

“ I WONDER if by chance you recall the fat lad that was cook for the officer’s mess when we used to go on the manœuvres in England,” remarked Cassidy to me one day. We were strolling slowly through the Park, getting his foot into work again ; but scenting one of his more expansive moments, I suggested a seat.

“ A great lad he was,” he went on when we had made ourselves comfortable, “ and it was cook he was for the officers over yonder. You recall his name, sir—Michael M’Doolan. ’Tis true that he was not the equal of a French chef, but he was a worthy lad to work under our doctor, of which same gentleman and his way with the people I have already told you. Of course you will understand, sir, that before we came into the billets, and whenever we are fighting, the doctor has no time to do anything but his job, and so ’tis the cook who does what he can for the officers, such

as milking any cow the owner has forgotten about, or the like.

“ I remember one day—we had come up to where we are now, sir—it being a day in November, and we were all working pretty hard just then. You’ll mind, sir, our hours are different to the others, for we are on always, and we never know when we shall be wanted or where we have to go. The officers all go out each night with parties of men and work in front of the trenches and on the different jobs, and come back in the morning—when they want a bit of food before they go to sleep. ’Tis the same with the men. They all come back into the farm or the dug-out behind the firing-line, where they get a chance of lying up during the day.

“ In the place where we were then the officers were in a farm. ’Twas a bit draughty, as there was more hole than wall, owing to the shells, and it was not over-distant from the firing-line itself, but hidden from it by a little hill. On the day I speak of I was walking from my own bit of a pigsty to their farm, when I felt the zip of a bullet as it went past my head. Thinks I to myself,

'That was as close as was convenient,' when another one zips past too. I was taking no risks, so I jumped into the ditch, the better to think. 'If there is not a blackguard drawing on me,' I says to myself, 'may I never again see Ballygoyle; but where is it that he is, for it is not in the firing-line that he can be?' seeing, as I have told you, we were hidden from it by a hill. I crept along the ditch to the officers' farm, and there I finds M'Doolan. The officers and men were all out, but he was not alone, for there were gathered with him behind the wall of the farm the four other cooks for the mess.

" 'What the devil are you all doing here?' I said, as I got out of the ditch. 'Is it a mothers' meeting that it is, or why are you not at the dinners?'

" 'Do you see the farm yonder?' says M'Doolan, pointing to one we could just see.

" 'I do,' says I, following his finger.

" 'They have us marked from there,' he says. 'There are three of them, I think, and it's sniping us they've been for the last two hours.'

" ' 'Twas from there, was it,' I says, 'that

it came?' and I looked through a hole at the farm.

" 'Have they been at you, Sergeant?' they says.

" 'Why else would I be in the ditch?' says I. 'I am not after training as a Boy Scout.'

" At that moment there came another shot. There was a terrible 'cluck,' and all was still. M'Doolan, he jumped up and rushed out before we could stop him, shouting, 'The devils, the devils!' at the top of his voice.

" 'Come back, you fool,' I cried, and went out and pulled him in. I pulled him in, I say, but he was peering through the different holes in the wall like a man possessed.

" 'Was it a cluck I heard behind there?' he says—in a terrible way he was—'was it a cluck, for if so 'twas Rosie.'

" 'Rosie?' I says. 'What are you talking about, and who's your Rosie at all?'

" 'It was,' he cries, peering through one of the holes, 'for I can see her—and it's dead she is.'

I looked out and I saw a hen lying in the

corner with most of its feathers off, and she certainly did not look very lively.

“ ‘ ’Tis only a hen,’ I cried in disgust. ‘ Away with you and your Rosie.’ ”

“ ‘ ’Tis not that,’ he says ; ‘ ’tis the Major. ’Tis terrible particular he is about getting his egg in the morning when he comes in, and when we comes here a week ago I found little Rosie. She was the only one left, and saving only that an ammunition wagon passed over her the day before yesterday she has been doing well. Oh ! ’tis a terrible thing she has passed away, Sergeant. ”

“ ‘ Why, only this morning she failed to do her duty, and when I went out there was nothing. The Major he says, “ M’Doolan,” he says, “ where the deuce is the Hen Fruit ? Hen fruit, you fool ! ” he cries, irritable-like, when I looks at him puzzled, “ produce of the feathered biped—egg ? ’ ” ”

“ ‘ “ She has misfired, sir,” I says. “ ’Tis either the wagon which passed over her two days ago, or else the round of ammunition she ate yesterday—but she is looking unwell. ” ”

“ ‘ Well, put her in a corner and sing to her this morning,” he says, “ and she’ll either

lay an egg or the bullet—but for Heaven's sake get hold of eggs somehow."

" " Well, I was doing my best. I had her in the corner over there, and it was hypnotising her I was. She was standing on one leg, and something was happening. I was clucking to her, when a bullet went between my legs from that same devil yonder. So I hopped it, but little Rosie stayed on, for I watched her, and 'tis an egg she would have laid before evening, for it was in earnest she was. And now what will I be after saying to the Major about it at all ? "

" " 'Tis rot you're talking,' I says. ' If the hen has been shot—and, bedad, after it had been run over by a wagon, and had eaten a round of ammunition, and had been looked at by you close, 'twas a merciful end for the poor bird—why are you five great hulking blatherers here ? Away with you, and capture the house and the snipers. Are not five Sappers enough to do it, even if they are cooks ? '

" " Less of your even and your cooks, Sergeant,' says one. ' We will do 't at once.'

" " Bedad ! sir," laughed Cassidy, " you'd have laughed to see those five. M'Doolan

elected himself the commander, and off they went up the ditch in great style, for all the world like a herd of hippopotamuses going to water. I followed them to see the fun. When they came to the end of the ditch they were still about two hundred yards from the house where they were. You'll mind, sir, the line was a bit mixed up just there, and there were a lot of the German snipers behind our own lines and all over the place. M'Doolan in a voice like a foghorn, gathered them together behind a refuse-heap and explained the situation.

“ ‘ Two of you,’ he says, ‘ will fire at the devils from here, to keep them engaged like, while we three will go round the back and rush them,’ and away they crept. The two that were left behind were not in a manner of speaking marksmen, but as they had not fired a shot since the beginning they were all over it. They plastered the house and the ground and the refuse-heap they were lying behind with bullets, and one of them struck a cow in the next field—leastways with a bellow of pain she disappeared towards the trenches.

“ But the diversion served, for the snipers had all their attention on the refuse heap, and M'Doolan and his two warriors reached the back unobserved. They crept up the stairs, and M'Doolan had his gun in one hand and Rosie in the other, for he was minded she should revenge herself. There were only two of them there, and they were occupied, as I have said, with the two outside, They crept into the room, and then with a whoop they were on them. M'Doolan tackled one. He hit him in the stomach with his rifle and in the face with Rosie, so that he dropped his gun and started praying. The other two had not their rifles, but one of them hit the second German over the head with a bottle of curry powder, while the other collared him by the legs. The first of them was trying to get Rosie's foot out of his mouth, and the other was sneezing curry when I got there ; and it was a great diversion, for M'Doolan was taking no risks, and he still had them covered with his gun, while the other two were trying to gather up what was left of the curry powder.

“ ‘ Murderers ! ’ roars M'Doolan, brandishing



Rosie in front of them, 'could you not have let her be while she laid her last egg? You Huths, you Gons!' he says, getting a trifle mixed. 'Tis my prisoners you are.' With that he seized them both, and when the other two had taken their guns he marched them out. 'Twas a great procession. We went down the road with the Germans in front, the one plucking curry powder from his mouth and the other feathers. The first man we ran into was the Major.

" 'What the devil is this!' he cries, putting up his eyeglass.

" 'We have avenged the death of Rosie, sir,' says M'Doolan, holding up the hen. 'Those two devils slaughtered her as she was getting ready to lay the egg for your breakfast to-morrow.'

" 'Great Scott!' says he, 'let's hear about it.'

" So M'Doolan told him the story. When he had finished the Major looked at him and then he looked at the Germans. One had still got his teeth full of feathers and the other was covered with a sort of yellow foam. Lastly he looked at the hen, and then he laughed.

“ ‘ Take ’em away,’ he says to me ; ‘ take ’em away, and send ’em to headquarters with my compliments.’ ”

“ ‘ But Rosic, sir,’ says M’Doolan. ‘ Is it roast or boiled you will have her ? ’ ”

“ The Major he looks at M’Doolan and laughs again. ‘ ’Tis a second Napoleon you are, M’Doolan,’ he says, ‘ and it is well you have done to capture them two ; but with regard to your cooking, do which you like, for we will not know the difference.’ ”