

“ 'Tis a fine body of men that they are,” remarked Sergeant Cassidy to me, as I sat with him one day in the house where he was slowly recovering from the wound in his foot, which had caused his temporary absence from the plains of Flanders. As he spoke, his eyes followed the fire engine, drawn by two grand white horses, disappearing in the distance. The bell was still clanging faintly, as he absent-mindedly felt in his pocket, to find that, as usual he'd left his cigarettes upstairs.

“ 'Tis a fine body of men that they are,” he remarked again, as he took one of mine. “ But, by jabbers ! sir, seeing them going up the street there, brings to my mind the last fire that I was present at, over yonder.” On this occasion he indicated Northumberland with a large hand ; but, no matter.

“ You'll mind,” he went on after a reflective pause, “ that those farms over the water are

not what you would call the equals of Buckingham Palace for comfort. The majority of them are built in the same manner all over the country, and when you've seen one you've seen the lot. There's the farm itself, in which reside the owners and the officers. The officers have a room to themselves, but in these farms all the rooms lead into one another. Mr. Tracey—you mind him, sir, the officer with the spectacles, fat he was—he was powerful set on washing, which is not to be encouraged in that trying weather; and he was rendered extremely irritated by the habit of the ladies of the farm, who would walk through the room when he was in his bath.

“ I mind one morning, perishing cold it was, when I came up to the kitchen to see him, and I looked through the door. Two of the old women of the farm were in the room, and they'd left both the doors open, while they had a bit of a set-to about something. Poor Mr. Tracey was sitting in his bath, shouting at them to go out of the room and shut the door. He'd lost his spectacles, and his towel had fallen in the bath, and the draught was

causing him great uneasiness. 'Twas a terrible example of the dangers of washing in those parts."

Sergeant Cassidy shook his head reflectively.

"Still," he continued after a moment, "'twas of the farms I was speaking. They have most of them two barns which run perpendicular to the farm-house, so that the three buildings enclose a sort of square yard in the middle of them. The barns are full of straw and hay and the like, and there it is that the men sleep, though 'tis well to climb up to the loft, and not to remain on the ground floor. The reason will be clear to you. These folks are very partial to pigs and hens and cows, and they are not particular where the animals go at night. When therefore I was roused from my sleep on one occasion by a fearful yell from below, I was not surprised.

"'Mother of Heaven! 'tis the Germans,' says the man next to me, hunting for his gun.

"' 'Tis nothing of the sort,' I says, as I looked through the loft. "'Tis the pig, going

to bed, and she has sat on the face of Angus MacNab.'

" 'The dirty beast has sat on me face,' cried MacNab, as he saw me.

" 'Then 'tis the pig I'm concerned about,' says I, and I went back to my blankets. I have no patience with them Scotchmen."

Sergeant Cassidy again availed himself of my cigarette case. "But where does the fire come in, Cassidy?" I asked, as he lit up.

"I am just coming to that, sir. As you can imagine, the soldier will not stop his smoking because he is in the middle of hay and straw. It is too much to ask of any man. There are strict orders about it, of course, but—well, an officer like you will understand, sir. One day—it was about eleven o'clock in the morning—one of the men says to me, 'Look at the barn.'

" ' 'Tis fired,' I cried, and there was smoke coming out at the top of the thatching. 'Run, ye blackguards, run. It's water and buckets we'll be wanting.'

"The first man in was the dirty schemer O'Toole, him that had been excused duty

that very morning by the doctor for gout in the foot.

“ ‘I have my bull’s-eyes saved,’ he says to me as I came up.

“ ‘You flat-faced malingerer,’ says I, ‘you have fatigues for a month as well.’

“ And then the officers came out. ‘ ‘Tis fired, it is,’ I says to the Major. Do you recall the Major, sir. A terrible sarcastic man he was—with an eyeglass.

“ He puts it in his eye as I spoke. ‘I didn’t imagine the damn’d thing was frost-bitten,’ he says. ‘Who’s the fool who did it?’

“ Then the boys got the water going. We had a ladder placed up to the loft, and we handed the buckets up to the men above. The lads kept a chain of full buckets on the move from hand to hand. But it was hopeless from the start.

“ ‘Get the animals out, boys,’ I shouts.

“ Then the fun began. The old women were out wringing their hands and weeping, and the old farmer was shouting to the interpreter, with a little pig under each arm. The interpreter goes up to the Major, and

tells him that the farmer said there was a fire-engine in the village. So the Major he sends off one of the officers to get it. Meantime one of the pigs had knocked down the old women, and then got entangled in their skirts. When that little box-up came to rest in the middle of the refuse pit, the skirts were on the pig. Oh, 'twas great! The fair at Ballygoyle was not in it. Then Mr. Tracey he climbs up the ladder to the loft, and gets an empty bucket in the chest, as they threw it out.

“ ‘ ’Tis hopeless, sir,’ he says to the Major when he could again speak, for the wind he had lost.

“ So the Major orders all the men out of the barn, and we started pouring water on the house to keep it from spreading. And then after about an hour the fire-engine arrived. 'Twas the most amazing contraption you ever did see. 'Twas an old tub on two wheels, with a hand-pump attached, and it had been brought by three old gentlemen with grey hair—one of them with a wooden leg. 'Twas the local fire brigade—the rest had gone to the war. The old man with the wooden leg

took on something terrible. He hopped about crying 'Oh! Oh!' and we thought he was hurt till the interpreter said he wanted the tub filled with water. Just as we had it filled the old pig knocked it over, and we had to fill it again. A terrible machine it was! When it was filled, those of the lads who could speak for laughter started to pump, while one of the old gentlemen took the nozzle and climbed up the roof of the farm-house, that he might the better direct the water. He had his thumb over the end of the nozzle to get the pressure up, and 'twas a powerful thumb he had, for the hose burst near the Major, and the water took him in the stomach. The lads were pumping with a will, and in stepping back the Major overbalanced and fell into the refuse pit in the centre of the courtyard. Oh, a terrible sight he was as he got up. All the men spent the afternoon looking for his eyeglass. And then the old gentleman on the roof was overcome by the heat, and fell off, and was only saved from destruction by going into a tub of pig-wash. 'Twas a great diversion, as, having his head downwards, he was nearly drowned."

I could stand it no more, so I rose to go. "Were the people compensated, Cassidy?" I asked.

"They will be, sir," he answered, "they will be—though it's my own belief the old ruffian of a farmer set light to it himself. 'Twas poor hay that he had, and he will be paid as if 'twas best quality."