

The Storyteller.

SURPLICE AND SWORD.

THERE was little in the appearance of the Pennsylvania mining village to indicate that the great Civil War was raging. A visitor in the town of Mount Vernon would not notice the scarcity of men in the streets, and, except for the anxious scanning of the daily papers, or the occasional sight of a wounded soldier home on furlough, one might forget that a state of war existed. Work at the mines was plenty, wages were high, and the village seemed to be experiencing a humdrum round of prosperity.

Father Dan O'Rourke was glad that the town had grown prosperous, for it enabled him to pay the indebtedness of his little parish. It was hard work to raise funds for the church and the modest residence he had bought, when the miners were not working well. But his energy and his sunny disposition had accomplished much among the miners towards improving their temporal, as well as their spiritual, condition. Himself a son of toil, he inherited the strong frame and robust constitution of his ancestors, and, when he was not occupied with his pastoral duties, it was no uncommon sight to see him spading up the soil in his little garden or plying the hammer and saw in making some needed repairs about his premises.

Though the smallness of his income sometimes made such exercise necessary, it was valuable to him in another way, for when the rough 'hewers of stone' saw the tall, handsome young priest engaged in these menial tasks they talked about it at the mines, and declared that 'he hadn't an inch of pride' and was 'just like one of ourselves.'

Even Sandy M'Dadd the 'boss driver' at the mines who was called behind his back 'the blackest Scotch Presbyterian in the country,' said of Father Dan—'He's a gude mon; a canny mon; though I dinna care for Popish priests.'

The great war had raged for two years, and conscription was reaching out its inexorable hand summoning the men to the strife. Now Father Dan found a new field of duty—comforting bereaved families, breaking the news of disasters that had come to them on the far off southern battlefields, and giving spiritual strength to the weak ones ere they departed for the theatre of the mighty conflict. In the midst of his apparently interminable labors he received a sudden and painful surprise—the more forcible because he had never dreamed of such a contingency. This was a notification that he had been drafted for service as a private in the Union army, ordering him to report at Wilkes Barre the following week for medical examination.

The next Sunday, after he had celebrated Mass, he read the legal notice to his congregation, and when the murmur of surprise had been subdued, he continued—

'My dear friends, it was supposed by many people, as well as by myself, that the sacred calling of the clergyman would relieve him of the obligation to take arms against his fellow-man. But since the Government, which it is our duty to obey, has decreed otherwise, I must prepare to sever the ties that have grown so dear to me and enter upon this new duty. Whatever we may think of this decree, let us not place our personal feelings above our patriotism. Our country has much to contend with in these troublesome times, and even if an occasional error is made, all will be remedied in the proper time and under the proper authority. During my absence you will have no resident pastor, as the bishop has no priest available to send in my place

'Now, I must say good-bye to you, and in saying this let me ask you to remember your religion and your duties towards your neighbor. No matter where I may be you may know that my prayers will always be with you. I am weak in the sight of God, my friends, and I beseech you not to forget me and to pray that, if it is his will, I may be permitted to return to you. So now, once more, good-bye, and may God bless you and protect you.'

As they listened to the words of the priest, the men of the congregation were filled with mingled indignation and grief. The women were openly sobbing and when, with a smile of resignation, he made the sign of the cross over their heads, perhaps for the last time, there was a hoarse murmur of impotent protest.

As the priest turned to go, several men rushed up to the altar railing and commenced to talk excitedly in low tones.

'You mustn't go, Father,' said one. 'The drafting office has no right to compel you to go. It's a scheme to get money, that's all: We all know that these officers may be bought off. We can raise the money, say the word and we'll have it in an hour.'

'Your impulsiveness has carried you away, James,' said the priest. 'What you suggest would be simply bribery, and I cannot countenance that either directly or indirectly.'

The rejection of this plan, which seemed so feasible to the most left them silent and unresourceful, brooding in helpless rage. At last one burly, red-haired miner, who was noted for his explosive language, blurted out:

'By cracker, the soldier that takes you with him will have to crawl over me first.'

That was what they all wanted to say, and now they had found a spokesman their eyes glistened and their fists clenched as if in anticipation of the contest.

'Don't go, Father, don't go,' wailed the women, and the church was filled with the sound of their weeping.

'There must be no violence, my friends,' said Father Dan, deeply affected by the scene. 'I am perfectly willing to go. Please do not cause me needless pain by attempting to resist the law.'

'Let me go in your place,' said the red-haired miner.

'You have a wife and children dependent upon you, Tim,' the priest answered, 'and anyhow I am determined not to evade the command.'

'Never mind me, Tim,' said the miner's wife. 'I'll let you go.' 'No, no,' said Father Dan, 'there must be no more of such talk. It touches me deeply to see such devotion, but my duty is plain to me. I hope to see you all again before I leave next Wednesday, and now good-bye again.'

Gathering the folds of his cassock about him, he strode away to the vestry holding his head high, with a strange twitching of his firm-set lips. And when he thought the altar boys were not looking he wiped his eyes and gave a suspicious cough that the sexton thought sounded like a sob. But when the priest turned around again he was smiling, and the sexton felt that he must have been mistaken.

Father Dan's house was thronged with excited visitors during the next few days. All kinds of possible and impossible plans were suggested to him, and fully a dozen men offered to act as a substitute for him.

'Sure we'll be drafted soon, ourselves, anyhow,' they would urge with unselfish plausibility, but Father Dan thanked them and continued his preparations for departure.

Father O'Rourke was the first clergyman who had been drafted, and not alone the Catholic priests, but clergymen of all denominations were deeply interested in the case. The Bishop made a strong protest to the local authorities, then finding that they could not, or would not interfere in the matter, he appealed to the Secretary of War for a ruling. Everywhere in church circles the sentiment was strongly expressed that it was wrong to deprive the people of their spiritual advisers in times so fraught with trials of spirit that required the consolations of religion. But the machinery of government, even in peaceful times, is slow, and when Wednesday came Father Dan said his final farewells and departed for Wilkesbarre.

Six of his parishioners who had also been drafted accompanied him and the party in charge of a recruit sergeant. Upon their arrival the men were taken to the recruiting station and placed in a small room, not over-clean and poorly ventilated. About two dozen men were there, of different types, some of them fairly respectable in appearance—others looking like the dregs of humanity. The air was noisome and oppressive, with a blended stench of cheap rum, stale tobacco, and human uncleanness, and several of the poor wretches were suffering from the effects of debauches which they had indulged in, with the hope of disqualifying themselves in the physical test.

The men scrutinised the priest closely when he entered, and some of them recognising his clerical dress, lifted their hats to him. A pale, nervous-looking man, half delirious with drink, was indulging in horrible profanity, that the guards could not induce him to suppress. One of them nudged him and whispered, 'See the priest,' and the fellow, after a glance at Father Dan, stopped suddenly in the middle of a fresh outburst, confusedly touched his hat, and slunk back into the crowd.

Presently the surgeon entered, a fat, bear-eyed man, with red hair, coarse features and the manners of a prize-fighter. He walked over to the table in the centre of the room and ran his fingers over a list which the sergeant had given him.

Father Dan's examination proved satisfactory, and he was given an order for a uniform. Here a difficulty arose. He was a man of unusual stature, and though he was given the largest suit obtainable it was much too small for him. The ludicrous appearance he made, with his trousers much too short, and his sleeves several inches from his writ, made him the butt of many secret sneers and gibes. But he had friends in the company—true, warm-hearted friends—and woe to the person who would insult Father Dan in their hearing.

Pat Moran, one of Father Dan's former parishioners, was one of these, and when the regiment was ordered to Harrisburg he insisted on giving his long overcoat to the priest.

'Take it,' he said, 'and put it around yer waist, under yer own overcoat, so that the spalpeens won't be laughin' at yer short trousers when we march down to the railroad station.'

'But you will need it yourself,' said the priest; 'the weather is chilly these evenings.'

'Me need it,' rejoined Pat, with a hearty tone of contempt at the insinuation. 'Me that's wurked up to me knees in water with the drip from the roof ov the mines turnin' to ice on me whiskers, an'orra the overcoat did I have.'

There were weeks of tiresome drilling at Harrisburg, and Father Dan found a great deal of work to be done among the soldiers. Before long he was the best known man in the regiment, and his good influence upon the men was noticed and spoken of by his colonel.

'I fear that we shall not have you with us long,' said this officer one day. 'Your Bishop and all of the clergymen of your neighborhood have sent a strong protest to President Lincoln, and it is very probable that you will receive your discharge before long.'

A few days after this conversation took place he received the appointment of company clerk, but he had scarcely entered upon the duties of his new position when the regiment received the orders they had awaited so anxiously during weeks of dreary suspense. The division to which Father Dan's regiment was attached was ordered to reinforce General Rosecrans' army in Tennessee. The journey to the front was uneventful, and when they reached Knoxville and trooped out of the train to stretch their cramped limbs and get a breath of fresh air after their journey, they learned of the surrender by the Confederates of Cumberland Gap, which had occurred only the day before.

Knoxville was in a stir of unusual military activity. Mounted orderlies galloped here and there with wild haste, baggage and supply waggons lumbered through the streets and impeded traffic, and the jangling spurs of the cavalymen striking against the pavements added their tone to the din that formed a part of the symphony of war. It was evident that some important movement was about to take place. In the afternoon a large cloud of dust appeared to the west of the city, moving southward, and upon inquiring the cause the recruits learned that the army had begun