

RED POCHER
THOMAS MACMANUS



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The Red Poocher



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" IF THIS ISN'T THE RAREST CUSTOMER IT HAS IVER BEEN ME. FORTUNE
TO FALL IN WITH AFORE!"
(See page 59)

The Red Poocher

BY

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"Through the Turf Smoke"

"In Chimney Corners"

Etc.

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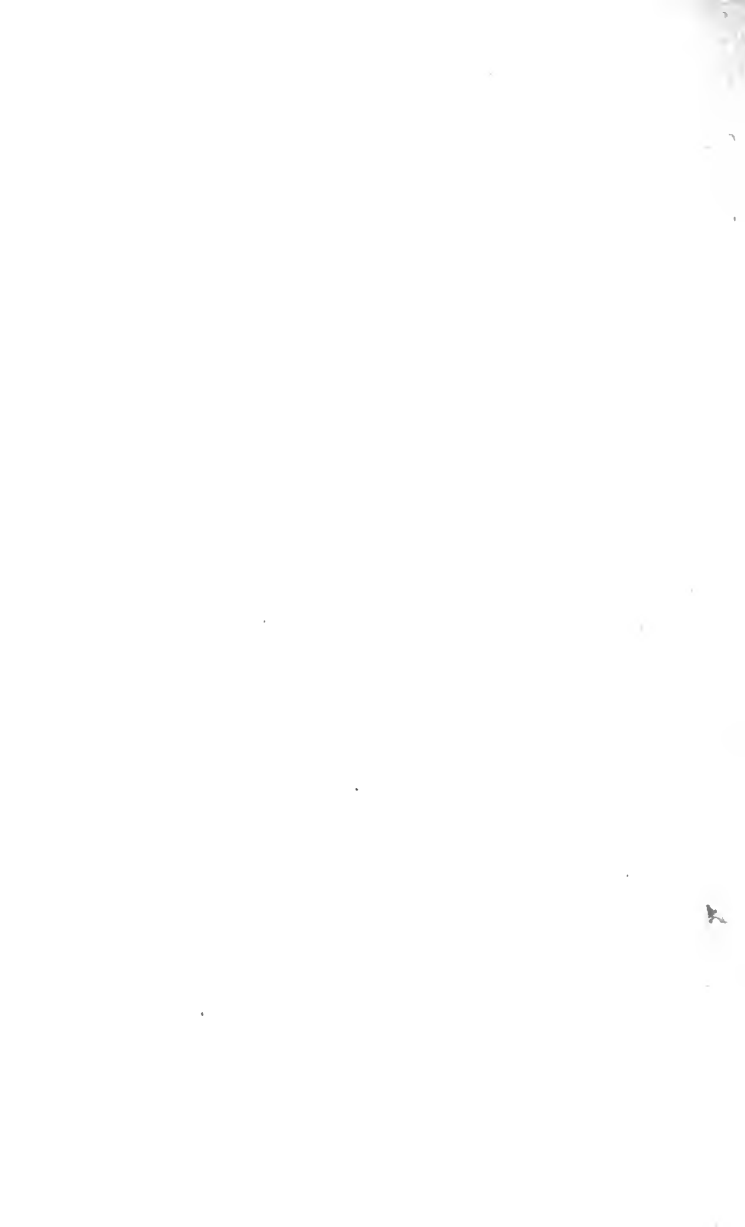
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WHY TÓMAS DUBH WALKED

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I

WHY TÓMAS DUBH WALKED

TÓMAS'S good woman reached to each of us a fine bowl of cream with an iron spoon in it of the size a hungry man likes.

“Musha, craythurs, it's starriv'd with the hunger yous must be. Fill the farlan's first out i' that pot, an' the minnit yous is done, I'll have yous brewed such a dhrap o' tay as 'll rouse the hearts in yous.”

Neither Tómas Dubh nor I needed much persuasion, other than that given by crying stomachs, to attack it with hearty good-will. Before the fire we sat,

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and we drew the pot between us, and, getting our legs about it, plunged in our spoons with small delay, ladling up the stirabout as right hungry men can, sousing it in the cream, and speeding it on again to our watering mouths; for when you've been on the hills from early morning till late at night, and eaten but a few mouthfuls of oat-bread and butter in the interim, what with the walking, the running, the spieling, the sliding, what with the whiff of the heather, and with the *feurgortach* (or hungry-grass) you must have tramped over, I'll warrant, tho you have been the most dismal dyspeptic was ever on a doctor's books, you'll bring back an appetite with an edge like the east wind. Tómas and I fetched back just such appetites, and very little else, for I was (putting it mildly) an indifferent shot, and tried Tómas's temper sorely.

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As Tómas had put it in anticipation, a fine pot of stirabout with a bowl of yellow cream proved "no mad dog to him" nor yet to me. Neither of us had time for a word. "Ivery time ye spaik it's a mouthful lost," was Tómas's maxim. We dug our ways through the pot from either side, till only the thinnest film separated our "claims," when Tómas rung his spoon in the empty bowl and said, "God be thankit!" on which I, too, feeling a sensation of satisfaction permeating the far-lands, threw my spoon to the bottom of the pot with a "Thanks be to God, and Amen!"

And now Ellen was pouring out for us two large bowls of tea that was thick and as dark as a blind window.

"Do ye like your tay sthrong, Jaimie?" she asked me.

"Well," I said, shaking my head doubtfully at the black flood she was pouring

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into the bowl, "my mother doesn't commonly make it *so* sthrong."

"An' there ye are now," she said. "That's how docthors differ. Tómas here wouldn't tell his name for tay if ye didn't make it as sthrong for him as the shafts of a cart."

"Why, I should think it a mortal bad plan to make a habit of takin' your tay like that, Tómas Dubh," I said.

"Tay," Tómas said oracularly, as he gazed at it with a blissful expression in his eye—"tay," he said, "is niver no good—an' I'd as soon ye'd give me so much dish-water to dhrink—if it's not made that a duck might walk on it."

I had grave doubts about this, but as Ellen had the bowls now creamed, and the piles of oat-bread and stack of butter at our elbows, I couldn't afford time to dispute it.

Tómas and I attacked the pile and the

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stack and the bowls of tea so bravely, and sustained the attack so spiritedly, that it was little wonder Ellen expressed the opinion that she “wouldn’t like to be the aitin’-house would do a big thrade with many such customers.” We didn’t stop to bandy compliments with her. And Tómas only passed two remarks during the demolition. He said, “Ma’am, if what your bread wants in hardness was borrowed from your butter, there’d be a big ’mendment on the two of them”; and later he said reflectively: “The back o’ my han’ an’ the sole o’ my fut to you, Meenavalla!” I gave him an inquisitive look, hereupon, while in the act of having what Tómas would call a good “shlug” out of my bowl; but Tómas was too intent upon his business to mind my look. When Tómas felt both hunger and thirst allayed, and that, over and above, he had taken in something for positive pleasure,

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he pushed his empty bowl from him, blessed him with all the fervor of a man satisfied with himself, Ellen, and the whole world, and winding up with another "God be thankit!" turned to the fire, drew out his short brown pipe, and began to fill it; and I, feeling within that blissful sensation which pervades the breast of one who hungered and has fed heartily, did in every particular likewise.

"What put me in mind of it," Tómas said, suddenly, from out of the reek of smoke the little brown pipe was raising, "was your firin'."

I blew a spy-hole through my own halo of smoke, and tried to see Tómas on the other side of the fire.

"Put ye in mind of what?"

"Meenavalla. An' the way of it was, your firin' put me in mind of the Red Poocher's."

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I didn't quite see the connection, but I asked: "An' what sort of shot was the Red Poocher?"

"The best from h— to Guinealand."

"Yes?" I said, modesty and vainglory struggling within me.

"An' then ye bein' the *worst* shot atween the same two *dis-thricts*, ye naturally put me in mind of him."

Now I did not, and do not, claim to be an expert marksman, but I confess the comparison, drawn as it was antithetically, hurt my feelings.

So I smoked on as silently as the asthmatic gully I pulled would permit. And Tómas, beyond the fire, proved himself my fellow—even his pipe noisily confessed the same weakness.

"Av coorse," Tómas said, after a couple of minutes, "ye know I was game-keeper at Meenavalla wanst!"

"I did."

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“Did ye know what fetched me out of it?”

“It must ’a been that the owner considered Tómas Dubh had too good a reputation, and was too honest, for to be wasted in Meenavalla.”

“I was five years in Meenavalla”—Tómas sat upon a stool so low that his knees stuck up on a level with his breast; he rested his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, and told his story to the fire—“five years, an’ contented in throth I was with it; for meself an’ Ellen was snug an’ warm, plenty to ait, an’ not much to do, an’ a fire all the winther would roast a quadhroopit. But the fourth saison there was an English gentleman from a place they call Hartfoord had the shootin’ i’ the place taken. But lo an’ behould ye! the first week in August the weather was mortal fine, an’ I was tempted to slip aff over to me moth-

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er's country to help her win the grain o' hay, for she was in the black need o' help—without a manbody nixt or near her wee place. Well, over to her to Cashelaragan, I slipt for the week, an' put as much of her wee grain o' hay through me fingers as I could do in the time; an' then back again. An' the first news met me slap in the face when I come back was, that I wasn't away the second night till the poochers was on the place, an' night an' nightly they had shot it for the remaindher o' the week!

“The curse o' the crows light on the same poochers, an' a hard bed to them! But when the English jintleman come, it's the poor shootin', Lord knows, he had; an' the sweetest of tempers wasn't his—small blame, indeed, to the man anondher the circumstances. He sayed he might as well have taken the elephant-shootin' as the grouse-shootin' of Meena-

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valla. He wanted to know was there e'er a chance of a loyon or a bear, or any other baste o' prey on the place, he might get the chance of a shot at. I, of coorse, toul' him there was no loy-ons in this part o' the wurrl'; an' I sayed there was no bear barrin' wan, an' if he shot that wan he was liable to be hung for shuicide—"

"Are ye sure ye sayed that, Tómas?"

"Sartint sure—but it was when I got the rascal's back turned. But I did tell him to his face wan thing. It was of a day he had the heart o' me bruck with the *chirmin'* an' *charmin'*, an' the blasphemamin' he carried on with. Siz I till him, 'Yer honor,' siz I, 'there's wan way, an' if we could work it we'd get frightsome big bags o' game, an' no mistake.' 'What way's that?' siz he, comin' till a stan' still. 'If ye can manage to put me on sich a way,' siz he, 'I'll make it well

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worth your while.' 'Well, I'm mortal thankful to your honor,' siz I, back again till him, 'an' the way's simple enough—if it only worked.' 'D—— ye,' siz he, lettin' a terrin' *ouns* (oath) out of him, 'an' out with it at wanst, till we hear what it's lake.' 'Well, it's this, yer honor,' siz I. 'If ye could somehow or other manage to fetch down a grouse with ivery growl ye give, an' a snipe with ivery curse, we'd have mighty full bags ere we'd be long on the hill—do ye see?'

"An' faith he did see it, an' it's some poor body's prayer I must 'a had about me at the time kept him from puttin' the contents of his gun intil me sowl. An' I then larnt what Peadhar Mor the tailyer (God rest him!) used often tell me—that a madman an' an Englishman is two shouldn't be joked with.

"Anyhow, this lad took himself off in a fortnight with a bigger load of sin (I'm

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thinkin') than snipes, an' he wrote a square patch of a complaint to Belfast, to Mистер McCran, the owner o' the place, an' Mr. McCran he give me the divil to ait over the business. He went within an ace of makin' me cut me stick; an' threatened that if iver he'd hear of a single brace of birds bein' pooched off the place again, I'd go, as sure as me name was Tómas.

“Well, glory be to goodness, when I come by a good thing I know it; an' small blame to me, I like to stick till it; so I sayed to meself, ‘Tómas Dubh,’ siz I, ‘plaise the Lord ye’ll sleep with wan eye open an’ the other niver closed for the saisons to come, an’ then ye’ll be as wide awake as who’s-the-other; an’ from this out, the poocher who puts salt on your tail ’ill be as cliver a man as yerself.’

“Well an’ good, the nixt saison come round, an’ an Englishman again tuk the

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shootin' of Meenavalla. He was a Mither Bullock (Lord save us! what on-christian names them English big bugs do have), an' he owned wan o' the gran-nest houses, I b'lieve, from head to fut of London sthreet. Well, howsomedivir, this Mither Bullock had took the shoot-in' this year, and when Mither McCran informed me of this, he toul' me also if there was as much as a mark of a poocher's heel found on all the place I would get laive to go thravellin' for me health."

"An' for your appetite, eh, Tómas?"

"On or about the twelfth of A'gust I gets a letther from Mither Bullock himself, to tell me he had another shootin' taken down the country in the neighborhood of Glenveigh, an' that himself an' a frien' he was fetchin' with him would spend a week on the Glenveigh mountain first, an' then they'd dhrive up through the Glenties way on his buggy,

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an' take the next week out of Meenavalla; an' for me to be prepared for them on or close afther the twentieth. An' he sayed it was toul' him the lan' had been pooched last year, till the shootin' of it wasn't worth the powdher, an' to remember that *he* wasn't goin' to stan' no sich nonsense; if there was a feather touched on the place he would shue me masher for all he was worth. 'Make your mind aisy, me boy,' siz I, when I read his letter, 'about that. The poocher who wings a bird on Meenavalla atween now an' the twentieth, 'ill be a conshumin'ly cliver fellow, who's in the habit o' gettin' up afore he goes to bed at all.' And very good care I had been takin' for the three weeks gone that no poocher would look at it across a march-ditch; an' better care still, if better could be, I was goin' to take that gun's iron (barrin' me own) wouldn't be levelled over it for the

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nixt eight days. For I was on it a' most day an' night, an' the tail of a poocher's coat niver wanst showed; an' I was determined it should be so till the Big Fella himself would step on the grass.

“It was just three evenin's afther the letther come that I was out as usual on the hill, an' I was havin' a couple of puffs at the grouse on me own account, when I noticed a thrap dhrivin' along the road below; an' half-an-hour afther, I sees Ellen on top o' the Skreg above the house, waiin' her shawl to me. ‘Surely,’ siz I to meself, ‘it's not the Bullock arrived?’ But when I reached Ellen, that same was the identical news she had for me. An' I'll not deny that I give a hearty good curse. ‘He seen me shoot-in', Ellen, as he come along the road, conshumin' till him!’ But I hurried down to the house. Wan jintleman was cool-in' the pony (a purty wan) up an' down

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the road; an' the other, who was my man, Ellen toul' me, was in the house. I put the boudest face I could on me, and marched in as undaunted as if I'd been only sayin' me prayers on the hill. But I knew be the scowl iv him I was in for it. 'Are you Gallagher?' siz he, quite short, an' without raichin' his han' to me. 'Yis, your honor,' siz I, removin' me hat, 'Tómas Dubh Gallagher—an' you're mighty welcome to these parts,' raichin' him me han', and givin' him a mortal sight warmer shake hands than, I seen, he wanted. 'Was them poochers I seen on the hill, Gallagher, as I come along?' siz he—tho mighty fine he knew who the poocher was at the same time. So, all things considered, I thought it best to tell the thruth, an' shame the divil. 'No, sir,' siz I, 'it was meself.' 'What!' siz he, 'have *you* turned poocher as well as presarver? Upon my word, a

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purty fellow you are! a purty gamekeeper! What did ye fetch down?' 'Nothin', please your honor,' siz I; for nothin' it was. 'Well, please goodness,' siz he, 'I'll not sleep in me bed the night till I report ye to your masher, an' I'm now givin' ye warnin' of it.' I pleaded with him as best I could, and showed him the outs an' ins of the thing, but I might as well have been spaikin' Spanish to pavin'-stones: he was bound to report me, an' report me he would; for it had always been his opinion, he sayed, that afther all the cry-out again' poochers, there was no poochers worse than the gamekeepers themselves—an' in the intherests of his brother-sportsmen all over the kingdom, he sayed, more nor in his own intherests, he'd have to report it. 'I see,' he says, 'ye got my letther,' tossin' it from him onto the table, for the letther had been lying in the windy from we got it; an' he

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had it in his han' when I come in. 'I wasn't to have come, as I sayed there, till the twentieth; but my sweetest curse upon all poochers—not forgettin' all gamekeepers—my sweetest curse on the whole assortment o' them, my Glenveigh place when I come on it was either pooched or gamekepted, or both, an' I wouldn't have got a hamper of birds off it in a month. I have promised a great number of presents of fowls to my frien's in England—promised to have them with them in the first week, an' it's lookin' purty like as if my promise is goin' to be bruck for the first time in me life—an' all through poochers an' gamekeepers, d—n them! Be ready,' siz he, afther he had foamed an' fumed up an' down the house, an' cursed curses that I wondhered didn't burn a hole in the roof gettin' out—'be ready,' siz he, 'afore the screek o' day the morra mornin', an' be out with

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us till I see what we can find in the nixt couple o' days. In the manetime, go out an' house that pony, an' give him the best care Meenavalla can afford; your wife 'ill make a little shake-down for ourselves, an' give us a bite of anything aitable, for our bellies is biddin' our backs good-morra with the fair dint o' the hunger.'

"The first sthray light wasn't on the hill in the mornin' till the three of us was there afore it, an' us bangin' away for all we were worth. The two jintlemen got intil betther humor when they found how plentiful the birds was, an' they fetchin' them down like hailstones. But, behold ye, I used always feel more or less pride in meself as bein' a purty dandy shot, but I can tell ye them two jintlemen very soon knocked the consait out o' me; the second jintleman was a pleasure to see shootin'; but to see the

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Big Fella himself puffin' powdher was a sight for sore eyes. That man, sir, could kill round a corner. Goin' on forty years, now, I've been handlin' a gun, an' have come in the way of a good many sportsmen that knew what end of the gun the shot come out of as well as who's-the-nixt; but that man's aigual or anything comin' within an ass's roar of it I nivr yet did meet.

“ Anyhow, to make a long story short, we dhropped the birds so fast—or, I should say, *he* dhropped them so fast, for tho we lowered a smart number enough for or'nary Christians, it was nothin' at all in comparishment with what he did—so fast did they dhrop that again' the third night he had the place purty lonesome enough of game. He had got all nicely hampered an' packed off, an' he started, himself an' his companion, off in their buggy nixt mornin', sayin' he'd have

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another thry at Glenveigh again, an' be back to Meenavalla wanst more in somewhat betther nor a week's time. Tho both of them graised me fist like jintlemen afore they went, he didn't seem to relent a bit about the report to Mистер McCran—it was his solemn duty, he sayed, an' he couldn't overlook it.

“It was only the second evenin' afther, I was comin' down aff the hill, an' just as I had got onto the road, an' I carryin', hung over me gun, a brace of snipe, I managed, by good managementship, to scrape up, when roun' the bend o' the road, afore I could say 'God bliss me!' comes a thrap tearin', with two jintlemen on it. 'Bad luck to yez!' siz I, 'an' God forgive me for cursin',' dhroppin', at the same time, both gun and birds, for I was sartint sure it was the chaps right back on me. But, in another minute, I seen I was mistaken, for naither o' them had

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the red whiskers o' my man: so I lifted me belongings, an' went on whistlin'. When the thrap overtuk me, it pulls up, an' without as much as Good-morra, Good-evenin', or 'The devil take ye,' the biggest-lookin' bug o' the two snaps me up with, 'How did you get them birds, me man?'

" 'By goin' for them,' siz I. I knew it was an ondaicent way to answer a sthranger, but the boul'ness of him went again' me grain. 'Who are you, sir?' was the next imperence he outs with. 'I'm a son o' me mother's,' siz I, 'an' maybe ye know me betther now.' 'Maybe,' says he, 'ye'll be so kind as to tell me where Black Thomas Gallagher, the gamekeeper, lives in these parts.' 'Sarra be aff me,' siz I to meself, 'what's this, or who is he this, I've been saucin'?' 'Yis,' I siz to him, 'I think I can show ye that, bekase I'm the identical man himself.'

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'Oh, indeed,' siz he, pullin' himself together, 'are ye, indeed? I didn't think when I took Meenavalla for the saison that I had such a witty gamekeeper intil the bargain. I'm a lucky man, throth,' siz he, an' his naybour laughed hearty. I turned square on the road, an' I looks at him. 'Ye're anondher a great mistake,' siz I; 'the shootin' o' this place has been taken by Mистер Bullock of London.' 'Exactly,' siz he, 'Mистер Bullock of London (which is me) has got the privilege of *payin'* for the shootin'; and his gamekeeper, by all signs, is to get the fun an' the snipes.' 'Come, now,' siz I, 'none o' your thricks upon thravellers. Mистер Bullock o' London was here the beginnin' o' the week, an' shot the lan' as clean as the day it was cree-aited, an' there's not a jintleman from wan end to the other of London sthreet but maybe is at the present spaikin' sinkin' his tooth in

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wan o' the grouse, an' wishin' to the Lord he was ten times hungrier.'

"But *mo bhron!* the face of that jintleman (an' his naybour, too) dhrew on himself, when I sayed this, was somethin' frightsome to behould; an' may I niver die in sin if the gun didn't shake in me han'. He thundered out of him sich an oath as would be a godsend to a quarryman for splittin' rocks, an'——

"Ellen, *a chara,*" said Tómas, "I misdoubt me this fire would be out long ago if ye hadn't the doore boulted. Throw a grain iv thurf an' another lump of fir on it, *a thaisge.*"

"Well, Tómas?"

"Well, Jaimie?"

"I want to hear it out. *Was* that Bullock?"

"Conshumin' till him, iv coorse it was."

"An' him shot the place? The red fellow?"

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“ Was the Red Poocher, av course, who was afther sthrippin’ Bullock’s Glenveigh shootin’ as bare as a bald head just afore Bullock come on it.”

“ An’ then what happened to you, Tómas?”

“ I walked—an’ I’m here now.”

MISTHER KILGAR OF
ATHLONE

II

MISTHER KILGAR OF ATHLONE

TÓMAS and I were lying on the brow of Crogh-na-gart-free after punishing a substantial lunch of well-buttered oat-bread, and were gazing on the valley of the Ainey-beg away far below, and following with our eye its pleasant sauntering till it went out and lost itself in Donegal Bay. The day was one of the pleasantest that dawned over Donegal that season. The soft breath that came up from the ocean tempered to us the rays of the high-riding sun. A restful feeling possessed us, and a meditative mood. We had been more than moderately successful that morning; three

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hares and several braces of birds stretched their dead lengths by our side. We had lit our pipes, and up through the clear thin air Tómas and I were sending such smoke wreaths as might well rivet the attention of any still-hunting peelers within two leagues' distance, suggesting to them a still-house in full swing.

“Tómas,” I said suddenly, “ye niver heerd anything whatsomivir of the Red Poocher again?”

Tómas slowly turned his red eyes on me, and fixed me for a minute with quiet disdain. Then he lifted his gaze off me, and contemplated the Glen Ainey again. I knew well there was much at the back of that look. Except at rare times Tómas was an uncommunicative animal, and to some people always uncommunicative. I, however, from careful study of his moods, had got the knack of temporarily unlocking his mental stores, the which

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could only be effected, too, by seizing the psychological moment.

“Tómas,” I said again, with a ring of determined persistence, “ye niver heerd nothin’ more of the Red Poocher?”

“That’s the second time ye’ve give me that slice of information. Sure I’m not deaf.”

“Well, I say, *did* ye iver hear anything of him afther he pooched Meenavalla and got you walked out iv yer situation?”

“Oh! Then it’s only lookin’ for news ye are? I thought it was givin’ news.”

“Ye’re as short, Tómas, as a hare’s scut.”

“Thanky, thanky. Fair exchange is no robbery—you give me abuse, an’ I give you a story. If a man wants to ax a thing, I like him to ax it sthraight out. Come! shouldher yer gun,” said Tómas, rising, “an’ take houl’ of them hares. It’s time we wirr thrampin’.”

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I had, after all, trifled with the golden moment, and it was gone. There was nothing for it now but to do as I was directed.

Altho Tómas and I weren't so successful in starting game during the remainder of the day as we had been in the morning, the whole day's sport would have averaged well, even if we had not (as fortunately was the case) drawn a *broc* ere we left the hills. Tómas had with him his terrier Grip, and from a huddled heap of rocks lying on the narrow passage of land between Loch Nam-breac-buidhe and Loch Na-carriga, Grip drew a *broc*. When both of them came tumbling out of the hole they were locked in each other's hold. They fought fiercely and furiously, howled and tore, tumbled and rolled—Grip uppermost now, the *broc* again; and anon both gained purchase with their hind legs on the ground, to be

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in another moment swirling and whirling over and over each other. The *broc* showed gallant fight, and when, after twenty minutes' wicked work, he succumbed, poor Grip limped from him with as bloody, tattered, battered, and disreputable a look as ever well-mauled corner boy bore out of a street row. Tómas's heart was proud for Grip's pluck, and he smiled benignantly as he patted her on the back, and tried to smooth down her much-tossed long locks. And when he reached home he would not sit down to supper till he had washed and dressed Grip's wounds—for she had as many as if she had been through Napoleon's wars—and carefully combed her, fed her, and bedded her by the hearth. When we had finished supper Grip was stretched asleep, and, as any old soldier might, was evidently in dreams fighting her battle over again, for she occasionally emitted

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vicious little snarls and yelps that probably marked crucial moments in the fight.

Tómas smiled a smile of inward satisfaction, turning a satisfied look upon her at each of these manifestations of the indomitable little spirit within her. But not so Ellen. Ellen gave vent to her dissatisfaction, abusing Tómas in good set terms as an “onnatural Christian.”

“How dar’ ye, Tómas,” she said, “go for to stan’ by an’ see the poor dog that knew no betther ill-usin’ itself an’ getting’ ill-used in that shape! How dar’ ye, Tómas!”

Tómas was now smoking and calmly contemplating the fire. Tómas had a maxim which he frequently repeated to me, and on which he now (as always) acted—“When a woman starts in to aise her mind on ye, don’t spaik back.”

“How dar’ ye, I say, Tómas!”

“Yis,” said Tómas, addressing the fire,

MISTHER KILGAR OF ATHLONE

apparently, "I did hear tell of him again—an' again."

I was a bit mystified; Ellen quite lost the thread of her abuse for the moment.

"What is the *amadan* bletherin' about?" she queried.

"Ah!" said I; "is it the Red Poocher, Tómas?"

"Yis, it's the Red Poocher, Tómas," he said, querulously mimicking my tone. "Wasn't it him ye axed me about?"

"Oh yis, oh yis!" I said, with anticipative pleasure, and hitched forward my stool.

Ellen looked disdainfully from one to the other of us.

"Och, to the dickens with the pair o' yez an' the Red Poocher—all in a bunch!"

Said Tómas:

"When Misther McCran sent me pack-in' from Meenavalla he engaged a new

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gamekeeper, wan Pether Magroarty, from the head of the Aineymore—Peadhar Kittagh he was known be, bekase iv bein' left-handed. Mither McCran he wrote down Peadhar Kittagh a letther as big as a bed-sheet full of instruitions an' diractions, warnin's an' thraits, an' the beginnin', endin', an' middle iv the letther was Red Poocher, Red Poocher, Red Poocher. An' Peadhar Kittagh he wrote McCran back that he'd be a gray Poocher when he'd take *him* in. He toul' him he might sleep with an aisy conscience when he'd engaged Peadhar Kittagh for his gamekeeper; an' for the time to come Meenavalla would be less trouble to him than his own kail-garden.

“Too sure, too loose. For ten months afther a corbie couldn't fly over Meenavalla that Peadhar Kittagh wouldn't come to his door an' curse it; an' there wasn't

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as much as the tail of a yalla-yorlin' lost off the lan'.

“Well an' good. A gentleman from Oxfoord, in England, wan Mither Hedger, took the shootin' this year; an' the evenin' he come on the groun' me boul' Peadhar wouldn't let him say God bliss ye! till he started puttin' him through his catechism to prove that he was himself an' no other. Mither Hedger was inclined to be purty mad with his game-keeper showin' so much cheek; but when Peadhar explained matthers till him he seen through it, an' proved to Peadhar's satisfaction that he was himself, an' thanked Peadhar, too, right heartily for bein' so cah'tious.

“ ‘Has there been any poochin' on the lan' for so far? Tell the truth, Magroarty,' siz he.

“ ‘Not the limb of a lark lost, yer honor,' siz Peadhar.

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“ ‘Then, plaise Providence,’ siz he, ‘it’ll be so till I clane the lan’ meself. Has there been any word at all, at all, of the Red Poocher showin’ up in the neighborhood?’ siz he.

“ ‘The Red Poocher,’ says Peadhar, ‘is takin’ good care to keep the brea’th iv the County Donegal atween him an’ us. I have heerd tell, no later ago than We’n’sday, that he’s at work up the Innishowen way, forty mile from here.’

“ ‘An’,” says Hedger, ‘I judge the same lad’s wisdom be the number iv miles he keeps off me. I’m a man, Magroarty,’ siz he, ‘that stan’s no nonsense.’

“ ‘An’, not intendin’ no disrespect,’ siz Peadhar, ‘you an’ I ir frien’s, so.’

“ But, behoul’ ye, Hedger he hadn’t got right saited himself when in to them steps Tuathal McHugh, the Binbane gamekeeper, an’ he as noisy as a whole duck-house, cryin’ out that the Red

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Poocher was on his hill afore br'ak o' day that very mornin'!

“He was an Irishman from Athlone, a Mither Kilgar, who had taken the Binbane shootin'. He had arrived just the night afore, Tuathal explained, an' takin' a sthroll up the hill afore brekwist with only himself an' his gun, he was speedily back with the word to Tuathal that there wirr two scoundhrils roun' the elbow iv the hill pepperin' away. They run lake the Roe wather the first gleek of him they caught, but tho he was purty far off he could make out that the biggest rascal iv the two had hair an' whiskers as red as blazes. They could scarcely fetch themselves to credit Tuathal, only Mither Kilgar himself come steppin' in at this with his gun upon his shoulder; an',

“‘Upon my word,’ siz he, when he'd inthroduced himself to Mither Hedger — ‘upon my word,’ siz he, ‘I'm sorry to

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say Tuathal only tells ye God's thruth. An' be all marks an' tokens, too, as far as I can gather,' siz he, 'I'm more than sartint it's no other nor the Red Poocher an' his collaigue. But, forewarned is forearmed. I'm prepared for him now; an' I'm blest if he comes on my shootin' again, an' I can get within range iv 'im, I'll give him as much lead as 'ill go good ways on makin' a coffin for 'im. May the divil take 'im, body an' bones!'

“ ‘Amen!’ siz Tuathal McHugh.

“ ‘I didn't know, Mither Hedger,' siz Kilgar, 'that you'd arrived yerself; but McHugh here, an' meself, an' me own man, wirr on the hill all day, an' as we wirr over in the neighborhood iv your shootin', I thought it best,' siz he, 'to dhrop in here an' give Magroarty warnin' that the bla'guard's about, so as to put him on his keepin'.'

“ ‘Mighty good iv ye, an' I'm iver so

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much obligated to ye, I'm sure,' siz Hedger, 'for yer thought. We wirr just dis-coorsin' on the very same subject iv the Red Poocher, an' Magroarty was makin' my min' aisy regardin' 'im'—informin' me that he was playin' himself in the exthreme end iv the county, when your gamekeeper here come in with the news that he was nearer us nor we bargined for. Well, all I say,' siz Hedger, siz he, 'is, he'd betther thtravel round my moor any time the divil puts it in his head to thtravel across it, or I'm grievously afeerd I'll be apt to forget, on sight iv 'im, that there's no special allowance for shootin' poochers in me game license—a short-comin' that should be rimedied.'

“ ‘By my faith,' siz Kilgar, ‘an' if he comes on me, he'll be apt to go off me again in betther style nor he's used to—with four men carryin' 'im, an' the doore supplied at me own expense, gratis.’

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“ ‘Anyhow,’ siz Kilgar, ‘we’ll prove ourselves purty big *amadans*, an’ laugh-in’-stocks for the counthry, if we let him do us. So far as I hear, he would do the divil himself to his teeth, an’ pooch hell with his tongue in his cheek; so we’ll have to keep a watch night an’ day. For the comin’ week he’ll have moonlight, an’ it ’ll be ojus the desthruccion he’ll make among the birds. We’ll have to work into aich other’s han’s, Mither Hedger,’ siz he, ‘an’ put a watch on the moors both be night an’ day. The wan watch ’ill do for both our grounds.’

“Very well. Kilgar arranged—as he had himself, his man, an’ his gamekeeper, an’ Mither Hedger himself, his own man, an’ his gamekeeper—he arranged that it would be mighty pleasant for them to work together in means; Mither Hedger to come over for the nixt day, an’ both iv them shoot Kilgar’s hills; an’

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then Kilgar go over with Hedger the day afther an' shoot Hedger's moor. It was agreed to that Hedger's own man was to do senthry-go on the hills every night, while Kilgar, as a set-off again' that, give his man an' his pony an' thrap to carry the hampers aich day to the railway station at Sthranorlar, a matther iv twinty mile.

“This Kilgar he was a long-headed chap, an' no manner iv doubt, an' he so arranged that a cat couldn't wash her whiskers on the two lan's, from the wan en' iv them to the other, without the whole party knowin' it afore her mouth was closed again; an' Hedger himself give in that if the Red Poocher could outwit Kilgar he'd deserve the heighth iv credit for it, an' he himself would be the first to give him it, he didn't care if it was his own lan' was done, an' not so much as a tail left on it.

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“ ‘This chat,’ siz Kilgar, siz he, ‘about poochers an’ poochin’, an’ the cliverness iv poochers, is, the wan half iv it, blamed humbug, an’ the t’other half lies. Iv coorse I’ll admit that if a man’s inclined to pooch, an’ he finds he has to dail with an ediot or an ass who’ll let ’im pooch, he *will* pooch, an’ small blame to ’im; he’d show himself as big an ass as the man he had to dail with if he didn’t pooch. This county iv Donegal, too, has ’arned itself the dickens’ own name as a poochin’ county. But—an’ it’s with all due respect I say it, Mither Hedger—it’s the know-nothin’ *amadans* of Englishmen who take the shootin’s here that is the cause iv all the poochin’.

“ ‘I agree with ye there,’ siz Hedger. ‘I heartily agree with ye there. That same has ever been me own opinion. Every cock can crow on its own du’ghill. When my counthrymen’s at home they

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think themselves fit to make fools iv the wurrl' an' its wife; but I've seen few iv them put their fut on an Irish moor that a chile couldn't bewildher them at wanst, an' laugh in its sleeve at them. I've seen them time an' again pay out gowpenfuls iv money for a moor, an' then poochers that was branded as blockheads by all that knew them, step in, an' undher their very noses wipe the moor as clane as an emp'y. male-kist; the men that paid for it congratulatin' themselves that the knaves hadn't thricked them into carryin' the bags for them. Such men, Mither Kilgar, disarve to be humbugged an' chaited—an' may they long be so, say I, till they l'arn to fetch a grain or two more common-sense an' a poun' or two less self-consait with them, when they label their portmantieys "Irelan.'" That's what I say,' siz Hedger.

" 'An' there ye say right,' siz Kilgar.

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‘Now I’ve been rentin’ moors an shootin’ moors as long as I have—an’ I’m sartint I’ve done so for a good score iv seasons—an’ I can say with cool confidence that till yistherday mornin’ a poocher niver scathered a feather on a shootin’ belongin’ to me yet. Bekase why, they knew their man; they knew, in the first place, it wasn’t an Englishman they had to dail with; an’ they knew, in the nixt place, that it was ME—ME; there isn’t a poocher from en’ to win’ iv Irelan’ but knows Kilgar.’

“‘Ha! ha!’ siz Hedger, siz he, ‘I think the divil himself when he was a hayro wouldn’t venture to pooch on your pre-sarves.’

“‘Well, at laist,’ siz Kilgar, ‘he didn’t; that’s why there’s a divil still.’

“‘Ha! ha! ha!’ siz Hedger, siz he. ‘I’m thinkin’ the Red Poocher is pros-

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pectin' for a new huntin'-groun', now he finds you in these parts.'

"'I'm thinkin',' siz Kilgar, 'he is. An' throth an' if he had waited another five minutes on me yistherday mornin', I'd 'a' sent him to a new huntin'-groun' be a mortal fast express, with his fare paid.'

"An right enough, the Red Poocher did seem purty slow about showin' up either on Meenavalla or on Binbane—Kilgar's place. Kilgar an' Hedger, with Peadhar Kittagh an' Tuathal McHugh, was out on the two places day about. It was lovely weather—just much like the sort me an' you had the day—an' the gintlemen did enjoy themselves, without no manner i' doubt. For the game was purty plenty, an they tumbled them at the rate of a shower i' hail, an' packed an' sent off well-filled hampers be the dozen to their frien's in all corners i' the king-

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dom, Kilgar's man, Thady, as he was called, bein' kept as busy as a nailer thrinnlin' [trundling] them off away to Sthranorlar, day an' daily. Hedger, he was in the very best i' good-humor, an' Kilgar was noways behind. They shot both i' them lake sodgers all day, an' dhrunk lake beggars half i' the night; for Peadhar Kittagh was as fine a han' at runnin' a still as e'er another in the parish; an' he'd as soon think iv laivin' his house without a dhrap i' *dew* as without holy wather. Then when the two gintlemen would get hearty at the potteen it was as good as a play, I'm toul', to hear them cursin' the Red Poocher, an' makin' their brags what *they'd* do if he'd dar' wipe his boots on *their* heather, an' laughin' at the numskulls that let him play his pranks on them, aich i' them thryin' to outdo the other in their defiance iv the Red Poocher, the wurrl', an' the divil.

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Then when Kilgar, somewhere afore mornin', would take it in his head to go home with Tuathal an' get an hour's sleep, Hedger he'd laive him up the moor; an' when the two would part they'd continue firin' salutes afther wan another till they'd get out iv hearin'. They had the whole counthry-side in a tarrible state iv alarm for the week these doin's lasted; people wirr afeerd to go to bed at night, for they couldn't tell what the norra damage these fel-las with their firearms would take it into their cracked noddles to do some night they'd have a worse fit on than usual; an' no daicent man knew, goin' to bed in the heighth iv health, but he'd fin' himself risin' a corp in the mornin'.

“A week, I sayed, these doin's lasted, an' then, like a capsized car, come to a middlin' sudden stop. An' it was this

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way: On Sunday night Peadhar put the potteen on the boord for them as usual, an' afther sayin' the litany on the Red Poocher they sung song an' song about, till a couple iv hours afore sunrise, when they had the usual noisy partin' on the hill, an' Hedger he returned to have a wee wink iv sleep, an' be over to Binbane brave an' early for another big day's shootin': on Sathurday they had been shootin' Meenavalla, so Monday was due to the other. In the mornin', then, Peadhar Kittagh managed, by manes iv plenty i' good diggin' in the ribs, to get the Englishman up betimes an' feed him, when the both i' them shouldhered their guns an' made thracks for their neighbor, laivin' Hedger's man, who'd been, iv coorse, doin' senthry-go all night on the moor an' the hill, in bed an' snorin' lake five carters.

“They expected to meet Kilgar an’

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Tuathal on the hill; but there wasn't any sign iv them; so Hedger an' Peadhar Kittagh headed on down to'rst Tuathal's.

“‘Be mae faith,’ siz Hedger, ‘if, as you say, I slep’ as heavy as a hog this mornin’, Kilgar must ‘a’ slep ‘lake an elephant. Ay, there’s the pair i’ them now,’ siz he, ‘without the house. Whistle on them an’ see what the divil’s keepin’ them.’ So Peadhar whistled.

“‘That’s Tuathal,’ siz Peadhar; ‘but Kilgar hasn’t shown out yet. That other’s some sthranger or other.’

“Hedger an’ Peadhar started a couple i’ birds here, had a bang at them, an’ fetched down wan. Then they thripped it down to the house.

“‘Mae frien’,’ siz the sthrane man was along with Tuathal, steppin’ forrid, ‘pardon mae inquirin’ yer name.’

“‘My name,’ siz he, ‘is Hedger—Mis-

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ther Hedger iv Oxfoord, England. You're a frien' to Kilgar, I suppose? What the divil's the raison he isn't out afore this?'

"'Yis, I'm a frien' iv Kilgar's—a very particular frien', in fact. Misther Kilgar 'ill appear to ye in another minnit. You're a very pretty shot, Misther Hedger, an' that's a fine bird neatly tumbled. Might I ax if ye have knocked over many more of them on this hill, Misther Hedger?'

"'Why, yis,' siz Hedger. 'I'm not a man noways given to braggin', but I'll say that if any other man in Englan', Irelan', Scotlan', or Donegal would engage to dhrop as many birds on this hill as I've done in the four days I've been on it with Kilgar, I'd—I'd just have an itch to see that man—Kilgar himself only excepted. I do admit that Kilgar bates me—but then Kilgar bates the divil him-

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self; the divil himself when he was a dhragoon couldn't shoot with Mистер Kilgar iv Athlone. That's admitted, an' can't be denied.'

“‘Indeed? Mистер Kilgar invited ye help him shoot the hill, I suppose?’

“‘Ay. Ye see it's this way: There's a scoundhril iv a fella goin' about here—an' unhung too, I'm sorry to say—that they call the Red Poocher. He was startin' in with his thricks upon sthrangers when I come here, an' I put about the size iv a naggin iv shot into him wan evenin' an' passed him on from me moor—Meenavalla. He come this way, an' Kilgar, nowadays loth to help the lame dog over the stile, give him another fistful or two iv the same medicine, an' sent him further. On the sthren'th iv this we sthruck up an acquaintance, an' shot our lan's day about, formin' an alliance that has sthruck terror to the hearts of all

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poochers, an' kep' them as mute mice in a male-bag.'

"'Railly?' siz the sthranger, in a very sleekit, quiet way. 'Then I'm mortal glad to l'arn it. I am mighty intherested meself in the suppression iv poochers an' poochin'.'

"'Right ye are, oul' chap. Give us yer han' on it,' siz Hedger, reachin' for the fella's fist.

"'Aisy, aisy,' siz the fella, dhrawin' back. 'Mortal much intherested, I say, in the suppression iv poochers and poochin', an' that's why it'll give me shupreme pleasure to—with all the expedition I can—present you, Misther Hedger iv Oxfoord, England, with a writ for a very han'some figure i' damages, be raison iv yerself an' yer sarvint, in conjunction with another pair iv notorious poochers—wan iv them popularly known as the Red Poocher—shootin' my Binbane *take*

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for four days, an' killin', slayin', and other-wise desthroyin' the grouse, snipe, an' hares thereon, an' other game. *My* name is Mither Kilgar—Mither Augustus Kilgar, iv Athlone, solicitor. An', furthermore, Mither Hedger iv Oxfoord, Englan', ' siz he, still in the politest manner imaginable, 'I may mention for yer gratification that if yer English frien's don't die till they taste some iv the many hampers iv game you've been thrinnlin' off to them from Meenavalla, they're likely to live to a very ripe oul' age. It's a sort of consolation to me to know that if the Red Poocher got yer help to pooch me, he likeways took the loan iv ye to help pooch yerself.

“‘As to the criminal action ye've left yerself open to, Mither Hedger iv Oxfoord, England, I'll lay that entirely atween yerself an' the police.’

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“Faith, poor Grip’s ’wakened again, an’ as fresh as a May flower. Ellen, *a theagair*, Grip would die in the dumps if I didn’t let him toss a *broc* now an’ again for sport.”

MISTHER McCRAN OF BEL-
FAST



III

MISTHER McCRAN OF BEL- FAST

Now it is not to be supposed that Tómas Dubh and I were poaching. Tómas held the threefold office of herd, steward, and gamekeeper of the Sruaill hills.

For lack of cover, these were bad grouse hills, so that Mr. Cusack, the Dublin gentleman to whom they belonged, could not get the shooting of them rented. Some years he came down and shot them himself, some years his sons came down and spent their holidays on them, and again, some years he wrote to Tómas to shoot them for him.

The last was the case on this particu-

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lar year; and Tómas very kindly invited me to fetch over my gun and join him.

Tómas and I, though we lived a good ten miles apart, were next-door neighbors; for whilst Tómas occupied the last house up the southern face of the Croagh Gorm, I occupied the first house down the northern slope. Our sheep-runs, then, joined half-way over the hills; and up there among the skies we frequently met when going our daily round to gather in our sheep, and treated each other to a smoke, the gossip of our respective parishes, and the marks and tokens of strayed sheep.

Tómas having good-naturedly asked me to join him, I took ten days to myself, handing over charge of my flock to Maeve. It was not the first or the twentieth time she had ranged the hills to count and gather the sheep. She knew every neuk on them as well as the lark

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that sang his life away amongst them, and she could scour them like a swallow.

Tómas and I had had for a week the most delightful weather. But early one morning as we climbed the hill, he directed my attention to Croghan-na-raidh, away in the west, and to the little cloud that sat upon it.

“A nightcap on Croghan-na-raidh,” said Tómas; “the weather ’ll br’ak on us the day, as sure as gun’s iron.”

And he was right, too. The weather did break on us. But he had wisely provided that we should not be far from home. He had not, however, calculated upon a mist. And in the mountains that unwelcome visitor has a method of evading all calculations.

We got lost in the mist—hopelessly, as at first it seemed to me. But, after several hours of despair, a running stream

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was eventually our salvation. It led us off the mountains—but where we knew not. When we reached a cabin that neither of us, in all our wanderings (so it seemed to us) had ever before beheld, and when going in we found Ellen house-keeping in it, our senses—as is ever the case with men who have got lost in a mist—would not be by her convinced that this was Tómas's own cabin which both of us had quitted that morning.

Ellen felt certain that we were under fairy influence. So she made us join her in a Rosary. And then she served us with a good supper.

Neither Tómas nor I felt that there was any illusion whatever about the supper, and it reconciled us to the curious state of things that seemed to exist. We confessed that the *sidhe* of the mist had got possession of us; and, tho through Ellen's prayers we had got back without

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bodily mishap, our senses in part lingered still behind.

We had known many, many cases of unfortunate people upon the hills having been taken away with the fairies before.

And we now knew that by the next morning we should find ourselves as we had been.*

“In throth,” said Tómas, as our chat brightened and lightened, “we wirr in purty near as bad a plight as Misther McCran the time he believed he wasn’t himself, but another.”

“Misther McCran? That’s not the Misther——”

“Ay, but it’s jist the Misther McCran that owned Meenavalla.”

*I do not know if it is necessary to tell that when one loses one’s self in a mist or in the night, he will not, on finding them, recognize fields, places, houses, that were perfectly familiar to him. And if, at discovery of these objects, he has been entertaining the idea that he is amongst other scenes, illusion has still stronger hold of him.

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“What! Ye don’t mane to say the fairies tuk him away?”

“No, but the Red Poocher did.”

“Oh, the Red Poocher? Tómas, *a mhic*——”

“Yis, I’m just go’n’ to reh’arse it for ye. If ye have only the good manners to offer me a shough i’ that pipe.”

“Beg pardon, Tómas,” and I wiped the stem on my coat sleeve and passed the pipe over to him.

He nodded acknowledgment.

“Well, ye see, the Red Poocher had pooched Meenavalla, as I reh’arsed to ye afore, for three years runnin’. Well, Meenavalla then begun to get such a bad name, seein’ the red scoundhril was so fond iv it, that sportsmen got shy iv it. The men that had been rentin’ it not only lost their game—an’ that was bad enough—but they foun’ that they wirr made a laughin’-stock iv, intil the bargain.

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So the next year afther Hedger iv Oxfoord was so completely an' shamefully thricked the sorra man could McCran get to take the Meenavalla shootin' if he was to bestow it to them. It lay, then, that year without a sportsman levellin' a gun on it, barrin' oul' Micky Murrin. Micky Murrin was the new gamekeeper McCran had got, all the way from Ards; for poor Peadhar Kittagh, like meself, got his notice to quit immaidiatly the news reached him iv the Red Poocher's doin' Peadhar an' Hedger. Micky he come to him with great comme'dations entirely for bein' a cliver fella out an' out that no poocher could outwit. Well, Micky was the only Christian scattered shot on the moor that year. Sthrange to say, the Red Poocher niver showed his nose on it atween June an' Janiary. Both Micky Murrin an' Misther McCran thought this was all owin' to Micky's

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own good managementship; but then ye'd get others to say—meself for wan—that the Red Poocher wouldn't waste his time walkin' over both Micky Murrin an' Micky Murrin's moor when there wasn't a rich gintleman in quistion that he'd have the pleasure iv makin' a hare iv."

"Which, Tómas, is my opinion likewise."

"But, be that as it may, the Red Poocher scoured the Gweedore counthry that saison, an' left Meenavalla to Micky an' paice. Nixt saison it was the self-same story. No sportsman tuk it, the Red Poocher didn't throuble it, an' Micky Murrin shot it.

"Well an' good; it lucked as if Mither McCran was niver goin' to get Meenavalla rented more. So on the followin' saison he says: 'Bad luck saize the Red Poocher! I'll go down an' shoot it meself.' An' down, accordin'ly, he sits,

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an' sen's Micky Murrin a letter to that effect, tellin' him about the date he'd be likely to arrive, an' givin' him full purtiklers an' diractions regardin' the preparations he was to make.

"Micky then laid out his accounts for to be prepared for his masther. An' of a mornin' about the time mentioned in the letter down the road Micky sees a Glenties car comin', with wan solitary man on it besides the dhriver, an' hauls up at the doore.

"'Hilloa!' siz the gintleman, steppin' off. 'I suppose you're Michael Murrin?'

"'Well, yis—*Micky* Murrin,' siz Micky, siz he. 'I dar' say you're Misther McCran?'

"'That's me,' siz he.

"'I haven't the smallest doubt iv yer honor's word; but, all the same, I know ye'll excuse me axin' for proof iv yer idintity. Ye can quite undherstan',' siz

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he, 'why I insist upon this little matter iv form.'

"'Quite right indeed ye irr, Michael,' siz he. 'Perfectly right. I can well undherstand it, an' I'm obliged to ye for bein' so sthricht even with meself. What name,' siz he to the dhriver, 'did I register under at your hotel where I spent las' night?'

"'Misther McCran iv Belfast,' siz the buck on the car.

"'Which,' siz Micky, 'is not sufficient proof, your honor.'

"'Which,' siz his honor, 'is not sufficient proof, as you very prudently remark, frien' Michael. So,' siz he, producin' a han'ful i' letthers from his pocket, 'have the goodness to obsarve the addresses on these.'

"Micky took the letthers in his han', an' seen them aich an' ivery wan addressed 'Misther James Bartholomew

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McCran, No. 31 Castle Place, Belfast'; an' more iv them, 'James Bartholomew McCran, Esquire, No. 31 Castle Place, Belfast.'

"'These,' siz he, produc'in' wee square bits iv pasteboord with his name on them — 'these is mae cards.'

"'An' now,' siz he, 'be plaised to ob-sarve mae bags.'

"Micky obsarved the bags likewise, an' on aich iv them was 'J. B. McC.' prented in white letthers, ivery wan i' them the size iv a goose-egg.

"'That's all right,' siz Micky; 'an' ye're right heartily welcome, Misther McCran, to these parts.'

"Misther McCran he then paid off the carman, givin' him han'some whip-money, an' went in with Micky, who set him down at wanst, with small delay, a Meenavalla welcome—his fill to ait iv the sweetest, his fill to dhrink iv the sthrongest,

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lashin's an' laivin's, and pocket his thanks.

“Nixt mornin' Micky an' him, dhrawin' the doore afther them, took ti the moor with their guns, an' had a very fine day's sport. Micky had thought that Mither McCran wouldn't be no great shakes iv a shot, an' that the best he could expect off him would be to do no harm with his gun. But when Mither McCran *yocked* to shoot, faith Micky's opinion changed as aisy as a poun' note in a public.* An' Mither McCran explained till him that, though he niver come to shoot Meenavalla afore, he was in the habit iv shootin' Scotch moors with frien's iv his beyont the wather.

“Micky he thraited him to the heighth iv good thraitmint that night again. An' nixt day they had another splendid day upon the moors. An' as they thrudged

* A public-house—a tavern.

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back again in the evenin', Micky, from the top iv the hill above the house, beheld his doore open. He bethought him that maybe he forgot to dhraw it afther 'im when they wirr laivin' in the mornin'.

“ But the nixt minnit he seen the shape iv a head, he believed, put out an' then pulled in again. ‘ Now,’ thought Micky to himself, ‘ Long Hudie Haghie has dhropped over to bid me again for them pair i' yo lambs he was pricin' last Sunday; but, upon mae socks, onless he's ready to give me the thirty shillin's I axed, he'll niver dhrive them to Carkir at twenty-nine an' elevenpence ha'penny.’

“ But, behoul' ye, the very nixt thing Micky spies, when he come a piece further, was a jaunтин'-car dhrawn up be the en' i' the house. ‘ Then,’ siz Micky, siz he till himself, ‘ it's jobbers for the fair iv Ardhara has gone in to light their pipes. Good luk ti their wits! they'd as

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likely get holy wather in an Orange lodge as a glint iv fire there.'

"But it was naither Long Hudie Haghie nor jobbers for the fair. When Micky stepped in there was four gintlemen saited at their aise; an' the minnit Micky's companion put his fut within the threshel afther him, all four i' them ups, an' there was four guns levelled at his frien's head.

"'Dhrop that gun out i' yer han' as fast as ye'd say "knife,"' siz the biggest i' the four gintlemen, with the muzzle iv his own gun not six inches from the poor fella's brains.

"It was a bad time to *yock* to arguey the quistion, so the poor fella dhropped his gun instantly, an' him the color iv the lime wall in the face.

"'Put yer han's behin' yer back now, if ye plaise,' siz the big fella, houldin' his gun steady.

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“‘Now, men,’ siz the big gintleman, ‘secure the scoundhril.’

“The other three, without many words, boun’ his arms together behin’ his back. When that was safely done the big gintleman lowered his gun, an’ lookin’ Micky’s late frien’ in the eye, says:

“‘It’s a sayin’ as throe as it’s oul’, that though the fox runs long, he’s caught at last. Eh, ye villain ye, is that not so?’

“The poor fella be this time had got his tongue, an’—

“‘In the name i’ God, gintlemen,’ siz he, ‘what’s this? or what’s the mainin’ iv it at all, at all? Irr yez goin’ to murdher an innocent man?’

“Well, at that the four gintlemen set up a loud laugh.

“‘An innocent man!’ siz the big lad.

‘Upon mae word ye’re a cool customer—as cool as a bog-hole at Chrissmas.’ Then he turns to Micky, who was stand-

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in' by waitin' his own turn, an' shakin' in his shoes to keep himself warm mane-while. 'Have I the honor,' siz he, in a way made the others laugh again—'the honor iv addressin' Misther Michael Murrin?'

"'Yi—yi—yis,' siz poor Micky, siz he; 'that's me.'

"'Care-taker an' gamekeeper,' siz the big gintleman, 'iv Meenavalla?'

"'Yis, if ye please.'

"'For James Bartholomew McCran, iv Belfast?'

"'For Misther McCran iv Belfast,' siz Micky.

"'An' did I write ye a letther not many weeks ago, sayin' I wis comin' down here to shoot Meenavalla meself? An' be whose authority have ye taken on yerself to give this lad parmission to shoot my lan', an', moreover, to aid an' abate him yourself parsonally?'

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“‘What?’ siz Micky, siz he, all dumfoundhered.

“‘What’s that?’ siz the lad that was boun’, an’ he blazin’ in the face. ‘What’s that?’ siz he.

“‘I’ll tell ye what,’ siz the big gintleman, turnin’ on *him*, an’ gettin’ up his gun again in a thraitenin’ manner. ‘You’ll be plaised to have the good manners—which I suppose ye’re not used till—to keep yer tongue in yer jaw, an’ spaik only when ye’re spoken till. Obsarve that advice, or if ye don’t, by mae faith ye’ll temp’ me to give ye the disarts you’ve long ’arned, an’ whitewash that wall with yer brains,’ siz he. Then turnin’ again to Micky, who was just now beginnin’ to get a wee glimmerin’ iv the mainin’ iv all this, he says:

“‘I’ve axed ye two plain quistions, an’ I want two plain answers: Did ye or did ye not get a letter from me, sayin’ I was

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comin' down to shoot this place meself? An' by whose ordhers are ye helpin' this gintleman here to shoot it?'

"'I-I-I-I got a letther,' Micky stammers, 'from Mистер McCran, sayin' *he* was comin' down to shoot it himself.'

"'Exactly. An' might I throuble ye to tell me if this han'some gintleman we have in the corner is named Mистер McCran?' siz he, lookin' at his companions with a wink.

"'Yi—yis,' siz Micky.

"An' with that the lads laughed both loud an' long, till ye wouldn't give three ha'pence for them.

"'An',' siz the gintleman, 'may I ax how ye have his name so pat?'

"'He toul' it till me himself,' siz Micky, sthraight back. An' this set them off in such another roar iv laughin' that ye'd think the ribs i' them would crack.

"'An',' siz the poor fella himself, as

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boul' as ye please, 'Misther McCran *is* mae name!'

"All four turned an' looked at him as mad as hatters.

"'Yis, we know, we know,' siz the big gintleman then, quietly but thraitenin'ly. 'We know that,' siz he; 'but I think I obsarved to ye afore that it isn't wholesome for ye to spaik much until ye're spoken to. Shut yer jaw now, an' ax mae laive afore ye open it again.'

"'An' so,' siz he then, turnin' again to Micky, 'he toul' ye himself, did he, that he was Misther McCran?' The lads laughed again, he put it so comically to Micky. 'It's a wondher to me now he continted himself with plain Misther McCran, an' that he didn't go in for Prence i' Wales, eh?'

"'Och,' siz Micky, siz he, 'I didn't believe 'im that aisy till he showed me his letthers addhressed to Misther McCran,

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an' showed me bits i' pasteboard with the name prented on them, an' his bag besides, with the first letthers iv his name on it.'

"The gintleman jumped on the floore at this.

"'He did, did he?' siz he. 'Oh, the natarnal scoundhril that he is! Boys,' siz he, 's'arch 'im instantly. If he has wan i' my letthers on 'im, I'll blow out the rascal's brains without givin' 'im time ti say God bless him! It wasn't enough to stale me bag an' come an' thry to stale me shootin'! but for to go for to thry for to stale me very name, an' pocket me letthers to prove it, that's what I'll not stan'!' siz he, goin' up an' down the house rampagin' an' swearin' lake a bad shearer, while the other three went through the buck's pockets an' turned them inside out. He too was beginnin' to swear an' to ballyrag, till the big gintleman run at

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'im with the butt en' iv his gun, an' it tuk 'is frien's all they wirr able to keep 'im from makin' a shower iv 'is brains. Then the buck soon quieted when he seen how much in airnest the big fella wis.

“ There, sure enough, they got as many letthers as would sthart a wee post-office—all addhressed to Misther McCran—an' a pack iv wee white cards with Misther McCran's name an' addhress on them; an' a bunch iv keys, moreover, that the gintleman likewise laid claim till.

“ ‘Well, hard feedin' to me,’ siz he, ‘if this isn't the rarest customer it has iver been me fortune to fall in with afore! Thank God,’ siz he, ‘that I've got as much ividence as 'ill thranspoort the vagabone. I'm only sorry I can't have 'im hung.’

“ All at wanst, when Micky Murrin he seen this, it dahned on 'im how cliverly he'd been taken in.

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“‘An’ I’m sure, now,’ siz Micky, siz he, ‘it wasn’t aisy for me to misdoubt the bla’g’ard’s word when he had all that ividence. It would take a sight long-headedder man nor me to see through ’im.’

“I wisht ye wirr to see the face i’ the boy when Micky tarmed ’im a bla’g’ard; it was a frightsome sight. An’—

“‘Hoh, hoh, hoh!’ siz he, in spite iv the gun, ‘is it you, ye miserable divil, ye!’ siz he, ‘that’s goin’ to join to abuse me, too? By the good daylight, I’ll be square with you, me gintleman—as well as with these oother scoundhrils!’ He was in an awsome rage.

“‘Be aisy! Didn’t I tell ye be aisy, an’ keep yer tongue in yer jaw?’ siz the big gintleman, gettin’ up the gun again. ‘Ye would thrait, would ye? Would ye, ye natarnal villain, ye? Faith yer memory ’ill have purty near as good a sthretch as yer conscience if ye keep spite into

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Michael Murrin till ye come back from Bottomy Bay. Give less i' yer chin-whack, now, for ye don' know how near heaven's to ye—or the other place—this minnit. Come, boys,' siz he, 'hustle the rogue on the car, an' thrinnle 'im off to the police-office at Glenties as fast as the divil can carry yez. You, McClellan,' siz he to wan i' them, 'swear all soorts again' 'im. Give 'im up on a charge iv poochin', thievin', an' swindlin'. Then hurry back here.'

"They hustled 'im on the car, an' sthrapped the poor divil down, notwithstanding' that he cursed an swore an' ranted an' raved, for all the wurrl' lake a bad lunatic, an' threatened them an' theirs with all soorts i' vengeance. An' me boul' Micky Murrin, the cutest man ye iver seen at how he'd been taken in, he swore back at 'im, and shuk his closed fist undher his nose, an' give 'im a no-

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tion iv what he'd like to be afther doin' with 'im if he had his way; an' when the car started, Micky stud on the road hurlin' 'im back two curses again' his wan—an' two i' Micky's best curses had more venom in them than any half-score i' th' other lad's, for, more be the same token, the lad should 'a' been ashamed iv 'is cursin', for he didn't know how ti do it an' do it right.

“‘An’, Misther McCran, yer honor,’ now siz Micky to him we may call the rale Misther McCran—that is, the big gintleman i’ the party—a powerful fine big fella, more be token he was iv a dark complexion, with hair an’ whiskers lake a crow’s wing—‘how does yer honor know,’ siz Micky, siz he, ‘for sartint that it’s the Red Poocher we have?’

“‘Hagh,’ siz he, ‘God bliss yer innocence! I know it,’ siz he, ‘in the first place, be his thrick. Who but the Red

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Poocher himself 'ud have the head to play so cliver a thrick?'

"'Thru enough,' siz Micky. 'An' in the nixt place?'

"'An' in the nixt place be his color, ye *gawmy*, ye!'

"'But he's not red,' siz Micky.

"'An' what color then?' siz he.

"'Sandy, iv coorse,' siz Micky; 'but that's not—'

'Oh, it's not red, isn't it? Sandy isn't red! I wish,' siz he, 'when ye're so tar-ribly cute, that ye could manage to see the differ atween an honest man an' a dishonest wan. But ti please ye we'll call 'im the Sandy Poocher. Is yer min' aisy now?'

"The other three lads wirr gone off with the poocher, an' this gintleman now explained to Micky how he'd come as far as Glenties three nights afore, an' he'd been persuaded to go off on down to the

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Rosses, where two iv his frien's had a shootin'. He went off there, laivin' his largest bag behin' him, he explained, an' sayin' he'd be gone ten days. An' it wis only when he got down to the Rosses he missed his keys, so they had dhriven up all the way that day, himself an' his frien's, up to Glenties again till he'd get his keys. Behould ye, his bag was gone when he come back, an' they couldn't account for it nohow in the hotel. But he wasn't long till he got a wee clew that fetched himself an' his frien's on here as hard as they could gallop—an' with what prime good luck Micky had just seen.

“Very well an' good. At along bed-time that night the other three come back with the news that they had put the lad in safekeepin', an' got him afore a magis-thrate an' remanded for a week, which was well.

“As they wirr on the groun', they con-

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sidhered they'd remain an' take a week or ten days' shootin' out iv Meenavalla afore goin' back to their Rosses shootin' again. So, accordin'ly, nixt mornin' they wirr on the hill, an' ivery mornin' afther it for a week, dailin' mortal desthruccion among the birds, an' recreatin' themselves cursin' the Red Poocher an' prayin' bad prayers on 'im ivery time they sat down to dhraw their win'. An' the day afore the Red Poocher's thrial wis to come on, they wint down that night to Glenties, an' left Micky his ordhers ti be off for Glenties at an early br'ekwis-time, so as ti be sure ti be there at two o'clock, the time the magisthrates wis to sit.

"So off at an early br'ekwis-time me brave Micky starts, takin' with 'im Mither McCran's keys that he had foun' on the dhresser. But lo, sir, when he came to Dhrimnacraish, within a long mile i' Glenties, he sees a car comin' with four

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polismen an' the pres'ner. 'What's the mainin' i' this?' thinks Micky. But, mae sowl, he wasn't long in doubts till the car throtted up an' the polismen an' pres'ner jumped off an' surrounded 'im.

"'Hoh, hoh, hoh! ye scoundhril!' siz the pres'ner, siz he, shakin' his fist at Micky, an' tearin' to get at 'im, takin' the polis all they could do to houl' 'im back. 'Hoh, hoh, hoh! the scoundhril! He's as bad as the poochers! Saize 'im, the villain! Saize 'im, the natarnal rascal! Saize 'im, an' put the han'cuffs on 'im!' an' with the fair dint i' rage he was shakin' lake a frost-bitten frog.

"'Gintlemen,' siz Micky, siz he, 'what—what—what's the mainin' i' this at all, at all?'

"'The mainin' iv it? In troth, I'll be afther lettin' ye know the mainin' iv it afore I'm done with ye!' siz the lad, springin' ti get at 'im again.

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“‘The mainin’ iv it is, me good man,’ siz the sarjint i’ polis, siz he, ‘that this gintleman here, Misther McCran i’ Belfast—’

“‘Gintlemen,’ siz Micky, in mortal alarm, ‘yez is anondher a gran’ mistake—’

“‘I beg yer pardon,’ siz the sarjint, ‘till I’m finished. This gintleman here, *Misther McCran*, as I afore sayed, i’ Belfast, a most daicent respectable gintleman, iv good cha-*rack*-ther, an’ able to produce the best testimonials as to the same, has been most outrageously an’ disgracefully ill-used by a pack iv rascally poochers—the leader i’ the gang bein’ generally known as the Red Poocher, though he can convart himself into a black poocher to suit his purposes—cruelly ill-used, I say, this gintleman has been be this vaga-bone pack—which it ’ll take you all yer time to prove that ye haven’t been in laigue with—boun han’ an’ fut, carried

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off he has been be this party i' criminals, carried off an' blin'folded, and bore away to a still-house in some disolate part i' the mountains, where he was forced to dhrink potteen, an' kep' dhrunk iver since. An' bore away again las' night from the still-house, with a bandage over 'is eyes, an' left dhrunk as the divil at the barrack doore in Glenties, with a placard roun' 'is neck to say that he was the Red Poocher. An' when the guard, hearin' such a thumpin' i' the doore that he thought it was the Fenian risin', turned the men out with their guns, they foun' him helpless an' speechless; an' when he was tuk in an' fetched to himself, he could tell nothin' about himself, only that he was the Red Poocher—an' that he'd swear to—till within two hours ago, when Mистер O'Gara i' the hotel come in an' idintified 'im, an', afther a dail iv tough arguaymint an' pursuasion, got 'im con-

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vinced that he wis himself, Misther McCran i' Belfast, an' not the Red Poocher.'

· "An', be cricky! I b'lieve it's a daicent bedtime. We'll be oursel's in the mornin' again, with God's help."

And we were.



MISTHER O'MARA FROM
THE COUNTY MAITH



IV

MISTHER O'MARA FROM THE COUNTY MAITH

TÓMAS DUBH and I had splendid shooting, and an altogether delightful time, that week. Tómas was a capable game-keeper; he was a capital shot, and a charming companion—charming, if you humored his little whimsicalities, and gave him his own way.

But it is difficult for me to say, even now, whether Tómas Dubh was born to be a story-teller or a sportsman. He invariably hit his mark in both. If poachers—but in particular the Red Poocher—had been the bane of Tómas' life, they at least gave him inexhaustible matter for fresh and racy and ofttimes startling yarns.

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And Tómas seemed to have begotten for the Red Poocher that homage which genius alone commands.

“Tómas Dubh,” said I, “that was the last, then, of the Red Poocher?” We were lolling and smoking on opposite corners of the hearth fire in Tómas’ little hut after a long and fatiguing but good—remarkably good—day’s sport; and likewise after a long and good—remarkably good—supper. Tómas, by way of reply, simply gave utterance to that peculiar grunt an indolent man uses to convey “I have heard you.” And out of Tómas’ impassive features I could not read anything eminently satisfactory.

“You don’t mean to say you heard anything more of him?” I hazarded.

Tómas slowly lowered his gaze (which had been following his smoke wreaths), and halted, his eyes upon me.

I winced.

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Tómas Dubh lay back once more, and contemplated the curling puffs which he now sent up more thickly from his age-browned dudeen.

I lay back, and puffed as smartly, and contemplated, too.

Suddenly, out of the smoky silence, Tómas, when the spirit moved him, spoke.

“To me bitther sorra, I heard of the Red Poocher again. The curse o' Crummil be on him—an' the curse o' the crows.

“Afther Mистер McCran himself had been taken in an' so cru'ly misused, there was a great cry-out entirely all over the counthry. The jintlemen sportsmen there was no houdin' or tyin' of, to *larn* that such a vagabone was allowed at large and laughin' in his sleeve at them, at the polis, an' at the law of the lan'; an' the papers, too, all over the three Kingdoms took it up an' made the divil's

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own thiraw about it—an' run over again the oul' story of Irelan' bein' the quare place anyhow, an' that nobody should be astonished at anything would happen in it. To be sure there was many's an ill-minded vagabone in all parts of the counthry that laughed hearty at the tarrible thing, an' sayed the Red Poocher was, by a lang chalk, the dhrollest lad they'd ever heerd tell of.

“ But anyhow, the noise was made over the counthry about didn't help Mистер McCran wan little bit only what it hindered him. For whatsomiver chance there was of his gettin' the shootin' of Meenavalla let to some sportin' chap or other afore, there was sorra take the chance at all now. So nixt year it went vacant, an' nixt year again, an' the year afther that. Ivery wan of the years Mистер McCran advertised the shootin' in the papers on the lame chance of catchin'

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some poor divil that didn't know its history. But farior! there wasn't a half-intelligent jack-day atween the four says of Irelan'—or of Englan' an' Scotlan' for that part—that didn't know as much about Meenavalla an' the Red Poocher as Misther McCran himself. So the dickens as much as a tent of ink was wasted replyin' to wan of the advertisements. Then Misther McCran put the consarn up for sale, an' put it in the papers. But the divil receive the man there was even then to come forrid an' offer him as much as tuppence-ha'panny in bad ha'pence for it. An' even when, on the fourth year, a company of half a dozen young English bucks, just fresh out of College, tuk, atween them, a whole dhrift of shootin's in vaarus parts of the county of Donegal, intendin' both to have the sport of shootin' the game an' the profit besides of sellin' them to Lon-

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don game-marchants, an' tuk the three shootin's that surrounded Meenavalla, the sorra wan of them would take Meenavalla for love or money. It was unlucky, they sayed, they'd have nothing whatsomiver to do with it on any account.

“ But behold ye, Mither McCran, to his exceedin' great joy, as you may well suppose, got Meenavalla let this year. On wan of his thrips to Glasgow which he used to take the first Sathurday night of every month, he fell in and made acquaintance with a County Meath egg merchant, be name Mither O'Mara, an' findin' out in the coorse of their discourse that Mither O'Mara had been intendin' to hire a small shootin' for himself be way of divarsion an' holidays, Mither McCran toul' him he was delighted to know it, he had the very thing to suit him, an', as Mither O'Mara was a daicent

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friendly man, he'd let him have his place, be name Meenavalla, in the County Donegal, on very moderate terms indeed. He sung its praises to the skies—but give divil a whisper of the Red Poocher. An' as good luck would have it the poor County Maith egg marchant didn't know a thing at all about the red rascal, Misther McCran (who agreed with his friends in considherin' himself a purty cliver cute business man) didn't laive Misther O'Mara till he persuaded him intil hirin' Meenavalla for the saison—an' at a longer price, too, nor ever it had been let for in its best days, afore the bad name got out on it.

“Misther McCran as ye may well suppose, was purty plaised with himself, over how he had hooked the poor divil O'Mara, who mightn't know a grouse—if he saw wan—from a geeraffe.

“Me and Misther McCran hadn't been

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on the very best of terms for lee an' long, but as soon as he let the shootin' till O'Mara, he writ me a letther wantin' to know if I would take over the gamekeepin' ov Meenavalla wanst more. He done me wrong, he confessed—for since the Red Poocher had been too able for himself 'twas small wondher he was too able for me. He pitched upon me now, as bain' the man who was ablest to meet an' watch the rascal if he dar'd make attemps on the lan' again. For, ye must undherstan', if the red fella hadn't troubled Meenavalla or its naighbourhood for three years or so, he wasn't idle elsewhere; the sorra a saison went by that there wasn't that there didn't come some new story, or a bunch of stories, from some unlucky corner or other, about him. An' Meenavalla besides, not bein let an' so not well watched, was pooched and double-pooched every year of them be some

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poocher or other, an' it might as well as not have been by the lad himself. Anyhow, Misther McCran sayed we wor goin' to put our best foot forrid this saison, an' win back for Meenavalla its good name an' fame, an' make it of some valuey to its owners; he'd come himself, he sayed, to identify Misther O'Mara, so there couldn't be no mistake, an' to give me dirachions an' advice, an' likewise talk to the polis an' get them to keep purticular watch upon Meenavalla. I wasn't on no account to breathe a syllable about Red Poochers, or poochin', to O'Mara, laist we'd frighten the life out of the poor divil, an' have his heels takin' near-cuts for the County Maith an' his little egg-store again.

“Misther McCran made offer of very fine terms entirely to me, so I threw up a job I had, workin' a hoss an' cart for Owen Melly of Scullogue (son to oul'

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own—marcy on him!) an' come an' tuk charge of Meenavalla.

“That was early in July. On the Twel'th of August, to the hour, Mither McCran an' Mither O'Mara with him, both of them havin' joined together at the Strabane Junction, was dhriven up till the doore on Paddy Boyle's car, of Glenties, an' I give them *cead mille failte*, both. Mither McCran stopped all that day, an' over-night; an' we walked O'Mara roun' a part of the shootin' an' from the top of the hill give him a look at most of it. Thru, he didn't know much about grouse or game fowls—but he wouldn't be tired boastin' about the daith an' destruction he often wrought among the crows an' pigeons. I promised, if he could only manage to look level along the barrel of a gun, I'd mighty soon initiate him intil the mystheries of grouse-killin', an' he'd think crows an' pigeons

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purtiklerly silly child's play afther. 'Red Poocher' niver crossed wan of our lips while we wor in his hearin'. But Misther McCran, afore he left, went until the polis barracks in Ardhara, an' read them a lecthur about the Red Fella, an' let them know he'd hould them responsible if they let that highway robber an' cutthroat come slouchin' aroun' his lan' wanst more. The sergeant of polis promised that a bee wouldn't buzz in all Meenavalla that saison but there wouldn't be a polisman at its lug makin' a note of it. Misther McCran laid on me as many diractions as would make a dixonary—an' then he went off contented.

"I was plottin' in me own mind how I'd keep Misther O'Mara from hearin' tell of the Red Poocher, an' a purty tickle-some parable it was—bekase eviry man an' his mother, standin' within twinty mile of ground had Meenavalla an' the

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Red Poocher coupled together on the tip of their tongue. But a might well 'a' saved meself the throuble, for behould ye! the very second mornin' he was there young Edward Mughan's son Jimmy, who had been at the Office lookin' for an Ameriky letter from Francie (God bliss the boy an' prosper him!) brought back a letther addhressed to 'Misther O'Mara of Maith, now shootin' at Meenavalla.' An' when he opened it, I seen that he read it no less nor four times over, an' afther the fourth readin' calls upon me, an' says he: 'Can ye read?' 'I can,' says I, 'if its prent or nice writin'.' 'It's nicer writin' nor it's readin',' says he, 'so far as I can undherstan' it. What does it mane?' I tuk the letther out of his han' an' read: 'Dear Misther O'Mara of Maith. I am told there's fine shootin' to be got on Meenavalla this saison. I'm comin' along as soon as I finish a big

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Englishman's (bad luck till him!) that I'm doin' now. Yours, thruly, The Red Poocher,' or words to that effect. Feth, it tuk more nor a hop out of me. This Red Poocher was the coolest scoundhril I ever calculated upon. The cat, too, was out of the bag at a jump. There wasn't anything for it but make a clane breast of the whole matther. An' I up an' done it. An' when I say that Misther O'Mara of Maith stormed an' swore at both me masther an' meself, I'm puttin' the case as calm as I can. There wasn't a bad name in his stomach that he didn't bang at both of us, an' sayed that as the divil made us he matched us. I knew we were both in the wrong, I as well as the masther, for not layin' a full program of the whole case afore him earlier in the business; so I sat down an' smoked till O'Mara's win' gave out, an' he could barge an' abuse no longer. An' then he

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ordhered out wan of his men—he had two men with him—an' a thrap, an' tuk me also, an' niver dhrew rein till he was at the Ardhara polis barracks. We went in, an' he put the letther intil the sergeant of polis's hands, an' demanded their purtection. The Sergeant read it, an' sayed it was deuced cool of the red villain surely. But he toul' Mистер O'Mara all the arrangements he had made for police pathrols to watch Meenavalla night an' day, an' he sayed if, from wan end of the shootin' to the other a frog jumped unknownst, he'd be willin' to offer him his head on a side dish. But, tho the Sergeant's arrangements was good an' very good an' wouldn't let a snipe sneak about on the sly, they weren't half good enough to please Mистер O'Mara, who went so far as to demand that even two polismen should for the nixt ten days live at the Meenavalla house. An' to

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plaise him, the Sergeant even give in to this.

“ From there he dhriv off, an' away to pay his respects to, an' have the counsel an' advice of the young English bucks who had taken the neighborin' shootin's. An', upon me davy, he sthrikes the six lads of them all congregated in the house on the Carkir shootin', ivery wan of them with a billy-ducks from the Red Poocher in his fist—same as Mither O'Mara had got! But the English college chaps were enjoyin' the thing rather. They sayed they wanted a good Irish adventure, an' this looked purty like the commencement of wan. They only wished to Heaven the Red Poocher would be as good as his word, an' come along, till they'd put a slug or two in his tail to ballast him. They'd give half their grouse, they said, for the excitement, an' they prayed God the Red Villain might

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turn up. An' when they foun' the state of flustrification O'Mara was in, an' the elaborate arrangements he'd been makin' with the polis for purtection, they did laugh their hearty skinful, I tell you. O'Mara he wasn't more nor half-plaised that they'd make so light of the thing, an' of him. 'Time enough till hallo, boys, when yez is out of the wood,' he says. 'An' them laughs last, laughs best.' All which set the English lads off in fresh kinks. An' when they l'arnt from Misther O'Mara that he was an egg-merchant from the County Maith, an' that he had big practice shootin' crows an' pigeons, they went outside the house in reliefs to aise themselves of all the laughter was weightin' their stomachs, an' which they didn't want to laugh out intil his face.

"Well, O'Mara, he wished to the Lord he was safely through with his shootin',

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anyhow—an' he didn't care how soon he'd be finished, now that the dhread of that Poocher was hangin' like a rotten roof-tree over him.

“‘I'll tell you, oul' fella, says they at last, ‘if ye don't mind we'll give ye a few days, an' lower every wing on the lan' for ye.’ Faith, O'Mara jumped at it. ‘Upon my word,’ siz he, ‘I'll not aisily forget it if ye do.’ It was only an exthra bit of sport, come chape, to them, an' they agreed, with a heart an' a half—an' toul' him, moreover, that he could aftherwards, if he choose, come an' amuse himself gettin' in the way of their guns, on their shootin's, though they couldn't promise him neither pigeons nor crows, they wor afeerd. O'Mara himself joined them in the laugh at this, for he was in purty good humor now he seen he'd have but little to dhread from the Red Poocher.

“ Still he didn't slacken wan bit in his

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watchfulness. He arranged with the polis, that, every day the English lads 'ud be helpin' him on Meenavalla, they'd have to do their pathrolin' upon the lands of the College chaps, lest the Red Poocher would step in, on the grand opportunity, an' not laive a kickin' thing upon their grounds. But in all cases he ordhered, as afore, that two polis should stay day an' night by his own place, an' ait an' dhrink in his own house.

“ He likewise planned that me an' his own two men should take the hampers of fowl nightly intil Glenties, to the Railway Station, an' have them shipped. He'd lend me an' his men, an' his conveyance, also to the English chaps to carry in theirs, further on; an' they could, for safety's sake, add one or two of their men to the contingent. 'From all the stories,' sez he, 'I'm tould of the Red Poocher, we can't be too cautious.'

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'Faith, yer right,' says the College chaps, winkin' the wan at the other.

"The very nixt mornin' the whole six of them, with three of their men, an' O'Mara an' wan of his men, an' meself, was on Meenavalla, bangin' away like a rajiment of Jarmins in the war. They wor all purty fair shots, the College chaps; an' Misther O'Mara himself, seein' that he was only used at tumblin' pigeons an' crows, didn't do at all so badly, an' give the bucks a deal less laughin' than they expected; an' odd time he conthived to get wan of the lads right in the line of his fire, which always give five of them a hearty laugh of course; but generally he went wan betther nor the man who could fire at a mouse an' hit a mountain.

"Afther the dozen of us were on the lan' three days ye might catch all the grouse we left livin' by puttin' salt on their tails. Every evenin', too, meself

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an' the rest of the escort tuk off the day's baggin', for the Glenties railway station. An' its meself was noways sorry to go the same journey, bekase Dan (wan of O'Mara's men) was the best sowl in the wurrl', an' niver let us pass Jimmy Kinny's public house without we'd go in an' wet our whistle. An' he'd give us two or three dhrinks, no less, afore he'd let us out. O'Mara's other man, Tarance, was a grumpy, growlin', good-for-nothin' dog-in-the-manger kind of a divil that wouldn't ax ye had ye a mouth on ye if ye thravelled with him from Cork to Christmas, an' begrudged seein' Dan thraitin', moreover. He'd not go intil Jimmy Kinny's with us, whether we stayed a minute or an hour, but 'ud remain danglin' his heels over the baskets of game, an' countin' the stars to keep himself warm till we's come out again. An' then Dan tuk us in to see if Jimmy Kinny was still alive

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on our way back. Them was pleasant evenings, I tell you.

“An’ for ten days this kind of thing went on. Bekase, O’Mara tuk meself an’ his own two men to help to weed the game out of the three shootin’s of the College chaps. An’ we had always wan or two, or may be three of their men with us be way of escort to Glenties every evenin’, an’ Dan, who must have laid han’s on a leprechaun, he had so much money, ever an’ always halted the funeral at Jimmy Kinny’s till we’d go in an’ sloke our thirsts.

“O’Mara, when he had four or five days’ practice, come to handle a gun like a man was intended to become a good shooter; an’ there was no more talkin’ of pigeons an’ crows, for he run the English lads purty close. What the lads used to enjoy, tho, was, that wanst O’Mara got his own lan’ shot an’ the

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game gone safely off, he quickly lost all terror of the Red Poocher, an' hadn't the ghost of another curse left in his liver for that scoundhril. It didn't seem to give him wan bit of consarn whether the red fella 'ud come in an' carry off every wing on his neighbor's lan's, or not—an' so they upcasted till him, bantherin'. 'Och well,' he'd say, 'it's each man cry when his own cow's sick.' But for that part the sorra much consarn did the Red Poocher give any of the lads, especially when they seen he didn't turn up durin' the first four or five days. An' they were more nor half sorry he didn't, an' give O'Mara a good round mouthful or two of curses for bein' so deuced purtikler, with his polis pathrols an' polis guards. An' there was small doubt but it was this kept the rascal off. Many's the bit of a debate they all had about how the Red Poocher would 'a' been likely to

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have gone to work, if he had ventured on the lan', an' how they'd have nonplussed him an' got hold of him, an' the way they'd have larked him, an' played him like a cat might a mouse, afore marchin' him into Ardhara polis barracks with a yard of rope decoratin' his neck. They would have had the dickens's own gay time with the buck, there was no manner of doubt, if he'd only been foolhardy enough to let his shadow fall on a daisy on wan of their lands. But they wor all agreed—an' Mистер O'Mara with them—that the red rascal had method in his madness, an' if he was within a big radius of them he had tuk purtikler good care to lie very low an' sing very, very small.

“Well, on the last night of the shootin' we had a regular big jollification, all hands of us, I tell ye. An', poor divil, the Red Poocher would have found his ears burn-

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in' if he had been within any sort of reasonable distance of us—bekase, there's no doubt of it, we joked a fair share at his expense. An' small blame to us, seein' he made such an impudently bould start writin' his threatenin' notices to all hands, as if he was goin' to do the dickens-an'-all, an' walk right over all of our heads. Far intil the night—or intil the mornin'—the spree run; an'—I' half-ashamed to tell it, but the thruth's the thruth—every man lay where he fell. The English chaps knew how to get round a quart of Irish whisky about as well as if they had been broken to it when they were on suckin' bottles, but they give in. An' when I give in meself, Mистер O'Mara, an' Dan, an' Tarance seemed as fresh as a May mornin', bad luck till them.

“The sun was purty high in the sky, nixt day, when we shouted an' shuk up.

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An' when we got our eyes opened, an' some of our senses back again, behold ye, wasn't it the sergeant himself of polis an' a band of his men was standin' over us. "Well, what's the row, now?" says we, when we seen this army crowdin' the kitchen. 'Nothin',' says the sergeant himself of the polis, with a heavy sigh, 'only the Red Poocher, be d—— to him!' 'What?' says wan of us; an' 'What?' says all of us, jumpin' for our firearms. 'The Red Poocher! Hurroo! show us him, sergeant, avic, till we get the chance of a puck at the hinder-end of his breeches'—an' ivery mother's sowl bruk for the doore. 'Arrah,' says the sergeant, 'to pot with yez for blatherin' edicts. Stand yer grounds till I ax ye wan question—Has any of yez got any returns or replies from the game yez has sent off?' No, none of them had. For the past three or four days they had sent a mes-

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senger to the office, an' then damned the London man for not bein' prompter in replyin', an' sendin' cheques. 'I thought as much,' sez the sergeant. 'What the dickens do ye mane?' says they. 'Are all of yez here?' sez the sargeant. 'All of us?' says they, lookin' roun', an' thryin' to count wan another—'Barrin',' says they, then, 'Misther O'Mara, an' his two men. They must have been afoot earlier, an' sthrolled back to Meenavalla.' 'Oh, indeed!' says the sergeant—'yes, indeed. I was just thinkin' they tuk a rather early sthroll this mornin'. There was a little note from him, informin' me as much, dhropped at the barrack doore, this mornin', an' advisin' me to come an' look afther yez, or yez would be apt to over-sleep yerselves, an' miss the early worm. I called by Meenavalla house just to satisfy meself, an' it's as lone as an anshint Abbey. Here's a note I picked up on

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the table here when I come in—I'm thinkin' that's the names of the six of yez on the cover of it. Purty well-ad-dressed, anyhow.'

“With their mouths open so ye might turn yer fist in them, an' their six pairs of eyes like bow-windies in a castle, they had the note tore open in half-a-jiffey, an' ivery man of the six let out of him a curse might kill a crow in a crab-three—for the note was something like this: 'Misther O'Mara of Maith presents his compliments an' hopes the six nice bright cliver young Englishmen is well as he'd wish them, an' as full of self-consait as iver. He is very sorry he has been called off suddint, for he should have liked much more of their improvin' company. But if his good friends wouldn't mind callin' roun' by his egg-store in the County Maith, on their way home to their dear mothers in England, he promises

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them plenty of pinkin' at pigeons an' crows. Yours thruly,

“‘The Red Poocher.’”

.

I said, after a while, “May I ask you one question, Tómas Dubh?”

“Throt it out quick, an' be done with it,” between whiffs of his freshly-lit pipe.

“Didn't those Englishmen themselves tack on the proper labels on the hampers before they sent them off?”

“Did I tell you that while Dan was makin' the rest of us merry in Jimmy Kinny's, Tarance, the growler, remained without to keep count of the stars?”

“Oh!”

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