"My God," said Stephen, "you are talking to me as if I were in league with murderers!"

"Don't talk about murder," said Lord Daintree. "There's not the slightest necessity to call that kind of shooting murder. I've seen the police shooting people in the streets of several cities, and nobody called it murder. You're so hasty, Butler. A minute ago you wanted to make out that I called the Irish gentry contemptible. Now you think I'm accusing your friends of murder."

"My friends!" said Stephen. "Can't you understand——"

"Aren't they your friends?" said Lord Daintree, mildly surprised. "I apologise, of course. I'm sorry I mentioned poor Manders at all. I'm sure you'd do anything for him you could. But, of course, if you can't, you can't."

CHAPTER XIV

LORD DAINTREE'S talk stirred again in Stephen the doubt and fear he felt about the Land League. Once before, when Dean Ponsonby lectured him, he had been obliged to face the question. But he had succeeded in putting it by again. Now it came on him more insistently and fiercely. The daily papers were beginning to report agrarian outrages in Ireland. One or two murders had startled society. But Stephen, absorbed in the excitement of Parliamentary life, had not allowed his mind to dwell on them. He did not wish to consider them. But now he found himself forced to, and to do so with Mr. Hegarty's simple teaching about right and wrong clear in his recollection.

He consulted, as he was bound to do, members of his own party about his difficulties. He got little help or guidance from them.

"It is impossible," one said, "for us to control the action of every local branch. Besides, it's not our business to help the English to govern the country. They've got police enough to help them. If they can't keep order themselves they had better let us try. We must break the power of the landlords, and put a stop to arbitrary evictions."

Another man, whom Stephen knew to be a sincere and devoted Nationalist, answered him differently.

"The whole business," he said, "is a means to an end. Your class, my dear Butler, is hopelessly and devotedly loyal to England. The Protestant aristocracy stands between us and our rights as a nation. We can't win them over. Therefore, we've got to break their power, to destroy them as a force in the country. I don't care a snap of my fingers about the land agitation from any other point of view. As a matter of fact, I'd rather have the gentry on our side, and let them keep their estates. But if they won't join us they've got to go. Everything that stands between us and our independence has got to go."

Stephen sighed. The indictment of the gentry was perfectly true. They might have gone into, the national movement and directed it. They preferred to hold on to the skirts of English statesmen. The extinction of their power was inevitable. But that did not make the means by which it was being brought about any pleasanter to contemplate

Another spoke in a third way.

"We can't stop the thing now, even if we wanted to. If we tried we should lose our influence with the people, and ours is the only restraining force. Without the little control we are able to exercise, things would go from bad to worse. There would be anarchy, actual anarchy, in the country if we withdrew from the movement now. Besides, how can we? The Government is threatening us with all sorts of pains and penalties, with the suspension of ordinary law. I believe they're going to put the country under a set of pretty nearly irresponsible police magistrates. If we turn back now; everybody will say we simply funked the threatened coercion. We should be utterly discredited, both here and in Ireland. No, I don't like outrage and murder any more than you do, Mr. Butler. I candidly confess that, if I had known what this business was going to develop into, I'd have kept out of it. But now I'm in it, I'm going on, right through to the end. We'll let the English see which is stronger, their law or the will of the Irish people."

One other answer Stephen got—a cynical answer it seemed to him. It was given him by an able man whose intellectual power had often fascinated him, but of whom he had always felt a certain distrust.

" You know the old proverb, Mr. Butler, about the impossibility of making omelettes without breaking eggs? Apply it."

" What do you mean? " asked Stephen.

" Just what I say. You can't have a revolution without a little—what shall I call it?—unpleasantness. In my opinion we're getting off extremely cheap. I understand that you're an extreme man, Mr. Butler. You wouldn't be content with a gas-and-water vestry in Dublin? "

" Certainly not. I want an independent parliament for Ireland; something analogous to Grattan's parliament."

" And are you fool enough to think the English will ever give us that? They'd be bigger asses than I take them for if they did. Why, man, an independent Ireland would smash up their empire in five years. The Unionists are quite right about that. No sane Englishman will ever agree to such a thing voluntarily. We've got to run a revolution. Well, we're doing it on the most economical lines possible; economical, that is to say, in the kind of unpleasantness you complain of. Why, if we went to work along Wolfe Tone's lines, or the Fenians', we should deluge the country in blood. Whereas the way we're doing the thing—what's an odd landlord here or there? Isn't it better to shoot a couple of dozen of them down in the country than to be hanging all sorts of really decent people on the lamp-posts of the towns the way the French did?"

"I don't believe for a moment," said Stephen, "that you mean half you say. If I thought you did, I'd never speak to you again."

"Ah, that's just because you won't think straight. You cherish illusions. Now, I got rid of my illusions years ago."

"I cherish a belief," said Stephen, "since you force me to put it into words, that there's a difference between a soldier killing his enemy on a battlefield and an assassin lurking behind a wall for the life of an unsuspecting neighbour."

"From the point of view of the man who gets killed there doesn't seem to me to be any difference at all. If I had to choose myself I think I'd rather perish by the hand of the assassin. I should get a lot more sympathy and have nice things written about me in the newspapers. The mere soldier——"

"I don't think the present condition of things in Ireland is a good subject for cynical jokes."

"All right. I won't joke. I'll give you a bit of advice straight out of Shakespeare, so it's sure to be good. 'These things must not be thought of in this manner. So they will make us mad.' They'd make me mad if I went over to Ireland and watched them going on. What you ought to do is to stay here with us. Let yourself be absorbed in the parliamentary struggle. You'll feel the way we're being bullied and browbeaten. Flame like the rest of us, and there won't be room in your mind for the very ugly considerations that are preying on it now."

"I knew," said Stephen with real pleasure, "that you did not mean what you said just now."

"Oh, yes, I did. That was the true philosophy of the affair. Only, thank God, our minds are so constituted that we can't keep our attention fixed on pure philosophy. For the most part we see the skirts and draperies of Truth, her frills and furbelows, and we're content. Now and again we catch a glimpse of the goddess herself, naked. Then if we're wise men we look the other way, and steal out of sight before we're caught. If we don't, our own thoughts tear us to bits like the hounds in the old myth. By the way, do you read Shelley?"

"Yes," said Stephen, "occasionally. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Only if you didn't read Shelley you might have given me credit for originality. I should like you to think that I hit upon that thought about Actæon and his dogs myself. But of course I didn't. For the matter of that Shelley didn't either. The idea was always there in the story for anybody to pick out who wanted it. I dare say lots of other fellows put it into words before Shelley, only they didn't write it down."

Walking down Piccadilly one morning Stephen met Lord Daintree, and received an invitation to dinner.

"I shall be all by myself," said the old man. "My son has some engagement this evening. He generally has. I shall be really grateful if you will give me your company. I want to hear the latest news about Irish politics."

After dinner he heard it. Stephen told him of the progress of the League, of the outrages that were occurring in the country, of the inability or unwillingness of the politicians to interfere.

"I'm very well out of that business," said Lord Daintree. "It's all very fine for Manders. He's a sporting man, and likes shooting. I don't. How long do you suppose it will go on?"

"God knows!" said Stephen hopelessly.

"It's annoying to me—very annoying. I don't want to live in London. I have had enough of cities in my day. I want peace in my old age, monotonous days and long evenings. I should like to live out the rest of my time at home. However, if I can't, I can't. What do these fellows want? What do they expect?"

"Oh, you know well enough what they want. Fixity of tenure, fair rent, and the rest of it; perfectly reasonable demands, if only they were made in a proper way. But it's terrible to see——"

"Don't harrow my feelings. Spare me the details. Let's stick to broad principles. I suppose they are reasonable demands. But how the deuce is one to yield to them? You may. You're a bachelor with no expensive tastes. But what about me? How can I reduce my rents when I'm put to the pin of my collar to live at present?"

The wine was excellent, and Stephen was smoking an expensive cigar handed to him by a well-trained servant. He recollected the condition of some of Lord Daintree's tenants, men who owed rent to their landlord and money to Heverin. He sighed.

"And there are other fellows worse off than I am, men with mortgage interests to pay, or heavy charges. How can we reduce our rents? But, of course, our position is plain enough. We've got to fight the matter out to the end. I dare say we'll be beaten; but we'll hang on as long as we can, and fight our corner. But what about you, Butler? Do you know that you are an extremely interesting person just at present? You've got yourself into such an uncommonly queer place. I suppose you are still a Nationalist?"

"Yes. I'm as convinced as ever I was that Ireland——"

"Quite so," said Lord Daintree. "I understand. Your grandfather said it all to my father about a hundred years ago. But you're not a Land Leaguer?"

Stephen hesitated.

"No," he said at last, "I'm not. I admit the justice of most of what the tenants want, but I can't take part in the effort they're making to get it."

"That's just what I expected you to say. Now tell me this. Is there any one else in Ireland in your position?"

"Yes. I'm sure there are plenty of men. There must be."

"Come, now, how many men can you actually count on who share your views?"

Stephen laughed.

"One," he said; "just exactly one. And he's a worn-out old Fenian who spent several years in gaol."

"Ah! and you and he are going to turn back the battle from the gate. Is that the idea? You and he, the two of you, are to stay the progress of the League and then force the British Government to give Ireland her independence. Of course, I'm a cynical old beast to be talking to you like this. You Butlers have always had a touch of the idealist in you. Your grandfather wouldn't take the title they offered him. Your father gave up what must have been a pleasant enough kind of life and came back to Ireland to die of the famine fever. And what good did they do? Ireland is no better off because they were fools—I don't use the word in any offensive way, but simply as the world uses it—and you're a great deal worse off. Now why should you be a fool too? You can't do any good. You admit yourself that you're perfectly helpless. Why not throw the whole business up? Let Manders and Heverin shoot at each other, and the devil take the one of them who screws least money out of the poor brutes of tenants. You leave it to them to settle. Take a trip abroad for a year or two, and then come back and marry a rich wife. You have your life before you. Get some good out of it."

"I can't," said Stephen.

"Why?"

"I can't tell you. I can't explain."

"You won't explain," said Lord Daintree, "because you think I wouldn't understand or would laugh. But I think I do understand. I've met men like you occasionally. I've met most sorts of men in my day, and your sort among the rest, but very few of them. You have an idea of duty and you won't go against it. You have at the back of your mind a thing you call principle, and you won't be false to it. Isn't that so?"

"It isn't that I won't," said Stephen. "I can't. If I went off to enjoy myself now and left Ireland I should be miserable, because I should despise myself. I couldn't help despising myself."

"Well, you're a fool then, like your father before you and your grandfather before him. But I'll give you this much credit. If there were more fools of your kind the world would be a better place than it is. You would be a hero then, and not a fool. But the world is filled with men like me. We are the immense majority, and we rule the world. We have the driving force, the thing that makes mankind do things, with us, and that is selfishness. Therefore you are a fool, and not a hero. At bottom a fool and a hero are the same kind of man. It's accident which determines which of the two a man of your temperament is to be. If, as happens once in a hundred years, his folly and the general selfishness make in the same direction, then he takes men along with a rush. They call him a hero, and make songs about him. But generally selfishness and principle pull opposite ways. Then the man of principle isn't a hero but a fool. At present you can't be a hero. Men of my class are selfish and want to keep their land. Men of the other class are also selfish, and want to get the land. We won't go your way, nor will the Land League. The result is that you'll be left staring by yourself—a fool. Take my advice and don't be a fool. It's not pleasant."

Stephen pondered the advice as he had pondered that given him by the Member of Parliament. He didn't take either the one or the other.

CHAPTER XV

FATHER STAUNTON sat in his study one day in February. A volume of his Cyprian lay open before him, but he was not reading. The difficulties which beset the Carthaginian Church were not so pressing just then as those of the Church in Dhulough. Even the fine white vellum of the binding of the volume failed to delight Father Staunton, though the fingers of the hand which propped the book on the table before him moved along the deep dints of the tooling. He was perplexed and worried. Things were happening in his parish which he did not like. Like many of the French ecclesiastics whom he had known as a young man, Father Staunton had a distrust of modern democratic ideas. Partly because he himself belonged to an old and honourable family, and partly because he was a man of considerable learning and high culture, his sympathy was with the aristocracy, even where, as in Ireland, the aristocracy is for the most part Protestant. His natural dislike of agrarian agitation deepened into definite hostility as he watched the developments of the Land League and its methods of work.

One of the shopkeepers in the village of Cuslough, a widow, came to him one day with tears in her eyes to tell him that her business was