

for themselves on the patch of grass—the green, old Mathias would call it—at the cross-roads. Old Mathias knew every curly-headed, barefooted one of them. He wouldn't ask for finer pastime than to be sitting there looking on at them and listening to them. He was counting them, seeing what friends of his were there and what ones of them had gone to Mass with the grown-up people, when he noticed a child in their midst whom he had never seen before. A little brown-haired fellow with a white dress on him like was on every other child of them, and he without boot or hat, as is customary with the children of the West. The face of the child was as bright as the sun, and it seemed to old Mathias as if there were rays of light coming from his head—the sun shining on his hair, maybe.

On seeing this child old Mathias wondered, for he hadn't heard that any strangers were after coming to the village. He was just going over to ask one of the little lads about him when he heard the buzz and clatter of the people coming home from Mass. He hadn't felt the time slipping by, he was so taken up with the children's sport. Some of the people bid him good-day as they went by, and he bid good-day to them. When he turned his eyes on the group of children again the little strange child wasn't with them.

The Sunday after that old Mathias was sitting at the door as usual. The people had gone over to Mass. The little folk were running and leaping on the green. And the little strange child was running and leaping with them. Old Mathias sat looking at him for a long time, for he gave the love of his heart to him on account of the beauty of his person and the brightness of his countenance. At last he called down to one of the little boys:

"Who's that child I see with you for the last fortnight, Coleen?" said he, "that one with the brown head of hair—but maybe it's white-red it is—I don't know whether it's dark or fair with the way the sun is shining on it. Do you see him now—he that is running up to us?"

"That's Iosagan," says the little fellow.

"Iosagan?"

"That's the name he calls himself."

"Who do ye think he is?"

"I don't know, but he says that his father is a king."

"Where does he live?"

"He didn't ever tell us that, but he says that his house isn't far from us."

"Does he be along with ye often?"

"He does, when we do be at pastimes like this. But he goes away from us when any grown-up people come among us. Look, he's gone already."

The old man looked, but there was no one there but the children he knew. The child whom the little boy called Iosagan was missing. The same moment the hum and bustle of the people coming from Mass were heard.

The next Sunday everything happened as on the Sunday before. The people had gathered as usual, and the old man and the children were left to themselves in the village. Old Mathias's heart gave a jump in his breast when he saw the holy child in their midst again. He arose. He went over and stood near him. After standing there a little while he stretched out his hands towards him and said in a low voice:

"Iosagan."

The child heard him and came running over to him.

"Come here and sit on my knee a little while, Iosagan."

The child put his hand in the thin, knotty hand of the old man, and they went side by side across the road. Old Mathias sat in his chair and drew Iosagan to his breast.

"Where do you live, Iosagan?" said he, still speaking in a low voice.

"My house isn't far from here. Why don't you come to visit me?"

"I'd be afraid in a king's house. I'm told your father is a king."

"He is the High-King of the world. But there's no need for you to be afraid of him. He is full of mercy and love."

"I'm afraid that I haven't kept His law."

"Ask pardon from Him. Myself and my Mother will make intercession for you."

"I'm sorry I haven't seen you before this, Iosagan. Where were you from me?"

"I was here always. I go the roads, and walk the hills, and glide over the waves. I am among the people when

they are gathered together in my House. I am among the children they leave behind playing on the road."

"I was too timid—or maybe too proud—to go into your House, Iosagan; but I found you among the children."

"There's no time, nor place where the children are playing for themselves, that I don't be with them. Sometimes they see me and other times they do not."

"I didn't see you till lately."

"Grown-up people are blind."

"And for all that I was let see you, Iosagan?"

"My Father has given me leave to reveal myself to you, because you love little children."

The voices of the people returning from Mass were heard.

"I must be going from you now."

"Let me kiss the hem of your robe, Iosagan."

"Do."

"Will I see you again?"

"You will."

"When?"

"To-night."

At that word he was gone.

"I will see him to-night," said old Mathias, and he going into his house.

The night came on wet and stormy. The big breakers were heard booming on the shore. The trees around the chapel were waving and bending with the violence of the wind. (The chapel is on a height which slopes down to the sea.) Father John was about to shut his book to say his rosary when he heard a sound as if some one were knocking at the door. He listened for a while. He heard the sound again. He got up from the fire, he went to the door and opened it. There was a little boy standing on the threshold of the door—a little boy the priest never remembered to have seen before. There was a little white dress on him, and he without boots or hat. It seemed to the priest as if there were rays of light coming from his face and playing around his brow—the moon shining on his comely brown head, maybe.

"Whom have I here?" said the priest.

"Get ready as quickly as you can, Father, and hurry down to old Mathias's house. He is at death's door."

The priest did not wait for the second word.

"Sit in here till I'm ready, said he. But when he came back the little messenger was gone.

Father John faced down the road, and he wasn't long putting it past him, although the wind was against him, and it raining heavily. There was light in old Mathias's house before him. He lifted the latch of the door and went in.

"Who is that coming to me?" said the voice from the old man's bed.

"The priest."

"I would like to speak to you, father. Sit here, near me."

The voice was weak and the words came slowly.

The priest sat down and heard the old man's story from first to last. Whatever secret was in the old man's heart was told to God's servant there in the middle of the night. When the confession was over, old Mathias received the Body of Christ, and he was anointed.

"Who told you that I wanted you, father?" said he in a low, weak voice, when everything was done. "I was praying to God that you'd come, but I had no messenger to send for you."

"But you did send a messenger to me, didn't you?" said the priest, and great wonder on him.

"I did not."

"You did not? But a little boy came and knocked at my door and said that you wanted my help?"

The old man stretched forward in his bed. There was a brightness in his eyes.

"What sort of a little boy was he, father?"

"A gentle little lad with a white dress on him."

"Did you notice as if there was a circle of light round his head?"

"I did, and it put great wonder on me."

Old Mathias looked up, a smile came to his lips, and he put out his two hands—

"Iosagan," said he.

With that word he fell back in the bed. The priest stretched gently towards him and closed his eyes.