer into words. He felt entitled to ask me a question in return.

"What do them ones want out here at all?" he said. "And why was the old gentleman off hot foot to the bog the minute I put him ashore on the island?"

I had not the slightest objection to giving a frank and full answer.

"Dr. Floyd thinks that the sword of King Cormac the Left-handed was buried in that bog about a thousand years ago, and he wants to dig it up."

I did not in the least expect that Poacher Quin would believe what I said. To my amazement he did not seem entirely incredulous. Indeed he scarcely seemed surprised.

"A sword, is it?" he said. "Well, now it could be that a sword might be in the bog. But tell me this, your Reverence, was there anything else in it along with the sword?"

I had not meant to say anything about the chalice of the Abbot Salmacius. Chalices are made of precious metals and are often adorned with jewels. It seemed to me unwise to excite the cupidity of the Flanagans by suggesting that there might be anything of intrinsic value in the crannog. But, having started by being frank, I thought I might as well go on. Besides, I was beginning to think that Poacher Quin knew about the existence of the chalice.

"There's supposed to be an old chalice there, too," I said, "and there may be other things."

"And is it them he's after?"

"Just those two things," I said. "Nothing else. I'll give you my word for that."

"I thought it might be no more than something of the sort," said Quin, "when I heard that the police was after him. I knew well he couldn't be what my cousin Peter was afraid of. Would the police be interfering with a gentleman down from Dublin Castle to look after what whisky might be in the place?"

So that was why the Flanagans and the people of Carrigahooly were so distrustful of Dr. Floyd. They took him for a revenue officer, and thought that he was bent on going out to Inisheeny in order to spy into the local industry, perhaps break open the unbonded stores of the islanders. Poacher Quin, his wits sharpened by his life-long contest with the law, knew better. He realised that Patterson would be the ally of a revenue officer, whereas he was harassing the Floyds. I wondered how Quin came to know what Patterson's suspicions were. I do not suppose that he spoke of them to anyone, except me.

"What makes you think," I asked, "that the police are after Dr. Floyd?"

"Didn't I see Mr. Patterson getting into the train along with him at Dunally?" said Quin. "Would he do that if he didn't want to keep an eye on him? And Sergeant Morris was down asking questions of Mrs. Maher before the gentleman was half an hour in the place. And there was a constable outside the hotel the whole night trying to see could he find out where the young lady went if she left the house. Isn't that enough to show anyone that the police are after them?"

"As a matter of fact," I said, "Mr. Patterson is entirely mistaken. He thinks Dr. Floyd is a Sinn Feiner down here trying to persuade you to murder the police."

"Glory be to God!" said Poacher Quin. "But sure it's what I'm always saying. There's mighty few people in the world has any sense at all, and the Government has less than most."

I am inclined to agree with Quin about the first part of his statement. The number of people with what he calls sense is surprisingly small. I am not sure that I want to dispute his estimate of the intelligence of the Government, though he does put it at less than nothing.

"I hope now," he went on, "that Mr. Patterson won't be wanting to come chasing out here after the old gentleman to Inisheeny."

"I hope not," I said, "but I am not at all sure that he won't."

I felt, indeed, fairly sure that Patterson would come out to Inisheeny if he could get a boat to bring him.

"It wouldn't suit my Cousin Peter Tom at all," said Quin, "to have the police out on Inisheeny. Do you think now, your Reverence, that the old gentleman would go away before the police came for him, supposing he got what he's after?"

"Do you mean King Carmac's sword and the chalice? I expect he'd make no difficulty at all about clearing out if he got them."

"I'm not saying for certain that it is King Carmac's sword," said Quin, "and I'm not saying it's a chalice. But my Cousin Peter was telling me one time--the way of it was this, your Reverence. Peter happened to be doing a bit of digging one day in the bog----"

"Getting the ground ready for potatoes, I suppose?"

It was perfectly plain that no men could possibly plant potatoes in the middle of a muddy lake, but Quin received my sneer without a sign of resentment.

"It might have been potatoes," he said, "or it might have been a lock of oats, or it might have been something else he was wanting to sow there. Anyway he was digging, and he came on a kind of long handled knife--that's what he told me--and a little later he came on an old cup, stained black it was with the bog water, and a hole in the bottom of it, as if the spade might have struck it."

"Very likely the spade did," I said.

"And if them's the articles the gentleman's looking for," said Quin, "he can have them, for they're no kind of use to my Cousin Peter. He can have them, and he won't be asked to pay a penny for them; only just to get out of Inisheeny before the police comes."

"You get those things for him," I said, "and I'll promise to have him clear of the island half an hour later. He won't want to stay a minute longer than he need."

"Your Reverence was always a good friend to the people of this island," said Quin, gratefully, "and to many another decent poor man. If there was many more like you Ireland would be a different country than what it is."

I really think Poacher Quin was right there; though I did not deserve the praise I got for being a good friend to the Flanagans. I am a peaceful, quiet man, constitutionally averse to the violent exertion required of reformers and patriots. If most of the people of Ireland were like me the country would be very much more placid than it is. Whether it would be better--as Quin seemed to think--is another question.

CHAPTER IX

The Flanagans finished their hauling of the net and came up the beach one by one to Quin's fire. The second cast had been quite as successful as the first. They had four sacks full of fish; fish that would have fetched a large sum if it could have been taken to the Dublin market. On Inisheeny, I suppose, it had no value, except its simple value as food.

The men gathered round the fire and drank the tea Quin had prepared for them; strong, black, milkless tea, heavily sweetened with large quantities of sugar. Neither the Inisheeny islanders nor the people of Carrigahooly have felt the sugar shortage. It is an odd thing but it is a fact that the further people live from the Sugar Controller the easier they find it to get sugar. In London, so I am told, it is impossible; in Dublin very difficult to get more than the apportioned ration. In the Irish midlands it is not very hard to buy an extra pound or two. In far western towns like Carrigahooly sugar can be bought freely by the stone. On Inisheeny no one knows that there is a shortage.

Thus life is full of compensations. The Flanagans cannot sell the fish they catch. They can sweeten their tea.

Poacher Quin took his Cousin Peter by the arm and led him aside. I felt sure that he was explaining to him that Dr. Floyd was an innocent if foolish man. I was not surprised when I heard Quin calling me a few minutes later.

"Your Reverence," he said, "if it's not troubling you too much, I'd be glad if you'd come here for a minute the way my Cousin Peter could say a word to you."

The remaining three Flanagans were far too courteous to display the least curiosity. They took no notice of Quin's call to me. They did not even look after me when I left them. They stood silent with their tin mugs in their hands, staring into the fire.

"My Cousin Peter," said Quin, "is willing to give the sword--if so be it is a sword--and the old cup to your Reverence."

"Not to me," I said, "I really don't want them. To Dr. Floyd."

"To your Reverence," said Peter Flanagan, gravely, "or to any friend of your Reverence; and it's only sorry I am that I haven't something better to be giving."

I hoped that Peter understood what he was giving. I have never been able to reconcile my conscience to the hard bargains driven by experts when dealing with ignorant people. I felt that I should be more comfortable if I explained to Peter what the things were.

"Are you sure," I said, "that you know what you're parting with? The sword belonged to King Cormac the Left-handed. It is a weapon of immense antiquity, and the cup----"

Peter waved my explanation aside.

"If it was the gold crown off the king's head," he said, "and the china cup that the queen does be drinking out of, I wouldn't begrudge them to your Reverence or to any friend of yours."

He made no bargain of any sort, did not so much as hint that Floyd should leave the island as soon as possible. This is the way in which great gentlemen do business. They give, and there is no word about a price to be paid, for the chaffering of the market-place is not consonant with their dignity. But in the background there is generally a lesser man, an agent, who settles to the last penny what the price is. In this case Poacher Quin made it quite clear to me that the Floyds must go. I was left in no doubt about that point, though Peter did not mention it.

I know these seas well, at least, in their summer moods, but our row home that night was a strange experience to me. It was as dark as it ever is in the month of July. The water was phosphorescent wherever the oars struck it. The bases of the rocks where the waves broke, shone with tiny sparks, lit and quenched in millions every second. At some moments the broken water looked like a sheet of white fire. We shot through the narrow passage between the rocks again and it was shining water which surged and foamed round us.

It was about four o'clock in the morning when we reached the "Aurora." The Flanagans wanted to present me with a whole sackful of fish, a small reward, so they seemed to think, for the good luck I had brought them. I accepted six soles and laid them in a bucket beside the mast.

I peeped into the cabin. Dr. Floyd was sleeping soundly. He was indeed snoring, and the air of the cabin was extremely stuffy. I felt that I should not be likely to sleep much on the bed which waited for me. I pulled my blanket out, for the night was cool, lit my pipe and settled myself in the cockpit.

I fell to wondering how the Flanagans distilled whisky on the island, what apparatus had they, what materials did they use? I wondered how long they had been engaged in the business, at what point in the upward progress of taxation did it become worth while to take the risk of distilling; had they been at it long enough to have a store of properly matured spirit. They had a store I knew, buried in the crannog, in the middle of the bog behind Peter Flanagan's house. How long was the whisky allowed to lie there before it was ferried to the mainland, and sold to Mrs. Maher? I was interested in the thought that my "Aurora" must have carried many

cargoes of ardent spirit; that bottles lay in the seaweed at the bottoms of the hampers of lobsters which I brought to land. I wondered how Mrs. Maher managed to dispose of it when she got it without attracting suspicion. Patterson was vaguely aware that something was going on, on the island. He had not the slightest idea what it was. I wondered if Patterson would be pleased or angry if he knew the truth. Would he regard illicit whisky as more or less dangerous to the state than smuggled arms?

These were fascinating problems, and my mind worked round and round on them. I am told that mental activity is the enemy of sleep, and that the man who is fool enough to go to bed with an interesting question writhing in his brain is doomed to hours of wakefulness. That was not my experience that night. I fell asleep, and my pipe dropped, half-smoked, from my mouth. I slept soundly, for I slept through the sunrise. I could not have slept more soundly if I had spent my last waking hours reading over my own old sermons.

When I woke again, or was wakened, the sun was high and it must have been about six o'clock. I heard a loud shrill whistling from the forepart of the boat, and saw Tommy's head rising from the sail locker. He had chosen "Danny Boy," a pathetic old Irish air, for his morning tune. But he whistled it as if there were no such things as yearning or melancholy in the world. Even the wail of the three long notes at the end of the second phrase of the melody became as cheerful as the trills of a skylark, when Tommy whistled them.

He looked round him for a moment, and then, putting his hands on the coaming of the locker, swung himself on deck. He had somehow managed to get his clothes off in the cramped space below, and he stood for a moment naked on the gunwale with one hand on the shrouds. Then he plunged overboard, and the whistling stopped abruptly. A moment later his head appeared, sleek and shining above the water, and he began to whistle again, taking up the tune exactly where he left it when he plunged. He lay on his back and kicked, raising small columns of foamy water and making a great splashing. But I could still hear the tune, shrill and clear. It is not every one who can whistle loudly when immersed in cold water, and, while kicking violently. I found myself envying Tommy.

He caught sight of me and stopped whistling.

"Good morning, Uncle Terence," he said. "Glorious, isn't it?"

I began to think it was. Tommy turned over on his side, swam a few strokes, and then dived. I could see him swimming towards me under water. His body looked curiously green. He came to the surface again close to the side of the "Aurora."

"Come along, Uncle Terence," he said. "This is simply splendid."

I have heard a good deal in my time about the respect due by youth to age, and the failure of the generation which is treading on our heels to recognise our dignity. To me nothing is more hateful than respect from a boy or a girl. The best compliment youth can pay me is to forget that I am old. That was just what Tommy did when he appealed to me to plunge into the water after him, and seemed confident that I should find it as glorious as he did. I rose, kicked the stiffness out of my legs, and stripped. I noticed, while I took off my shirt, that a boat with a brown jib and a white mainsail was approaching the island, running fair before the morning breeze. She had reached the entrance of the bay, but I was intent on my bathe, and thought nothing about her. I stepped out of the cockpit on to the narrow deck outside the coaming. I steadied myself for a moment with my hand on the boom, and then took a few steps aft, and plunged in from the "Aurora's" counter.

I am not only old, I am inclined to be fat. But I can still take a neat header. I was conscious that I disappeared with scarcely a splash. I rose, immediately, in time to hear Tommy's shout of approval.

"I say, that's good," he said, "you went in like a seal off a rock."

My example stimulated him. He swam to the boat's side, made a wriggling spring, and gripped the shrouds. There was a confused struggling of legs and arms. Then Tommy stood on deck. I could take a header still, and swim well enough when I was in the water, but I was not at all sure that I could grasp the "Aurora's" shrouds, or pull myself on board if I got my hands on them.

"Cast off the throat halyard," I shouted, "and throw the end of it overboard."

Tommy did as I bade him, and, I am thankful to say, offered me no further help. I wanted none, and the offer would have been an insult. Any man can get into a boat from the water if he has a rope in his hand which is led up to a block on the hounds of the mast. I climbed on board and stood a little breathless, rubbing the water from my thighs, but ready to show Tommy how to take a proper header. They have a swimming bath at Haileybury, and I have no doubt that Tommy practised there all through the summer term, taking running headers from the side of the bath or bounding high in the air from the spring board. But for all that, and though he has the advantage of being only sixteen years old, I can still take a better header than he can.

Our shouts woke Floyd. He crept out of the cabin in his pyjamas, sniffed the fresh air, and looked at the sun.

"I wish I could swim," he said.

"I say, Floyd," I said, "I've got some good news for you. That fellow Flanagan dug up the----"

I glanced at Tommy who was standing on the counter poised for another header.

He plunged in, and I felt I could speak freely to Floyd.

"He's got the sword of the left-handed king, and the chalice."

"I thought he had," said Floyd, "and, of course, he won't part with them."

It was, no doubt, incredible to Floyd, that anyone should for any consideration give up such treasures. He scarcely believed me when I told him that they were his.

"The only condition he makes," I said, "is that we leave the island at once."

"No difficulty about that," said Floyd. "I don't want to stay here in the least."

Then he too began to whistle--a hymn. I recognised it at once. It begins, "I'm but a stranger here." He had more sense of the appropriate than Tommy in his choice of tunes.

Tommy climbed on board again and appealed to Floyd to join our bathe.

"It doesn't matter whether you can swim or not," he said, "we'll look after you, and not let you drown."

Floyd must have been extraordinarily elated by the news about the sword and chalice. To my amazement he slipped off the jacket of his pyjamas. I thought he meant to jump straight into deep water, trusting to Tommy and me to pull him out. But at the last moment he hesitated.

"I can't swim," he said. "I wish I could."

Tommy seized the life-buoy which lay under the legs of the crutch on which the boom rested.

"Here you are," he said, "guaranteed by the Admiralty to support three full-grown men for hours."

Floyd wriggled his head and shoulders through the buoy. He looked like a huge, rather deformed mushroom when he stood up. But he is a man of spirit. He sat on the side of the boat for a minute, and then let his legs and body slip slowly into the water. Tommy encouraged him by whistling "Danny Boy" right through, *allegretto, con molto spirito*. Then came a moment when Floyd's hands, resting on the deck behind him, could no longer support him. He fell forward with an immense splash into the sea. Tommy stopped whistling, and gave a joyous whoop. He raced along the deck towards the stern, stubbed his toe on a cleat, slipped, and fell sideways into the water. I took another neat and dignified header from the counter. When I came up Tommy was laughing breathlessly. Floyd, his head perfectly dry, his shoulders no more than splashed, was bobbing about like the float on the end of the line of a riverside fisherman.

Then the boat which I had seen at the entrance of the bay bore down on us. She was moving slowly with a light breeze dead behind her. Her jib hung limp. Her mainsail, boomed out against her port shroud, hid the helmsman and the crew. But I

recognised the boat. She was the "Seven Daughters." I wondered whether Mrs. Maher, anxious about the safety of her trade, had come out to the island in the hope of being able to kidnap Floyd and carry him away. The "Seven Daughters" drew slowly abreast of the "Aurora." I could see at last who was on board of her. Patterson sat at the tiller. He had Constable Moran with him to work the sails.

I was not very well pleased to see Patterson and a policeman along with him. The Flanagans would certainly resent his arrival. They might even think that I had broken faith with them, though I did not want him on the island any more than they did. However, I swam towards him and hailed him cheerfully.

"Hullo," I shouted, "come to join the picnic? But you're late. We're going home almost at once."

I made that clear, in the hope that, when he heard we were leaving the island, Patterson might not insist on landing. He might possibly round up his boat and sail away again. He must have recognised the "Aurora" as soon as he entered the bay. But I do not think he knew who the bathers were until I hailed him. He did not seem the least pleased to see us. He looked at me and then stared at Floyd.

"Good Lord!" he said, and turned his head away.

There was every excuse for his tone of disgust. Floyd was exceedingly ridiculous in his life-buoy. Tommy, who was climbing on board the "Aurora" again, looked like a hairless ape. I could keep up no appearance of dignity, and Patterson must have got up very early in the morning in order to reach Inisheeny at half-past six. He had probably started without sufficient breakfast. He was naturally annoyed with me for going off in the "Aurora" without saying a word to him or offering any kind of apology. He was still, of course, full of his theory about the Floyds being agents of a secret society. Yet the sight of Floyd, bobbing about with my life-buoy around him, ought to have removed that suspicion entirely from his mind. No dangerous revolutionary, charged with the dark counsels of a secret society, would float about the sea with a ring round him, like a malicious caricature of a water lily in a pond, lifting its head above its leaf. I do not suppose that in all history there is a single recorded instance of a conspirator placing himself in such a position. And Patterson reads history. He ought to have known that the thing was impossible. If I were to see a man in spangled tights hanging by his heels from a swinging trapeze, I should not suspect him of being a bishop. Patterson ought to have reasoned in the same way about Floyd and the life-buoy.

Patterson's obvious ill temper rather spoiled my enjoyment. It certainly made Floyd uncomfortable, and affected even Tommy's spirits. Instead of attempting another header he went into the cabin and took my only towel. I followed him on

board, finding it this time much more difficult to get out of the water. Indeed, I was glad enough to accept a hoist from Tommy, who put his hand under my arm at a difficult moment. Floyd paddled himself and his buoy to the side of the boat and we hauled him on board without much difficulty. I made Tommy give him the towel. Floyd was my guest, as well as being a man of high position in the learned world. I did not like to think of his getting wet into his shirt, or standing about on the deck till he dried.

Patterson rounded up and dropped his anchor a little way astern of us. I could see as I dressed that he and Constable Moran were busy with a basket, getting out food. I hoped that his temper would improve after he had eaten something. Meanwhile he was likely to stay where he was. He had brought no dinghy with him and Mrs. Maher's boat is much too big to be run into the wretched landing slip which the Inisheeny people use. Poacher Quin would not, as I knew, put off in a curragh to take Patterson or any other policeman on shore. The police are always persecuting him and arresting him on one pretext or another. It was not to be supposed that he would go out of his way now to do a good turn to Patterson. Nor would the island Flanagans stir. Patterson suspected them of various kinds of sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion. It was only natural that they should suspect Patterson. They certainly would not land him on their island. If he wanted to go ashore he would have to appeal to me. I might be able to persuade Quin to land him in a curragh. Nobody else could. This thought rather pleased me. I was not exactly angry with Patterson, but he had no right to say "Good Lord!" in a tone of contempt, and turn his head the other way when he saw me in the sea.

When I had dressed and was feeling warm again I got the "Primus" stove on deck and set Tommy to clean the soles. It gratified me to see that Patterson had nothing in his basket but bread and cold meat. I thought that the smell of frying fish, borne down to his boat on the breeze, would make him feel envious. Then for the first time that morning, I thought of Molly. She was on shore in her tent, and had nothing to eat. She must, of course, be brought off to the "Aurora" for breakfast. I looked out for Poacher Quin, who ought to have been waiting for signals and orders beside his curragh. He was nowhere to be seen. Molly herself came out of the tent and waved her hand to me. I did not know for certain what she was trying to convey to me by waving her hand, but I could easily realise that she was hungry and eager to get on board for breakfast.

I looked up and down the shore. I scanned the fields. I got out my glasses from the cabin and examined the whole surface of the island, so far as it was in view. There was not a sign of Poacher Quin anywhere. What struck me as still more odd

was that no Flanagan, man, woman, or child, was in sight. I was sure that I had seen people moving about through the fields and going in and out of the cottages when I was bathing. They had all disappeared.

Patterson hailed me from his boat.

"I want to speak to you," he said. "Will you come over here?"

"Unless I take another swim," I said. "I can't."

Patterson saw the truth of that. His next question showed that he was awakening to the situation.

"How do you mean to get ashore?" he asked.

It ought to have been quite plain that I could not get ashore at all unless someone came off for me in a curragh. And there was no sign of Quin. I began to think that he had either hidden himself deliberately, or else died suddenly during the night. The only human being in sight on the island was Molly Floyd. She had come down to the landing-place and stood there waving her arms in a way which struck me as silly, until I realised that she was signalling. I suppose she must have been a Girl Guide or something of that sort at one time in her life. She had evidently learned flag flapping thoroughly. She seemed anxious to deliver her message whatever it was; but I could not understand what she was at. I was born too early for the Boy Scout movement and never had the chance of learning anything really useful.

Floyd was trying to shave at the mirror in the cabin. I appealed to him. He said he thought he could spell out Molly's message if she worked slowly, and if he had a book containing the alphabet in his hand, Molly was flapping at very high speed, and there was no book on signalling on board, so Floyd was not much use. I tried Tommy, who was cleaning fish, with his head over the side of the boat.

"Tommy," I said, "are you a Boy Scout, or a Sea Scout, or a Cub, or anything of that kind?"

I knew he could not be. Our great public schools, faithful to their tradition of class exclusiveness, do not enroll their pupils in democratic organisations like the Boy Scouts. They have, however, Officers' Training Corps of their own, and I thought it possible that Tommy might have been taught signalling.

"Look at Molly," I said, "and try if you can make out what she's at."

Tommy looked at her obediently, lifting his head from his work and holding a half disembowelled fish in his hand. But I saw at once that he knew nothing about signalling. If I ever meet one of the able men who write novels to prove the uselessness of our public schools, I shall tell them that Tommy Graham, a 5th Form boy at Haileybury, cannot read plain signalling. That will help him to open up a new line of attack, and he will, I hope, be grateful to me. He ought to be. He would never

find out a thing like that for himself. For I am sure that, being a very clever man, he does not associate with the stupid people whom our public schools turn loose into the world. That, indeed, may be the reason he writes the kind of books he does.

Tommy waved his fish in the air by way of reply to Molly, and then went on with the work of cleaning it.

Patterson hailed me from his boat.

"Miss Floyd is signalling to us," he shouted.

"I know that," I said. "Can you read what she's saying?"

"No," shouted Patterson, "I can't; but Constable Moran has been through a course of signalling and holds a certificate for efficiency."

"Good," I said, "turn him on to the job and let's hear what Miss Floyd wants to say."

I began to wish that Patterson had anchored the "Seven Daughters" a little nearer the "Aurora." It was highly inconvenient, now that we were on speaking terms with each other, to have to shout everything we wanted to say. And it irritated me to see him talking to Moran without being able to know what he said. I gathered by watching their faces that Moran was very unwilling to try to read Molly's message. Patterson argued with him, and in the end gave him a sharp order. The men of the Royal Irish Constabulary are well disciplined and quite accustomed to attempting what they know to be impossible. Moran took his stand on the fore deck near the mast. He turned his face resolutely towards the shore and drew a notebook from his pocket.

Molly caught sight of him at once, and began to signal more rapidly than ever. She went far too fast for Constable Moran. He made one or two attempts to write something down. Then he took to scratching his ear nervously with his pencil. After a few minutes he gave up, closed his notebook, and turned to Patterson. I felt more than ever annoyed that I could not hear what they were saying to each other, but I kept my glasses on them, and by watching their faces could guess at their talk. Patterson suggested a plan of some kind. Constable Moran was doubtful whether it would be any use. Patterson insisted on its being tried. Constable Moran took his place near the mast again and began to signal to Molly.

He did not say very much, but he took a long time about saying it. He paused between each gesture, giving me the impression that he had to think what the next movement ought to be. Either his certificate for proficiency was very easily won, or else he won it a long time ago and had not practised since. I never saw anything so deliberate and cautious as his movements. However, Molly understood him. I very nearly understood him myself. What he had to say to Molly--what any intelligent

man in his position would say--was obvious. "Please go slowly." And this, so Patterson told me afterwards, was what he did say, except that he left out the "please." Molly, having taken in this request, began her message all over again. This time she went so slowly that I thought she would be tired before she finished. Moran took down what she said word by word. Then he handed over his notebook to Patterson. Patterson read the message through two or three times and I could see that he was puzzled. At last he shouted to me.

"I can't quite make out what she wants. Moran has got muddled up. But there's something about a black pig."

Molly might very well have left that out. She had, no doubt, an adventurous time during the night with that pig, and I could understand that she wanted to tell us all about it. But she must have known that Constable Moran was in no position to enjoy chatty conversation. In dealing with him she ought to have confined herself strictly to what was necessary. I shouted an explanation to Patterson.

"That's all right and quite unimportant. She's merely telling us that she was wakened up two or three times during the night by Michael Flanagan's black pig. Poacher Quin told us she would be."

"She says she's had some tea," said Patterson.

"I'm glad to hear that," I said. "One of the children must have brought it to her. The Flanagans are decent people whatever you may say."

"Can't hear," shouted Patterson. "What's that you say?"

"Nothing," I yelled, "only that the Flanagans aren't so bad as you think them."

Floyd, properly shaved and almost entirely dressed, came out of the cabin. I told him that Molly, after a broken night's rest, had enjoyed her morning tea. I thought he might be anxious about her. He was not.

"Molly's all right," he said. "Molly's always all right."

"She wants some breakfast," shouted Patterson.

There was plenty of breakfast on board the "Aurora," and I did not see how Molly was to get her share, unless someone could be found to put her on board.

"As well as I can make out from what Moran took down," Patterson shouted, "the island people have all disappeared, and she can't get anyone to put her off."

"Tell her to go and look for them," I shouted. "The island is quite small and there aren't any caves or hiding places. She's bound to find someone soon."

Patterson gave an order to Moran, who pulled himself together for the effort of signalling another message. I could see that he was doubtful of his own ability and I wanted to let him off as easily as I could. But I knew perfectly well why Poacher Quin and all the Flanagans had disappeared, and I knew that they would not come

back again or launch a curragh unless they were reassured about our intentions. They had seen Patterson and Moran arriving in the "Seven Daughters," and they did not want the police on the island.

"Tell her," I shouted, "to find Poacher Quin, and to promise him----Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you all right," said Patterson, "but I'm not sure that Moran can signal all that. Don't try him too high."

Constable Moran had already begun to spell out the first part of the message. He stopped abruptly.

"Tell Moran," I shouted, "to tell Miss Floyd to tell Poacher Quin that he's to bring out with him the sword of King Cormac the Left-handed, and the Chalice of Salmacius."

"To bring what?" said Patterson.

He curved his hand round his ear, and listened intently. I yelled as loudly as I could.

"The sword of King Cormac the Left-handed."

"Can't hear," said Patterson. "Did you say sword?"

"Yes. The sword of King Cormac. Don't pretend to be stupid, Patterson. You must have heard of the man I mean, Cormaccius Rex Scæva, vulgo Kithogue, one of the most famous of all the Irish kings. And the chalice--got that? C-H-A-L-I-C-E, chalice of the Abbot Salmacius."

Patterson began to swear. I could see he was swearing by the expression of his face. Constable Moran sat down on deck and gave up all attempts to signal to Molly.

"All right," I shouted, "if Moran can't manage that, just say sword and chalice without mentioning names: Quin will understand. After all there can't be many swords on the island, and I'm pretty sure there's only one chalice."

"I can't make out what you're saying," said Patterson. "It seems to me you're talking nonsense. Either that or there's some echo playing the deuce with your voice."

"It's perfectly simple," I said. "Listen and I'll say it over slowly. Miss Floyd is to find Poacher Quin, and to tell him that he and Peter Flanagan are to bring me the sword of King Cormac the Left-handed and----"

"Damn it," said Patterson, "I can't stand this. Wait a moment and I'll swim over to you and hear what it is you want to say."

He began to undress as he spoke. I do not know whether it was modesty, weariness, or hunger which moved Molly. She turned her back on the shore and

walked away. I saw her disappear over the ridge of the island. I was not particularly uncomfortable about her. She was sure to light on a few Flanagans somewhere, and they would give her some breakfast.

Patterson, who is not a very good swimmer, arrived panting at the side of the "Aurora" and we pulled him on board. He asked for a towel and a suit of clothes. Our one towel was very wet and I had no clothes to offer him. I told Tommy to fetch my number two jib out of the sail locker.

"You won't find it a very comfortable thing to dry with," I said, "but it's better than nothing. Afterwards you can have Floyd's pyjamas. It's that or my oilskins, for I've no spare clothes. You'll lend him your pyjamas, won't you, Floyd?"

Floyd is generous and good-natured about everything except ancient swords and chalices. He fetched the pyjamas from the cabin.

"I couldn't make out what the deuce you were saying," said Patterson. "Who is this fellow, Cormac? I never heard of any Cormac on Inisheeny. And what about his sword?"

I could see that his suspicions were aroused again. The presence of a stranger with a sword on Inisheeny was enough to confirm his old theory of a landing of arms for the use of rebels. With that idea fixed in his mind he was quite capable of thinking that Salmacius was a Bolshevik, from Russia, and "chalice," a code word for machine guns.

I saw that I had a long and difficult explanation before me, and I was beginning to feel very hungry.

"Let's have breakfast," I said. "We can't signal any more till Miss Floyd comes back, and I don't feel equal to going into the history of Cormaccius Rex till I've had something to eat."

CHAPTER X

After breakfast I lent Patterson a spare pipe I keep on board, and gave him some tobacco. I set Tommy to wash up the plates and cups. Floyd, who does not smoke, and is therefore inclined to be active after meals, offered to help him. This left me free to talk plainly to Patterson.

"I may as well tell you at once," I said, "that you are entirely wrong in your idea that the Floyds are Sinn Feiners or political agents of any kind. Floyd is a perfectly harmless antiquary."

"What does he want on Inisheeny then?" said Patterson. "There isn't so much as a ruined church on the island, which is a surprising thing when you come to think of it. I shouldn't think there is another square mile anywhere in Ireland without a ruined church on it."

"Ruined churches aren't the only things antiquaries like," I said. "Floyd prefers crannogs. He's a specialist on crannogs."

"That sort of thing leads on to politics," said Patterson. "If he isn't a Sinn Feiner now he soon will be."

It was the word crannog, plainly an Irish word, which led Patterson astray, and there is some excuse for him. A mere nodding acquaintance with the Irish language does turn the most loyal people into revolutionaries.

"Anyhow," I said, "whether he's a Sinn Feiner or not--and I don't believe he is--it wasn't politics brought him here. He came to open a crannog, a very remarkable crannog, containing the sword of the Left-handed King Cormac, and the chalice of Salmacius, buried there over a thousand years ago."

"That's what you were trying to shout to me," said Patterson. "No wonder I couldn't make out what you were saying."

"He went to the crannog yesterday evening," I said, "and found it had been opened by somebody else. That put him out a good deal as you can imagine. At first he thought I'd done it. Sneaked out there without saying a word to anyone, and started excavations on my own. Of course, I hadn't."

"I don't suppose you knew there was anything to dig for."

"That's what I told Floyd, and in the end he believed me. But the place had been all dug over. There's no doubt about that. I found out last night that Peter Flanagan had been at it, and had dug out the sword and the chalice. However, he doesn't want them, and is going to give them to Floyd. So that's all right."

"That's a pretty tall story," said Patterson.

He looked at me doubtfully. Then he glanced at Floyd, but could not see much of him, because he had his head over the side of the boat and was dabbling a teacup in the sea.

"I don't mean to say that I think you're trying to 'pull my leg,'" said Patterson.

"Thanks," I said. "I'd rather be taken for a fool than a liar. Your idea is that Floyd and the Flanagans have stuffed me up with this story."

"That's about it," said Patterson. "I don't want to say anything insulting to you, Rector, but that about burying a sword a thousand years ago strikes me as a bit thick."

It is, I suppose, "thickish," but I thought I could convince Patterson.

"I'll call Floyd," I said, "and I'll get him to show you his copy of the original MS. which he found in a library in Rome."

"If you're going to produce some beastly pamphlet in Irish," said Patterson, "you may save yourself the trouble. I can't read Irish, and wouldn't if I could."

"It isn't in Irish," I said. "Didn't I tell you it was written a thousand years ago--centuries before Irish became fashionable. It's in Latin."

I called Floyd. He left his washing-up willingly enough, but I do not think he liked the idea of showing his Diary of Salmacius to Patterson. It is impossible to judge entirely by appearances, and though Patterson is young and healthy-looking, he might have been a rival antiquary. However, after a little persuasion, he went into the cabin and got the MS.

I was surprised to find that Patterson could read it. There must be very few police officers who can read contracted mediæval Latin, written in a bad hand. And he was really interested in what he read. He saw at once that the MS. was a copy of a genuine document. No forger would have thought of adding Scæva after the name of an Irish king, or translating the word afterwards as kithogué.

"I found the crannog easily enough," said Floyd. "You see the MS. speaks of 'lacus in medio insulæ, summo collis.' Vile Latin, of course, but quite easily understood. I walked straight to it." He became actually enthusiastic as he went on with his story. "I poked about till I found the causeway, 'pons lapideus,' the Abbot calls it. 'Vix sub unda submersus.' That gave me the only hint I wanted. A causeway scarcely submerged. There was evidently a crannog. What I was afraid of was, that the causeway might have been broken up or sunk in the mud. But it hadn't. Surprisingly well those old fellows built! I felt my way out to the crannog, and then found it had been opened."

Patterson followed the story with close attention. His suspicion of Floyd completely vanished. Indeed, I think the MS. had convinced him of Floyd's honesty

even before he heard the story.

"And you think that Peter Flanagan has got the sword and chalice," said Patterson. "Much more likely he has thrown them away if he ever found them."

"Quin told me last night," I said, "that Peter had them safe."

"I wouldn't believe Poacher Quin," said Patterson, "not if he was on his deathbed taking an oath."

This made Floyd uneasy.

"Do you think," he said; "do you really think that he could possibly have thrown away things like----But he couldn't. No man could do such a thing."

"He didn't anyhow," I said. "He's got them, and he's going to give them to you."

But Floyd was not altogether reassured.

"I'd like to go and get them," he said. "I think we ought to go ashore at once and get them. It's a very serious matter. It will be nothing less than a loss to Europe, a loss to civilisation, if these things have disappeared."

That, of course, is nonsense. Europe can get along perfectly well without the sword of King Cormac. Indeed, considering the use Europe has recently been making of such things, the fewer swords there are about the better for everybody. But I understood Floyd's feelings and I sympathised with him. I would have put him ashore if I could. My difficulty was that I had no way of doing it unless Molly found the Flanagans and brought one or two of them back with her to get out a curragh.

Floyd became nervous and irritable.

"I must insist on going ashore at once," he said.

He might insist as much as he liked, but I had no motor engine on the "Aurora," and I wouldn't use it if I had. The Inisheeny landing-place is surrounded and fringed with jagged rocks.

"We don't know what may be happening on the island at this very moment," said Floyd.

I suppose he had an idea that Peter Flanagan, in a state of partial insanity, might be throwing King Cormac's sword into a bottomless bog hole, as the knight in Tennyson's poem flung Excalibur into a lake.

Patterson, who ought to have had more sense, joined Floyd in this foolish clamour.

"I quite agree with you," he said. "We ought to go ashore. The Flanagans are a wild lot. No girl should be left unprotected on the island. Miss Floyd may be in serious trouble."

Having ceased to be suspicious of the Floyds, Patterson was rushing into the other extreme and becoming over careful of them. I did not see that he had any real

right to fuss about Molly, considering that he wanted to arrest her only the night before. Floyd, I was pleased to notice, snubbed Patterson at once.

"Molly's all right," he said. "But--just think--that man Flanagan is simply a savage, and has no idea of the value of what he's got."

"He is a savage," said Patterson, "and that's why I say that Miss Floyd----"

"What can he possibly know," said Floyd, "about the value of relics like King Cormac's sword?"

I began to get rather tired of this duet of futile complaint.

"Very well," I said. "Go ashore, both of you. I don't want to keep you here."

I knew they could not stir. Floyd cannot swim at all, and Patterson swims badly. But I had not counted on Patterson's determination and resource. He called Tommy.

Tommy had finished washing up. He was sitting with his back against the mast, staring out to sea over the bow of the boat. He must have found it very dull; but I suppose he thought he would be still duller if he came aft and joined us in the cockpit. He knew that Floyd had a Latin MS. on board, and though a 5th Form Haileybury boy can read Latin fluently, he does not want to do so during the summer holidays.

"Tommy," said Patterson, "come here for a minute."

The boy came aft and dropped into the cockpit.

"Do you think," said Patterson, "that you could swim ashore?"

"Of course I could," said Tommy. "Anyone could. It's nothing of a swim." He rather liked the idea of a second bathe. The day was very hot, and any change was pleasant after sitting for an hour staring at the calm sea.

"Could you fetch off a boat of some sort to us?" said Patterson.

Tommy could see, as we all could, three currachs lying bottom up on the shore above the landing stage.

"If the oars are there I could bring off a curragh," said Tommy.

"Very well then, do," said Patterson.

"Right-o!" said Tommy.

"There now," said Patterson. "It isn't impossible to get on shore you see."

He seemed to think he had scored a point against me, and shown great cleverness in sending Tommy to swim ashore. I had thought of swimming half an hour before he did, and, if I had wanted to go ashore, I should have swam there myself, or sent Tommy. But I had not said anything about swimming, precisely because I did not want to go ashore, and was particularly anxious to keep Patterson and Floyd where they were.

Tommy stripped rapidly and stood with one foot on the gunwale. Then he

plunged into the sea. I watched him strike out for the shore, giving a good display of an over-arm racing stroke.

"Patterson," I said, "you're responsible for what that boy's doing. It's robbery for him to take the Flanagans' curraghs. In fact, it's worse than robbery. It's piracy on the high seas."

Patterson grinned.

"If nothing worse than piracy is ever done on Inisheeny," he said, "the Flanagans will go to heaven when they die."

"I don't know what you mean by talking like that," I said. "There's nothing going on on the island--and never was. You've got a silly notion that the whole place is full of cannons and machine guns, landed by Russian Bolsheviks, or Germans, or Jugo-Slavs, or Turks, or somebody. But that's utter rot."

"Oh, is it?" said Patterson. "Will you tell me, then, why everybody is set on keeping me and the police off the island? Do you know I had to steal Mrs. Maher's boat this morning? She wouldn't lend it to me. Nor would anyone else in Carrigahooly. And why did everyone object to the Floyds coming here? If the Flanagans are the kind of innocent sucking angels you think they are, why won't they let anyone land on the island? Tell me that."

I would not tell him that. It was not a thing which either Patterson or any other policeman ought to know.

"And what was Peter Flanagan doing, digging in that crannog?" said Patterson.

"Yes," said Floyd, "why did he dig there? Unless he knew what was in it, there was no reason for digging there."

"As well as I can make out," said Patterson, "he waded out through an undrained bog and dug holes in a beastly little island in the middle of it. Now will you tell me why he did that unless he wanted to hide something?"

"You mean find something," said Floyd. "Find, not hide."

"Hide, not find," said Patterson, obstinately, "He couldn't have expected to find things there."

I had no answer to give to these showers of questions. Floyd was certainly wrong in supposing that Peter Flanagan went digging for King Cormac's sword. Patterson was equally wrong in thinking that he was hiding smuggled guns. It was no use my saying that he had dug holes simply for the sake of exercise. No one would believe that of Peter Flanagan on any evidence. I could think of no reason for the excavation, except the real one and that, of course, I could not give.

Tommy landed safely, and succeeded in launching one of the curraghs. He is a boy of energy and resource. I should have shrunk from walking down over sharp

rocks in my bare feet with a curragh balanced on my shoulders. Tommy made nothing of it; but he looked rather ridiculous while he was doing it. A man always looks ridiculous, like some large, ungainly beetle, while he is carrying a curragh. When he has nothing on him in the way of clothes he looks grotesque.

The oars were apparently forthcoming, and Tommy was soon rowing off to us. I made a last effort to persuade Patterson not to go on shore.

"Let Floyd go," I said. "They won't mind him so much, but they don't want you."

"That's exactly why I'm going," said Patterson. "If they don't want me it's a sign that I ought to be there."

"I call it bad manners," I said, "to go where you're not wanted. It's their island and you oughtn't to go there without an invitation. You wouldn't like it if half a dozen Flanagans walked into your house one day, and sat down without asking your permission."

"I'd soon hoof them out of that," said Patterson, truculently.

"Well," I said, "you can't complain if they hoof you off Inisheeny. It's what they'll do, I expect."

Then Tommy arrived in the curragh. It did not take him long to get into his shirt and trousers. He was the only one of the party who seemed to want me to go ashore with them. He had an idea that I should be dull and lonely if I were left on the "Aurora" alone. He is an affectionate boy, and often thinks of other people as well as himself. But I was quite firm in my refusal.

"I'm not going," I said. "I hate rows, and you're sure to have a row with Flanagan. I shouldn't wonder a bit if Peter Flanagan Tom goes for you, Patterson, with King Cormac's sword. It's the only weapon on the island, and of course it's old, but it must have been a good sword in its day."

"I'll deal with him and your friend, the poacher," said Patterson, "if they attack us."

"I'm sure you will," I said, "and that's why I want to keep out of it. If you come back alive try and bring some bread with you. I have a tinned tongue and one sole; so I shan't starve, but I'd like some bread."

I did not really believe that there would be any serious fighting. The Flanagans are a peaceful people, and I had some hope they might not recognise Patterson. In Floyd's pyjamas he did not look the least like a policeman. Poacher Quin would, of course, recognise him in any disguise. He has seen a great deal of Patterson, far more than he wants to. But Poacher Quin is a thoughtful and reasonable man. I hoped he might take the view that a policeman in borrowed pyjamas is not officially a policeman at all, and therefore not an enemy. A judge does not pronounce

sentence when he is wearing a dressing gown. He waits till he gets into his wig and robes. A parson is not supposed to preach, and very seldom does preach, without his surplice. It was quite possible to think that Patterson would not try to arrest anyone when he had left his uniform behind him in Mrs. Maher's boat.

My true reason for staying on the "Aurora" was that I wanted a little sleep. I had been up most of the night before, and had gone through a good deal of mental strain. The day was extremely close and heavy, not at all the sort of day on which it is pleasant to walk about on islands, climbing walls. I felt that I should be happier by myself on the "Aurora."

CHAPTER XI

I settled myself as comfortably as I could on one of the sofas in the cabin and went to sleep. I slept for two hours, and I must have slept very soundly. A sailor, even a yachtsman, on board his own boat ought to be conscious in his sleep of a change of wind. A definite break of settled weather ought to rouse him to full consciousness at once. I only woke gradually and I did not wake at all until the thunderstorm was right over the island.

I was aware, dimly and half consciously, of a din, a confused mingling of various noises, rapidly getting louder. I raised myself on my elbow, rubbed my eyes, and made an effort to disentangle the different sounds which had wakened me. The most obvious was the violent beating of heavy rain on the coach-roof of the cabin and the drip of water trickling through the open skylight. Another watery sound was almost as loud. A short sea had got up and the waves were breaking in angry little smacks against the sides of the boat. There was a strong wind, which rushed through the "Aurora's" standing rigging with a fierce hiss. Most of the running gear seemed to have gone adrift. I could hear ropes whipping wildly, blocks groaning, and the sharp knocking of some metal against the mast. I took that to be the shackle of the peak halyard which had worked loose off the strap round the mainsail cover.

I snatched an oilskin coat and a sou'wester from the peg behind the cabin door and went out. I was not in the least uneasy about the safety of the "Aurora." Her ground tackle is heavy, far too heavy for comfortable handling, and I knew that for his own sake Tommy had paid out plenty of anchor chain. He had to sleep on whatever chain was left in the locker forward, so he was sure to have got rid of as much as he could. The "Aurora" was not in the least likely to drag her anchor and go ashore. But I did not like the way everything had gone adrift and no one who cares for his boat is content to sit still in shelter without knowing exactly what is happening on deck. I was met as I crawled out of the cabin by a vivid flash of lightning, followed almost immediately by a peal of thunder, and a downpour of rain.

I spent a strenuous twenty minutes securing halyards, hauling tight and belaying sheets, and lashing the legs of the crutch on which the boom rested. Then I looked out to see how Constable Moran was getting on in the "Seven Daughters." He was having a bad time of it, for his mainsail had not been properly made up and was bellying wildly in the wind, the gaff and the boom swinging from side to side. Fortunately, Constable Moran, though bad at flag signalling, is quite a good man in a boat.

At first I could not see the island at all, for the rain made a thick curtain around me. But after three or four violent flashes of lightning the storm began to pass away westwards. The rain was still heavy, but I was able to see the shore. Molly's tent had disappeared. It must have been blown clean across the island and into the sea, at the other side, for it was never found again.

At first the only living thing to be seen on Inisheeny was Flanagan's black pig. It did not mind the rain, and was enjoying itself with the contents of the brown trunk, Molly's clothes, I suppose, which it had rooted out and scattered.

A few minutes later I saw a party of five men, a woman, and a donkey coming towards the landing-place along the track which leads round the island. I got out my glasses and recognised Molly and Patterson. They were walking together at the head of the procession. They were wet, of course, indeed they were both soaked to the skin, but they looked quite cheerful. Patterson appeared to be actually pleased with himself in spite of the condition of the pyjamas which he wore. It seemed to me plain that he had not arrested anyone on the island, or discovered a dangerous conspiracy against the state. He would not have been chatting with Molly, and laughing, actually laughing, in the middle of a thunderstorm, if he had been engaged in any desperate work.

I was further reassured by recognising Poacher Quin and Peter Flanagan Tom, both of them apparently free men. If Patterson had arrested anyone he would have arrested them. But they had no handcuffs on their wrists and were under no restraint. Peter Flanagan was walking behind Patterson. He was leading the donkey by the ear, a simple way of leading a donkey, which is common on Inisheeny. He must have been wet, as wet as Molly and Patterson, but he did not look limp or in any way disturbed. He paced along with all the grave dignity of a mace bearer in a civic procession. I have always respected and admired Peter Flanagan. I admired him more than ever then. Only a real aristocrat could have preserved the appearance of perfect dignity when leading a donkey by the ear through a downpour of rain. The donkey had two creels on its back, and was evidently very heavily laden. It went slowly, and stumbled occasionally. It would not have moved at all if Poacher Quin had not been behind it with a stick. Poacher Quin had no sense of dignity. He beat the donkey as if he enjoyed doing it. Behind him were Floyd and Tommy. Floyd was carrying in his arms a large bundle made up in sacking. He was carrying it very carefully, and I came to the conclusion that he had actually secured either the sword or the chalice, perhaps both. Tommy, who had been barefooted all day, was limping a little.

Molly was the first to notice that the tent had gone, and that the pig had got at

her trunk. She and Patterson ran on at once, and Tommy limped after them. They drove away the pig and rescued all that was left of Molly's clothes. A disaster of that kind would have broken the temper of almost any girl. Molly seemed to take it as part of the day's fun. With the help of my glasses I could make out that she was actually laughing as she retrieved her garments from the neighbouring fields and packed them into the trunk. Tommy helped her and must have made his feet much worse by rescuing a blue skirt from the middle of a whin bush. Patterson took summary vengeance on the pig. He found the tent pole in a ditch, and chased the pig, beating it savagely. I wondered that it did not occur to him to borrow the sword of King Cormac from Floyd. He might have killed the pig if he had had a proper weapon.

Neither Poacher Quin nor Flanagan took any part in chasing the pig and the clothes. They went down to the landing place and lifted the creels off the donkey. Then they looked gravely and anxiously at the bay. The wind had followed the thunderstorm and was blowing strongly from the east, right into the mouth of the bay. The tide was flowing, and there was rough water in the race off the north point of the bay, where the current met the wind. The result was a nasty confused sea over the whole surface of the bay, and the wind was whipping the spindrift off the tops of the waves. It was plain that Quin and Flanagan did not like the look of it at all. I quite sympathised with them. Launching a boat of any sort off rocks into that kind of sea is an awkward business, and it is very difficult to get a curragh alongside a bigger boat under such conditions.

Quin and Flanagan must have been very anxious to get the party off the island for they made up their minds to risk the voyage. They carried the largest of the curraghs down to the edge of the water, watched for a comparatively calm moment, and launched her. Peter Flanagan jumped on board at once, seized a pair of oars and pulled out a few yards from the land. There he was safe enough, for the curragh rode even the jagged seas easily, and he could keep her head to wind with occasional dipping of the oars.

Poacher Quin, who had been standing knee deep in the water, waded ashore. He hoisted one of the donkey's creels on his shoulders and then walked into the sea again. The waves washed round his ankles sometimes, sometimes flowed well above his knees. Peter Flanagan watched his opportunity. When a big wave came he backed in on the crest of it, gripping the water firmly with his oars and bringing the curragh to rest for a moment beside Poacher Quin. The wave rushed on, wetting Quin to the waist, but he stood firm, tipped the heavy creel from his shoulder, and laid it in the bottom of the curragh, letting it fall as lightly as if it weighed no more than

a pound or two. Peter Flanagan pulled a strong stroke and the curragh shot out again. The business was repeated with the second creel, which seemed to be even heavier than the first.

Then Patterson and Tommy came to the landing-place, carrying Molly's trunk between them. Poacher Quin took it on his shoulder, waded out, and laid it safely in the curragh. He went on shore again. Floyd was sitting on a rock, nursing his precious parcel. Molly came running down. She had at the last moment discovered a pair of stockings jammed by the wind into a hole in one of the stone walls, and had turned back to get them. She was now quite ready to embark. Quin looked round the party. It was plain that he could not take them all without overloading the curragh. He chose Tommy. I suppose he regarded him as likely to be more useful than any of the others in transhipping the luggage to the "Aurora."

He and Tommy waded into the sea. Peter Flanagan backed in for them on the crest of a wave, and they scrambled on board. Poacher Quin got out two more oars and the curragh was pulled out towards the yachts. She went to the "Seven Daughters" first, and one of the creels was put on board of her. It was a difficult business. Tommy leaped on board the boat, gripping the shrouds and making a spring for it, as the curragh swept past stern first. Then Poacher Quin took in his oars and left the management of the curragh to his cousin. He pulled to windward until he lay dead ahead of the yacht and then let the curragh drift astern. Constable Moran, standing on the bow of the "Seven Daughters," flung a rope to Quin, who made it fast to the handles of the creel. Then with a sheer lift, Moran and Tommy got the creel on board, and the curragh went past.

We repeated the business on the "Aurora," Tommy coming on board to help me. We managed Molly's trunk without difficulty, but we very nearly got into trouble with the creel. It was much heavier than I expected, and I am not, I suppose, as strong in the arms as Constable Moran. The lift was too much for us, though Tommy did his best. We got the creel clear of the curragh, but the "Aurora" gave a heavy lurch at the critical moment, and the creel went deep into the water, very nearly dragging Tommy overboard. It was impossible for us to get it out of the water with a straight pull. I held on to it to keep it from sinking altogether, while Tommy bent the jib halyard on to the rope to which I clung. Then we hoisted it on board. The water ran in streams out of it, and some seaweed straggled through the openings of the basket work.

"What's in it?" I asked. "If it's anything that's likely to be spoiled by wetting it's done for now."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Tommy. "It's nothing but fish, fish and lobsters for Mrs.

Maher."

I understood better than I used to the value of these creels of fish and lobsters which are sent to Mrs. Maher from Inisheeny. A dip into salt water does such goods no harm. The worst that could happen to well corked bottles would be the washing off of their labels, and I do not suppose that the Flanagans put labels on the bottles they use. Theirs is not a brand which depends for its value on a widely advertised name.

"I suppose the other creel is full of fish, too," I said. "But why did they put it into Patterson's boat?"

"Oh, that's a present for Patterson," said Tommy. "Peter Flanagan gave it to him. Lobsters, you know, and fish."

If that creel were really a present for Patterson, it probably did contain lobsters and fish and nothing else. But it surprised me very much that Peter Flanagan should have given a present to Patterson. That was the very last result I should have expected from his visit to the island. He had landed with the full intention of discovering the workings of a plot. He certainly meant to arrest a few Flanagans and carry them off. It was most amazing that he should be returning, laden with freewill offerings from the grateful islanders. I knew perfectly well that neither Peter Flanagan nor anyone else could bribe Patterson. He was quite incorruptible. I began to wish that I had gone ashore myself. I should have liked very much to have seen what happened on the island.

"I don't think Patterson expected them to give him presents," said Tommy. "I know I didn't. I rather thought they'd all turn out and throw stones at us as soon as they saw Patterson. You told us we might get into a row; but there wasn't the beginning of a sign of anybody being in a bad temper. Lambs and doves, that's what they were."

"Perhaps they didn't know who Patterson was," I said.

That was not a very plausible explanation of what had happened, but it was the only one which occurred to me.

"Oh, they knew him all right!" said Tommy. "They came out in a procession to meet him. The head of the deputation was Peter Flanagan, and he made a long speech, as good a speech as any fellow ever made, with words in it you'd hardly think ever got outside a dictionary. I had an idea that Patterson intended to be nasty, but he couldn't, simply couldn't, after listening to that speech. Nobody could. There was a lot in it about the police always being welcome to the island, and how nobody would be more pleased than Peter himself, if Patterson went and lived there altogether. I can't give you the exact words, but that was the kind of thing, and there

was a lot more of it."

"I don't suppose Patterson believed all that," I said.

"Not at first," said Tommy. "He looked nastier than ever at first, as nasty as a man can look in striped pyjamas. But afterwards--I'm not sure that he ever really believed it; but when Peter Flanagan and the rest of them brought out the fish and the lobsters and kind of offered them up like a sacrifice--Patterson couldn't do anything, could he? There must have been two dozen lobsters at least, and any amount of fish, and all the Flanagans were--not exactly down on their knees, but kind of praying him to accept the offering, as if he'd been some kind of god. What could he do?"

"He couldn't very well arrest them or search their houses after he'd taken the fish."

"Exactly; and they jolly well knew that. Then Molly came out of Peter Flanagan's house. She had Peter's baby in her arms, and was looking uncommonly pretty."

"At your age, Tommy," I said, "you oughtn't to know whether a girl is pretty or not."

"I'm getting on for seventeen," said Tommy, "and I can't help knowing when a girl is pretty. Though, of course, I don't care. But Patterson knew and cared. You may bet on that. The very moment he saw Molly he stopped looking nasty. And when she said that Peter's baby is a darling, he agreed with her, though he can't possibly have thought so. Then she--the next thing that happened was rather disgusting, Uncle Terence. Perhaps I'd better not tell you."

"Go on," I said. "I'm old and hardened."

"Well, she--she made him kiss it, pushing it at him, you know. And he did. I felt a bit sick myself. The baby was such a horrid little beast. Then she said all the Flanagans were darlings, and of course Patterson agreed to that too--had to, with her looking at him the way she was. Molly's all right, of course, and a good sort in every way; but I'm glad she doesn't look at me like that."

"Did she make him kiss the grown-up Flanagans?"

"Not exactly; but he shook hands with two or three of them. Then we had more speeches, and Peter Flanagan made some sort of presentation to Dr. Floyd, which quite reminded me of the week when the fellow who had been hunger-striking got out, and everybody lined up to meet the train and gave him £5 3s. 6d., and an illuminated address. Old Floyd seemed frightfully pleased and made a long speech about some left-handed fellow who jolly nearly got burnt alive in a church. I couldn't see what that had to do with us, but the Flanagans all cheered, so, of course, I joined in. After that we trotted off and got caught in the thunderstorm."

There were a number of questions which I wanted to ask Tommy. I had the main

outlines of the story, and thought I understood pretty well what had happened; but there were a great many details that I should have liked to know. I had no time for more talk just then. The curragh, with the whole party on board, was plunging out towards us, making very heavy weather of it. The embarkation, a damp and strenuous business, had been going on while Tommy told his story.

The curragh went to the "Seven Daughters" first, and put Patterson on board. Then she came on to the "Aurora." She reached us in the middle of a particularly vicious squall, and we had a troublesome job with Floyd. Peter Flanagan allowed the curragh to drift past us, stern first, and Floyd's proper plan was to wait till she rose on top of a wave, and then make a jump for the "Aurora," grasping the shrouds or the runner. But he would not part with King Cormac's sword for a single instant, insisting on holding it and the chalice against his chest with both hands. He is not an active man, and he is unsteady on his legs in a boat. Tommy and I stood by to catch him and pull him on board; but we missed him the first time, because he sat down abruptly on Quin's knee just when he ought to have been standing up. The second time he went past we gripped him by the elbows and dragged him on board. I pushed him into the cabin to get him out of the way; though there was not much room for him there along with the dripping creel, the trunk, and the remains of the packing case.

Molly jumped on board actively enough, and clung to the shrouds while the "Aurora" rolled and dipped her gunwale under. Poacher Quin followed her, and told me that he wanted a passage back to Carrigahooly. I was very glad to have him. The wind, had been shifting round to the north, and I thought it was going to blow harder. Tommy knows what he is doing in a boat, and I could have managed all right without Poacher Quin if everything went well and nothing carried away. But I was not very confident about my jib sheets, and there were other ropes--the "Aurora" is an old boat, and I cannot afford much new gear. If anything was carried away it would be a great advantage to have Poacher Quin on board.

We tied down two reefs and got out the number two jib, on which Patterson had dried himself after his swim. I should have preferred three reefs and the storm jib. But Tommy was full of the idea of racing Patterson home and wanted to carry all possible sail. I had not the heart to disappoint him, and--I ought to have more sense at my age, but I like a good sail myself. We should be close hauled on the port tack the whole way if the wind stayed where it was. But I had a feeling that it would back further to the north, and if it did we should race home with free sheets. The "Aurora" is a stiff boat, not likely to bury herself under a double reefed mainsail in anything less than a gale.

Patterson got under way first, much to the annoyance of Tommy. But we were not far behind him, and I felt fairly confident that we should pass him before we were a mile from the island. The "Aurora" is sluggish in a light wind, but she can leave the "Seven Daughters" behind her in a breeze, especially if there is any sea running.

Molly sat beside me in the cockpit and showed no signs of being sea-sick. She gave little cries of excitement and delight when the "Aurora" dipped her gunwale under and green water came racing past the coaming. What happened to Floyd, in the cabin, I do not know. He must have been exceedingly uncomfortable, but he was not, I think, sea-sick or even squeamish. They say that no one ever is sea-sick if he is frightened or greatly excited. Floyd was not frightened, but he was completely absorbed in gloating over the chalice and the sword. I daresay that saved him.

CHAPTER XII

I steered until we were almost abreast of Patterson, a little to windward of him. Then I called Tommy aft and gave him the tiller. I knew he would enjoy the excitement of passing the other boat, especially if Patterson, who has done some racing in his day, tried a luffing match. Besides I wanted to talk to Poacher Quin. There were a good many things I was anxious to find out about the events of the morning on the island.

The wind, as I expected, worked round to the north. The "Aurora" reached along, and no longer dipped her nose into the seas. I was able to keep fairly dry on the lee side of the mast with my feet braced against the gunwale. Poacher Quin crouched on the deck beside me.

"Now, Quin," I said, "I want the whole story out of you. How did you and the Flanagans manage to get Mr. Patterson off the island without a row?"

Quin drew his pipe from his pocket and peered carefully into the bowl. He satisfied himself that there was a small nugget of tobacco there. He fished out a match, struck it on the seat of his trousers, and held it in the hollow of a curved hand over the bowl of his pipe. I admired the way he lit the damp tobacco in a strong breeze with spray flying. I can light a pipe myself in a boat; but I have to take two hands to it, and I have never been able to strike a match successfully by rubbing it against wet trousers. Only men like Poacher Quin, who have been in and out of boats all their lives, can do that. He took three or four puffs of smoke. Then he put his pipe away and began to talk.

"The way of it was this," he said. "As soon as we seen the 'Seven Daughters' coming into the bay with the police on board, we knew there might be trouble, for Mr. Patterson is a mighty determined man. From what your Reverence was telling me last night he had a wrong notion entirely, for there was no cannons nor rifles, nor any of them sort of things on the island. And what's more they weren't wanted. There isn't a man on Inisheeny cares a thrawneen if there never was a gun in the whole of Ireland. They have more sense than to be running after the like. You may say what you like of the Flanagans, but they have some sense. Only it didn't suit them to have Mr. Patterson searching high and low, and in and out for what wasn't there."

"He might," I said, "have found what was there."

"He would," said Poacher Quin, "and that wouldn't have suited either. Well, the first notion was that if there wasn't anyone to put him ashore in a curragh, he

wouldn't be able to get ashore. So they went off, every man and woman and child to the far side of the island, and me along with them. Though I knew rightly that notion would be no good. Patterson is that kind of a man, that if he couldn't do what he wanted one way, he'd do it another."

"I suppose you forgot all about Miss Floyd," I said, "or did you mean to keep her there permanently?"

"What we meant," said Quin, "was to let her stay where she was till the police went away. What harm would that do her?"

"None. But you might have had to keep her there a long time. Patterson wasn't going to up anchor and sail home just because you wouldn't put off a boat for him."

"I knew that well," said Quin, "and it wasn't long before I seen I was right. Master Tommy is a good swimmer, so he is, and when I seen him heading to the shore I knew the way it would be--how he'd take a curragh and land Mr. Patterson. And that's what happened. There was a lot of talk then about what it would be best to do. Some of the boys was all for throwing Mr. Patterson into the sea and leaving him there to drown the best way he could. And I think maybe that that's what would have been done, only nobody wanted to bring trouble on your Reverence, and maybe have you arrested for being a Sinn Feiner."

"They'd hardly have done that," I said, "whatever happened to Mr. Patterson."

"They might have took you," said Quin. "They're wild about Sinn Fein now. I declare to God a man can't give a lick of a stick to an ass, but they'd make out he was after an Irish Republic. I wouldn't wonder a bit but they'd have arrested you if Patterson was drowned."

"Anyhow," I said, "I'm glad you let him off. You may not like him, but he's rather a friend of mine."

"The next notion," said Quin, "was to hide the stuff whatever it might be."

He looked at me questioningly. I tried to encourage him to go on.

"Exactly," I said, "any stuff that Patterson might dislike the look of. Where did you mean to hide it?"

"On the small little island on the bog behind Peter Flanagan's house."

"No good doing that," I said. "Dr. Floyd knew the way there."

"I knew that," said Quin, "and I said plain and straight that it was no use putting the stuff there. So that notion was dropped and devil a one knew what was best to be done. Well, I told them I didn't like Patterson, no more than anyone else did. And I had more reason not to like him, for I knew him well. 'But,' said I, 'Patterson's a gentleman, so he is.'"

Considering the way Poacher Quin has been persecuted by the police, that was

a handsome and generous thing to say. It was more than I ever heard Patterson say of him. Quin would not, indeed, wish to be called a gentleman. He and his cousins on Inisheeny are probably the only males left on these islands who do not claim the title. But I knew he hated being taken for a Sinn Feiner, and Patterson always called him that.

Tommy must have been inattentive to his steering. He let the "Aurora" fly up into the wind during a particularly strong gust. The jib flapped violently, and the sheets lashed Quin's side like whips. A wave lopped over the bow and wetted both him and me. It was a minute or two before he could get on with his story.

"The nature of a gentleman is this," he said. "You'll understand now, your Reverence, that this is what I told the boys on the island. 'I'm knowing gentlemen all my life,' says I, 'and more's the pity that there's so few of them left in the country now. For the nature of them is this, that if you treat them decent they'll treat you the same.' Well, my Cousin Peter is a sensible man, and, says he, 'I'm willing to let the old gentleman take what I found in the bog. The sword, if so be it is a sword, and the old cup with a hole in it. Is that treating him decent, or is it not?' 'You'll do that, Peter,' says I, 'but you'll do more,' 'What more?' says he. 'This more,' says I. 'You'll give the half of the fish you caught last night to Mr. Patterson and a dozen, or maybe two dozen, lobsters along with it.'"

If Tommy had been the least bit older than he is, I should have suspected him of paying too much attention to Molly. He was certainly paying too little to his steering. The "Aurora" flew up into the wind again. This time Poacher Quin remonstrated.

"Will you give her a little sheet when you see the squall coming, Master Tommy?" he said. "Keep the sheet in your hand now, and ease it when you feel her going against the helm. Have you the lee runner slacked away? You have not. Well, you ought to have."

He scrambled aft and slacked away the runner. Then he came back to me, and I started him off again at his story.

"I suppose Peter didn't want to part with all that fish," I said.

"He was willing enough to give the fish and the lobsters and more along with them if he thought it would be any use. But he wasn't sure would Patterson take them. To tell you the truth, I wasn't sure myself. He's a hard man, is Patterson, and the worst of the gentry is that you never know what they will take from you or what they won't. I've seen the time when a magistrate--I'm talking now of the old days when the magistrates was gentlemen--I've seen the time his lordship himself would take a pair of ducks from me, or any other man, and he smiling, pleased, so as he'd give you an old suit of clothes, or a pair of boots that would be worth twice as much

as the ducks. And I've seen the same gentleman another day, and if you offered him as much as a dozen fresh eggs: 'Is it trying to bribe me you are, you scoundrel?' would be what he'd say."

"Patterson might have thought you were trying to bribe him," I said.

"That's what had me afraid," said Quin, "so I said to Peter: 'It must be done proper if it's done at all.' And I told him about the time the Lord Lieutenant came to Carrigahooly, and the way the gentry--and there was gentry in it them times--went to him with their hats in their hands and told him he was the finest man ever was seen, and they'd give him the coats off their backs, and more to that."

I remembered the incident; though it is twenty years now since Carrigahooly received a Lord Lieutenant. Quin had not got the wording of our address of welcome perfectly right, but he had caught the spirit of it. He went on:

"That's what we'll have to do,' I said to Peter, 'and it'll not be me and you, but every man in the island that'll have to do it.' Well, your Reverence, it was that we did, and I'll say this for Peter, it was well done. The Lord Lieutenant himself would have been pleased with the speech that was made. I declare to God, when I was listening to it, I'd have thought Peter was pleased to see Patterson."

"It seems to have worked all right," I said. "Patterson evidently believed every word that was said."

"I'm not sure he did," said Quin. "My own notion is that it was the young lady that pacified him in the latter end. She came out of the house where she'd been drinking tea along with Peter's wife, and she ran up to Patterson, and 'Isn't he a darling?' said she, meaning my cousin Peter."

"Are you sure of that?" I asked. "My nephew was telling me the story just now, and he said she meant Peter's baby."

"Whether it was Peter himself or the baby," said Quin, "makes no differ. Patterson couldn't contradict her, her being the fine young lady she is. No man would like to contradict a young lady like her. When she said Peter was a darling--and it's my belief it was Peter she meant--there wasn't anything Patterson could do only take the fish that was offered him. There was no trouble in the world with him after that, for he was thinking more about the young lady than he was about us. So I packed up the fish and the lobsters into one of the creels belonging to Peter's ass, and away with the whole of us so that he wouldn't have time to change his mind. Not that he was wanting to change his mind. Why would he, when he had a young lady like her talking and laughing to him?"

"Well," I said, "Patterson will have enough fish and lobsters to last him some time, any way. And so will Mrs. Maher. It's fish and lobsters you have in her creel

too, I suppose, the one you put on board this boat?"

"There's fish in it," said Quin, slowly, "and there's lobsters in it."

He left me to suppose as indeed I did suppose, that there was something else besides fish and lobsters. But that was no affair of mine, and I had, I fear, a good deal of sympathy with the Flanagans, with Mrs. Maher, and with her customers. I am a loyal and law-abiding man. I pay my income tax without making an attempt to defraud the revenue. But I do not think that any Government ought to tax whisky to such an extent that it costs two shillings a glass.

In spite of Tommy's erratic steering we made a fast passage to Carrigahooly, and it was still early in the afternoon when we landed. I left Poacher Quin to make up the sail and to deal with Mrs. Maher's hamper of fish. I wanted to have as little as possible to do with that. The Floyds went straight to the hotel to get dry if they could. Tommy went with them to help to carry their luggage. I went up to the rectory. My plan was to have a fire lit in my study, to have a large and satisfying meal, and then to read the newspapers until I went to sleep. I had two days' newspapers to read. I had been through a good deal of physical exertion, and I felt that I was entitled to a quiet hour or two.

CHAPTER XIII

I have sometimes envied those, the richer among my friends, whose households are well organised and properly staffed. It is pleasant to find the newspapers laid out in orderly rows on a table devoted to them; to feel sure that the ink bottle on the writing table will be full of clean ink; to know that the paper cutter--an instrument naturally inclined to wandering about--is sure to be in its fixed place. I like to have my clothes laid out for me, all neatly folded and well brushed, the clothes suitable for the day, the hour, or the coming occupation; to find a clean collar ready to hand just when a clean collar is required, and to see boots equipped with trees standing in rows, dusted and shining. Pleasantest of all are the well-ordered meals, the table decked with bright silver and clear glass, the regular sequence of plates of various sizes and shapes, the food tastefully arranged on dishes, and decked, when decoration is possible. In church I am content, as indeed a priest of the Church of Ireland must be with decency. I long ago smothered my natural craving for ornamental and ceremonial. But in my own house I would be a ritualist if I could, for I enjoy ceremony in the affairs of daily life. But domestic ritualism is only possible for the rich. To live as I should like to live, a staff of well trained servants is required, acolytes, thurifers, crucifers, men and women who understand and love the business. Such ministers demand, and very rightly command, high wages. I am a poor man and must be content with less than I should like. I am also a lazy man, and I am not sure that I should take the trouble to live the kind of life I think I want to live, even if it were within my power. Ritualism in church or military barracks, where indeed ritualism is more cultivated than anywhere else, or in the home, demands unceasing and laborious attention to detail. A lazy man, a lover of his own ease, cannot be a ritualist, any more than a lazy woman can be well dressed.

I am sure, too, that my way of living has certain advantages. I reached home after my expedition to Inisheeny, at four o'clock in the afternoon. I wanted a solid meal. In a well-ordered house, managed by properly trained servants, it would be quite impossible to get such a meal at that hour.

Afternoon tea might be had, under protest, an hour before its proper time. But afternoon tea was not in the least what I wanted. For luncheon I was plainly two hours late, and for dinner at least three hours too early. If I had asked a well bred, upper class parlourmaid for either luncheon or dinner I should have, been firmly, though politely, snubbed.

But I am not afflicted with good servants. My modest rectory is managed by one

energetic widow of about forty, who calls herself a working housekeeper and keeps a child, the fruit of her brief married life, somewhere out of sight in the back part of the house. I should have no objection to her calling herself a lady companion and keeping three children so long as she made me fairly comfortable and conformed to my irregular ways. With her in my kitchen I had very little doubt that I should get exactly the meal I wanted, and that it would be ready for me as soon as I was ready for it.

I did get exactly what I wanted. I changed my damp clothes and washed the salt off my face and hands. Then I found waiting for me two large chops and a dish of fried potatoes. Afterwards I had pancakes, eight or ten large pancakes, and a pot of tea. My housekeeper cannot make coffee, and she has not the right touch for *soufflés* and omelettes, but she can make tea, being one of the few women in the world who knows when water is boiling, and she is better than any cook I know at pancakes. It is to her credit that I did not even have to tell her to light a fire in my study. She is a west of Ireland woman, and knows that fires are desirable, even early in the afternoon, in July. And fuel is not scarce in Carrigahooly. The town is surrounded with excellent bogs, and we are able to warm ourselves without wrangling with coal controllers or parading in shirts with ropes round our necks to beg mercy from reigning colliers.

I settled down in my armchair at about half past five o'clock. I stretched my feet out to a pleasant blaze on a hearth piled high with brown turf. I had my tobacco and three pipes beside me. My mind was quite at ease, for I knew that when Tommy came home, whatever time that might be, he also would be fed on chops and pancakes. I opened the newspapers that lay ready for me. There were four of them, two for each day that I had been away from home. I can still afford, in spite of the rising cost of living, to take in plenty of newspapers, and I hold it to be the duty of a fair-minded man to read both sides of every question, even of the Irish question.

I waded through the leading articles in both papers, and learned from one that Ireland is at present a maelstrom of crime, in which helpless citizens are swept round and round, with rapidly increasing velocity, towards destruction. The other paper told me that Ireland was the most peaceful and crimeless country in Europe, that there were no murderers and robbers among us, except the Lord Lieutenant and the police, aliens whose crimes cannot be laid to the charge of Ireland.

After enjoying the leading articles, I passed on to the actual news of the day. I skimmed a few assassinations and a couple of sieges of police barracks, and came to an account of the proceedings of the Sinn Fein Courts of Justice. I discovered, with a shock of surprise, that the law officers of the Irish Republic had begun to

punish people severely for illicit distilling and trafficking in poteen. I foresaw a curious and interesting situation in Inisheeny when the new law came into competition with the old law in suppressing the Flanagans. Patterson and his police would go out to the island to arrest Peter Flanagan Tom. The armed volunteers of the Republic would go out there too, in another boat, for the same purpose. But Patterson would also want to arrest the volunteers, and the volunteers, being at war with England, would want to shoot Patterson. The Flanagans would try to drive off both their enemies. I, if I found a safe place, would be able to watch three small armies chasing each other round and round the island; settling their differences in the end, perhaps, by a triangular duel like that arranged by Mr. Midshipman Easy.

It was with this pleasant thought in my mind that I dropped off to sleep.

I was wakened an hour later. Tommy passed the window of my study, whistling loudly. His tune was "Danny Boy" again, but this time he seemed to have got nearer the real spirit of it. Instead of treating it as a gay, irresponsible, comic opera tune, and imparting a cheerfulness to it, which it certainly does not possess, he was whistling it with some feeling for its proper melancholy. I came to the conclusion that he must be hungry. This pleased me. If Tommy were really hungry he would probably not disturb me until he had eaten, and I might look forward to another half hour, perhaps a whole hour, of peace. I closed my eyes again, but I was not allowed to go to sleep. Tommy walked into my study.

"I say, Uncle Terence," he said, "they want you rather badly down at the hotel. I'm sorry for you, for you look jolly comfortable there, and I'm sure you will hate turning out."

Tommy was perfectly right. I was comfortable, and I did hate the idea of turning out. I hated it so much that I did not intend to turn out, no matter how badly I was wanted.

"I promised to bring the message up to you," said Tommy, "and to say that you were to go at once."

"I'm not going," I said. "I'm not going either at once or later on. I've done all I can for those Floyds. Very few men would have done as much. If Floyd has lost King Cormac's sword he must find it again for himself. It's no use his sending me up messages. I'm not going near him again."

"It's not Dr. Floyd," said Tommy. "I mean he didn't send the message."

"I'm not going to stir out of this place for Molly either," I said.

"Molly's all right," said Tommy; "and so is Dr. Floyd, as far as I know. The last time I saw him he was going off to see some ruins, after groudging over the sword for nearly an hour. It wasn't he or Molly that sent the message."

"Then who did?"

"Mrs. Maher," said Tommy. "She and Poacher Quin. They want you rather badly."

This surprised me. Mrs. Maher is perfectly well able to manage her own affairs, and Poacher Quin had never appealed to me except when Patterson arrested him. I thought it very unlikely that Patterson had done such a thing since he returned from Inisheeny.

"If they want me," I said, "they'll have to come up here. I'm not going to them. What on earth do they want?"

"I don't know," said Tommy. "They didn't tell me, but I'd say it was something uncommonly important."

I thought for a moment that perhaps Patterson might have managed to sink the "Seven Daughters" on the way home. But I did not see that Quin would be affected by it. He does not own the "Seven Daughters," and I do not think he would break his heart if Patterson were drowned. Besides, there would be no point in sending for me if the boat were sunk. I should be no kind of use until the bodies were recovered and the time came for burying Patterson.

"Did Patterson get home all right?" I asked.

"Oh, yes!" said Tommy. "I saw him and Moran going up the street together. In fact it seemed to me that Mrs. Maher and Quin weren't particular glad to see him. It was soon after they came that they got into a regular fizz and sent me galloping up here for you."

Well, if they had reason to think that Patterson had found out what was happening on Inisheeny it would account for their being in a regular fizz. Mrs. Maher would be fined a ruinous sum if she were caught buying and selling illicit whisky, and Poacher Quin would go to prison for years. The fear of any trouble of that sort made me more determined not to mix myself up in the matter. A clergyman can do almost anything in Ireland, but he has to be careful about defrauding the revenue. The officers of Customs and Excise, mostly Englishmen, have deplorably little respect for religion.

"You'd better go down to Mrs. Maher," I said, "and tell her I'm too tired to stir."

"All right," said Tommy. "I'll tell her, but she'll be frightfully disappointed, and so will Quin."

He left the room, and a few minutes later passed the window again. This time he was whistling, not "Danny Boy," but a cheery Irish reel tune.

I did not go to sleep again when Tommy left me. I could not help speculating about the message I had received. What misfortune had fallen on Mrs. Maher and

Quin? Why did they want my help? I turned and twisted all sorts of possibilities round in my mind, and failed to hit on anything which would account for their urgent message to me. At last my curiosity became stronger than my laziness. I left my comfortable chair and walked down to the village.

I found Mrs. Maher and Poacher Quin sitting in the little office behind the bar of the hotel. They both looked depressed and miserable. Quin had a tumbler of porter before him, but he seemed to have no heart to enjoy it. Mrs. Maher, though she liked a bottle of porter well enough, was not even pretending to drink.

"Well," I said, "here I am. I've come to you in spite of saying I wouldn't. You got the message I sent, I suppose?"

"The young lad is after telling us," said Quin, "that your Reverence wouldn't come. And small blame to you. Why would you be going to jail along with the rest of us?"

"It's no use you're coming, and that's a fact," said Mrs. Maher. "If you'd been here an hour ago something might have been done; but, sure, it's too late now."

"It'll be six years I'll get over this job," said Quin. "Six years for certain. Maybe more."

"I seen in the papers a week ago," said Mrs. Maher, "that a man somewhere down in Kerry was fined a hundred pounds for less than what we've done; and how could I pay a hundred pounds, or, for the matter of that, a hundred shillings?"

I listened to these lamentations, and it seemed to me that there could be only one cause for them. Patterson must somehow have discovered the secret of Mrs. Maher's trade with the Inisheeny islanders. I sincerely hoped that he had not also found out that my "Aurora" was used as a smugglers' cargo boat.

"How did he find out?" I asked.

"I don't know he has found out yet," said Quin.

"He has. He has," wailed Mrs. Maher. "Sure, how could he not?"

"In the latter end he will, of course," said Quin, "unless something's done to stop him."

Quin looked at me appealingly as he spoke. It was evident that I was the person to do the "something" which might possibly save the situation. But I did not see what I could do.

"Your Reverence was always a good friend to the poor," said Mrs. Maher; "and you'll help us if there's any help in it."

Mrs. Maher is not poor, though she chooses to say she is. But I do not deny that I am one of her friends.

"If you'd tell me exactly what's happened," I said, "I might be able to advise you

what to do."

"The way of it is this," said Quin. "There was a bit of an accident."

"Accident!" said Mrs. Maher. "A nice sort of an accident!"

"It was nobody's fault, anyhow," said Quin.

"It was your fault," said Mrs. Maher, "and well you know it."

"If it was anybody's fault," said Quin, "it was Peter Flanagan's; for I said to him twice--no, but I said to him four times--'Are you sure, now, Peter,' says I, 'that it's the creel for Mrs. Maher you have on the right side of the ass, and the creel for Mr. Patterson on the left side of the ass?' 'I am sure,' says he. And whether he was sure or not nobody will ever know. For what with the storm that was in it and the way the tide was making against the wind, the devil himself wouldn't have known which creel was which by the time we had them in the curragh."

The full horror of what had happened broke on me suddenly. The two creels had got mixed. I had carried home in the "Aurora," and Poacher Quin had handed over to Mrs. Maher a perfectly innocent basket of fish. Patterson had brought home in the "Seven Daughters" a basket with some fish on top, a layer of seaweed underneath them, and then---

"There was two dozen bottles in it," said Poacher Quin; "and as good stuff as ever came out of Peter Flanagan's still."

"Well," I said, "you're done for, now. Both of you, and the Flanagans, too. I never heard of such a stupid blunder in my life. I can only say that I'm uncommonly glad I'm not mixed up in it in any way. Nothing can save you."

"Unless your Reverence is willing to help," said Mrs. Maher.

"I can't help you," I said. "Patterson's not a fool. He wouldn't believe me if I went to him and told him that the whisky is John Jameson, and had paid duty."

"Sure, we wouldn't ask that of your Reverence," said Quin: "for we know well you wouldn't be telling lies for the sake of the likes of us."

"What are you asking, then?" I said. "What do you expect me to do?"

"It could be," said Quin, "that he hasn't opened the hamper yet. And if he hasn't there's a chance for us. If your Reverence was to go to him and was to tell him there'd been some kind of a mistake about them two creels--there'd be no lie about that."

"No," I said. "That would be true enough. There certainly has been a mistake."

"And you could tell him," said Quin, "that it would only be a pleasure to us to take round the hamper that belongs to him--God knows that'd be true enough--if so be he'd let us take away the other. He might do that."

"He would," said Mrs. Maher. "He'd do it if your Reverence asked him."

"Why should I ask him?" I said. "Go and tell him that story yourself."

"He wouldn't believe me if I did," said Quin. "The kind of a man Mr. Patterson is, he'd think there would be something behind what I'd tell him, and he wouldn't believe me."

The kind of man Poacher Quin is, there usually is something behind every statement he makes, and no one but a fool would believe him. I quite saw that Patterson's suspicions would be immediately aroused if Quin went to him with a request to be allowed to change the hampers. On the other hand he might agree to the exchange if I asked him, always supposing that he had not already unpacked the hamper he had. That consideration made me hesitate. It seemed to me that I should be putting myself into a very doubtful position by asking Patterson to exchange the hampers if he knew what was in the one he had.

"You'll do it, now, won't you, your Reverence," said Mrs. Maher.

She is a middle-aged woman and has the reputation of being hard in her dealings. The last thing I should suspect her of is trying to wheedle a man, but she certainly tried to wheedle me into going to Patterson's. The tone of her voice when she spoke, and the sidelong look in her grey eyes showed me plainly that she had fallen back on woman's last and most effective weapon. But I was not going to be caught that way.

"No, I won't," I said, firmly. "I don't see any good in involving myself in this wretched business."

Poacher Quin breathed a heavy sigh.

"It's not to be expected that you would," he said; "and what must be, must. If I'm to spend the rest of my life in jail for this job I can't help it. And, sure, God is good. Maybe He'll make it up to me after."

Poacher Quin's resignation and his pious hope of a special heaven hereafter, for those who have spent this life in prison, moved me. I felt really sorry for the man.

"Look here," I said. "I won't go to Patterson myself, but I don't see why Miss Floyd shouldn't go. From what I've seen of Patterson----"

"Begad, but he was after her right enough on Inisheeny!" said Quin.

"I expect he'd do a good deal for her," I said.

Mrs. Maher looked inquiringly at me and then at Quin. He nodded slightly. I suppose I gave her some intimation that she had guessed our meaning rightly.

"If that's the way it is between them," she said, "it's likely he'll do as she asks him. Why didn't you tell me that before, Quin, and then we needn't have been troubling his Reverence?"

"Because I never thought of it till this minute," said Quin.

"It's very little sense you have, then, not to think of it," said Mrs. Maher. "It's very little sense any man has for the matter of that."

She might, I think, have made an exception of me. I had sense enough to see that Molly would have a better chance than any of the rest of us of persuading Patterson to change hampers--supposing he had not yet opened the one he took home with him. If he had opened it neither Molly nor anyone else would be able to induce him to hush the matter up. That was my opinion, and I knew Patterson pretty well.

"I wonder now where she is," said Quin, "for we oughtn't to be losing any more time."

CHAPTER XIV

We had no difficulty in finding Molly. She has a loud ringing laugh which carries a long way, and the moment we opened the door of Mrs. Maher's room we heard it. It came from the garden, a patch of ground at the back of the hotel. Half of it is used for growing potatoes. The other half serves as a drying green. Molly and Tommy were playing cricket on the drying green. They had a coloured rubber ball, bought I expect in Mahony's shop. They had improvised a bat out of part of the lid of a packing case. Tommy was bowling when I caught sight of them, and Molly had just sent one of his balls into the potato ground, and was running hard. Sabina Quin was fielding, and chased the ball vigorously enough, but seemed unable to throw it when she got it. Her idea was to run back with it, like a faithful retriever, and place it safely in Tommy's hand.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Quin, "but his Reverence would like to have a word with you."

Molly dropped the bat at once and came over to me. She must have been getting tired of the cricket. She can hardly have supposed that I was going to suggest a new adventure. Tommy followed her. Sabina, still clutching the ball, pretended to be very busy in re-spreading the clothes which had been removed from the drying green. She need not have been anxious. Mrs. Maher did not scold her. She was, indeed, extremely gracious.

"Let you go on playing ball with the young gentleman, Sabina," she said. "He'll be wanting you when the young lady is away from him."

I do not think that Tommy wanted to play cricket with Sabina in the least. When he saw that we did not want him, he sat down on a potato ridge and lit a cigarette. Molly, eager and inquisitive, followed us into Mrs. Maher's room.

"His Reverence," said Quin, "will tell you what it is that he's wanting you to do."

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I don't want you to do anything. It's Mrs. Maher and Quin who've got into a scrape, and they think that you could help them out."

"I love helping people out of scrapes," said Molly. "I often have to be helped out myself."

"And we'd help you," said Quin, heartily, "and so would anyone."

"The only thing I can't do," said Molly, "is get that sword back from father. So if that's what you want----"

"It's not what we want," said Quin. "Nor we wouldn't ask it if we did want it. Let him keep the sword."

"He can have all the swords there is in the town," said Mrs. Maher, "if it's swords he wants."

"If it isn't the sword," said Molly, "or the chalice, what is it?"

"It's a mistake that has happened," said Quin.

"A terrible big mistake," said Mrs. Maher. "A mistake that'll cost me a hundred pounds or more."

"And if it isn't set right," said Quin, "it's likely that I'll be spending the rest of my life in jail."

"It must be a perfectly frightful mistake," said Molly, "if it means your going to jail for life. We simply must stop that."

"It's yourself can do it, miss," said Quin, "if so be it can be done at all. The way of it is this: You maybe have noticed the two creels we had on the ass's back on Inisheeny."

"Full of fish?" said Molly, "I remember."

"Well, the one of them was for Mr. Patterson," said Quin, "and the other was for Mrs. Maher here, and the mistake that was made was this, that each of the two got the wrong one that wasn't meant for him, but for the other one."

Quin's statement was confused in form; but Molly grasped his meaning at once.

"I don't see," she said, "how they can put you in prison for that."

"Maybe you don't quite understand, miss," said Quin. "What happened was that Mr. Patterson got the creel that was meant for Mrs. Maher and she got his."

"I understand that all right," said Molly. "But it isn't a crime to mix up two hampers."

"You'll have to tell her the truth, Quin," I said. "You can't expect Miss Floyd to help you if you keep her in the dark."

"I am telling her the truth," said Quin.

"Tell a little more of it, then," I said.

"There was fish and lobsters in them baskets," said Quin.

"I know that," said Molly, "for I saw them packed. At least I saw one of them packed."

"But you didn't see what was put into the other," I said.

"There was fish in Mr. Patterson's," said Quin, "and that's what was meant for him."

"But not what he actually got," I said. "That's where the mistake comes in."

"What was in your hamper, Mrs. Maher?" said Molly.

"There was fish in it, too," said Mrs. Maher.

"Out with it now," I said. "You'll have to tell it sooner or later. What else was

there?"

"There was that in my basket," said Mrs. Maher, "that a young lady like you never would have heard of, so what's the use of telling you what it was?"

"But it was what would be mighty displeasing to Mr. Patterson if he saw it," said Quin.

"I'd like to know what's in it," said Molly.

"Sure you wouldn't know the meaning of the name of it, if I was to say it to you," said Quin.

"It's poteen," I said. "Do you know what that is, Molly?"

"Kind of whisky, isn't it?" said Molly.

"It's a kind of whisky," said Quin, "that would send me to jail if Mr. Patterson got a hold of it."

"And do you mean to say," said Molly, "that Mr. Patterson can send you to jail just because he doesn't like the kind of whisky that Mrs. Maher has? That's ridiculous."

"It's true, though," I said. "He really can and will. It's difficult to explain without going into a complicated question of political economy. But it's quite true."

"If it's anything to do with politics," said Molly, "I don't want it explained. There's nothing I hate worse than politics. And we've no time to spare. The thing to do is to get that hamper back from Mr. Patterson before he opens it. That's it, isn't it?"

"It is," said Quin. "And if you ask him, devil a doubt but he'll say yes."

"I'll ask him of course," said Molly. "I'll tell him there's been a mistake. That's perfectly simple."

"If so be he hasn't opened the hamper before you get at him."

"Come on," said Molly. "There isn't a moment to lose."

She seized me by the arm as she spoke, making it perfectly clear that it was I who was to come on. But I was not a bit more inclined to call on Patterson in Molly's company than I had been to go by myself. I hung back, trying to think how I had best excuse myself. Molly tugged at my arm.

"I'd much rather not," I said. "In fact, I won't. You see, Molly, it'd hardly do for me to mix myself up in an affair of this kind. You must remember that I'm a clergyman. You can't expect me to take part in condoning a felony, or becoming an accessory after the fact. And that's what it would come to if Mr. Patterson has opened the basket and knows what's in it."

"If he's opened it," said Molly, "we're all done for."

"I'm not," I said. "Up to the present I'm clear of all suspicion and I mean to remain clear. Do try and remember that I'm a clergyman."

"Well," said Molly. "I'm a girl."

I did not see what that had to do with the point under discussion, so I went on with my defence.

"And being a clergyman I can't take part in defrauding the revenue."

"Being a girl," she said, "I can't go and call on Mr. Patterson by myself. It wouldn't be what's called proper. Not that I mind whether it is or not. Only if you're going in for keeping up your character as a clergyman I may as well keep up mine as a girl."

That seemed to me, when I thought it over, a fair statement of the case.

"Come on," said Molly, once more.

This time I gave in and went with her. I suppose she did not quite trust me, for she held on to my arm as we walked up the street. My only hope was that Patterson might not be at home when we reached his house. But we were told that he was at home and shown into his sitting-room. He was smoking a pipe and reading the newspaper. He jumped up when he saw Molly, put his pipe into his pocket, and offered her his chair.

"No, thank you," said Molly. "We're not going to stay. We simply called to say that we're frightfully sorry about a mistake that's been made."

"Oh," said Patterson, "what mistake?"

"That hamper of fish and lobsters," said Molly, "wasn't meant for you."

"Surely," said Patterson, "there can't be any mistake about that. The Flanagan people made such a business of giving it to me. They can't have meant the basket for anyone else."

When Patterson first began to speak I felt greatly relieved. It seemed to me evident that he had not opened the basket. If he knew what the contents were he would hardly have spoken as he did. But almost immediately I became uncomfortable again. I did not understand Patterson's tone. It was too suave and too innocent, and he glanced at me from time to time as if there were something behind his words, a private understanding between him and me. But Molly noticed neither his tone nor the expression of his eyes. She went on explaining the position to Patterson with polite patience.

"That's just where the mistake came in," she said. "They did give you a basket of fish; but owing to some confusion you've got another basket which was meant for Mrs. Maher. That's what we want to apologise for."

"It doesn't matter, does it?" said Patterson.

"Of course it matters," said Molly, "and we're most anxious to set it right. I'll send round Poacher Quin with your hamper at once. And you can give him Mrs.

Maher's."

"What's the good of going to all that trouble?" said Patterson. "One hamper is just the same as the other. They're both full of fish."

I looked sharply at Patterson. He spoke with an unconcern too elaborate to be natural. I did not know what to make of it. If he knew what was in the hamper he was behaving in a very odd way.

"But your Hamper has far more fish in it," said Molly. "That is to say the hamper you ought to have. That's why Mrs. Maher wants to change. She feels most uncomfortable at the thought that she's keeping what doesn't really belong to her."

That seemed to me a most unwise thing to say. No one who knows Mrs. Maher would suspect her of feeling uncomfortable about getting the best of any bargain or exchange. Patterson knew just as well as I did that she would exult in cheating her own daughter if she had one. But he did not even smile.

"Please tell Mrs. Maher," he said, "not to be distressed about the mistake. I have quite as many fish as I'm at all likely to want."

This time Patterson actually winked at me, using for the signal the eye which was furthest from Molly. I gasped. It was scarcely possible to doubt that he knew what was in the hamper, and meant to keep the twenty-four bottles of whisky for his own use.

Molly replied to his words, not to his wink, which she did not see.

"But the fish in your basket," she said, "are far better than those in the basket you've got. Soles and plaice and red mullet and turbot. They were picked out specially for you. Mrs. Maher's hamper has nothing in it except dogfish. Poor Quin is frightfully upset about the mistake, almost in tears. He can't bear to think of your having nothing to eat but dogfish."

If there had remained in my mind a shadow of a doubt that Patterson knew the truth and was playing with Molly, his reception of her last speech would have chased it away. No one, least of all Patterson, who knows the man, could possibly believe that Poacher Quin was almost in tears over a mistake which deprived an enemy of his of some good fish. I should think that so far from being distressed Quin would be delighted to think that Patterson had nothing but dogfish to eat. He would be still better pleased if Patterson had nothing at all.

"The French," said Patterson, "eat the fins of dogfish served with a kind of black sauce. I'm told they're excellent."

"But poor Quin is frightfully upset about it," said Molly.

Then she appealed to me.

"Isn't he?" she said.

I could back up that statement without departing a hairsbreadth from the truth. And I did so though I felt that Patterson thoroughly understood Quin's feelings.

"You'd be sorry for him," I said, "if you saw him now. He feels the mistake acutely."

"Tell him," said Patterson, "that it's all right. He needn't think any more about it."

He spoke to Molly; but I felt sure that he meant me to give the message to Quin. I understood it. Molly certainly did not.

"But it's not all right," she said, "and it won't be unless you let him give you back the basket that's intended for you."

She was extremely persistent. I began to wonder that Patterson did not tell her the truth, and put an end to the whole argument. But I suppose it would scarcely have been safe for him to admit that he knew all about the whisky. His position was quite as delicate and difficult as mine. Neither of us could face public opinion if it came to be known that we were the accomplices of smugglers.

"Come along, Molly," I said. "We mustn't bother Mr. Patterson. If he likes to keep the hamper he has, there's no more to be said."

"Oh, but do stay and have some tea," said Patterson.

"No, we won't," said Molly. "We'll go straight back and tell Quin what you've said. I call it cruel."

I felt sorry for Patterson. He had been put in a very difficult position, and had only succeeded in making Molly angry with him, which I am sure he did not want to do.

She pranced out of the room and I followed her.

On our way back to the hotel, I discovered to my surprise that Molly was angry with me and not with Patterson.

"I call it perfectly horrid of you," she said, "not to back me up. He evidently hasn't opened his hamper, and doesn't know what's in it. If you'd said a few words to help me he'd have agreed to the exchange."

The extreme injustice of this charge stung me, particularly as I could not defend myself without giving away Patterson's secret.

"I think you're selfish and cruel," said Molly, "and I should never have thought that any clergyman would have been so wicked. Poor Quin! And he thought you were his friend."

"I am," I said, feebly.

"No you're not," said Molly. "If you were you'd have tried to save him."

If it was necessary that Molly should quarrel with anyone it was certainly better that I should be the victim rather than Patterson. I was becoming more and more

convinced that it would be very painful to him to find out that she was really angry with him. It turned out before we reached the hotel that she was not seriously and enduringly angry even with me. She recovered her temper quite as rapidly as she had lost it. After a minute's silence she turned to me with a smile.

"Don't tell father about the mistake," she said. "There's no use upsetting him."

I had seen Floyd upset once, when he discovered that the crannog had been opened, and suspected me of the crime. I quite agreed with Molly that it was most undesirable to upset him again. But I did not see how the muddle of fish, lobsters, and whisky affected him. He had got his sword and his chalice. Why should he care what happened to the other exports from Inisheeny?

Molly explained.

"You see," she said, "the basket which Mr. Patterson has, the one which Mrs. Maher ought to have, has the bones in it. I packed them myself. And if father knew that they weren't safe in the hotel, why----!"

I interrupted her at that point. I had not the slightest idea what bones she was talking about, and bones of any sort seemed an unnecessary complication in a matter already greatly confused.

"What bones?" I asked.

"The bones that were dug out of the crannog," said Molly. "Incised bones, they're called, which means bones with little scratches on them. Crannogs are full of incised bones, always."

I remembered that the guide book to the antiquities of the museum--the book I had originally consulted--said something about incised bones.

"Didn't I tell you?" said Molly. "Father found the Flanagan children playing with a whole lot of incised bones. He was furious, of course."

I do not wonder. To see children playing with incised bones must have been as painful to Floyd as it would be to a financier to see a man throwing sovereigns into the sea.

"But he cooled down," said Molly, "when Mrs. Flanagan collected all the bones and gave them to him. He couldn't carry them. There were far too many. So I put them into the hamper. You see now why it wouldn't do to tell father about the mistake."

"But," I said, "the bones are quite safe. Mr. Patterson won't want to keep them."

"Don't you see," said Molly, "that if father knew he'd go straight to Mr. Patterson and ask for the bones?"

That seemed to me a very natural and proper thing to do. I saw no possible objection to Dr. Floyd asking for the bones, and getting them, as no doubt he would.

"And if he did," said Molly, "Mr. Patterson would open the basket at once to get them out, and then!"

I felt sure that Patterson had already opened the hamper, and was quite well-aware of its contents; but I could not say so to Molly.

"He's bound to open it soon," I said.

"But not at once," said Molly; "and we may manage to get it back before he does. But we shan't have a chance if father goes asking for those bones, for then Mr. Patterson will go straight and get them."

It interested me to hear that Molly still had some hope of recovering the hamper. I wondered how she meant to do it. Persuasion had failed with Patterson. It seemed unlikely that threats would succeed. I became curious to hear what Molly's new plan was, so I readily promised to say nothing to her father about the loss of the bones.

"He may be back," said Molly, as we reached the door of the hotel, "though I expect not. Father loves ruins and when he gets to one he's never seen before he's rather inclined to linger."

CHAPTER XV

Dr. Floyd had lingered. Indeed, he lingered on until half-past nine o'clock, which was lucky for Molly, for it gave her plenty of time to discuss her scheme for recovering the hamper. She was able to hold what she called a council of war without being interrupted.

I was invited to attend the council. I ought to have refused the invitation, gone back to my rectory, and declined to be lured from it again. If I had listened to the voice of common sense I should have taken care to see nothing more of Patterson, Poacher Quin, or Mrs. Maher until the Floyds had left Carrigahooly. I had done a great deal for the Floyds at considerable personal inconvenience. There was no reason whatever why I should mix myself up any further in their affairs. Nor did I feel called upon to help Mrs. Maher and Poacher Quin to recover their lost property. They had never given me a single bottle of whisky, though I had been ferrying it across from Inisheeny for them for months, perhaps for years, and was certainly entitled to some reward. Beside, they were no longer in any danger of imprisonment or fines. The only question that remained to be decided was whether they could get their whisky back or whether Patterson would succeed in keeping it for his own use. I rather hoped Patterson might secure the stuff in the end. Mrs. Maher and Poacher Quin could get plenty more. In any case it was no business of mine how the struggle ended.

But my curiosity got the better of my common sense, as it had got the better of my laziness earlier in the afternoon. I stayed and acted as a kind of chorus, like the chorus of a Greek play, in the council. I offered comments, taunts, and irritating advice to the others.

Molly presided without being formally voted to the chair, indeed, without being in a chair at all. She preferred to sit on the edge of Mrs. Maher's writing table. She opened the proceedings with a short account of our position.

"He's got the hamper," she said, "and he won't agree to exchange--which is bad. But he hasn't opened it yet, or hadn't when we were there--which is good. So that's one thing on each side."

"What's called a pro and a con," said Tommy.

I do not know what people mean who say that our public schools fail to provide a good education. If Tommy were not highly cultivated he would not have thought of describing Molly's two points as a pro and a con.

Molly looked at me for a confirmation of her statement. I could not give it,

knowing as I did that Patterson had opened the hamper. However, I supported her as well as I could without saying anything that was not true.

"He didn't mention the subject of whisky," I said, "all the time we were with him."

"And he would have mentioned it," said Quin, "if he'd known there was whisky to mention. Mention it! No, but he'd have had me arrested before now if he'd known, and he couldn't have been able to help knowing if he'd opened the hamper."

"That settles that," said Molly. "The next thing is to decide how we're going to get our hamper back. My idea is that the simplest thing is to go and take it."

That certainly was the simplest thing; but there were certain objections to it. Poacher Quin stated one of them forcibly.

"He wouldn't let you, Miss," he said. "He'd stop you."

"He would if he was awake," said Molly; "but I don't suppose he'll sit up all night watching that hamper. What's to hinder anyone going there in the middle of the night and taking it?"

"It could be done," said Quin; "there's no doubt it could be done."

"It would be burglary," I said.

"It wouldn't," said Molly, flatly.

"It's my opinion," said Mrs. Maher, "that his Reverence is right, and burglary is what I wouldn't care for myself, though the Lord knows you might do pretty near anything in Ireland now and no harm come of it."

She felt that she was quite deeply enough dipped in crime already. If she were caught burgling Patterson's house she would not get off with a fine.

"I don't see that it's exactly burglary," said Tommy, "if we don't take anything of his."

"Of course it's not burglary," said Molly. "Burglary is a kind of stealing, and it isn't stealing if we only take what's our own."

We ought to have had a solicitor with us to advise on these difficult points. There was a certain speciousness about Molly's argument. I felt that it would be better to shift my ground slightly.

"Anyhow," I said, "it would be housebreaking, and that's a serious offence."

Poacher Quin had not been listening to this discussion. Ethical questions and fine legal distinctions do not interest him much. His mind had been working on the practical side of the affair.

"There's nothing to hinder anyone getting over the wall into Patterson's backyard," he said. "It's easy enough to climb."

He looked at Tommy as he spoke, evidently with the idea that Tommy should do the climbing.

"And once you're in the yard," said Quin, "there's nothing in front of you only the back-door. Now, what's to hinder Mrs. Dever--that's my sister, Miss, and she's Mr. Patterson's servant--what's to hinder her leaving the back-door open for the night?"

"There, now," said Molly, triumphantly. "It won't even be housebreaking. It can't be housebreaking if nobody breaks the house, and nobody need break the house, if the door's opened."

Molly had certainly got over my housebreaking objection. I had nothing more to say on that point. I had to satisfy myself by taunting Quin.

"Being your sister, Quin," I said, "she'll probably have no hesitation in leaving the door open."

"She'll do it if she's asked," said Quin.

"Seeing as how she's Sabina's aunt," said Mrs. Maher, "I'd say she'd be likely to leave the door open whether she was asked or not. Of all the girls ever I had in my house Sabina's the worst for not caring whether a door's open or shut, or a window fastened, or a cupboard locked. The only time ever I knew her to lock a cupboard shed lose the keys and then you'd sooner she left it open."

Mrs. Maher had long and painful experience of Sabina's ways. She ought to be able to guess how the girl's aunt was likely to behave.

"She might leave it open," said Quin, "or she might not. But she will if she's told, and we'll send Sabina round to tell her."

"There'll be the dickens of a row to-morrow morning," said Tommy, "when Patterson finds out the hamper is gone."

This sounded like an objection to the burglary, though a feeble one. But Tommy was not thinking of it in that way. He evidently regarded a row the next morning as an attractive finish to the excitement of the night.

"There'll be no row at all," said Molly; "his own hamper will be left instead of the one that is taken away, and he'll never know that anything has happened."

"That's a good notion," said Quin, enthusiastically. "Devil the smarter young lady there is in Ireland than your ladyship."

I liked the way in which Quin promoted Molly to a position in the peerage. If only all titles were given as rewards for intelligence and acuteness of intellect the House of Lords would be in a much stronger position than it is.

"It all seems ridiculously easy," I said. "What time do you think of starting, Quin?"

"Is it me start?" said Quin, in a tone of amazement, which was certainly genuine.

"Of course it's you," I said. "You're far more interested in getting back that hamper than anyone else is."

"I'll not do it," said Quin.

His teeth closed on the words. His face took an expression of sulky obstinacy.

"And why wouldn't you do it?" said Mrs. Maher. "There's nobody as well fit to do it as you are, for you're the only one of us that's accustomed to the like."

This was grossly unjust to Quin. He had broken the law in many ways, but he had never committed burglary.

"Do it yourself," he said to Mrs. Maher, "if you're as keen as all that on having it done."

"How could I be climbing walls," said Mrs. Maher. "I've more respect for myself than to be trying them games at my time of life."

Mrs. Maher must be fifty, and cannot be expected to be as active as a young girl. But it was the first time I ever heard her admit she had reached that unmentionable age which is called "my time of life."

"But why won't you do it, Quin?" said Tommy.

"You'll go to prison in any case," I said. "Mr. Patterson is sure to open that hamper to-morrow, if it isn't taken from him to-night. They can't give you more than a life sentence, even for burglary, and you said yourself that you expected to get that for smuggling."

"I'll tell you why I won't do it," he said. "It's a bad thing to go to jail, so it is, for the rest of my life. But it's better than being killed dead so as there'd be no rest of my life. And that's what would likely happen if I went trying to take things out of Mr. Patterson's house in the middle of the night. He'd shoot, so he would, the minute he saw me. And, what's more, he'd hit when he did shoot, for that's the kind of man Mr. Patterson is."

I had not thought of that possibility. But I saw at once that Quin had good reason for feeling nervous. Patterson had given me a hint that he did not mean to take advantage of the accident which had placed Mrs. Maher's whisky in his hands by prosecuting anybody. But he might very well take a different view of an attempt to burgle his house. I know that he goes to bed with a loaded revolver under his pillow. And an Irish policeman, nowadays, is wise if he shoots at once when he sees a stranger in his house at night.

"I'd rather be alive than dead, any day," said Quin, "even if I am in jail."

I sympathised with him entirely. Molly did not.

"You're a coward," she said, "but I don't care whether you come with us or not. Tommy and I will do it without you. Won't we, Tommy?"

"Rather," said Tommy.

Quin was neither subdued nor angered by the insult which Molly flung at him. He

was so filled with admiration for her daring that he gave her a new courtesy title.

"Your honour's ladyship," he said, "is the finest young lady ever was. I'll be off this minute to tell Sabina to run round to her aunt, and bid her leave the back door open. Tell me now, your honour's ladyship, wouldn't it be as well if Sabina was to go with you to help to carry the hamper?"

"Do you think she'd go?" I asked. "She might be afraid of being shot, like you."

"Is it Sabina go?" said Quin. "I'd like to see her not go when she's told. She knows well what'd be waiting for her after if she didn't do what she was bid. I reared that girl myself ever since her mother died, as your Reverence knows well, and nobody will ever have it to cast up against me that I spared the stick on her."

This testimony to Sabina's character impressed Molly.

"She might be useful," she said. "What do you say, Tommy? Shall we take her?"

The argument that Sabina must be obedient because she had been beaten impressed him less than it did Molly. He has, no doubt, often been beaten himself and knows the effect. But he had seen Sabina playing cricket and formed a good opinion of her.

"She seems a sporting sort of girl," he said.

"Does she know her way about the inside of Mr. Patterson's house?" said Molly.

"If she doesn't she ought to," said Mrs. Maher, "for there isn't an hour of the day or night, when I'd be wanting her, but she'd be over there with her aunt. She's in that house more than she's in this, though it's in this and not that that she's paid to be."

"She knows the inside of Patterson's house," said Quin, solemnly, "as well as she knows the outside of her own skin."

He slipped out of the room as he spoke, and I have no doubt laid heavy injunctions on Sabina. Mrs. Maher went after him, afraid, I suppose, of being dragged into the burgling party. I thought it was time for me to go too. The council of war was over, and I wanted to see Patterson before he went to bed. Quin's fear that there might be shooting weighed on my mind. I was perfectly certain that Patterson would not fire at Molly if he knew who she was, or even at Tommy. But he would not expect them in his house in the early hours of the morning, and Quin was perfectly right in saying that he is a good shot with a revolver. I was not much afraid of Molly and Tommy being arrested. Nobody is arrested in Ireland now for anything they do in the way of burglary, arson, or murder; though a good many people are arrested for what the Government thinks they may be going to do. I was, therefore, not in the least uneasy about the escapade ending in the Police Court. But I was rather afraid of Patterson's revolver. The simplest thing to do was to give him warning of what he might expect. I left Molly and Tommy to discuss the details of

their plan, while I strolled up to Patterson's house.

CHAPTER XVI

Patterson told me frankly, that he had unpacked his creel directly he got it into the house. It did not occur to him that there had been any mistake. Till Molly and I called on him with our proposal for making an exchange he honestly thought the whisky was meant for him. His idea was that the island Flanagans wanted to give him a present, and he appreciated the delicacy with which the gift was made.

"If they had offered me the poteen straight out," he said, "I couldn't possibly have taken it. It wouldn't have done for a man in my position to say thank you, and walk off with two dozen bottles of whisky under his arm."

The human conscience is a curious thing. I have no doubt that Patterson would have refused the whisky if it had been offered to him. But when he did not have to admit that he was taking it his conscience let him alone.

"Of course, if they'd made any conditions," he said. "I shouldn't have touched the stuff. That would have amounted to bribery. But when I found the bottles in the bottom of a hamper which I believed contained nothing but fish----"

He looked at me inquiringly, as if he wanted to know what I thought about the morality of his action.

"That," I said, "put you in an entirely different position."

"And, after all," he went on, "why shouldn't a man, just because he happens to be a policeman, do what everybody else in the whole country is doing?"

"Well," I said, "as long as your own conscience doesn't reproach you----"

But apparently it did, slightly. That is the worst of being an Englishman. Long centuries of orderly living have confused the minds of the English, so that they have come to think a thing must be wrong if it is illegal, and is sure to be right if the law allows it. We Irish understand that it is sometimes right to break the law. Perhaps we go too far and think that it is never right to keep it. But Patterson is much less emancipated in spirit.

"I can't help feeling," he said, still defending himself, "that the police in Ireland have a right to some little indulgence. Here we are potted at like woodcock all over the country, and the Government never does a thing to help us. It's rather hard if we can't get a drop of drink now and then to keep our spirits up."

"It was a great comfort to me," I said, "to find that you weren't going to prosecute poor Quin."

"I might have prosecuted him," said Patterson, "if I had known that he had anything to do with it. That man deserves all he's likely to get. He's an out-and-out

Sinn Feiner. Oh, I know you say he isn't! But I'm perfectly sure he is; and if I'd known all I know now about the hamper not being meant for me, I'd have prosecuted him and Mrs. Maher without hesitation. But I never thought of the possibility of there being a mistake till you and Miss Floyd came here this afternoon. Then, of course, it was too late to do anything."

"Quite too late," I said. "Besides, I suppose you wanted to keep the whisky when you had it."

"I'd drunk some of it," said Patterson. "That's what made it too late to do anything."

"I suppose," I said, "that you don't consider it in any way dishonest to keep two dozen bottles of whisky that really belong to Mrs. Maher?"

"They don't belong to her any more than they do to me," he said. "If they belong to anyone I suppose they belong to the Inland Revenue people. And they'd make no use of the stuff if they had it. They'd pour it down a drain as likely as not."

"Which would be horrible waste," I said, "and quite contrary to the public interests in times like these, when there's an all round shortage of everything."

"Exactly," said Patterson, heartily.

I think that the idea of it being a public duty to prevent the waste of whisky was new to him and helped to reconcile his conscience, still a little restive, to what he was doing.

"So it comes to this," I said, "that anyone may keep that whisky who can get it."

The good old rule, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power
And they should keep who can.

"That's Wordsworth, though you mightn't think it."

"That just about expresses the position," said Patterson, "whoever wrote the lines."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," I said. "Because Molly Floyd and my nephew, Tommy, haven't by any means given up the idea of getting the whisky back for Mrs. Maher. They mean to burgle your house to-night while you're asleep."

"If I catch that blackguard, Quin, on my premises," said Patterson, "I'll shoot. I won't have my house raided by Sinn Feiners without putting up the best defence I can."

"Quin isn't going to be in the party at all," I said. "That's what I came to tell you."

It's a purely private enterprise. Nothing in the slightest degree political about it. There'll be nobody in it except Molly Floyd, my nephew, and perhaps Mrs. Maher's servant, you know the girl, Sabina Quin."

"Oh, if it's only those two girls and Tommy----"

"That's all. So I rely on you not to shoot. Any other kind of welcome except that."

"There'll be no necessity for shooting," said Patterson. "I'd have tea and cake and chocolates and anything else they'd be likely to fancy, ready for them, if I thought they'd really come. But of course they won't."

I felt pretty sure that they would try, and I did not like the airy contempt with which Patterson was taking the warning I was giving him.

"They couldn't get into the house if they did come," said Patterson. "I always bolt the windows and lock the doors at night."

I did not feel obliged to tell him that his back-door was going to be left open for the burgling party. If he had been a little less self-confident I might have warned him of that.

"Well," I said, "don't shoot any way, and don't have any of your police lurking round to arrest them. I don't suppose Molly Floyd and Sabina would mind being arrested. But if it got into the papers that Tommy had been caught burgling a house in the middle of the night----The boy's at Haileybury, you know, and they have to be tremendously particular about keeping up the tone of these public schools. It's impossible to say what the head master would do with a boy who was mixed up in such an escapade."

"Expel him, I should think," said Patterson. "But you needn't be afraid. I'll send the police off in some other direction for the night. And I'll go to bed myself."

"Don't sleep too sound," I said, "or you may find your whisky gone in the morning. You can't complain if it is. You said yourself that that whisky is the property of anyone who can get it."

"Look here," said Patterson, "if you really believe they're going to try and break into my house, why not spend the night here? I'll sit up if you'll keep me company."

"I can't do that," I said. "I'm too sleepy. I was up the greater part of last night, and I've had a hard day. I'm not as young as I was, Patterson, and I have to be careful."

"Then I'll go to bed, too," said Patterson. "But if you will stay with me, and they really come--which they won't--we could open the door and invite them in. It would be rather fun to see their faces if we did that."

Up to that moment I had not thought of taking any part in the burglary. I had fully

intended to spend the night in my own bed and wait till the next morning to hear what happened. But when Patterson spoke, I began to see that I should miss a good deal of amusement if I stayed at home. One more night out of bed would not really make much difference to me, and it might be a long time before I had the chance of watching another burglary. But I refused Patterson's invitation.

"I couldn't honourably join your side now," I said. "Molly and Tommy have discussed their plans in my hearing. They trusted me. It would be a mean thing, after hearing all I have heard, to lie in wait for them in your house. No, no, Patterson. I can't do it. If I take any part in the affair it must be as a burglar, not as a supporter of law and order."

"Oh, all right!" said Patterson. "If you feel that way about it there's no more to be said, but I should have thought you'd have been more comfortable in the house with me than hanging about in the street. And, look here, don't let them try and get over the wall into the back-yard. I suppose it's by the wall into the yard they're arranging to come?"

"That's the plan, I believe," I said.

"It's just the sort of plan they would make," said Patterson, "so you'd better tell them to remember that the wall's in a horribly rickety state. All the stones on the top are loose. It would be quite easy to get a nasty fall."

"I'll warn Miss Floyd if I see her," I said, "but I haven't quite made up my mind, yet, whether I'm going to join the fray or not. I can't well go back to them and deliver a message like that direct from you. They might think I'd been giving them away. By the way, don't forget about the police. That sergeant of yours always seems to me a stupid sort of man. If he happens to be patrolling the street while they're climbing the wall, he'd be sure to arrest them."

"I'll tell him to patrol somewhere else all night," said Patterson.

That seemed to me to settle everything satisfactorily, so I said good night to Patterson and went home.

I found Tommy enjoying a heavy meal. The poor boy had had very little to eat all day, and I was not surprised to find that he was exceedingly hungry. I felt bound to warn him not to eat too much.

"If you gorge yourself," I said, "you'll go to sleep afterwards, and very likely not wake up till late to-morrow morning."

"I was rather afraid of that," said Tommy, "so I borrowed your alarm clock. I set it for half-past twelve."

"Rather early for your start, isn't it?" I said. "I don't know when Patterson goes to bed, but lots of people sit up till twelve, and if he does he won't really be sound

asleep at half-past."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Tommy. "We're not going to start till two. But I have to be down at the hotel before one. There are some things I've promised to bring to Molly. And there are lots of arrangements to be made."

My house, so far as I know, contains no dark lanterns, false beards, or disguises of any kind, indeed none of the accessories of successful burglary. But I did not ask Tommy what he was going to take down to Molly. He gave me no time to ask him anything.

"Dr. Floyd goes to bed before eleven every night," he said, "so he'll be asleep when I get there, and Molly will let me in."

"You haven't confided your plans to Dr. Floyd, then," I said.

"Oh, Lord, no!" said Tommy. "He's not that kind of man at all. In fact Molly is to go to bed at ten-thirty, so as to put him off the scent. Not really go to bed, you know, only pretend."

"I hope she has an alarm clock too," I said. "It would be very awkward for you if she went to sleep, and you had to begin the night by breaking into the hotel."

"Oh, that'll be all right," said Tommy, "Sabina is to stay awake too. They won't both go to sleep."

"Sabina is joining the party then?"

"Yes. She's a real sport, that girl. Simply jumped at the chance as soon as it was mentioned to her. We thought she'd be quite useful to us. She says she can find her way round Patterson's house, however dark it is, and she told the aunt to leave the back door open. The aunt said she'd have the hamper ready for us in the scullery, if she can get hold of it. Patterson's had it in his sitting-room so far and hasn't let her near it. However, she thinks she can sneak round after he's in bed and lug it into the scullery. Not that it really matters where it is. We can get it unless he takes it up to bed with him."

"I never heard of a better planned burglary," I said.

"It is pretty well worked out," said Tommy, complacently. "You see I've read quite a lot of books about burglars and I know that the great mistake which all criminals make is not providing beforehand for every possible contingency."

There was, as I knew, one contingency which Tommy had not contemplated. But no criminal, however astute, could possibly foresee that his victim would be willing to offer him a friendly welcome when he arrived.

Tommy was in a condition of pleasurable excitement. But his appetite did not fail him. He ate an enormous meal. Then he put the alarm clock on the corner of the sideboard and lay down on the sofa.

"You'll excuse me, won't you, Uncle Terence," he said. "I think I ought to snatch a little sleep when I can get it. I can always drop off when I want to, at any hour of the day. It's a great thing to be able to do that."

I liked the serious way in which he took the burglary business. That touch about being able to go to sleep for a short spell took me straight back to my own youth. I remember reading of the Duke of Wellington, and, I think, of several other military commanders, that they possessed this useful power. Captains of ships have it, according to the writers of our best adventure stories. So have muscular heroes of all kinds. I have no doubt that Tommy reads books very like those I read forty-five years ago and they produce the same effect on his mind, as they did on mine. He felt adventurous and heroic with a burglary before him, and he was preparing himself for action according to the most approved receipts.

He really did go to sleep while I stood watching him, with the alarm clock ticking loudly in his ear. I stole from the room on tip toe, but I need not have been careful to avoid making a noise. Tommy slept through a visit from my housekeeper who went into the room to clear away the plates, and I know no woman who can make more noise with plates--short of actually breaking them--than my housekeeper. I made up my mind that I would go myself and waken Tommy at twelve-thirty, instead of leaving him dependent on the alarm clock. I know that alarm clock well, for I have had it for years, and it is not by any means a trustworthy machine.

It turned out in the end that the clock was more trustworthy than I was. I woke with a start, not knowing that I had been asleep, at one o'clock. I went into the dining-room at once, and found that Tommy had gone.

I made up my mind to go after him.

The night was dark, for the clouds which had collected in the sky after the thunderstorm had not blown away, but I was able to recognise Sergeant Morris and Constable Moran, shortly after I passed through my own gate. They were walking away from the town; which showed me that Patterson had kept his promise, and sent his men to patrol some distant road.

"Good-night, sergeant," I said. "Going out into the country?"

The sergeant knew my voice and told me that he was going a couple of miles along the road and then coming back again. I hoped he would take a good while over his four miles, long enough to give us time to finish the burglary.

After meeting the police I saw no one else till I reached the door of the hotel. There I almost ran into a man who was lurking in the shadow of the porch. It was too dark for me to see who he was; but he recognised me at once, perhaps by the sound of my steps in the street, perhaps by the outline of my figure before I entered

the porch.

"Good evening, your Reverence," he said.

I recognised the voice. It was that of my friend Poacher Quin.

"Hullo, Quin," I said. "I thought you'd be at home in your bed."

"It's where I ought to be," said Quin, "and it's where I would be if I had any sense."

"Why aren't you, then?"

"I was in my bed," said Quin. "I was in it by ten o'clock; and I'd be there still only I couldn't sleep with thinking of what might be happening to the young lady and Master Tom."

"If you'd take my advice," I said, "you'd go back to your bed now. They'll be all right."

"They'll not be all right," said Quin, "unless they give up the notion of taking things out of Patterson's house. Maybe they have."

"No, they haven't. They mean to go through with the burglary."

"If that's the way of it," said Quin, "I have my mind made up to go along with them."

Considering that he fully expected to be shot by Patterson, that was a very heroic resolve, and I admired the spirit of it. But I was painfully aware that Quin's presence would create an element of danger. Molly and Tommy would be safe enough even if they came on Patterson unexpectedly and told him to hold his hands up. But I could not be sure what would happen if Quin were discovered dragging hampers about Patterson's kitchen at two o'clock in the morning.

"You'd far better go home," I said. "What's the good of running unnecessary risks?"

"I'd never sleep easy again," said Quin, "if them two ones was to be shot, which is likely enough, and me lying quiet in my bed."

I should never have suspected Quin of that kind of chivalrous self-sacrifice, and I began to feel that I ought not to kill his nobler impulses with counsels of prudence. He accepts a grave responsibility who persuades the common man to be a hero. When the hour of high emotion has passed, and the hot mood has cooled down, there are likely to be things which are very hard to bear. The soldier who comes back from the war with only one leg and finds it impossible, to earn a decent living is a continuous and unbearable reproach to the preacher of patriotism who bade him go. But he who induces a hero to descend to the level of a common man does something much worse. He is responsible afterwards for a maimed soul, a far more horrible thing than a body without a leg. That is what I felt when Quin declared his

intention of sharing the risks of the burglary.

"Very well," I said. "I don't think they want you in the least; but you can go with them if you like. I dare say you feel that you ought to keep an eye on Sabina. If anything were to happen to her you would be sorry afterwards when you remembered that it was you who drove her into it."

Poacher Quin may have had some natural affection for his daughter; but if he had he chose to conceal it carefully.

"Sure, what would happen the like of Sabina?" he asked; "and what harm if something did? She's a wild slip of a girl in spite of all I done in the way of trying to beat sense into her. She'll come to no good any way. It's not her I'm thinking of but the young lady and Master Tom."

A light was shining faintly through the drawn blind of a window, on the second floor of the hotel, the window which belonged to the Coffee Room. I picked up a handful of fine gravel and flung it against the glass. A minute later the window was opened and Molly's head appeared.

"Who's that?" she said. "Go away at once or I'll send for the police."

CHAPTER XVII

Molly's nerves were evidently jumpy. She must have thought that we were real burglars come to rob the hotel just when she was planning to break into Patterson's house; or, perhaps, Sinn Feiners, eager to possess themselves of arms, who had heard of King Cormac's sword. But whatever she thought she was in no position to appeal to the police.

Her threat reminded me of a story current after our 1916 rebellion in Dublin, of an old woman who managed amid the general confusion to steal six pairs of boots out of a shop. She was going home with her booty when she was beset by another, a stronger looter, who took the boots from her. She complained bitterly that the police failed to do their duty. It was, she said, a scandalous thing that she should be openly robbed in the streets of Dublin, and that no one should be arrested for the crime. I intended to tell that story when I got into the hotel. I forgot to do so when the time came because Molly's appearance startled me.

Tommy came down and opened the door for us, as soon as we made it plain that we were friends and fellow-conspirators. He invited us to go upstairs, and, stepping softly so as not to wake Dr. Floyd, we went into the Coffee Room. There I saw Molly dressed in riding breeches, gaiters, and a dark blue blouse. She was standing on tip-toe in front of the fireplace, trying to see as much of herself as possible in the mirror over the chimney-piece. The blue blouse was probably her own. The riding breeches and gaiters were mine, and were far too big for Molly. I understood then what it was that Tommy had to bring down to her from the rectory, and why he wanted to be at the hotel an hour before the burglary was timed to begin. Molly required time to dress herself in these unaccustomed garments. She turned to me when I entered the room.

"Do I look like a Sinn Feiner?" she said, "a real Sinn Feiner?"

"Exactly like one," I said. "No real Sinn Feiner I have ever seen looked the part more thoroughly. But why do you want to? There's nothing political about your burglary. It's simply an ordinary crime."

"Tommy thought it would be safer," said Molly, "if we dressed up as Sinn Feiners."

"I have been reading the papers a bit since I've been over here with you," said Tommy; "and, as far as I can make out, Sinn Feiners are never arrested, whatever they do; so I thought----"

What Tommy thought was plain enough, and quite a natural thing for anyone to

think who read only one paper. If Tommy had read a different paper he would have learned that Sinn Feiners are the only people who ever are arrested in Ireland, and that they are carried off and imprisoned whether they do anything wrong or not.

"I've got masks," said Molly. "Tommy said we ought to have them, so I borrowed some stuff from Mrs. Maher and made them. Black, of course."

Tommy's information about Irish crime was not up to date. We used to wear masks when we went out on raids; but now we have given up hiding our faces. I do not suppose we shall take to masks again unless our war against England is intensified by the use of poisoned gas. Then, of course, we shall have to wear them, but they will not be made of black stuff borrowed from Mrs. Maher.

"Masks are quite unnecessary," I said, "They used to be worn a good deal by the best criminals, but they've gone completely out of fashion lately."

"That's a pity," said Molly. "But I think we'll use them all the same. I wouldn't like to waste the stuff Mrs. Maher gave us. It was the lining of an old coat of hers, and we've cut it up. Besides, the masks I've made are rather sweet."

She picked up a scrap of shiny black stuff from the table beside her and fitted it over her eyes.

"Quite like a conspirator in a secret society, isn't it?" she said. "But the worst of it is that I've only made three, and now that you and Mr. Poacher Quin have come to help us we'll want two more."

"It's awfully good of you to come to help us, Uncle Terence," said Tommy.

"I've not come to help," I said. "It's far better for you to understand that clearly from the start. I've simply come to look on."

"Oh!" said Molly.

She was disappointed, but her "Oh!" also expressed contempt for me. I daresay I deserved it. The part of an onlooker is not a heroic one.

"But Quin is going to help," I said. "He's prepared to do anything. In fact, he rather craves the post of greatest danger."

"What I was thinking," said Quin, "was that your ladyship mightn't find it too easy to get over that wall. It's a nasty wall, so it is, and the stones on the top of it is loose. And you'd be none the worse for somebody to give you a hand from the top while Master Tom would be giving you a leg up from down below."

"I took a look at that wall," said Molly, "and it is a bit beastly. That was one of the reasons why I put on these clothes. A skirt is a nuisance for climbing in."

She looked down at my riding breeches, and I could see that she did not think much of them. But she might have expressed some thanks for the loan. They may not fit her, but they are very useful to me, and I did not press them on her.

"What I was thinking," said Quin, "was that if I was to get on top of the wall, and was to pull your ladyship up to me, that Sabina and Master Tom could pass the hamper up to us, and we could drop it over on the other side. We could do the same thing with the one we're going to get when we have it."

Quin had evidently been working the whole thing out, and was likely to prove the most valuable ally. Unfortunately there were two strong objections to his joining the party. One, which I had already considered, was that Patterson would almost certainly shoot him if he saw him. The other was that Quin has a fatal attraction for the police. There are people who are peculiarly attractive to mosquitoes, midges, and other insects. They are horribly bitten and stung while their friends escape. Other people attract dogs. Strange curs follow them in the streets and refuse to be shaken off. Pets desert their masters and go to them. I myself suffer from being attractive to cats, animals which I detest. If there is a cat anywhere in a house when I enter it the creature comes to me at once and tries to sit on my shoulder. Some such perverted instinct draws the police to Poacher Quin. If there were only one policeman in Ireland, and he were stationed on Fair Head, he would find his way, inevitably, to Poacher Quin, even if he were living in County Kerry.

I do not know that any scientific explanation has ever been offered of this kind of animal magnetism, but the fact of its existence can scarcely be disputed. If, after an explanation has been found, a preventative can be suggested, it will be a great boon to all who are afflicted by their own attractiveness, and especially to those, like Poacher Quin, who are beset by the police.

"I hope," I said, "that Sergeant Morris won't come along the street during your operations."

"You'd better keep watch, Uncle Terence," said Tommy, "and warn us if you see anyone coming."

"I've told you already," I said, "that I'm not going to help you in any way. I'm going to do nothing but look on."

"But that would be looking on," said Molly; "at least it would be looking out, which is much the same."

"And you needn't give yourself away by shouting," said Tommy. "All you'd have to do would be whistle if you saw the police coming along."

"Just as if you were some ordinary person going home," said Molly, "who happened to be whistling as he went."

"Ordinary people don't go whistling along the road at two o'clock in the morning," I said. "No man, unless he was drunk, would whistle at that hour."

"You might pretend to be drunk," said Tommy. "Then if you saw anyone coming

you could just stagger along whistling some tune, and we'd know what you meant."

"Any tune would do," said Molly. "'God save the King,' or anything."

"Unless a man was stark mad as well as drunk," I said, "he wouldn't whistle 'God save the King' in Carrigahooly either by day or night."

"It doesn't matter what tune it is," said Molly.

"Very well," I said. "I'll do this much for you. I'll stand in the archway beside Mahony's shop, opposite your wall, and if I see the police coming I'll whistle, 'We won't go home till morning.' That seems a likely tune for a man to whistle after a convivial evening."

"Thanks awfully," said Tommy.

"It won't deceive the police in the least," I said. "They know perfectly well that nobody can get drunk in Carrigahooly nowadays, except you, Quin, and remember, if the police do come, it's no use your appealing to me to certify that you're respectable people. I shall disown you."

Molly whistled the first half of the tune through.

"Sure you know it?" she said. "It wouldn't do to whistle the wrong tune, or to whistle it so that we didn't recognise it."

"I've known that tune," I said, "since I was Tommy's age."

"All right," said Molly. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. And now if we had Sabina we might start. Where is Sabina? You go and get her, Tommy."

Sabina, when she appeared, was not so elaborately dressed for the performance as Molly. The only unusual part of her costume was a pair of white tennis shoes, several sizes too large for her, which I recognised as mine. They too must have been among the things which Tommy brought down from the rectory. They are the only pair of tennis shoes which I own, and I did not like the idea of Sabina cutting the soles to pieces climbing stone walls. But I did not intend to say anything about them. It was her father who brought up the subject. "What's them things you have on your feet, Sabina?" he said.

"It's a pair of shoes," said Sabina.

That is the kind of obvious answer which irritates a questioner, by implying that he must be a fool not to be able to find out so much for himself. It irritated Quin.

"You may take them off then," he said. "Cock the likes of you up with white shoes. The next thing you'll be wanting will be silk stockings."

"It was the young lady bid me wear them," said Sabina.

"She's quite right, Quin," I said. "All efficient criminals go about in rubber-soled shoes. They make far less noise than leather."

"She'd make no noise at all," said Quin, "if she was in her bare feet. Take them

shoes off you, Sabina."

I think the girl wanted to wear the shoes, though she cannot have found them comfortable. But she sat down at once and took them off. Her obedience was a fine witness to the excellence of Quin's system of educating girls. When she had got rid of the shoes, she began to take off her stockings.

"She needn't do that, need she, Quin?" I said.

"If I can't have the shoes," said Sabina, "I'm as well without the stockings. I'd only have them wore into holes tramping the roads with them and climbing walls."

There were already so many holes in the feet of Sabina's stockings that they could scarcely have been made any worse, even if she had walked over broken glass. I suppose she was afraid they might disappear altogether from the ankles down.

Then I saw that it was not altogether in order to save the girl from the sin of vanity that her father made her take off my tennis shoes. He had unlaced his own boots and was putting on the shoes himself.

"I don't mind lending them to you in the least, Quin," I said, "but I hope you'll give back what's left of them to-morrow. They're mine, you know."

Molly took no part in the discussion about the shoes. This rather surprised me. It was she, so I gathered, who had originally told Sabina to wear them. I should have expected her to make a protest against Quin's order. She did not do so because she was busy making a mask, and was in no position to attend to anything else. When she had finished it she ordered Quin to stand up and try it on.

"I don't know," said Quin, "if one of them things would be much use to me. They're well enough for your ladyship and the young gentleman, and there'd be no harm in Sabina wearing one if it pleases her. But it's my belief I'd be better without it."

"The great thing," said Tommy, "is not to be recognised. If you're wearing one, Mr. Patterson won't be able to swear to you afterwards even if he happens to wake up and see you."

"If he wakes up and sees me," said Quin, "there'll be no need for him to swear to anything afterwards, only to my dead body. He'll shoot, so he will."

I became more and more convinced that Poacher Quin is an unusually brave man. The cool way in which he faced the prospect of death would have put many professional warriors to shame.

Molly shook the mask she held in her hand like a small flag. She wanted to have her party uniform in appearance so far as their faces were concerned, and was not going to be balked by Quin.

"Stand up," she said, "and let me see if it fits you."

She put the mask over Quin's eyes and tied it behind his ears with the tape she had sewed to the corner of it.

"I might as well be an ass with a pair of blinkers on me," said Quin.

I do not know whether it was his appearance or his comparison of himself to an ass which affected Sabina. She became a victim of a fit of giggling, and unfortunately she giggled very loud.

"If you do that," said Molly, "you'll wake father. He's in the next room, and he doesn't sleep very sound."

That did not stop Sabina. She is a girl of great courage, inherited perhaps from her father. If I were Poacher Quin's daughter I certainly should not venture to laugh at him.

"If you don't stop that noise this instant minute," said Quin, "I'll give you what'll cure you of laughing for the next year, anyway."

Sabina certainly understood the meaning of the threat, for she stopped laughing abruptly. But Quin's speech was not always easy for strangers to follow. I saw that Molly was slightly puzzled.

"He means," I explained; "that he'll beat her to such an extent that she'll cry instead of laugh for the next twelve months."

"Your Reverence," said Quin, "am I to wear this contraption on my face?" He fingered the mask disconsolately as he spoke.

"I think you'd better," I said. "Miss Floyd wants you to, and it's a pity to spoil the fine sacrifice you're making for her sake by disputing about a mere trifle. Besides, men who are condemned to be shot are always blindfolded, and you've just said that that's what you expect, so you may as well conform to the usual custom, and perish decently."

I did not think that Quin's mask was likely to make much real difference. But Patterson had distinctly told me that he would fire on Quin if he saw him. He would not, I hoped, take the risk of firing upon a masked man whom he could not recognise, who might possibly be Tommy or even Molly. He would certainly hesitate if he happened to notice the white tennis shoes.

"We're all ready now, aren't we?" said Molly.

"We're as ready as we ever will be," said Quin, mournfully.

"Very well," said Molly. "Tommy, you and Quin get the hamper. Mrs. Maher said she'd leave it in the kitchen all ready for us. Sabina, put out the lamp."

"One minute," I said. "Are you sure it's all right about Patterson's back door? It would be awkward if you found it locked."

"You told your aunt to leave it open, didn't you, Sabina?" said Molly.

"I did," said Sabina, "and she said she would, and what's more she said she'd leave a candle and a box of matches on the corner of the sink, on the right hand side as you go in, so as we'd be able to strike a light and not be tripping over anything in the kitchen."

"That sister of yours, Quin," I said, "has a head on her shoulders. She's thought of everything."

"Come on," said Molly. "There's no use standing here talking. It's long after two o'clock."

I went over to the window which Molly had left open after putting out her head to threaten us with the police. I shut it quietly.

"There's no use having Mrs. Maher robbed by somebody else," I said, "while we're off burgling Patterson."

CHAPTER XVIII

Tommy and Quin left the hotel first, carrying the hamper of fish which was to be put into Patterson's kitchen. Molly and Sabina followed them. I lingered behind. My idea was to follow at a distance, keeping in touch but far enough off to be able to pretend that I was an independent wayfarer unconnected with the party. It was not likely that anyone would be abroad in the streets of Carrigahooly at 2 a.m., but there is always a chance that the doctor might have been called to an urgent case of illness, or that some wakeful person, hearing the noise of footsteps, might look out of a window. I did not wish to be seen in the company of four masked and very suspicious looking characters.

I made an excuse of my boot lace, and stooped to tie it as Molly and Sabina passed through the door. I felt a touch on my shoulder and stood up abruptly. I was abominably startled. There is something about a surreptitious midnight expedition which makes a man nervous even if he is innocent of any evil design. I looked round and saw Mrs. Maher standing beside me. Her appearance would have been sufficient to frighten me at any ordinary time. She had evidently just got out of bed. Her head was surrounded by thin wisps of greyish hair, and a very thin, short grey pigtail hung down her neck. She carried a guttering candle in her hand, and its light emphasised the deep lines and high bones of her face. She wore a thick dressing gown, of a bluish pink colour, which I believe is called--or while it was still used in dyeing, used to be called--maroon. She had unlaced boots on her stocking-less feet. Anyone might have been startled by seeing Mrs. Maher suddenly in the middle of the night. But it was a relief to me to recognise her. I quite feared, when I felt her touch, that Sergeant Morris had found me and was going to ask me to give an account of myself.

"Your Reverence," she said, "was always a good one to help them that was in trouble, and, if I live to be a hundred, I'll never forget what you're doing for me this night."

She insisted on grasping my hand and squeezing it, which I disliked. I knew what she meant. She thought I was risking my life and liberty by burgling Patterson's house in order to save her from being fined; whereas I would not have risked a blistered heel to keep her out of prison. As an honest man I could not accept her gratitude without a protest. Besides, the feel of her hard hand and the appearance of her skinny arm, emerging from the sleeve of the maroon dressing gown, made me shiver.

"I'm doing nothing at all," I said. "If you want to thank anyone, thank Miss Floyd,

and Sabina, and my nephew."

"I will thank them," she said, "and if there's e'er a thing I can do for any one of them, they have only to ask. If it was the clothes off my back I'd give it to them."

So far as the clothes off her back was concerned, it was a safe offer. I do not suppose that even Sabina would have taken a present of that dressing gown.

"But your Reverence----"

She sank her voice to a stealthy whisper and then stopped dead. I knew that there was a request of some sort coming. I had suspected that all along. Mrs. Maher is not the kind of woman who gets out of bed in the middle of the night merely to express gratitude.

"If it would be convenient and pleasing to your Reverence," she whispered.

"Well?" I said, "what is it? Do you want to come with us?"

"I do not," said Mrs. Maher, emphatically. "But what I do want is, that my name shouldn't be mentioned in connexion with what's going on to-night. The police has a terrible strong hold on a woman in my position, and if they started persecuting me I might as well leave the town, and that's what they'd do if they thought I'd had any hand in breaking into Mr. Patterson's house."

I felt I could safely promise that Mrs. Maher's reputation should not suffer through anything which Molly did. I left her more or less satisfied, and I hope I shall never have another interview with her in the middle of the night.

I thought that my talk with Mrs. Maher would have given the burgling party time to get some way ahead of me and that I might walk briskly towards Patterson's house without overtaking them. But I found Molly waiting for me just outside the hotel. Sabina, so I learned, had been summoned by her father to help to carry the hamper. It was rather heavy, and no doubt it suited Quin that he and Tommy should take turns at one side of it, while Sabina, without any relief, carried the other.

"It's rather dark, isn't it," said Molly.

It struck me that she was beginning to be nervous. I might have guessed if I had been quick-witted and observant that she was nervous even before we left the hotel. She had been very anxious to start, and had hustled the rest of us. That was a sign that she was not altogether enjoying herself, though I am bound to say that she kept up appearances very well.

"I didn't expect it to be quite so dark," she said.

"It generally is darkish at this hour," I said.

Molly laid her hand on my arm, but not at all in the way she had taken hold of it before. This time she was not trying to drag me forward or keep me captive. She seemed to be seeking protection, and the kind of comfort a child gets from the touch

of a grown-up person.

"I almost wish," she said, "that we hadn't come."

"Cheer up," I said; "everybody feels that way at the beginning of a desperate enterprise. Once you're well into it you'll enjoy yourself again. And there's nothing to be frightened about."

"I'm rather frightened of the police," she said. "You'll keep a good watch, won't you? and warn us in time if anybody comes."

We overtook the rest of the party outside Patterson's house. There were no lights in any of the windows. Patterson had evidently made up his mind that the burglary would not be attempted, and had gone to bed. I could not suppose that he was waiting for us all by himself in a dark room. The wall of his yard looked to me much higher than I thought it was. Walls, mountains, and other things which stick up always do look higher than they really are in the dark.

"I don't believe I'll ever be able to climb it," said Molly.

"You will, miss," said Quin. "With the help of God, you'll climb it easy."

"There's no use finking it now, Molly," I said. "You've brought us all out here. It was your plan originally--and we can't have you going back on us now."

Molly is a plucky girl. She recognised her responsibility as leader of the expedition, and pulled herself together.

"Come on," she said, "the sooner we start the better."

She meant, I think, that the sooner she started the sooner the terrifying experience would be over. But she was plainly determined to go through with the business now.

"If we can't climb the wall," she said, "we'll have to go and get a ladder somewhere."

"There's a ladder in Mahony's back yard," said Sabina, "and I know where it's kept. We could borrow it easy."

"You might call it borrowing," I said, "but I don't advise your attempting two burglaries in one night. You can't tell what Mahony might do if he woke up and found you dragging off his ladder."

Mahony is, I know, a peaceful and timid man; but, unlike Patterson, he had not been told to expect burglars.

"You can manage that wall all right without a ladder, Quin. Anyhow I'm sure Sabina can."

"I can, of course," said Sabina.

"That one," said her father, "could leap any wall you put her at; the same as a young goat. But I'd rather have the first try at it myself. You couldn't tell what a girl

like that might be doing if she got over into the yard by herself. And it's my belief I could do it if I had the hamper to stand on. Let you give me a hand now, Master Tom, and we'll set it over against the wall."

Tommy, who showed no sign whatever of nervousness, took one side of the hamper. He and Quin tugged it across the road and set it down close to the wall. I felt that it was time for me to retire into the archway beside Mahony's shop at the other side of the street. It was a deep archway and looked quite dark. I should be out of sight there if anyone happened to pass along, and I should be in a good position for watching the scaling of the wall. But Molly caught me by the arm.

"Don't go yet," she said. "I'd feel happier if you stayed just for a little."

I realised that if Molly's nerve gave way the whole enterprise would fail, so I stayed where I was, though I did not feel comfortable.

Quin stood on the hamper and found that he could just reach the top of the wall with his hands. He made several gallant efforts to pull himself up, and I think he might have managed it if the stones on the top had been firm. But they were loose and kept giving way. One after another fell with a loud noise on the footpath, and each time Quin came down again on top of the hamper.

"In the end," I said, "you will no doubt pull the whole wall down and be able to walk straight into the yard; but you'll probably awaken everybody in Carrigahooly first."

Quin understood just as well as I did that he was making an abominable noise. He stepped down from the hamper.

"Can you not do it?" said Molly, anxiously.

She was a little disappointed at his failure; but I think she would not have minded much if he had refused to try again.

"Will I go for the ladder?" said Sabina.

"You will not," said Quin. "Didn't you hear his Reverence say there was to be no robbery done?"

He pulled away the mask from his face and stuffed it into his trousers pocket.

"I'd be better able to climb," he said, "if I could see what I was doing."

Then he took off his coat and handed it to Sabina.

"Take care of that coat now," he said, "and don't set it down anywhere without you remember where it is you put it. Mind, now, if that coat's lost you'll be sorry for it. Now, Master Tom, if you put your hand under my foot and give a bit of a hoist when I speak the word, I'm of opinion that I'll get the better of the old wall yet."

But Tommy had a better plan than that. He belongs to an officers' training corps, and in the course of military evolutions had learned to stand with his face to a wall

and his head tucked in in such a way that somebody else could mount on his shoulders. He explained this manoeuvre at some length to Quin and then put himself in the proper position. I was glad then that Quin had insisted on wearing my tennis shoes. He had to trample on Tommy's back a great deal before he was in a position to get on top of the wall. If he had been wearing his usual heavy boots he would certainly have broken Tommy's collar bone, perhaps his spine.

"Splendid!" said Molly, when Quin seated himself astride of the wall.

What I expected was beginning to happen. The excitement was curing Molly's nervousness.

"Glory be to God!" said Sabina, fervently. "He's done it in the latter end."

It was Molly's turn next. According to the original plan, she and Quin were to sit on the wall while Tommy and Sabina passed the hamper up to them. She stood cautiously on the hamper and looked up at a stretch of smooth wall above her.

"Will I ever do it?" she said.

Quin, balanced rather perilously on the loose stones, leaned over towards her, and spoke encouragingly.

"You will, your ladyship," he said. "You will, easy. Let you stand up against the wall now, Master Tom, the way you were standing. That's right. But put your head down now, for fear the young lady might hit you a kick on it. Listen to me, Sabina, let you take her ladyship's foot and put it on the young gentleman's shoulder."

Quin turned to one after another as he gave his directions. He had taken over the leadership of the party and no one seemed inclined to dispute his commands. So, in times of stress, master minds emerge and assume the direction of affairs by mere force of fitness and ability.

"Do you all understand me, now?" said Quin.

Tommy, his muscles braced tight, his head tucked in, was scarcely in a position to reply. Molly was looking up anxiously and said nothing. Sabina responded by seizing Molly's left ankle.

"Reach up your hand now as high as you can, miss," said Quin.

Molly, standing shakily on Tommy's back, reached upwards. Quin caught her by the wrist and pulled.

"Give a lep now, Miss," he said.

Molly did her best and for a moment hung suspended in the air. Then she slowly dropped down again on to Tommy's back, feeling about vaguely with her feet for a secure resting place.

"Give another lep," said Quin. "Sabina, didn't I tell you to take a good hold of her ladyship's foot and give a hoist to it?"

"How can I," said Sabina, "when she's kicking the way she is. She'd have my face broke on me if I went near her."

"It makes no matter if it is broke," said Quin. "The face you have on you is no great ornament, anyway. Lep now, Miss. Lep higher. Lep for your life."

There was a short, fierce struggle. Sabina risked the destruction of her unornamental face. Quin pulled hard, and Molly got her knee on top of the wall at last. A moment later she was seated safely, panting. Sabina was out of breath, too, and Tommy, when he raised his head, was purple in the face. Quin was the only one who seemed unaffected though he had worked harder than anyone else.

"Mind where you're sitting now, Miss," he said. "There's a lot of broken glass on top of this wall, and you'd cut yourself before you'd know it."

I remembered that it was my riding breeches which Molly was wearing. I sincerely hoped that she would be careful. I cannot possibly afford to buy another pair, and I cannot ride about the parish, with any dignity, in breeches cut to pieces by broken glass. I thought of adding an exhortation to Quin's warning, but I felt it would be no use. If Molly did not keep clear of the broken glass for the sake of her own skin she was not likely to be influenced by the thought of damage to my breeches. Besides, I felt that it was fully time for me to retire and hide myself in Mahony's archway. Even if Patterson were sound asleep, the noise made by getting Molly up the wall would have wakened him long before. I was surprised that it had not wakened everyone in the neighbourhood. Perhaps it had. In Ireland nowadays an unusual noise in the middle of the night does not lead people to look out of their windows. It acts like a war-time alarm signal in towns subject to air raids. Those who hear it retire fearfully and silently to the safest place they know. I dare say Mahony spent half that night in his cellar.

I could see fairly well from the shadow of the archway. The street being narrow I could also hear what Quin said. He spoke in a hoarse whisper, but the words carried quite clearly to my hiding place.

"Now, Master Tom," he said, "let you and Sabina put your hands under the bottom of the hamper and lift it up as high as you're able so as her ladyship and me can get hold of it by the two handles and pull it to us, and do you be mighty careful, Miss, and not be moving more than you can help, for the wall's rotten and it wouldn't do if it came down on us."

The hamper was heavy. I knew that by experience, having taken part in hauling it on board the "Aurora." But Tommy and Sabina managed to raise it. Unfortunately they could not lift it quite high enough. Quin and Molly leaned sideways and stretched their arms down until I thought they must certainly overbalance and fall, but

they could not grip the handles.

"A bit higher now, and we have it," said Quin.

But the "bit higher" was impossible. Tommy and Sabina let the hamper down again. There was a short consultation, and then another plan was tried. Tommy knelt down and Sabina put the hamper on his shoulders. Then he slowly and very carefully raised himself, Sabina holding the hamper to prevent it slipping off. I think this plan might have succeeded. Quin had actually got hold of one handle and Molly had her finger tips on the other when I became aware of a horrible disaster. Sergeant Morris and Constable Moran were coming down the street.

There could not possibly have been a worse moment for their appearance, and I am ashamed to say I completely lost my head. I knew that it was my duty to give timely warning to the burgling party. I remembered that I was to whistle a tune, but I entirely forgot what tune it was to be. Beyond a vague impression that it was something bacchanalian, I could remember nothing about it. And I had no time to think. Sergeant Morris and the constable were moving slowly, but they were getting nearer. I broke out into a shrill attempt at "He's a jolly good fellow." Molly raised her head and looked in my direction. Then, satisfied apparently that I was not whistling the tune agreed on, she bent down again and caught the handle of the hamper. Quin had less confidence in me or else he did not know one tune from another. He hesitated for a moment when he heard me whistle. Then he let go the handle he held and dropped out of sight into Patterson's yard. Molly, without hesitation, let go her handle and dropped after him. Sabina gave a wild cry.

"It's the police, it's the police," she said, "we'll be caught."

But she did not mean to be "caught" if she could help it. She fled up the street at a speed that I should have thought impossible for a barefooted girl, over stony ground. Poor Tommy could do nothing to save himself. He was bent under the hamper when my uncertain alarm sounded. When Quin, Molly, and Sabina all let go, the whole weight of it came on him suddenly. He staggered and collapsed, crushed to the ground, with the hamper on top of him.

I stopped whistling and withdrew further into the shadow of the archway. I might have gone right through it into Mahony's yard and found a secure resting place in some shed, but I was most anxious to see what happened next, and I felt sure that Sergeant Morris, with Tommy rolling on the ground in front of him, would not take the trouble to search for me.

"It's Sinn Feiners, sure enough," said Sergeant Morris.

He and Constable Moran halted and drew their revolvers.

In Ireland at present we are living through three revolutions, one political, one

syndicalist, and one agrarian. They are so mixed together that even their most active agents cannot distinguish between them. The Royal Irish Constabulary has been given the job of saving the present order of society, and has been given no intelligent orders how to do it. It is no wonder that the men occasionally fail to understand clearly what is happening before their eyes. But they have never for a single moment failed in courage or faltered in the performance of duty. If ever, in years to come, we draw up a national calendar of brave men, comparable to the church's calendar of saints, there must be a splendid All Heroes' Day set apart for the commemoration of the high deeds of the unnamed men of our Irish police.

Sergeant Morris believed that Tommy and his hamper were the débris of a force of Sinn Feiners, which had been attacking Mr. Patterson's house. Believing that, he must have expected that riflemen would open fire at him from front and side and rear. Yet neither he nor Constable Moran displayed the smallest sign of fear, and they made no movement of flight.

"Will I shoot?" said Constable Moran.

In his position I should have shot Tommy without waiting for permission, if indeed I had not been too terrified to pull a trigger. But Constable Moran was a member of force whose discipline is unsurpassed, I suppose, even by that of the Guards' Brigade. And Sergeant Morris remembered that he represented law and order.

"You will not shoot," he said, "there's no more than one of them left, and we're well able to take him without shooting."

Tommy struggled clear of the hamper and stood up. He must have been bruised and cut in various parts of his body, but I was glad to see that he had no bones broken. I fully expected to see him attempt to escape by making a rush up the street. It would have been a foolish and useless thing to do. The police could certainly have shot him, and even if they did not fire he would have been caught. They were within a few yards of him by the time he was on his feet, and Constable Moran is a tall, athletic young man who would have run the boy down sooner or later.

Tommy realised the situation and adopted a policy which I should not have thought of. He advanced to meet the police and greeted them with cheery friendliness.

"Good evening, sergeant," he said, "nice night, isn't it? Good evening, Moran. That was a great sail we had home from Inisheeny this afternoon."

The situation became extremely interesting, and I felt sure that no one would take any notice of me. I stepped cautiously to the entrance of my archway so as to be able to see and hear all that happened.

"Put the handcuffs on him, Constable," said Sergeant Morris.

He must have come across plausible criminals before, and he was not going to be taken in by bluff.

"Oh, nonsense," said Tommy. "You know who I am perfectly well."

"I do not know who you are," said the sergeant, "but I will know to-morrow morning when I get you before a magistrate."

Then Tommy remembered that he was wearing a black mask, a most effective disguise, and that the sergeant could not possibly recognise him. He tore it off and threw it on the ground.

"Now you know who I am," he said. "I'm Graham, Tommy Graham, the rector's nephew."

"If that's the best story you have to tell for yourself," said the sergeant, "you needn't waste your breath telling it to me, and I'd advise you think of a better one before to-morrow morning. Put the handcuffs on him, Moran, before some more of them comes to rescue him."

The sergeant had often seen Tommy. He had seen him as lately as the day before when he stood on the end of the pier and watched us row off to the "Aurora." He ought, I think, to have recognised him. But there was a good deal of excuse for him. It was most unlikely that my nephew would be found masked in the middle of the night trying to break into Patterson's back yard. Moran seemed to be a little uncertain. He hesitated to handcuff Tommy.

Tommy drew a matchbox from his pocket, struck a light and held it up in front of his face.

"Look at me, sergeant," he said. "You've seen me lots of times. You must know me."

The sergeant stared at him and became doubtful.

"You're mighty like the rector's nephew, I'll say that much for you."

Tommy will some day be a great man. He had kept his head and acted with presence of mind in a most difficult situation. His next speech struck me as masterly.

"That's all right, then, sergeant," he said. "Good-night."

He spoke in a tone of complete self assurance, and he began to walk away, as if walking away were precisely what might be expected of him. But the sergeant, though shaken in his belief that Tommy was a criminal, was not yet convinced of his innocence.

"Catch hold of him, Moran," he said.

Moran obeyed this order promptly enough, and gripped Tommy by the collar of his coat.

"You can't be walking off like that," said the sergeant. "You may be the rector's nephew, or you may not, but you'll have to give an account of yourself. What are you doing gladiating about in the middle of the night with a black mask on your face, and climbing over the wall into Mr. Patterson's back-yard?"

That, I thought, would put Tommy into a corner. The fact that he is my nephew--if he convinced the sergeant of it--would no doubt go a long way towards clearing him of the charges of sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion. But Sinn Feiners are not the only people in Ireland who break the law. There are criminals of a more familiar kind who are bent simply on taking other people's property. Even my nephew, though I am a highly respectable man, might be a thief. The case of Geordie Robertson, in the Heart of Midlothian, if not actually historical, is yet a good example of the depths to which the relatives of clergymen occasionally sink. The black mask, the hamper, and the broken wall required a good deal of explanation. I felt that Tommy wanted help. He had done very well, so far; but the time had come when somebody ought to stand by him.

I stepped out of the archway and crossed the street.

"Good evening, sergeant," I said. "I see you've got my nephew there. But you needn't arrest him. He hasn't been doing anything wrong."

The sergeant recognised me at once. Even if he had not been able to see me very well he would have known my voice. Being a parishioner of mine, he listens to my sermons nearly every Sunday. He has, of course, a great respect for me.

"If your Reverence says it's all right," he said, "I won't be contradicting you. But the circumstances is mighty suspicious, so they are."

"Who do you think he is?" I asked.

"If your Reverence hadn't spoken up for him," said the sergeant, "I'd have said he was a Sinn Feiner breaking into Mr. Patterson's premises with intent to murder."

"Well," I said, "you know now that he's not that, anyhow."

"I'd like to know this," said the sergeant, firmly, "and it's not out of disrespect to your Reverence that I'm asking it. What was the young gentleman doing lifting baskets down off the wall of Mr. Patterson's yard, him and a young girl that looked to me mighty like Sabina Quin. I seen him at it myself, and I'm prepared to swear to it."

It was quite time for Tommy to take up his own defence again, and I was anxious to hear what lie he would invent to account for the position in which the sergeant found him. A lie of some sort seemed to be necessary but I did not see how a plausible one could be found.

"Tell the sergeant what you were, doing," I said.

Tommy, to my astonishment, told the truth, though not quite the whole of it.

"I wasn't lifting a hamper down off the wall," he said, "or taking anything out of Mr. Patterson's yard. I was trying to lift a hamper over the wall, so as to put it into the yard."

I do not know what more Tommy intended to say. At that point he was stopped abruptly. He was standing with his face towards the wall and I saw his glance shift from the sergeant and his eyes fix themselves on something beyond and above. I looked and saw Molly's head and shoulders raised over the wall. She was making faces at Tommy, violently. She was also gesticulating with her hands. She was evidently attempting to convey some message to him by silent signalling, but I could not make out what she meant. Nor could Tommy.

"Go away," he said.

"What's that you're saying?" said the sergeant sharply.

"Nothing," said Tommy.

"I heard you," said the sergeant, "and Constable Moran heard you. Come now, what was it you said?"

I did not think that the situation, difficult enough already, would be in any way improved if Molly were dragged over the wall or chased round and round the yard by Constable Moran. It seemed to me that the best thing to do was to recall the sergeant's attention to the original subject of conversation, and let him forget the momentary interruption.

"Come now, Tommy," I said, "tell the sergeant exactly, what you were doing with that hamper. He has a perfect right to ask the question. After all you were behaving in a very suspicious way. You can't deny that."

"It'll be better for the young gentleman," said the sergeant, "and better for all of us, if he'll tell the truth."

CHAPTER XIX

I suppose it is generally better to tell the truth; but in this case the truth was singularly difficult to believe. I almost wished that Tommy would have invented a lie. Any lie would have been more credible than the story he actually told.

"I told you the truth before," said Tommy, "and you wouldn't believe it. But I don't mind telling it to you again. I was trying to get a hamper over the back wall into Mr. Patterson's yard. It's a hamper that belongs to him, so I was simply trying to give him his own property. There's nothing illegal about that, is there? The hamper is full of fish--fish and lobsters. Now will you stop arresting me and let me go home?"

"I'd let you go home," said the sergeant, "if you'd tell me a story that any man could believe. But----" the poor man was evidently perplexed. "Did anyone ever hear of a gentleman taking a hamper of fish to another gentleman across a ten foot wall in the middle of the night? Why would you do the like? Why would anyone?"

"If you doubt my word," said Tommy, "go and see what's in the hamper for yourself."

"Constable Moran," said the sergeant, "will you go and search that hamper while I keep an eye on the prisoner?"

Moran approached the hamper cautiously and opened it more cautiously still. I do not think that he still suspected Tommy of being a Sinn Feiner. But the police have to be very careful. Explosives have often been used for the destruction of barracks, and nobody likes the idea of being blown to pieces suddenly. But whatever feelings of fear he might have had, Moran did his duty thoroughly. He laid the lobsters in rows on the road and made little piles of fish. When the hamper was quite empty he packed the lobsters and fish back into it again. Then he made his report.

"There's nothing in it," he said, "of a compromising kind."

"I told you so," said Tommy.

I think that the sergeant would have released Tommy then if Molly had not chosen that moment to put her head and shoulders over the wall again. She was making faces even more urgently than before, but the meaning was as unintelligible as ever.

"Go away, Molly," said Tommy. "Go away at once."

This time the sergeant turned sharply, and caught sight of Molly before she disappeared.

"Did you see anyone on top of the wall, Constable Moran?" he said.

"I seen a girl," said Moran, "or it might have been a grown woman."

"Or it might have been a young lad," said the sergeant. "Tell me now," he said to Tommy, "who was it you were speaking to?"

Tommy had been pestered by the sergeant, and he was aggravated by Molly's making faces at him. His temper gave way suddenly, and once more he spoke the literal truth.

"It was Miss Floyd," he said. "Go and arrest her, and then perhaps you'll be satisfied."

I was very much afraid that the sergeant might send Moran across the wall to pursue Molly. Fortunately his attention was distracted by the appearance of Sabina at the far end of the street.

She approached us very cautiously, keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the houses, and making no noise with her bare feet. She may perhaps have been moved by a vague desire to help Tommy, and a feeling of shame for having fled in a moment of panic, leaving him in the hands of the police. Poacher Quin, in spite of his obvious faults, has some fine feeling and a good deal of courage--his daughter might have inherited a sense of loyalty and chivalry from him--or she may simply have been filled with curiosity and prepared to take the risk of being arrested for the sake of finding out what had happened to the rest of the party. She probably calculated on being able to escape again if she were pursued.

Sergeant Morris, very alert now, after Molly's two appearances, saw Sabina at once.

"There's a girl there, Moran," he said, pointing to Sabina, "and I'm of opinion that it's Quin's daughter, the same that was with the young gentleman at the first go off."

"It's her right enough," said Moran.

"Will you go after her then, and catch her?" said the sergeant. Constable Moran started up the street at a good pace. Sabina turned and fled at once. They passed from our sight, though for a long time I could hear the rapid beating of Moran's boots on the hard road surface.

"Them Quins," said the sergeant, "is always up to some mischief. If it isn't one thing it's another."

He shares Patterson's prejudice against Poacher Quin, and he goes further. I never heard Patterson say a word against Sabina. The sergeant thinks her as bad as her father.

A light appeared in one of the upper windows of Patterson's house. A moment later the blind was pulled up and the window opened. Patterson thrust out his head.

"What's all that noise about?" he said. "And who's there?"

"It's me, sir," said the sergeant, "and Constable Moran was with me till just this minute. We're on patrol duty."

"I wish to goodness you'd patrol somewhere else," said Patterson. "You've kept me awake for the last half hour talking under my window. Who the devil are you quarrelling with? I can't have people arguing about politics in the street at this time of night."

Patterson must, I thought, have been awake for a good deal more than half an hour. And if he heard our conversation with the sergeant he must have been more amused than annoyed. But he was evidently determined to represent himself as an innocent householder roused from sleep.

"There was no quarrelling done, sir," said the sergeant, "and there wasn't a word said about politics, either good or bad."

"If you weren't talking politics," said Patterson, "what were you arguing about? There's nothing else men wrangle over in the way you've been doing except politics. Surely to goodness it wasn't religion."

"The constable and myself," said the sergeant, "was arresting a prisoner."

"They've arrested me," said Tommy, "and I wish you'd tell them to let me go again."

"Who are you?" said Patterson.

He was apparently surprised, annoyed, and puzzled. He was acting so well that I began to wonder if he were acting at all. It was just possible that he had forgotten all about the burglary. If he had dismissed my warning from his mind and gone to bed he might, in the first confused moments of waking up, be really astonished at what was going on. In that case he might possibly order the sergeant to march Tommy off to a cell in the barracks for the rest of the night. I thought it well to attempt some sort of explanation.

"There's been a slight misunderstanding," I said. "The sergeant has arrested my nephew, Tommy Graham."

"That you, rector?" said Patterson.

Like the sergeant he has the advantage of listening to my sermons, and therefore knows my voice.

"Yes," I said. "I happened to be out for a walk----"

"It seems to me," said Patterson, "that everybody in this town is out for a walk to-night except me. I must be the only man in the place who went to bed. Wait a moment, and I'll come down and see what all the fuss is about."

He closed the window as he spoke, and the light disappeared.

The sergeant turned to me. There was an unmistakable note of anxiety in his

voice when he spoke.

"Would you say now," he asked, "that Mr. Patterson was annoyed?"

"It seemed to me that he was," I said. "But he'll get over it. Most men are a little fractious when awakened at this hour."

"If he takes it into his head," said the sergeant, "that me and Constable Moran was talking politics, there'll be trouble."

"Well," I said, "you can't be surprised at that. Nobody ought to talk politics in the middle of the night, except in Parliament, of course."

"But there wasn't a word said about politics. I'd be thankful, now, to your Reverence, if you'd tell Mr. Patterson that we wasn't talking politics."

"I can't do that," I said, "I distinctly heard you say that my nephew was a Sinn Feiner, and that's a highly political thing to say."

"I was wrong there," said the sergeant, "but anyone might have made the mistake. He looked mighty like a Sinn Feiner when I seen him first."

Patterson really had been in bed. When he opened the door of his house and stepped into the street he was wearing a dressing gown, a suit of pyjamas, and a pair of bedroom slippers. He carried a candle in his hand.

"Dear me, Patterson," I said, "you look exactly as if you'd been in bed."

"So I have been in bed," he said, "in bed and asleep. You don't suppose I was going to sit up all night on the off chance----"

He stopped abruptly and glanced at the sergeant. He could not very well go on to explain that I had warned him of the burglary. Sergeant Morris would not have questioned his officer as he had questioned Tommy, but he would have tried to find out, and in the end certainly would have found out, why Molly, Tommy, Sabina, Quin, and I wanted to break into Patterson's house. The story, when he had it complete, would not have been published, but it would have been told. It would have passed, in undertones, from one police barrack to another, till every policeman in Ireland knew it. And that would not have been pleasant for Patterson. His reputation as an efficient and zealous officer would not have survived two dozen bottles of poteen.

He came over to me and whispered.

"You don't mean to say," he said, "that they've really been trying to enter my house?"

"Of course they have," I said. "I told you they were going to. You ought to have believed me."

"Nobody," said Patterson, "could believe a thing like that beforehand."

Sergeant Morris did not like this whispered conversation. He did not know what

I might be saying to Patterson about him. I hope he regards me as a friend; but he had been arresting my nephew, and I might be capable of taking a mean revenge by prejudicing his officer against him. He stepped forward and made his statement exactly as he would have made it in court before a magistrate.

"I discovered the prisoner, sir," he said, "in the act of climbing the wall between the street and the yard of your house."

"Oh, don't let's go into all that again!" said Tommy. "I told you before that I wasn't climbing the wall."

"It looked to me very like as if you were," said the sergeant.

"Look here, Mr. Patterson," said Tommy. "You remember that hamper of fish the Flanagans gave you on Inisheeny?"

"I shall never forget it," said Patterson.

"Well, it got left in the hotel by mistake, and I was trying to give it back to you. That's the whole thing; and if the sergeant hadn't come muddling in and arresting me it would have been done now and everything would have been all right."

"But I told Miss Floyd," said Patterson, "and I told you, rector, that I didn't want those fish."

"Oh, I know that," said Tommy, "but we did want to give them back. That's the point."

"Tommy has an extremely sensitive conscience," I said, "he couldn't sleep easy when he thought that you were deprived of fish which properly belonged to you."

"But I don't want them," said Patterson. "However, it's all right now, anyhow. Sergeant, you can go. Find Constable Moran and patrol somewhere else, not outside my window. Good night, Rector, good night, Tommy. I'm grateful to you for trying to give me the fish, but don't do it again."

I thought that the whole affair was ended then so far as Tommy and I were concerned. Molly and Poacher Quin would, no doubt, make their way out of Patterson's yard when things had quieted down. We had nothing to do but go home to bed. But Tommy is a boy of indomitable spirit. He was not inclined, even then, to give up the original object of the expedition.

"But, I say," he said, "you may as well have the fish. There they are, in the hamper beside the wall."

"But I keep on telling you I don't want them," said Patterson.

"You can't leave them lying there all night," I said. "They're valuable fish, Patterson. The lobsters alone are worth four or five shillings. It's simply putting temptation in the way of dishonest people to leave fish about like that. You oughtn't to do it."

"Oh, very well!" said Patterson. "Bring them into the house if you like."

"And I suppose I can have the other hamper," said Tommy.

Sergeant Morris was still standing near us. He was evidently puzzled by the turn things had taken. He was listening attentively to what we said, and I had no doubt he would remember every word of it afterwards. Patterson turned on him snappily.

"I thought I told you to go away and finish your patrol somewhere else," he said. "Why are you standing there?"

The sergeant, disappointed I fear, saluted and stalked up the street. He would, no doubt, come on Constable Moran somewhere. I sincerely hoped he would not find Sabina under arrest.

"We'd like our hamper, you know," said Tommy, "the one that belongs to Mrs. Maher. So when we've brought yours in we can take ours. You won't mind, will you?"

"Not a bit," said Patterson. "I don't know why on earth you're going to all this trouble, but you can have the other hamper if you like. Come along into the house, and I'll get it for you."

He turned as he spoke and went back towards the door of his house. He glanced at me as he went, and I felt sure that Mrs. Maher's hamper would be a disappointment to her when she got it, Patterson had not believed in the burglary when I warned him of it, but he had evidently stored the whisky in some safe place before he went to bed.

"Uncle Terence," said Tommy, "you'll give me a hand with the hamper, won't you? And with the other when we are taking it away. They are frightfully heavy, both of them."

The one with the fish in it certainly was heavy. Tommy and I staggered a little as we carried it into Patterson's house. But I had every hope that the other, which we had to carry much further, would be lighter.

"I say," said Tommy, "things are turning out better than I expected in spite of that ass, Sergeant Morris. I wonder where Molly is. It'll be rather a score for me when she crawls home and finds me sitting on the hamper in a sort of alone-I-did-it attitude. I must say I scarcely expected to pull it off, but I have, or as good as have, now."

CHAPTER XX

Tommy and I lugged the hamper into Patterson's house, and dumped it down in the sitting-room. Our part in the exchange was accomplished, but Patterson seemed in no hurry to give us the other hamper as he promised. He fiddled about the room, striking matches and lighting the lamp. At last he offered me a drink.

"You'd be the better for something before you go home," he said.

Tommy, in an earnest whisper, besought me to refuse the offer. He had borne himself well while under arrest, but his nerve had been a little shaken by the experience. He wanted to get home as soon as he could.

"Don't let's delay," he said, "it's frightfully risky staying here. Anything might happen."

There certainly still were several things which might happen--the capture of Sabina by Constable Moran, for instance, or the arrest of Molly by the Sergeant. I understood Tommy's dislike of further complications. But Patterson was pressing.

"You must have a drop of whisky," he said. "I have some excellent stuff."

I understood from the way he said his last sentence that he was offering me some of the island poteen. I very much wanted to taste it, and I felt that I had fairly earned a drink. Patterson went over to the sideboard and opened one of the cupboards. The door was not locked, which shows that Patterson must have more confidence in Quin's sister than I should have in Quin. I should be very sorry to leave him alone in a house with a bottle of whisky that was not locked up. Patterson got out a syphon of soda water and a bottle.

"Excuse me a minute," he said, "I must go and get some tumblers."

"Please get the hamper too," said Tommy. "We really ought to go."

Patterson left the room, carrying his bedroom candle with him. We heard him going along the passage which led to the pantry. We heard the clinking of glasses, when he moved them, and then the running of water from a tap. Patterson had evidently been obliged to wash up the glasses, which is very much what I should expect to have to do if Poacher Quin's sister were my housekeeper.

"I wish I knew where the hamper is," said Tommy. "I'd get it and go, if I knew. In fact, I've a good mind to make a bolt for it without the hamper."

He looked round nervously. I do not know what he expected. What actually happened surprised me and I am sure startled him. Molly burst into the room. She was giggling excitedly; but not, I think, through happiness. She seemed to me slightly hysterical. It was some time before I got her story out of her. At first she would tell

us nothing except that the police had captured Poacher Quin.

"They're taking him to prison," she said, "and you must go and rescue him at once."

I was not prepared for another encounter with Sergeant Morris, and I did not see how I could rescue Quin, unless I knew what he had been arrested for. It was very hard to get any coherent account of what had happened from Molly. She spoke in short gasping sentences, and would not begin at the beginning of her story or keep her events in chronological order. However, I managed to find out that she and Quin had actually taken the hamper out of Patterson's scullery and carried it across the yard. There they waited, sitting on the hamper, I suppose, until the police who had arrested Tommy had disappeared. They tried to lift the hamper over the wall and failed. Quin, very gallantly, offered to go and get a ladder, Mahony's. It was while he was returning with the ladder that Sergeant Morris came on him and arrested him.

Patterson came back with his tumblers on a tray while I was still questioning Molly. He gave a start of surprise when he saw her. He must, I think, have expected to see her sooner or later, but he was startled by her appearance. Molly in my riding breeches was rather a curious sight. But she was much too excited to be embarrassed. She rushed at Patterson the moment he came in.

"Do go and save poor Quin from the police," she said. "They've caught him, and they're going to put him in prison."

"I really think you ought to, Patterson," I said. "He hasn't committed any crime. It isn't against the law to carry a ladder about, even in the middle of the night."

I fully expected to hear Patterson say that Poacher Quin is a rank Sinn Feiner, and deserves to be arrested, whether he has committed any crime or not. I dare say he would have said something like that in spite of the fact that Molly was standing in front of him with her hands clasped and a look of supplication in her face. But before he answered me there was an outburst of noise in the street, trampling of feet, voices raised, and some very profane language. Poacher Quin was evidently putting up a fight for liberty. Patterson set down his tray of glasses and went to the door.

"I'll put a stop to that row at all events," he said.

"And bring Quin back with you for a drink," I said, as he left the room. "You ought to remember that the whisky is really his, and it's rather hard if he doesn't get even a glass of it."

Patterson made no reply to this appeal. I might have followed him into the street and pressed Quin's claims on him, but my attention was attracted by Molly. She turned on Tommy in the fiercest way.

"Why didn't you go home at once, when I told you to?" she said. "If you had

everything would have been all right."

"You didn't tell me to go home," said Tommy.

Molly stamped her foot.

"I did," she said, "I put my head over the wall twice and signalled to you that you were to go home at once, because Quin and I had the hamper safe and didn't want you any more, because we'd lift it over the wall ourselves as soon as we'd got Mahony's ladder. I couldn't say it out loud on account of the police. But you ought to have understood."

"I didn't understand all that," said Tommy. "How could I when all you did was make faces at me?"

"Anyone with any intelligence would have understood," said Molly. "Look here!" she turned to me, "you'd have understood, wouldn't you, if you'd seen me signalling like this?"

She stood in front of me and began to nod and frown, occasionally waving her hand.

"I call that making faces," said Tommy.

"You'd have understood, wouldn't you?" said Molly to me.

I was saved from having to take a side in the debate, by Patterson's return. I was pleased to see that he brought Quin with him and had apparently got rid of Sergeant Morris.

"We'll all have a drink now," he said, genially. "I'd like Quin to taste this whisky. I've always heard he's a bit of a connoisseur."

"Any whisky that you and his Reverence might be drinking," said Quin, "would be good enough for me."

Patterson gave us each a tumbler. He winked at me as he poured out the whisky. He was evidently looking forward to seeing Quin's astonishment when he discovered what he was drinking.

Quin raised the tumbler half full of undiluted whisky, and held it at arm's length. Patterson and I watched him with interest. Quin bowed courteously to me.

"May the devil fly away with the roof of the house where you and I aren't welcome," he said.

Then after a brief glance at Molly, he turned towards Patterson.

"May you have the choice of all the girls in Ireland," he said, "when you're looking for a wife."

He drew the glass towards his mouth. Then he set it down abruptly on the table. He had not tasted the whisky. The smell of it told him what it was.

"Gosh!" he said.

But it was scarcely possible that Patterson could be offering him his own poteen to drink. He raised the glass again, sniffed critically, and then swallowed a mouthful of the spirit.

"Gosh!" he said again. "If any man, if his Reverence himself, if every bishop in the whole of Ireland had said that to me I'd have told him he was a liar."

He set the tumbler down, crossed the room, and took Patterson's hand. He shook it warmly.

"I always said you were a gentleman, Mr. Patterson," he said. "There was them that didn't agree with me, but I always said it. Didn't I, your Reverence?"

"Yes," I said. "I've heard you say that, Quin."

I did not think it necessary to add that I had also heard him say other, very different, things about Patterson.

"And it's a gentleman you are," said Quin. "But mind what I'm saying to you now." He sank his voice to a tone of solemn warning and held Patterson's hand firmly. "Mind what I'm saying now. If the Sinn Feiners was to catch you and me with that stuff," he nodded towards the bottle, "they'd have our blood. Them fellows is terrible down on the whisky. But," here his voice became more reassuring, "I'm not the only one that'll stand by you. There's the Flanagans, and there's more besides. We'll be a match for them in the latter end, so we will!"

CHAPTER XXI

I finish writing this account of the Inisheeny adventure three weeks after the night of the burglary.

Nothing really exciting has happened since then. Patterson called on me the evening after the Floyds left Carrigahooly. He formally renounced his belief that Poacher Quin is a dangerous revolutionary, and said he no longer thought that the Flanagans are engaged in storing arms for the use of our Republican army. Beyond that he would not go, though I pressed him to tell me how he likes his new allies. The situation greatly interests me. Up to the present the Sinn Fein, *de facto*, Government of Ireland has not taken any steps to put a stop to our trade in illicit whisky. But I expect soon to hear of the arrest of Patterson. The Inisheeny distillery will certainly not be allowed to go on with its manufacture, for we Irish are honourable men. We are at war with England, but we refuse to take an unfair advantage of our enemy by cutting off one of their supplies of revenue.

I want to know how Patterson means to act when he is arrested by the officers of the Irish Republic for robbing the English Treasury, and afterwards rescued by Poacher Quin and a party of Flanagans. But, though I tried till Tommy yawned and went to bed, I could not induce Patterson to argue out his position with me. He kept switching the conversation off to other subjects, and appeared totally uninterested in the really peculiar dilemma which faces him. Yet I should have supposed he would have appreciated the flavour of the dish which has been set before us. Is there any parallel to our case in the history of other revolutions; any instance in which a party of rebellion undertook to enforce the laws and secure the revenue of the older Government? Is there any instance of an alliance between the officers of the Government, and the habitual breakers of the law to defeat the good intentions of revolutionaries? These are just the sort of questions which Patterson, who is a student of history, used to like to discuss. But he left me that night without discussing them.

I have not seen him since. Two days later he went on leave. This morning I had a letter from him asking me to go up to Dublin, and there marry him to Molly Floyd. I suppose he has been thinking so much about her, that he has had no time to spare for the consideration of the problems which confront us in this country. I feel a little disappointed in him. Love-making, betrothals, and marriages are common things and have been taking place all over the world for centuries. Our position in Ireland is unique in its entanglement. If Patterson were a really intellectual man it would interest

him more than Molly does; though I admit and have always said that Molly is a very pretty and most attractive girl.

THE END

[The end of *Adventurers of the Night* by G. A. Birmingham]