CHAPTER XIX

MR. MANDERS and Stephen Butler left the railway station together. Major Thorne busied himself for a while distributing his police among the cars which were to carry them back to Cuslough and getting the mounted men into order for the march.

"You'll dine with me to-night, Butler," said Mr. Manders. "I'm asking the gallant Major, too. He's sure to spread himself out largely in the course of the evening about his performance to-day. I expect it will be great fun listening to him."

But Stephen did not want to be amused. He declined the invitation and rode off by himself. He preferred to spend his evening alone at Dhulough House. Mr. Manders approached the magistrate.

"Major Thorne, I shall be very glad if you'll dine with me this evening. Don't bother about dressing if your clothes are somewhere else. There are no ladies, and I can give you a wash."

"Sorry," said the Major; "I can't possibly. I should like to, but I've got a lot of writing to get through this evening. I'll send the car on with you from Cuslough."

Mr. Manders was vexed.

"Hang it all," he muttered. "Why should everybody take life so seriously? Heverin and his bullocks are nuisance enough in the daytime. They ought not to be allowed to spoil our evenings as well."

The news of Heverin's surrender reached Cuslough before the police did. It was received with great excitement, and spread rapidly to every cottage in the neighbourhood. The people crowded into the village as if for a fair. The shaggy ponies on which they rode were tethered

in every back yard. When the yards and stables were full they were left standing forlornly in the gutters of the street. Men crowded the rooms in which the League committee met and gathered round Heverin's door. When the police marched in the street was thronged with people, and groups of men were discussing the situation excitedly. It was generally felt that Heverin's surrender was likely to injure seriously the power and prestige of the League. Fiery spirits counselled prompt and immediate vengeance on the coward. There was talk of breaking the windows of his house at once, and even of setting fire to it. But the people were by no means unanimous. There were those who had good reason to recollect the fact that he was banker to the community. Popular disapproval expressed by window-breaking and such demonstrations might have the effect of goading Heverin to extreme measures against those who were completely in his power. It was difficult, though evidently not impossible, for the law to make men pay a landlord what he claimed as his due. It was still to be proved what forces a moneylender could call to his aid in an hour of need.

"Sure we all know," said the supporters of Heverin, "that he's a good friend to the League. Wasn't it himself that put down five pounds for a subscription, and who else gave the half of it?"

"Devil the one deserves better of the League than he does. If it isn't Father O'Sullivan himself, where would you get the equal of Mr. Heverin?"

"And what would you have the man do? Was he to see his beasts sent off to Dublin in the train, and him with money in his pocket to pay the trifle that was owing on the land?"

So these men spoke, hoping for advances of money from Mr. Heverin's purse, advances which they sorely needed for the purchase of seed potatoes; or dreading the calling in of debts long

due. While the wrangle between the two parties dragged along, Heverin himself drove into the village. He looked neither to right nor left, greeted no man, but went straight to his house. He entered it, shut the door behind him, and almost immediately closed and barred the shutters of the windows on the ground floor. His appearance quickened the temper of the crowd. What had been a wrangle before now became a debate. Angry words were spoken; voices were raised; there were threats and even scuffles. The police emerged from the barrack and patrolled the street in couples. A quiet evening and a good night's rest were certainly due to them after their long day's work, but it seemed most unlikely that they would get them. All day they had been occupied in protecting Heverin's bullocks from Heverin's friends. Now they were to protect Heverin's friends from each other. Later on, very probably, they would be employed in protecting Heverin himself from his friends.

The crowd in the street grew larger as fresh people streamed into the village, and its temper got more excitable. Major Thorne, from his office in the barrack, ordered out more police. The inspector, with his sword in its shiny scabbard, paraded the street anxiously as the evening darkened. It began to rain. He went into the barrack and reported the fact to Major Thorne.

"The people will disperse," said the magistrate, "when the rain gets heavy."

He was a well-read man, and as befitted one of his profession he took an interest in the history of popular demonstrations. He knew that in Paris, in London, and elsewhere, rain is a much more effective preventer of riot than any police force.

"I don't think they will, sir," said the inspector.

He was a young man, and was not nearly so well read as Major Thorne. But he had the advantage of several years' experience of Irish crowds.

It turned out that the inspector was right, although it rained heavily enough to justify any crowd in postponing a demonstration. The wind which had blown gustily earlier in the day, playing tricks with hats and Riot Acts, died completely away. A heavy downpour of rain descended quietly and persistently. The police officer eyed it through the window of the barrack and, since he knew that it would not disperse the crowd, disliked the look of it very much. It seemed certain that his shiny scabbard and spurs would require much polishing in the morning, and he feared that his pretty uniform would be spoiled. He shrugged his shoulders and went out again. His men had donned grey capes, and marched dripping up and down the street. The crowd took almost no notice of the rain. One man here and another there turned up the collar of a frieze overcoat, or slouched the brim of a soft felt hat, so that the rain ran off it instead of lying like water in the moat of a castle round the head of the wearer. But most of the people had no overcoats. Drops of rain glistened on the rough texture of their jackets, and their faces shone with moisture when they stood within range of a lighted window. The only creatures, with the exception of the police officer, whom the rain made uneasy, were the ponies condemned to stand in the gutters. They turned this way and that, trying to discover the direction from which the rain blew, so that they could turn their backs to it. But there was no wind at all, so after a while they gave up the attempt and stood with stooped heads and arched shoulders, apathetic, motionless, save when some passer-by, pressed for room, struck a shaggy flank with his stick, or pushed against lean ribs to gain space for walking.

Suddenly the debating of the various groups of men ceased. All heads were turned in one direction. The police stopped their patient tramping and faced round towards the top of the village

street. Father O'Sullivan drove in along the road from Dhulough, gave over his horse and trap to the care of his servant and walked rapidly to the League rooms. A feeling of tense excitement and nervousness was general. Groups broke up, and men moved quickly here and there among the people. The single light which burned in an upper window of Heverin's house was extinguished. The police straightened themselves, shook the rain from their capes and stamped warmth into their feet, making muddy puddles of the ground on which they stood. Every one expected that something would happen. The leader, the man with power other than the power of muscular arms or heavy batons, was present. The growling discontent of the crowd, the fierceness, the timidity, the anger and the prudence would be gathered and welded into a force; a force that would——To what end would Father O'Sullivan direct the force at his command?

The police officer, wet now so that further wetting made little difference to him, entered the barrack. He found Major Thorne seated at a table writing diligently by the light of an ineffective oil lamp.

"I think it right to report to you, sir, that the priest, Father O'Sullivan of Dhulough, has just driven into the village and entered the rooms of the League."

Major Thorne pushed away his papers.

"Father O'Sullivan, you say. Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir. I know him well."

"Good," said Major Thorne.

He walked sharply across the room and then back to his chair. He took a fresh piece of paper, hesitated, paced the room again, and then wrote a note rapidly. He handed it to the inspector with an order.

"Dispatch a mounted man at once with this note to Mr. Manders."

A sergeant entered the room, saluted and said—

"A young man is going to and fro through the crowd, sir, summoning the members of the League committee to meet Father O'Sullivan. The rest of the people have been turned out of the committee room."

"Thank you, Sergeant. That will do. Or stay. Do you know who the man is—the messenger?"

"He's a boy by the name of Sheridan, sir; the son of a man that was evicted on the Snell estate."

"Sheridan, Sheridan—let me see. You were with us this afternoon, Sergeant. Is he one of the two men we took at Knocknagoona?"

"He is, sir."

"The one who didn't say thank you when I released him?"

"The same man, sir."

"Thank you, Sergeant. That will do."

He turned to the inspector when the sergeant left the room—

"You will have sufficient men ready at the top of the street to protect Mr. Manders from any annoyance when he comes into the village, but make no arrests if you can help it. Later on there will probably be speeches. The priest will make a speech, I expect. You will stand as near him as you can and make careful notes of what he says. Have a couple of intelligent and reliable men with you. I want to know exactly what is said, and I want two or three reports made independently. You understand?"

The officer bowed and withdrew. The crowd outside gathered round the committee rooms of the League. There was no longer any sign of disputing or wrangling among the people. They were waiting. It was evident that the police would not be called upon to interrupt the fighting of individuals or to put a stop to any kind of indiscriminate rioting. Their duty, if they were to have any duty to do, would be to stop some organised movement. It was now quite dark.

The people, staring through the window, watched the figures of the men inside the committee room. Father O'Sullivan sat at the head of the table with the lamplight shining full on his face. The watchers noticed the strong set of his jaws, the look of determination in his eyes, the clenched hands on the table before him. There was not a man there who did not feel that he could trust Father O'Sullivan without fear of being deserted or betrayed. There were very few who did not feel also that it would be an unpleasant thing to find themselves in opposition to the priest. More than one man was uneasily conscious that it might be almost equally unpleasant to have to obey Father O'Sullivan in his present mood.

One member after another rose to speak. The crowd outside gathered closer to the window. Faces were pressed, and noses flattened, against the panes. Then Father O'Sullivan said something. The man who sat next to him got up and closed the shutters. The pressure of the crowd round the window grew less when it was no longer possible to see anything. Here and there a man detached himself and went down the street. At a word from the police officer two constables followed them. They were young men, and they talked eagerly together. After a while they separated and disappeared into different houses and yards. Soon, two of them came out again carrying an empty tar barrel. Others joined these with creels of turf on their shoulders. One carried an oil can in his hand. They approached the crowd which still stood before the League rooms. It became evident that they meant to build and light a fire. The crowd parted, leaving a large vacant space in the middle of the street. The police officer gave an order, and a body of his men stepped into the space with the intention of preventing the building of the fire. The officer himself went again to the barrack. The young men with the barrel and the turf stood still.

They understood that the police officer had gone for orders. They were content to wait and see what the orders would be.

Major Thorne was still writing. He was making out warrants for the arrest of certain individuals as suspected persons, dangerous to Her Majesty's peace and the security of the realm. He listened to the officer's report.

"Let the men build their fire if they like," he said. "I don't see what harm that can do, so long as it doesn't set a light to Heverin's house. They'll make it easier for you to use your notebooks when the speeches begin."

The officer returned to the crowd and withdrew the police from the space which had been cleared. The men with the tar barrel and the turf walked quietly into the middle of the street and began building their fire. They worked skilfully and quickly. Since their ancestors worshipped the sun the fathers and grandfathers of these men have built great fires on St. John's Eve. It is small wonder that their descendants have some skill in such architecture now. Other peoples make fires occasionally, intermittently, to celebrate victories or coronations, to announce invasions, to consume heretics, wicked books, vanities, and other noxious things. No people, except the Connacht peasants, have built fires regularly—annually. Therefore a fire in Connacht can be built more swiftly and mightily than elsewhere, and can be made to light even when it rains.

Once built, eager men crowded round it. Frieze coats, and even small grey jackets, were stripped off and spread over the turf to keep off the rain. Rheumatism is a remote evil; the failure of a bonfire on a wet night is a horribly pressing possibility. Besides, every one was already soaked to the skin, whereas the turf, so far, was no more than damp. Then, the blaze being properly provided for, the crowd moved away again. Beside the fire stood only the man

with the oil can in his hand, and three assistants ready to strip the coverings from the turf when the great moment arrived.

The flash of lamps was seen, though dimly, because of the downpour of the rain, and soon the noise of fast driving down the road towards the village became audible. The police officer called some of his men to him. He felt sure that Mr. Manders was coming in response to the magistrate's summons. It was clearly impossible to drive a horse through the crowd which waited round the bonfire. He and his men went to meet the trap, and stopped it at the entrance of the village.

"You are Mr. Manders, I suppose," said the inspector, trying to peer into the darkness which lay beyond the two glowing lamps of the trap.

"That's my name," said the agent. "Maybe you'll be so good as to tell me what in the name of all that's holy you're doing there with that enormous crowd of policemen!"

"I'm here to conduct you safely to the barrack, but you'll have to get out and walk the rest of the way. There is a big crowd in the street."

"I can see that," said Mr. Manders. He got out of the trap and shook himself. "Tom, you can take the mare home. This'll be an all-night job, I expect. And now, sir, if you and your men will stand out of the way, I'll go on."

"You can't go by yourself. It wouldn't be safe."

"Oh, wouldn't it? I'm prepared to risk that. There's not a man would lay a hand on me in the open. The blackguards daren't, if they wanted to ever so much, and I don't believe the most of them do."

The inspector and his men closed round Mr. Manders.

"My orders," he said.

"Oh, orders! I suppose that settles it. Come and let's make an absurd procession of ourselves

if we must. Why the devil Major Thorne is so fond of doing things in perfectly ridiculous ways beats me!"

Just as Mr. Manders and the police reached the crowd, the window of the room immediately above that in which the committee sat, became light. The figures of Father O'Sullivan and one or two other members of the committee were seen. The crowd cheered loudly. Mr. Manders and the policemen passed close to the house on the opposite side of the street without attracting attention. The watchers beside the bonfire pulled the covering-coats off the turf and flung them aside. Oil was poured from the can; a match was struck, and in a moment the whole street was lit by a blaze. The crowd cheered more frantically than ever.

"Go on to the barracks," shouted the officer in Mr. Manders' ear. "You're safe now. I must stay here."

The window of the room in which the light had appeared was flung open from the bottom. The crowd cheered again and again. More oil was flung on the fire, and the blaze leaped higher. The turf and the tar barrel caught fire. Sparks flew up through the rain. The faces of the crowd became plainly visible—lean, haggard faces, but lit now with fierce excitement. These were the same men who, a little while before, had stood apathetic and hopeless in the field beyond Cuslough, while the Member of Parliament and Mr. Heverin made speeches to them. They were not apathetic now. They had discovered that they possessed power, a power which had already successfully defied the law and rendered impotent the ancient force of the aristocracy before which they and their fathers had bowed in submissive helplessness for centuries. But no one looked at their faces, their lean frames, or the soaked ragged clothes that hung round them. Their eyes and the eyes of the spectator police beside them, were fixed

on the figure and face of the priest, who stood framed in the open window with light behind him and the brighter light of the fire glowing and flashing on him from the street. He stood in the centre of light, not daylight, but wild, lawless light—light which resembled the passions of the men below him. He was fitly placed above them, fitly illuminated by the flames of their fire. It was he who had roused in them hope and courage, and with these had awakened long-slumbering lusts of revenge and hate and greed. It was to him they looked now at the critical moment when their cause had been betrayed, and a base submission made by a man they trusted.

Father O'Sullivan raised his hand and the cheering stopped. There was silence, so that the rush of the flames could be plainly heard, and even the dull, heavy dropping of the rain on the drenched thatch of the roofs and the drenched clothing of the crowd.

"Men," he began, "what are you going to do? You have heard what happened to-day. The man we trusted, whom you trusted, whom I trusted—and may God forgive me for not knowing better—the man whom you elected to a post of honour, making him your treasurer, this man has betrayed us. I care not under what provocation or fearing what danger the betrayal was made. He did it! That is enough. And yet it is right to say that his deed is worse than such a deed would have been if one of you had done it. You or I might have been cowards. He was not only a coward, but a traitor."

A fierce groan and a storm of hissing burst from the crowd. Then suddenly there was silence again.

"For what did he do? He paid the rent demanded of him—the tyrannous impost of the landlords who have ground our bodies into the dust for generations. Well, a man might pay who was threatened with eviction, who saw before

him a vision of his children starving on the road-side and his wife desolate. Such a man might pay, and we should call him a coward; but we should pity him. But this man, this Heverin, what risk did he run? Was his home to be taken from him? Was his wife to starve? Was he to be forced into the workhouse or the gaol? No! but he was to lose a pound, ten pounds, twenty pounds; paltry money, dirty money, money with a curse on it; and for the sake of the money he did what some of you refused to do at the risk of the lives and honour of your families. Therefore I say he is not only a coward, but a traitor too."

"Shoot him!" shrieked a voice from the crowd, and a cheer followed.

"Wait. Who is this traitor? There are those among us who have refused to join our ranks, who prefer the old bondage, who pay what is asked of them. We reckon them poor-spirited, miserable men, who dare not strike a blow for liberty. But we can have some respect for them. At least, we know who they are and what they are. But this man! This Heverin! It was he who talked loudest of the justice of our cause. It was he who presided at our first meeting. It was he who, this very day, urged you to fight for him, brought you into danger from which I was too late to save you. It is he, this Heverin, who is the first of all to betray you. What is to be said for him?"

This time not one voice but many yelled, "Shoot him!" "Captain Moonlight!" "An ounce of honest lead!" and each suggestion was met with cheers.

"No." Father O'Sullivan's voice rang out clear above the tumult. "No, no, and a thousand times No! Miserable men, would you break the law of God? No; but I will tell you what to do."

The police officer nodded to the two men who stood beside him. It was clear that the crisis of

the speech had arrived. He and his subordinates drew pencils and notebooks from their pockets. Great drops of rain blotted the paper. The pencils moved stickily, making deep black marks on the damp surface, or rushed forward leaving fainter tracks on the dry spots. Here and there they pierced and tore the paper. But the writing went on. Father O'Sullivan, turning slightly, let his eyes rest upon these writers.

"I see the police listening to me," he said. "Taking down my words. You police! You came of the people, and you ought to be with the people in their struggle. But what are you? You are renegade curs, hired assassins of the tyranny which you call the Government. I know you, but I do not fear you. I know the man who placed you where you are, the man, the stranger, who has come among us with the heart of a Herod in his breast. He waits for you and your report in the barrack beyond there. He waits. Let him wait. I neither respect nor fear him. I defy him and his lawless power. I defy him to arrest me, handcuff me, hang me if he dares. But he dare not. With his spies listening I will tell you what to do and how to deal with the traitor. Don't touch him. Don't speak to him. Don't answer him. Don't buy from him or sell to him. Let him eat the flesh of the bullocks he has saved, and grow fat on it if he can. But let him herd them himself, kill them himself, flay them himself, roast and boil them for himself. Let him drink the whisky with which his den is stored, but let no man send so much as a boy to draw a can of water for him from the well. Let the grass grow up to the doorstep of his house before a foot except his own presses it. Let the walls of his house totter, let the roof of his house fall before a hand is stretched out to shore them up for him. This is what you have to do. Do it thoroughly."

He turned to the police again.

"Have you written down what I have said? Well, take it to your master who waits for you in the barrack. Take it, take the very words I used. Shall I say them over again for you? Take them, and tell him this from me, that I have not broken or counselled other men to break even the vile tyranny which he calls law. Tell him to point out if he can even in the old code of the penal days one statute which compels, I say compels, an honest man to have traffic with traitors. If he can find any such law I shall walk into his prison of my own free will and hold my hands out for his iron fetters. And now, my men, go home. There is no more to do or say to-night."

The police officer turned on his heel and walked back to the barrack with his notebook in his hand. The crowd, watched by the constables, kicked the remains of the bonfire to pieces and trampled the glowing fragments into the mud, Then, some on foot, some on the patient ponies, they set off home. Most of the tired policemen were allowed to lie down in the barrack. Father O'Sullivan, dismissing the committee, walked up and down the street to satisfy himself that the people were really going home. He noticed as he passed that a light burned in the upper room of the barrack, Major Thorne sat there working at his warrants and his reports.

CHAPTER XX

MR. MANDERS sat smoking beside the fire in the office of the police barrack while Major Thorne worked at the pile of papers on the table before him. Now and then a sergeant entered the room bringing news that the street of the village was clearing and the people going quietly home. At last word came that Father O'Sullivan had also gone home, taking the last member of