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

ruined. No one entered her shop or would buy from her. She had sold bread to a man who was obnoxious to the League, and now she herself was made to share his punishment. Ruin, and afterwards starvation or the workhouse, faced her and her children. Two days afterwards he heard that the cattle on a farm near Cuslough had been brutally maimed and some of them killed. On this very morning news had been brought him that Mr. Manders, the agent, had been shot at as he drove home after sunset.

Father Staunton thought of these and other things and could not read his Cyprian. His face was drawn and marked with heavy lines. His right hand fidgeted nervously, tremulously, with some papers which lay beside his book. He looked an old, a very old man; like one in whose life the final break had come.

There came a brisk tap at the door and Father O'Sullivan entered. He said something about a meeting of the League which was to be held in Dhulough village on the following Sunday evening, and asked Father Staunton to give his permission to a priest from a neighbouring parish to speak at it. He made his request as if the granting of permission were a mere matter of form, as if it were certain to be granted.

"I am not sure," said Father Staunton, "that I shall give the permission. I do not care for these Land League meetings."

Father O'Sullivan looked at him with astonishment.

"Surely," he said, "you will not refuse. He has spoken here several times before. It would be a very strong step to forbid him to speak again."

"I think I will refuse. I don't like the way the League is going on."

"But all the priests, or almost all, are in favour of it, and the people are all in it. The people will be very disappointed. They will be very angry."

The words were innocent enough, but there

was a hint of a threat in the way Father O'Sullivan spoke them. He had, indeed, no very great respect for Father Staunton. He regarded the old priest as a feeble, worn-out man. He was mistaken. There was behind Father Staunton's gentleness and habitual indecision a capacity for making up his mind on occasion.

"I do forbid him," he said. "I refuse to give him leave to speak at the meeting, and, what is more, I shall warn the people from the altar next Sunday against the Land League."

"Why?"

"It is an immoral conspiracy. Who cut the tails off Cassidy's bullocks last week? The Land League. Who's ruining the widow Dever's little shop and driving her to the workhouse? The Land League. Who had a shot at Mr. Manders last night? I'm a priest of the Catholic Church, and I'll give no countenance to devilish cruelty and murder."

"You are mistaken, Father; indeed, you are mistaken. The League does not encourage such outrages. They are not our work. Do you think I would be chairman of meetings where such things are planned?"

"Your League doesn't stop them, and it might. It doesn't discourage them. It doesn't denounce them. Why not?"

"But we are not policemen. Surely the police ought to do their own work without coming to us to help them. You cannot expect us to patrol the country."

Father Staunton looked at his curate long and searchingly; but Father O'Sullivan met his gaze without flinching. It was the old man's eyes, and not his, which dropped at the end of their encounter. Father O'Sullivan had done nothing of which he was ashamed, was doing nothing which his conscience forbade. And he, too, was a priest of the Church, an upholder of Catholic morality, of the teaching of Jesus Christ. Father

Staunton could not but believe that the man before him was honest.

"You are teaching the people," he said, "to repudiate their just and lawful debts; to refuse to pay what they owe. Is that in accordance with the teaching of the Church?"

Hitherto Father O'Sullivan had spoken as a man on his defence. He had been calm and respectful in his manner. He had shown no trace of excitement. Now, suddenly, there came bright patches of red on his cheeks. His eyes opened wide so that it was possible to see a rim of white all round the pupils. A pulse throbbed visibly in his temples. He seemed to be struggling to give expression to strong feeling. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. Then he spoke.

"Lawful debts! Yes, lawful according to iniquitous laws of man's making which allow the rich to rob the poor. But just! How can you call them just debts? Is it justice to take the food out of the mouths of hundreds of women and children that one man may live in luxury? Is it justice to burn the roofs off the poor mud-cabins that shelter the people, because they can't pay what is demanded of them? Oh, you mustn't talk of justice. Sure, you know—aren't you a good man, and don't we all know that you have the mercy of God in your heart and His love for the poor?—you know that the people can't pay. It isn't that they won't; they can't. Wasn't the harvest last year the worst that was known since the famine? And never a penny of their rents would the landlords forego. Ah! don't talk of justice."

Father O'Sullivan came close beside the table; he knelt down, pushed away the Cyprian, and took Father Staunton's hands in his.

"Think, Father," he said. "Think of last December, at the blessed Christmas time, when they were getting ready the crib for the Son of Mary to lie in the chapel. They came with the

police to the people's houses, and they broke the doors off them, and dragged all the sticks of furniture out on to the roadside and the rain coming down on them. The women were gathering the little children under their shawls—all the shelter that was left for them in the cruel, wide world. The men stood there, stupid with misery, while the thatch of the roofs was burnt before their eyes. Think of it. God in heaven! Can a man think of it and not burn with rage?"

Father Staunton sat silent. He knew that the description his curate gave was true. He realised with awful plainness the scenes. He had heard the women's wailing. He had seen the dumb despair in the men's faces. He wavered. For a moment it seemed to him, as it seemed to Father O'Sullivan, that any means were justifiable which would put an end to such things. Then he remembered more. He remembered faces, base, cruel faces, in which there was not dumb despair but furtive hate, and bitter, cowardly cruelty. He saw, in imagination, men, like fiends, crawling through the darkness with knives in their hands to cut and mangle the beasts which stood patient in the bare fields. He had visions of others, heartened for awful iniquity with draughts of whisky, lurking behind walls with loaded guns that they might take human life. Father O'Sullivan might argue and excuse himself, might disclaim the League's responsibility for such deeds; but they followed the League's teaching, as rain followed the gathering of clouds in the south. He remembered the widow and her shop. She also was ruined. Her children too were starving. It was the League, not the landlord, which was cruel to her.

"I know well what you mean," he said. He rose slowly from his chair and drew away his hands from the young man's grasp. "Believe me, I have felt it. It is true that I have been a selfish old man, that I have cared too much for my

own comfort and too little for my people. Yet I have not been so selfish that I have not sometimes felt for them. I know well that they have suffered. But I say this to you solemnly now. There is something worse than suffering wrong. There is a world beyond this one where they who suffer wrong are recompensed. A man may suffer wrong and be saved. But what is to be said of those who of their own set purpose *do* wrong?"

Father O'Sullivan also rose. The colour had gone from his cheeks. Even his lips were almost white. The look of fierce determination which had long before attracted the wonder of Stephen Butler, took the place of excitement on his face.

"May God forget me in my last hour," he said, "if I stand by with folded hands and see my people suffer wrong; if I drug them with talk of the joys of paradise so that the wicked may make a prey of them now without fear of vengeance."

"Take care," said Father Staunton, "lest you deny the faith."

"I shall take care that I am not false to God's truth and God's justice."

The curate left the room.

Father Staunton went over to the chair before the table and sat down again. He pulled the volume of Cyprian over towards him, closed it, and stroked the smooth sides of the book softly with one hand. The afternoon light began to fail. Clouds gathered from the south-west, heavy, black clouds—and they obscured the twilight which still lingered in the west. The fire glowed in the grate, but there were no flames among the sods of turf. The priest sat almost in the dark.

It seemed to him that Father O'Sullivan had defied him, had made light of his authority, had treated his opinions with contempt. He was angry. Of late years Father Staunton had very rarely been angry with any one. Old age and much reading of great books had made him very

tolerant of the ways of men. It surprised him to find that he was really angry with his curate. At first he was well pleased at the heat of his feeling. It was righteous indignation, a jealousy for what was good. He began planning how he would exercise the authority vested in him as parish priest. He would forbid his curate to have anything more to do with the Land League. He would prevent the young man making speeches and stirring the people up to evil doing. He would write to the Bishop and complain that Father O'Sullivan was insubordinate.

He rose, walked over to the fireplace, fumbled on the dark chimney-piece, found a candle and a box of matches. Above the fireplace in a little black frame hung a card on which, delicately illuminated, were a few words from the *Imitation of Christ*. During all the years of his priesthood Father Staunton had kept this illuminated card hung somewhere so that he saw it daily. The thing itself was very dear to him. It had been wrought by his sister, a nun in a French convent. She had chosen the words, had drawn the letters and the ornaments which surrounded them with delicate taste and patient care. She had given it to her brother at his ordination, years and years, nearly fifty years before. She was dead. Twenty years before he had seen her grave in the convent cemetery and her name graven on the slab in the convent chapel. There remained to him just these words from her hand; a reminder now of childish games, of hopes and high emotions confessed to each other and shared in early youth; of the dedication of his life and hers to God.

The candle he lit shone for a moment on the words, and then its flame died down to a tiny spark, the dry wick curling red over the unmelted wax. But the moment's light was sufficient. He read: "*Ad te ipsum oculos reflecte.*" The context was perfectly familiar to him. He could have said the whole chapter off by heart. Now, before

the flame of his candle swelled again to give him light, he remembered sentence after sentence of stark exhortation. "Beware of judging the deeds of other men. In judging others a man engages in futile labour. We lose the power of right judgment through love of ourselves." With the recollection of the words there came on him a sense of the strange spirit of the book in which they stood. Like many another before him, and many since his time, Father Staunton became the victim of the fascination of utter self-denial. Thomas à Kempis set Jesus of Nazareth before the eyes of men as no one else ever did. The man who has once felt the tender pathos of the sternness that breathes out the words of *The Imitation* can never reckon on escaping from the slavery of Jesus. He may lose sight for a while of the Master of Whom his soul is enamoured; he may put out of his mind the words so that they do not haunt or trouble him; but at unexpected moments, at inconvenient times, just when he desires them least, the words will come back to him, the figure of the Master will be before him, the passionate pleading of the sorrowful eyes will compel him.

Father Staunton took his candle and with a hand that shook pitifully carried it over to the table. He understood quite clearly that his anger with Father O'Sullivan was not righteous or noble. It was a base thing. It came from a sense of personal slight, of outraged dignity. It had its root in that selfishness, that *privatus amor*, against which the book warned him. With the revulsion of feeling which followed this flash of self-knowledge he saw his curate with other eyes. The young man was earnest—more than earnest—was passionate for a cause, and for him at least there was no personal gain in view, no selfish motive at the back of what he did. He was fighting, but fighting for others, not for himself, and those others were the poor, the despised, the

seemingly helpless. Men's blood is hot when they fight. A young man's blood boils in him when he is putting forth all his strength. How is he to stop to contemplate the hideousness of wounds, the ghastly spectacle of hacked bodies? How is he to find time or heart to pity groaning men? Father Staunton understood and shuddered.

"May God forgive us all," he murmured, "for our hatred and our bitterness."

But though he understood, though he could sympathise with his curate and even admire him, the old priest's mind was too clear, his eye too single, to allow him to confuse right and wrong together. The ways in which the Land League worked, the tyranny by which its battle was being fought, were not right. Father O'Sullivan, with his passionate sense of wrong to be righted, might grow confused about plain issues. But the older man, standing apart a little way from the strife, brought into touch with Jesus of Nazareth, could not think that God's battles were fought by such means.

"I shall warn my people," he said. "I must warn them or be false to my duty as a priest. Maybe they will not listen, but I shall warn them."

Then he drew his paper over to him and began to write. But the idea of a letter to his Bishop complaining of Father O'Sullivan's conduct had gone from his mind. Instead he wrote to Stephen Butler. It is curious nowadays to think of a parish priest writing a confidential letter to a Protestant landlord. The agrarian struggle has left behind it many evil fruits, and among them the almost total separation between the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant gentry of Ireland. These two classes no longer know each other. Even the best men of each find it hard to work with the others for what both believe to be right. A generation of priests has grown up which knows nothing of the gentry, which dislikes and distrusts them as all men do

strangers. The remains of the landlord party, remembering the part taken by the clergy in the land war, look upon the priests as hereditary enemies. But for Father Staunton there was nothing strange about writing to Stephen Butler. In his eyes the landlord was still what he had been once—the natural leader and guide of his people. He knew Stephen well, liked him, and trusted him. It seemed that at a time when people were listening to counsels of lawlessness and breaking free from all restraints, when the stability of the little society at Dhulough was threatened, that the landlord ought to be at home among his people.

Therefore he wrote at length to Stephen Butler. He told him about the growing strength of the Land League in the neighbourhood, of the outrages that had been committed, of the boycotting, of the attack upon Mr. Manders.

"I am sure," he went on, "that you are very busy in London with your Parliament work. I read about your doings in the papers. No doubt it is all very interesting and very important. Perhaps you may succeed in achieving something, even in getting for Ireland what I know you want. Whether it would be good for us if you did get it I cannot tell. But I am sure that you ought to be at home with us now. We need your help here. I am sure that there is more important work waiting for you in Dhulough than any you can find in England. I mean to do my best with the people. But I think you can do a great deal that I cannot. They have always liked you personally, and you come of the old stock, which means a great deal to Irishmen."

It is not surprising, considering the friendship which existed between him and Stephen, that Father Staunton should have written the letter. It is surprising that he should have so little understood the situation in Ireland as to suppose that Stephen Butler's presence would have the

smallest effect in staying the progress of the Land League. Neither then nor for many years afterwards would any landlord in Connacht lead or guide the people. A violent, passionate class hatred swept from the minds of the peasantry all feeling of loyalty to the aristocracy. The distinction between good landlords and bad was obliterated in the people's minds. The representative of a family which had been settled among them for many generations, which had suffered in their trouble, helped them in their need, paid its victim to the destroying angel in the famine time, was a landlord. The alien who had bought an estate for less than its value, taken rents as a speculator takes the profits of his investments, who lived in London and regarded Ireland as a tea merchant does his garden in Ceylon—he was nothing worse than a landlord. There was nothing worse for him to be.

Father Staunton did not realise this. Few men did at first. Stephen Butler, hearing what was happening in Ireland, in touch more or less with some of his own party who were taking a leading part in the agitation, was beginning to guess at the meaning of the new spirit in the country and to feel his own helplessness. Nevertheless he took the priest's letter as a plain call to a duty which could not be refused. He returned to Ireland to face the trouble which was upon the country, just as his father had returned to face the famine.

CHAPTER XVI

ON Sunday at midday mass, Father Staunton spoke his mind to the people about the Land League. He reminded them that years before he had warned them against the Fenian Society. He appealed to the history of that