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

movement as a proof of the wisdom of the words he then spoke to them.

"It won't be good for yourselves or your families," he said, "if you take to lawless ways. No good ever comes of taking the law into your own hands. You'll be liable to suffer for it in the end, as many others have suffered before you."

Then he reminded them that besides the laws of men, breaches of which may sometimes escape the punishment due to them, there is a higher law, the law of God.

"You ought to obey that law," he said, "because you love it. But there are some of you, either strangers as I hope, or men of your own parish, that don't love the law of God. I warn you now that there's no escaping punishment for breaking it. It may be in this life or it may be not till the life to come, but here or hereafter the punishment is sure."

More he said in the same strain, and as he spoke his voice gathered strength from his earnestness. There was no doubt that he spoke from his heart with intense conviction. But he felt from the very beginning that he was saying what the people were unwilling to hear. The men stood sullen with downcast eyes. As he continued speaking he became aware that his congregation was definitely hostile to him. Here and there, indeed, a woman burst into tears, moved to emotion by the solemnity and earnestness with which he spoke. Nor was there any outward sign of disapproval. There was perfect silence. There was no want of respect in the behaviour of the people. But the curious and subtle sense of the sympathy of his audience which comes to every public speaker warned him that his words were wasted, that the people did not believe him, or believing, did not mean to obey.

After mass was over he crossed the road to his presbytery. A number of men were loitering near the chapel gate. Not one of them lifted his

hat as the priest passed. Yet the distance at which they stood was such that he could not feel sure that any actual disrespect was intended. Nor could he be certain that he was meant to overhear the words they said. Yet one remark reached his ears—

"It's a pity Father O'Sullivan wasn't at mass to-day."

It was Father O'Sullivan's duty on Sundays to serve the outlying chapel at Cuslough. He was not usually present at midday mass in Dhulough. The remark he overheard struck Father Staunton as a strange one. He stood still for a moment, half intending to turn aside and speak to the men. Then he thought it better to leave the matter alone, and entered the gate of the presbytery. As he did so he heard another voice, and this time he was sure the words were meant to reach him—

"Father O'Sullivan's not so fond of eating his dinner up at the big house with the landlord."

It was with a poor appetite that Father Staunton sat down to his midday meal. He had done what he believed to be his duty. He had spoken nothing but what he was sure was the truth. But the people were very angry with him. There crept over him a numb feeling. He pushed his plate away, unable to swallow the morsel in his mouth. A sensation of nausea seized him. He feared that he might be actually sick. Then he grew cold and trembled. It was not that he feared his people or their hostility. He did not fear them, but he loved them very much. He had baptised half the adults of the parish and most of the children. He had taught them, presented them for confirmation, given them their first communion. He had listened to the confessions of these men and women till he knew their very hearts. They were his people. He loved them. It went near to breaking his heart to think that they would turn against him. He

heard the noise of Father O'Sullivan's car being driven into the yard. The curate had returned from Cuslough and in a few minutes would come in and speak to him as usual. He waited, but Father O'Sullivan did not appear. Then he heard men walking down the gravel path which led from the front of the presbytery to the stable yard. He glanced through the window and recognised them. They were some of those who had formed the group outside the chapel from which the remarks that pained him had proceeded. No doubt they were going to tell Father O'Sullivan what had been said in the chapel. He waited for a long time. Then at last he heard footsteps in the passage. The door of his room was flung open and his curate entered.

The young priest's face was quite white and his eyes were bright with anger. He strode across the room and stood opposite the table at which Father Staunton sat at his dinner.

"You denounced the League from the altar to-day," he said.

Father Staunton sat still. His eyes were on the dish of meat growing cold on the table before him, and he did not raise them. He laid down his knife and fork and clasped his hands together, twining the fingers round each other and then rubbing them stiffly together. A casual onlooker might have supposed that the older man was a culprit—a desperately frightened culprit—struggling in the face of a judge to find some excuse for his evildoing. Father O'Sullivan glared at him and then repeated what he had said before—

"I hear that you denounced the League from off the altar to-day."

He spoke even more truculently than he had at first. Perhaps he imagined that Father Staunton was afraid of him and might be overborne with fierce tones and angry words. Like many men of gentle nature and kindly heart, Father

Staunton shrank from fierceness and anger with the same kind of dislike which a delicate lady feels for foul language or actual filth. But he was no coward, and he was not, in spite of his downcast eyes and nervously working hands, in the least afraid of his curate. He looked up at last and met Father O'Sullivan's angry gaze calmly.

"I did my duty this morning when I warned the people from sin, and I am prepared to do it again. Nor do I think that you have a right to call me to account for what I say to them."

A man less intensely enthusiastic, less profoundly convinced of the justice of the cause for which he worked, might have been cowed by the quiet dignity with which the old man spoke. But Father O'Sullivan neither heeded nor observed it. A man of high moral fibre, of that sympathy which comes of culture, might have been moved, touched by the gentleness with which the answer was given. Father O'Sullivan was a strong man and an honest, but his outlook upon life was a narrow one. There was not room in his heart for sympathy with an opponent, nor had he the capacity for seeing things from any point of view but his own.

"There is to be a meeting of the League this evening," he said, "at which I shall preside. I shall make it clear that it is only one priest here and there who intends to desert the people in their trouble."

"I," said Father Staunton, "shall drive over this afternoon and explain to Mr. Manders that I have no part with the ruffians who attempted to take his life last week, or with those whose violent language urged ignorant men to the commission of such crime."

A sudden spasm contorted the curate's face.

"You mean," he said, "that you regard me as a murderer or responsible for murder? Such a suspicion is unjust and horrible. But I say this, if Mr. Manders had been shot dead, while I should

abhor the crime, I should maintain and believe that he got no more than he deserved."

He turned and left the room. Father Staunton, leaving his almost untasted dinner, drew his chair close to the fire. He crouched over it, holding painfully cold hands outstretched to the blaze. He believed that once again he had done his duty, but the belief brought him little comfort. He knew that there was anger, fierce and bitter resentment, against him in the curate's heart. He knew that there was a quarrel between them, and that for a long time there could be no fellowship or friendliness. It brought intolerable misery to him to think that he, a priest, must share the labours of the sanctuary with another, also a priest, who felt bitterly towards him; that alternately they would offer from the same altar the sacrifice which expressed the unfathomable love of God, and that all the time there would be between them a darkness of hate separating their souls from one another, and perhaps both their souls from the Divine Master.

Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to do what he said he would do. Mr. Manders was a man for whom he had little liking, and with whose way of life he had small sympathy. But all the more, he felt it necessary to make Mr. Manders understand that he, the representative of the Church in the parish, had no sympathy with lawlessness and crime.

He ordered his horse to be harnessed and put into the trap.

"I shall drive myself," he said. "Tell Patsey that. I won't interfere with his Sunday afternoon."

The housekeeper was very solicitous for his comfort. She warmed his old dreadnought coat before the kitchen fire, warmed his gloves, sought out a long woollen comforter.

"You won't be late, Father?" she said. "The wind is bitter cold, and with the cough

that's at you, you oughtn't to be going out at all."

She wrapped him, protesting feebly, in the various garments she had prepared. She tucked the rug round his feet and legs, and, all the while she grumbled about the cough that would surely be the death of him some day, and the fact that he had hardly tasted his dinner. She had lived for years with Father Staunton, and for years had grumbled about his ways to her friends; but she loved him in her heart, and this excessive care for his comfort was her way of showing that she was aware that Father O'Sullivan had been vexing him, and that her sympathies were with her old master, and not with the curate.

The road to Cuslough is bleak, and after he had passed a mile of it Father Staunton began to appreciate the bitter coldness of the wind. It crept in between the buttons of the frieze coat and chilled his body; it blew up under the rug and turned his legs to stone; it numbed his hands, so that he could not feel the reins between his fingers. He was too miserably cold to notice the people who passed him on the road, though they might have interested him. Heverin, the publican and moneylender of Cuslough, drove towards Dhulough on his car. Heverin was a leading member of the Land League Committee, and had been elected its treasurer. Having drunk whisky enough to make him self-assertive, he drove as if he had an exclusive right to the use of the centre of the road. Father Staunton's horse—an aged animal wise enough to recognise the danger of asserting his master's rights against the treasurer of the Land League—stood quietly in the ditch till Heverin had passed. Johnny Darcy came next, better dressed and more prosperous-looking than he had been before the meeting at which the Land League was started. It is a fortunate thing that lofty patriotism, which lands some men in ruin and gaol, which even

leads to the gallows, occasionally puts a decent coat on the backs of its professors. With Darcy were two others who walked beside him, respect and admiration expressed in their mien and gait. Johnny Darcy's was a spirit suited for stirring times. These were his humbler followers. All three were hangers-on of the League's committee. They stared at Father Staunton, and touched their hats to him with a certain insolence of gesture. Others followed them—three or four men. It seemed that Cuslough was to be adequately represented at the meeting, over which Father O'Sullivan intended to preside.

Mr. Manders ate his dinner in the middle of the day on Sundays. Most good Christians do this, because Sunday afternoon is a dull and difficult time to get through, and a heavy meal at an unaccustomed hour induces sleep; and in sleep the hours pass swiftly and agreeably. Mr. Manders, who usually lunched at his office on a sandwich and a glass of sherry, always slumbered profoundly on Sunday afternoon. He was asleep when Father Staunton, stiff with cold, was shown into the comfortable dining-room. Mr. Manders received him with blinking eyes, but the greatest cordiality.

"Sit down, Father Staunton. Why, bless my soul, you are desperately cold. Come over to the fire."

He piled on more turf as he spoke and pulled the deep chair in which he had been sleeping close to the blaze. He took the priest by the shoulders and pushed him into it.

"Wait now," he said. "Don't begin to talk yet. I won't hear a word about your business, whatever it is that brought you here, till you are properly warm again."

He went to the door of the room, and shouted to his servants—

"Here, Mary, Tom, Bridgie, whichever it is of you that's supposed to be at home this after-

noon! Bring me a kettle of boiling water. Never mind your caps and aprons or whatever it is you haven't got on. I want the water at once and boiling."

In Mr. Manders' house a demand for boiling water was not uncommon, and there was hardly an hour of the day or night at which it might not be made. Mary, Tom, and Bridgie always had a kettle on the fire. It was Bridgie, the cook, whose turn it was to stay at home on the Sunday afternoon of Father Staunton's visit. At the first sound of her master's voice she started from the kitchen with the kettle in her hand, and almost before Mr. Manders had finished his exhortation she had it singing beside the piled-up turf on the dining-room hearth. Mr. Manders poured a liberal allowance of whisky into a tumbler, adding the boiling water, and stood the steaming drink on a small table beside the priest's chair. Then he brought over the sugar-bowl from the sideboard, took a lemon, a knife, and a spoon, and placed them all beside the tumbler.

"Mix in the condiments for yourself," he said, "and don't let me hear a word out of your mouth till you've put yourself outside that glass of punch."

Father Staunton sniffed the mixture. The very steam of it restored some colour to his face. He sipped it and gasped; sipped again and coughed; took a good mouthful, and felt the warm tingling to his finger-tips. He drank half the contents of the tumbler. Even his feet began to feel less numb. He stretched them out towards the blaze, and lay back in the chair. Then he set the tumbler down, and sat straight.

"I came to tell you, Mr. Manders, that I deplore and condemn in the strongest manner the violent proceedings of the Land League, and especially the attempt which was made on your life."

"You needn't have come all this way to tell

me that," said Mr. Manders. "I know you too well, Father Staunton, to suppose for a moment that you approve of this work. You're a gentleman and a Christian. Of course, you wouldn't mix yourself up with a pack of murderous blackguards. I don't need you to tell me such a thing as that."

"It's bad work," said the priest. "Bad work, very bad. It's worse than the Fenian times. It's a terrible thing to me to think that in my parish men should be going about in danger of their lives."

"Come, now, you mustn't take these things too seriously. After all, these fellows are rotten bad shots. They missed me the other night at twenty yards, and practically a sitting shot. I'd hardly have believed it possible to miss at the distance, especially when the ruffian had a stone wall to lean his gun on."

"I wish you would ask for police protection. They may not miss you the next time."

Mr. Manders' face hardened suddenly. The cheery light died out of his eyes. There was a cold, hard look in them when he answered.

"The man that misses me the next time will shoot no more, unless he enlists in the devil's militia and carries a rifle in hell. I'll shoot him, and I'll shoot him dead! As for police protection, I won't have it. I'll show these blackguards that I'm not afraid of them. The worst thing you can do is to let fellows of that sort think you're frightened. I'll go about my business as usual, and I'll have no police driving after me. But I'll have a revolver in my pocket and a Winchester repeating rifle on the well of the car. You might mention that to your curate, Father Staunton, and let him tell the committee of the League. They know I can shoot straight, and they'll have to make their best murderer pretty drunk before he takes me on again."

"My curate——" began Father Staunton.

"I don't want to talk about your curate," said Mr. Manders. "I have my own opinion of that young man, but it's not one which it would suit me to tell you, or, for the matter of that, which would suit you to sit and listen to."

"Still, I'd like you to know——".

"It's not the least bit of use, Father Staunton. There's no good telling me that he's this, and that, and the other thing, and all that's excellent. He started the infernal League here, and that's enough for me."

Father Staunton sighed. The room grew dark while they talked, and at last Mr. Manders rose and began to search for a box of matches that he might light the candles which stood on the chimney-piece.

"I must be getting home before it gets too late," said the priest. "My trap is in your yard. I'll say good-bye to you here, and go and get it."

Mr. Manders went over to the window and looked out.

"It has begun to snow," he said. "You oughtn't to attempt to drive. Stay here for the night. I can have a bed made up for you; it won't be the least trouble. You can drive home to-morrow morning."

But Father Staunton would not accept the offered hospitality. In spite of all that could be said to him he struggled into his great-coat again, got out his horse and trap, and started on his drive home.

In spite of the snow the drive was less trying than it had been earlier in the afternoon. The wind was on his back and the horse, with his head turned homewards, travelled fast. But Father Staunton's heart was heavy. He foresaw much trouble. He knew better than Mr. Manders how strong a hold the League had on the people.

He approached the village of Dhulough. It surprised him to see lights moving about up and

down the street, and to hear the sound of men's voices in loud talk. Then as he entered the village his horse shied. Two men had stepped suddenly from the shadow of a house and stood in the middle of the street. Father Staunton gathered the reins tightly in his hand, whipped the horse, and drove past them. Immediately he heard a low curse behind him. Then from the darkness on each side of him came the noise of booing. Lights flashed before him, and were suddenly extinguished. Fierce shouts came to him from every direction. His horse, thoroughly frightened, began to plunge.

"Do you know who I am?" shouted Father Staunton. "I'm your parish priest."

"We know you well enough. You've been plotting and scheming with the agent, God damn him!"

Then the crowd yelled: "Yah! Yah! Yah!"

The horse became almost unmanageable. Father Staunton's nerve did not fail him, but his hands were an old man's hands, not very firm or steady on the reins, and they were numb again with cold. A man came quickly down the street from the direction of the presbytery. Father Staunton recognised him by his walk. It was Rafferty, the old Fenian. He seized the horse's head and began stroking the creature's neck. Then, still holding the ring of the bit in his hand, he turned to the men who shouted.

"You blackguards and cowards!" he said. "You'd come out here in the dark to frighten an old man's horse. You'd boo and hoot your priest that never did anything but good for you. But you wouldn't fight like men when you had the chance, neither you nor your fathers before you. It's all you're fit for, to frighten women and priests, and shoot in the dark behind walls, and cut the tails off cattle. You're cowards! Go home and hide yourselves!"

He was apparently right in his estimate of the

character of the men who surrounded him. No one made any answer. Then the police sergeant, followed by four of his men, appeared. They came from their barrack at the far end of the village. There was a stampede of men rushing through the snow out of the village. The police advanced at a run with their batons in their hands.

"Stop, sergeant," cried Father Staunton, "there's no harm done. It's only some foolish boys. Don't go after them. Let them be."

Old Rafferty led the horse into the presbytery yard and helped the priest out of the trap. Father Staunton was trembling and unsteady on his feet. He took Rafferty's arm and allowed himself to be led to his own door. The police stood at the gate, uncertain whether their services would be required again. The housekeeper, scared and white, opened the door.

"Where is Father O'Sullivan?" asked the old priest.

"He's up in his own room, your reverence," said the housekeeper.

"He is, Father," added Rafferty; "and, what's more, he's been there for the last two hours or more."

"Thank God!" said Father Staunton. "But come in, Rafferty. Come in and sit down awhile. I must thank you."

But Rafferty shook his head.

"I must be getting off to my own home," he said. "It's a long row I'll have to-night with the storm that's in it, but the wind's off shore, and, thank God, I'm strong in the arms still."

Father Staunton went to bed very early. He lay awake during the greater part of the night, coughing constantly and very miserable. The next day the housekeeper, thoroughly alarmed, sent for the doctor. It appeared that there was nothing worse the matter than a slight congestion of one of his lungs, but for some time Father O'Sullivan had charge of the parish.