

"Sproul," shouted the sergeant, "I'll report you to-morrow."

So he did. And after divers investigations and an immense expenditure of foolscap and envelopes with "On Her Majesty's Service" in the corners, it was one morning announced in all the newspapers, metropolitan and provincial, that Sub-constable Joseph Sproul was removed from Gurthnabober to Shannaclough.

The first man to congratulate him was Murty Magrath.

"You're all right now," said the sheriff, thrusting his fingers down his white cravat. "You're now in the midst of as gentlemanly a breed of pigs as is to be found in Ireland. You'll find the change very pleasant I can assure you."

But the pleasant change did not come till later in the autumn—hence we had to put Joe Sproul among the exceptions when recording the fact that the summer months had passed pleasantly for nearly all our friends and acquaintances in the parish of Shannaclough.

Nellie and Nannie were as happy as the day is long all through those summer months, never being a day absent from school, till that "terrible fall of rain"—as their father called it—in the second week of August compelled them to remain away for nearly a whole week. The roads during that week were flooded for several hundred yards and several feet deep at three different places between the ivied farmhouse and the little convent among the hills. So you see Nannie and Nellie could not go to school during that week, unless they constructed a canoe, and knew how to paddle it; as the two horses, and Jessie the jennet, and even Robin, the old white donkey, were kept hard at work the whole time hurrying away with the hay from the long meadow. For the river continued to rise and rise after that "terrible fall of rain" till fully half the long meadow and a wide strip of Mr Cormack's lawn were under water, and Martin Dwyer expected to see his train-cocks set sail down the river in pursuit of divers trusses, which during the first day of the flood passed under the arches of Corrigan Bridge from meadows higher up the stream. But the train-cocks were saved, "every one of them," as Martin Dwyer triumphantly told Body Flynn and a few other inquiring friends in the chapel yard after Mass on Lady Day.

Ned Cormack did not fail to note the energy and tact displayed by young Tom Dwyer in getting the hay beyond the reach of danger. Tom was ably seconded by Joe Cooney, and their example roused Mick Cormack and Paddy Brien to a degree of exertion of which they had never believed themselves capable, while Gauth Manogue, as her master said was "as good as the best of them" that day. In fact the removal of the hay-crop of the Long Meadow on this occasion was quite an exciting business.

Alice Cormack watched the progress of the work with great interest, and when the last load moved away, she and her mother walked over to the old farmhouse to congratulate Mrs Dwyer, and get some of Terry Hanrahan's eve-apples. Of course Nannie and Nellie went with them into the orchard—where, somewhat to Mrs Cormack's surprise, they found the orchard man's daughter sitting on the grass reading a book, with the tears rolling down her sunburnt cheeks. She was a subscriber to the "Sisters' Library," and paid her penny a week punctually. She had finished making a bib for her little sister an hour before, and had just come to the most affecting part of the story which Sister Xavier, who had charge of the library, recommended her to take when paying her penny at the convent on Saturday—when, feeling a touch upon her shoulder, she looked up and started to see the two ladies standing close to her. In spite of the tears on her sunburnt cheeks, there was something comical in Molly Hanrahan's frightened look, and Nannie and Nellie's musical laugh hushed the thrush on the top of the winter pear-tree into sudden silence in the very middle of his evening song. Alice could not help joining in the laugh, and even Mr Cormack smiled as she took the book from Molly's passive hand.

"Oh, yes, Molly," she remarked gently, while the girl got upon her feet; "this is a very affecting story. I don't wonder that it made you cry. Are you fond of reading?"

"I am, ma'am" Molly replied, wiping away the tears with both sleeves. "I never feel lonesome now. Between sewin' and readin' I don't feel the time passin'."

"This is a nice little bib you have made," said Alice, taking the bib from the grass, and critically examining the workman-hip. "You sew beautifully, Molly," she continued, seeming to count the stitches all round the hem. "Was it the Sisters of Mercy taught you to sew?"

"It was, miss," the girl answered. "And when the orchards are shook," she added delightedly, "I can go to school again for six months. I was mindin' the kitchen-garden at Cloonmore since the currants got ripe. An now I must stay here, off and on, till we have the apples drawn home. And after that father says I can go to school."

"I am told that you have a very good voice," said Mrs Cormack "Splendid" said Nannie. "She's the best in the singing class."

"Well, get me some eve-apples," returned Mrs Cormack, "and they come over to the seat and let me hear you sing."

Molly Hanrahan knew exactly where to lay her hand upon the ripest apples upon the tree—indeed, she had made the selection in

expectation of Mrs Cormack's visit that evening to the orchard—and the quickness with which she performed her task caused Alice no little surprise.

"Well, now sit down and sing," said Mrs Cormack, as she took the little basket from Molly and laid it upon the rustic seat.

Molly Hanrahan blushed and smiled and hung down her head; but taking courage she fixed her soft brown eyes upon the river below, and sang the "Meeting of the Waters," in a voice of such exquisite sweetness and with such correctness and feeling, that Alice Cormack was first startled and then spellbound, and when the song was concluded, stared in amazement at the orchard-man's daughter for two whole minutes, evidently regarding her as something altogether incomprehensible.

"You certainly have a very sweet voice," said Mrs Cormack with an amused smile at her daughter's astonishment. "Will you sing another song for us?"

"She has every song you could mention," said Nellie. "But when I saw the sun shining on the water I knew that was the one she was going to sing. I wonder is the Vale of Avoca anything like this?"

"I'm sure it is not half so nice," returned Nannie. "I could not rest in the Vale of Avoca. I couldn't live anywhere else but here. But I suppose Moore meant that whatever place you'd like best would be a Vale of Avoca."

"You are very fond of your home, Nannie," said Mrs Cormack, pushing back the golden hair from Nannie's forehead with her closed hand, and looking somewhat sadly into the mild blue eyes that lost all their melancholy in responding to the glance that dwelt so kindly upon them. "Your heart will have taken deep root in your 'Vale of Avoca,' too, Nannie; and yet I dearly love the Vale in which I have found a very happy home." And Mrs Cormack looked down at her pretty home, with the thick fir-grove behind and the neatly kept lawn in front, as she added, as if to herself, "indeed I doubt that people who do not care for the spot where they were born, and spent their childhood, are capable of caring much for any place or any person either."

Nellie's bright dark eyes expressed surprise, and indeed incomprehension, as she fixed them upon Mrs Cormack's face—the while automatically gathering her coal-black hair behind her ears, in the same way as the gloved hands had done her sister's fair tresses. But Alice seemed to understand the matter very well, and turning round quickly, fixed a lingering look on the house with the glass porch—observing as she did so that her father and little Eddy were staring on their customary walk to look at the sheep. Then Margaret appeared outside the door, with her red cloak on her arm. She must walk by the fir-grove this evening, as the river has overflowed the walk by the hazels. But, to Alice's surprise, instead of going round to the fir-grove, Margaret returns quickly to the house, and disappears within the glass porch. Alice looked around to see if she could discover an explanation of this sudden retreat. It could not be Martin Dwyer, with his coat on his arm and a rake on his shoulder, even though his shadow seemed to reach all the way to the bridge from where he stood on the site of the last train-cock. Nor would Margaret have run away from the white greyhound, standing on the brink of the water, and showing not the slightest symptom of having gone mad. Tom Dwyer is too far away, up among that thick cluster of hay-cocks near the road, to have had anything to do with that sudden change of purpose on the part of the beauty of Rockview House. But stay! there is somebody coming. The avenue gate is swung open, and Alice saw Mr Robert O'Keeffe riding at an easy trot towards the house.

Mrs Cormack caught sight of Mr O'Keeffe as he gracefully reined in his handsome bay horse and said hurriedly:—

"Come, Alice, we must be off. Dear me, how near the house is; and yet how long the way seems round by the bridge."

Alice was surprised at her mother's haste; but it was not the first time that she noticed Mrs Cormack's anxiety to be in the house whenever Mr O'Keeffe called. Nannie and Nellie were a little surprised, too. They hardly ever knew Mrs Cormack to leave without saying good-bye before. And Tom's dark eyes would have betrayed his disappointment to the most unobservant beholder when he saw Alice and her mother walking quickly towards home—for he intended to accompany them at least as far as the avenue gate.

But we regret to be obliged to record that the feeling was in no way shared by Alice.

Molly Hanrahan also looked cast down for a moment on finding herself alone; but just then Terry Hanrahan was seen leading his mule through the orchard gate, and Molly jumped up to gather the necessary supply of apples, while yet there was light, for the "pattern." The "pattern" was held every year on "Lady Day, in Harvest," in the little churchyard where Aileen Cormack was laid to rest long ago.

Mr Armstrong will buy some apples at the pattern to-morrow from Terry Hanrahan, as he has done every Lady-Day for five-and-twenty years. Then he'll stroll among the graves, remarking to himself that the dressed graves are not nearly so numerous as they used