CHAPTER V

THE Sunday which followed the evening of Mr. Manders' dinner party proved to be the worst sort of day. The wind swept in across the sea from the south-west, beating torrents of rain against walls and windows which obstructed its way, soaking sodden the thatch of cottages and the bare fields. The little rectory was beaten and buffeted. The road to the church lay ankle deep in mire. At eight o'clock Eugene Hegarty, his porridge eaten, retired to his study and locked his door.

It is said that you can know a man by the inanimate things with which he chooses to surround himself. None so poor but, if he has a room at all which he can call his own, manages somehow to impress his individuality upon it. The pictures he chooses to look at, the books he chooses to keep, the kind of chair he chooses to sit in, the table at which he writes, the gun or fishing-rod standing in the corner, the slippers by the fireside, the dog on the hearthrug, the scattered papers or neatly packed pigeon-holes will reveal to the seeing eye the nature of the man. No doubt when a man, married excessively, loses his individuality in his family, getting absorbed, as it were, in bustling wife and many children, his own room, like his own soul, is neglected and desolate. There are men who have been trained and worried into thinking it a duty to spend their spare hours with their families. They play innocent card games or read out books they do not care about to children who secretly despise them, and wives who tolerate them as necessary incumbrances of life. You cannot tell anything about these men by looking at the rooms they

live in.. But that is because they have ceased in any real sense to be men, having become instead fathers of families.

Eugene Hegarty had met no such fate. His soul was his own, and his room. He need scarcely have troubled to lock the door of it. There was no one who wanted to disturb his privacy. Neither his wife nor the draggled maid ever entered his study if they could help it. He had free scope to make what he liked of the room. And a wise man, entering it, would have known Eugene Hegarty; might have guessed even the lean face, the thin, black beard, and the narrow long-fingered hands; would have been certain of the colourless, large eyes which seemed to look past or through the material things before them. In the middle of the room stood a bare deal table, ink spotted. On it lay a small bottle of faded ink and a badly mended quill pen. The man was no great writer though he had dropped ink on his table. There was also a Bible, well worn with constant use, a copy of *The Imitation of Christ*, and, strange in a Protestant clergyman's study, a small iron cross. Mr. Manders had called him methodistical. He meant, for Mr. Manders used ecclesiastical phraseology in a loose, popular manner, that Mr. Hegarty was righteous overmuch. The typical Methodist does not nourish his soul on Thomas à Kempis and the image of the cross. There was no carpet on the floor, but at one end of the room lay a small mat worn threadbare in the middle by the knees of the man who knelt on it for many hours every day. Above it hung a small picture, the only one in the room. It represented the Good Shepherd disentangling a pitifully stupid-looking sheep from a thicket of vicious thorns. In a small bookcase were some college textbooks, very dusty, an old Latin Commentary on the Psalms and some thin brown volumes, well read, whose titles ran lengthways up their backs—*Christ is*

All, Genesis; Christ is All, Exodus; Christ is All, Leviticus. Eugene Hegarty was a man who expected to discover Christ in unlikely places. There was also two plain wooden chairs. Under the window stood a ponderous iron chest, secured with two padlocks. A brass plate on its lid announced that it had been presented to the parish of Dhulough in 1820 by Stephen Butler and was meant for the safe keeping of church plate and church documents.

Eugene Hegarty unlocked first one padlock, then the other. Slipping the clasps over the staples he slowly raised the lid. It was very heavy and the man was not strong. He paused, his pale face slightly flushed with the exertion. Then he took one by one from their green baize bags and laid on the table a silver flagon, chalice, and paten, the communion vessels of his church. He took the flagon in his hands, crossed the room to where his mat lay, and knelt in prayer. Then rising he carefully polished the vessel with a soft cloth. Again he knelt, this time with the chalice. His lips moved, and during the first half of the prayer his words were audible—

"What shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that He hath done unto me? I will take the cup of salvation."

He rose and with the utmost reverence rubbed the chalice till it shone brightly. Once more he knelt, holding the paten in both hands, and prayed partly silently, partly aloud.

Then he left the room, returned, and brought with him a rough basket, woven of unpeeled osier rods, like the creels which the countrymen have for the backs of their donkeys and their wives. He wrapped the silver vessels in their baize coverings again, and stowed them very carefully on the clean straw in the bottom of the basket. Over all he laid a white cloth, and then, for the rain was falling heavily and he had to carry them to the church, a brown sack.

It was nearly eleven o'clock. He climbed the narrow staircase and entered his wife's room. The days were generally too long for Mrs. Hegarty. A childless woman, she had little in the way of occupation or amusement at Dhulough. The pleasure of dressing herself grew stale unless there was some chance of Mr. Manders admiring her when dressed. She decked her drawing-room with such ornaments as she could collect, and with the numerous mats and antimacassars she had ample time to make. She pulled its suite of furniture about, pushing a crooked sofa now against one wall, now against another, and draping it in various ways with a bright, knitted sofa blanket. But there was never any one to notice what she did except Mr. Manders, so the joy of doing things palled. When her husband entered the room the debris of her breakfast on the tray, brought up to her by a slatternly, barefooted maid, lay on the foot of the bed. She turned her head on the pillow as the door opened. She looked very young as she lay there with a white coverlet over her, and her mass of gold hair drawn back from her face and plaited. It was easy to see why John Manders admired her. Her great blue eyes looked peevishly at her husband, but it was possible to imagine them filled with a very different expression, an expression attractive to most men.

"Caroline," he spoke timidly, "you ought surely to be getting up. It is very late."

"What's the good of getting up on a day like this? Listen to the rain against the windows."

"But are you not coming to church?"

"Church! Don't be absurd, Eugene. How can you expect me to go to church in such weather? I should be soaked to the skin and my dress destroyed. Besides, there will be nobody there."

"You must have forgotten, Caroline, that this is Sacrament Sunday."

It was Eugene Hegarty's custom to administer the sacrament to such of his people as cared to receive it once in every month. Sometimes, for he had very few parishioners, only one or two waited for the part of the service which followed the sermon. Then, to the great grief of the clergyman, there was no sacrament. His own soul revolted against the starvation imposed upon it, but Eugene Hegarty was loyal to the law of his Church. Now on this fiercely wet day he knew that no one was likely to be in church except old Dogherty the sexton, and his deaf wife. Others, sheep scattered through a wide wilderness, had far to come, and would not face the inevitable soaking. He greatly desired that his wife should be there.

"I think," he said, "that you ought to come, Caroline."

"Please don't worry me," she said, "I don't want to catch a bad cold, and I have no thick boots. Get me a Prayer Book, Eugene, and I'll read the service through for myself. I promise, really and truly. And you know that's just as good as if I went to church. I've often heard you say that it doesn't matter where we say our prayers. And bed's much more comfortable. It makes me shiver to think of that draughty church. I'll be up and dressed before you get home, and I'll have dinner ready and a good fire for you."

Her eyes lost their look of peevishness. She smiled at him just as she had smiled years before when she promised to marry him. Her face had all the appeal in it which a child's has when he begs for some forbidden sweetmeat; and she was a beautiful woman. Eugene Hegarty sighed. Once he had believed that her smiles were the outward expression of a beautiful soul within, a soul innocent and spiritual, the home of lofty feeling. Now he knew—but the thought was never allowed to form itself in his mind. He clung bravely to the ideal he had formed of the woman

he loved. Yet if he had allowed himself to examine her as keenly as he daily examined himself he would have known that his wife for all her smiles and large eyes, was pitifully selfish and very vain.

"Get me the Prayer Book, dear; and do pull the cover of the dressing-table straight before you go. I asked Bridie to do it, but she's so stupid she only made it worse, and it worries me to look at it."

He went over to the table and pulled at the draperies which covered the bare deal beneath. There was a stiff, orange-coloured fabric and over it folds of muslin. In his efforts he plucked too hard and tore a flounce of this thin stuff. He looked round at his wife, half frightened, expecting that she would scold him; for this dressing-table was, next to her drawing-room, Caroline Hegarty's chief pride. On it she laid china trays with patterns of pink flowers on them, a china box, and a ring stand. The china box held cold cream, then a fashionable unguent. On one of the branches of the ring stand hung a gold ring with small blue stones in it. Her watch was propped up in a frame made of yellow wood. There was also a tortoise-shell comb, a hand mirror framed in rosewood, and a hairbrush with an ivory back. The whole display witnessed to the fact that Caroline Hegarty cherished one ideal. She liked to be able to think of herself as a dainty woman.

"Stupid fellow," she said; but she still smiled. "Don't meddle with it any more. Run and get the Prayer Book. There's no harm done. I can sew it up to-morrow."

Eugene Hegarty wrapped himself in an old frieze coat, rolled up the legs of his trousers and tramped down the road to his church. The little bell, rung in irregular short trots with pauses between them, greeted him when he came within a hundred yards of the building. He entered

it with the precious basket on his arm. Old Dogherty stood in the porch, tugging manfully at the bell-rope. He gave a cheerful greeting—shouted it, being accustomed to conversation with a deaf wife.

"A wet day, your reverence. Maybe now, you mightn't be giving us the Litany, seeing there'll not likely be anybody here but herself and me."

Inside, Mrs. Dogherty stretched her lean, wrinkled hands towards the turf fire which blazed in a huge grate placed, perhaps as a symbol of the upward aspirations proper to everything in the sacred building, some five feet off the ground in a hole in the wall. She also greeted the clergyman—

"Your reverence must be wet. Sure, you won't be bothered reading the Litany to-day, when there's nobody in church but old Jimmy and myself. You'll be catching your death in your wet clothes; and then what would Mrs. Hegarty say to us?"

Evidently Mr. and Mrs. Dogherty had agreed beforehand about the Litany.

"But see now, your reverence; I have the surplice airing for you before the fire. And I put a new button on the neck of it. The steam that came out of it would surprise you. You might have wrung the water from it. It's wonderful the damp that's in it."

The surplice hung on the back of a pew, spread, an amazing width of linen, before the fire. Mr. Hegarty rolled it up and allowed Mrs. Dogherty to put his great-coat in its place. Then he unpacked his basket and carried the vessels up the aisle. The square flag-stones under his feet sweated moisture. The gate of the chancel rails stuck fast with damp, and needed a strong push to open it. The three limestone steps which led up to the altar were stained with patches of green. The red altar-cloth was moth-eaten in places; the

linen covering above it was limp with damp, and spotted here and there with ironmoulds. Behind the altar, very rusty now, were the metal hooks driven into the wall to support the dossell hangings with which Antony Butler had decked the church many years ago. Otherwise, save for the general dilapidation, all was as it had been on the day when Stephen Butler had sworn his oath of perpetual hostility to the power of England.

Suddenly the voice of old Jimmy Dogherty rang clear through the building.

"Is it a seat, your honour? Faith, and what would hinder us from accommodating a gentleman like yourself? It's the seat belonging to Dhulough House you want. Well, now, sorra the man nor woman has sat in it this twenty years. But it's there waiting for the family that has a right to it. And aren't you the young master himself? Sure, I might have known you'd be coming to the old church so soon as you set foot in the country."

Eugene Hegarty turned. Old Dogherty had dropped the bell-rope and was proceeding like a crab sideways up the aisle. Mrs. Dogherty, dimly aware, in spite of her deafness, that the stranger was some great one, stood curtsying beside the fire. A tall young man followed Dogherty. Reverence for the building he entered struggled in him with a keen appreciation of the grotesqueness of the welcome offered him. A smile flickered, was checked and then flickered again on his face.

"There's the pew belonging to the family," said Dogherty. "Right under the holy pulpit itself. A fine square pew it is, and a table in the middle of it. Wait now, your honour, wait till I give it a bit of a dust. If I'd known you were thinking of coming I'd have had out the red curtains that your father—a fine gentleman he was—did have hanging round him the way people wouldn't be looking at him and him saying his

prayers. I have them safe. Well do I remember taking them down after the funeral. It was my father was sexton in those days."

Eugene Hegarty retired quickly to his vestry room. The arrival of young Stephen Butler in the church excited him strangely. Many a time he had heard the story of this boy's grandfather and his strange oath, sworn there before the very altar which faced the young man. It seemed to him as if this Stephen Butler had come there for no other purpose than to accept the inheritance of hopeless struggle bequeathed to him; as if he, Eugene Hegarty, was that day to lay the old curse upon this fresh soul. His hands trembled as he tried to fit Mrs. Dogherty's new surplice button into a hole plainly too small for it. Then without the usual preliminary knock, Dogherty opened the vestry-room door and thrust in his head.

"Your reverence," he said, in a whisper hardly less audible than his previous shouts, "it might be as well if you were to read the Litany after all. It would look decenter like. And, maybe, he wouldn't like the bit about all the nobility and gentry not to be said. And, your reverence, it's five minutes off the hour but it would be better not to be delaying. The likes of the quality don't care to be kept waiting for their prayers any more than for their dinners."

Eugene Hegarty read the morning service through, and the old sexton repeated the responses. Neither of them thought attentively of the words they said. Both their minds were fixed on young Stephen Butler, sitting, kneeling, or standing in the great square pew under the pulpit. To Dogherty the day was one of pride and joy. He saw again one of the old stock, the real ancient gentry, of whose strange doings he told tales inherited from his father and grandfather. But to Hegarty the young man's figure was altogether a pathetic one. The face he saw before him was fair to look at, full of honesty and

courage. Life was all before this Stephen Butler, life with promise of good and joy. What would come of it? Did he know, this confident youth, of the pledge taken for him? When he knew would he accept or repudiate it? Would he laugh at his grandfather's passion and the pathos of his father's life? So no doubt he might spend his days pleasantly as others of his class did, eating and drinking, riding after hounds, shooting birds, proclaiming and preserving the rights of gentlemen and landowners. Eugene Hegarty was himself a Celt, a dreamer and a mystic, a man for whom things seen were of far less importance than the things which, feeling after, he did not see. It seemed to him unspeakably sad to think that no more than that should come of the life of the young man before him. Reading aloud the entirely familiar words of the Church service, he fell to wondering whether it were in this Stephen Butler to feel fiercely as his grandfather had felt, or tenderly as his father had, for Ireland. So, certainly, there would lie before him hard and steep ways. Eugene Hegarty, Celt and dreamer, child of a beaten race, knew that sadness comes down like a cloud in the end over the lover of Ireland. The pathos of the man who sees, but sees with tearful eyes, is only one degree less intense than that of the life of him who does not weep because his eyes are blind.

The service neared its end. The time came when the three worshippers knelt at the altar rails and Eugene Hegarty, with the paten in his hand, bearing the consecrated bread which was for his soul and theirs the body of the Crucified, stood before them. He approached Stephen Butler and began to speak the words wherewith the inestimable benefit is conveyed to the faithful man. He faltered and stopped; began to speak again, and then by press of intense emotion became dumb. The young man kneeled with bowed head and outstretched hands, waiting. But Eugene Heg-

arty could not speak. At last, wondering at the long silence, Stephen Butler raised his head. The eyes of the two men met. It seemed to the clergyman that he saw suddenly through the eyes of the man before him into the soul behind them. There was no longer any doubt in his mind. Here was one capable of devotion to a lost cause, one who would not shrink from the toil and pain which came from such devotion. At last he was able to speak, and did speak clearly, manfully, the wonderful words. He laid in the outstretched hands the Body of the Lord.

The remainder of the service was for him full of splendid emotion. That which comes to others sometimes in the high places of the Church, where organs sound gloriously and clear voices sing, where shafts of stone rise heavenward and arches are lofty, came to him there in the tattered, woefully bedraggled little church. The wind swept round it. The rain, oozing through cracked window-panes, trickled down the walls. Old Dogherty's hoarse voice followed his, quavering. But it was the angels' song he repeated, in the spirit of the angels themselves: "Glory be to God on high."

Kneeling for the first time before the altar of the old church at Dhulough, Stephen Butler realised more clearly than ever before, more clearly even than he did when his Quaker guardian admonished him, the greatness of the kingdom into which he had entered, the weight of responsibility which lay upon him. He knew that he was free, in a way that most men are not free, to do great things, good and bad. He was free because he was spared the necessity of earning bread to eat; because he was under no necessity of seeking the approval of master or superior; because he was not dependent on the judgments that men might pass upon him. He understood that he had thrust on him a position of leadership, a possibility of great influence. He

desired then to do only what was right and brave; to make honourable use of his wealth and position. It was this desire which Eugene Hegarty had seen in his eyes when he gave him the sacrament. It was their fellowship in the capacity for spiritual emotion which had made them friends before they spoke to each other.

Stephen walked home through the rain and the storm. Coming near the house he heard the sea raging against the shore, rolling and dragging stones, worn round by ages of its fury, up and down the steep beach, making a hollow roaring. He saw the haggard trees, bent, battered, torn, and their fresh leaves scorched with salt spray. The lake behind the house when he passed it was turbulent and brown. The house itself stood like a cowed thing, resisting the violence of wind and rain doggedly, as it had resisted such storms for more than a hundred years. Stephen himself found a joy in struggling against the storm. He passed the house, forced his way with bent head to the beach, and stood staring out into the welter of the sea. Sponges of tough yellow spume, torn from their quivering rest in some pool, whirled through the air, struck him in the face or were borne past him across the short wiry grass against the windows of the house behind. He was filled with a wild sense of exultation, a longing even to strip himself and go in to battle with the waves which seemed so strong and angry. He felt vaguely a desire to prove himself stronger than they were, to assert the mastery which he, a man, had over all their rudeness. He picked up great stones, and with both hands flung them against approaching waves. He watched their splash as they struck the water, and heard the hollow tone of their impact with other stones beneath the surface. Suddenly a wave larger than any before rushed up the beach, caught him, for he would not run from it, surrounded him, and wet him ankle high. He felt the stones be-

neath his feet quake, and then roll as the wave receding dragged them down. He staggered, clutched at the air, and fell. When he rose he was soaked with salt water to the skin. The wind chilled him. He turned and walked back to the house.

Within there was warmth, and the comfortable sound of rain and storm beating in useless rage against the windows. The storm excited him strangely. Dried, fed, and warmed he sat all the afternoon at the window of the library. He had a book in his hand but he did not open it. The scene outside, the glimpse of the wild sea, the long line of surf, the driving rain, and the ceaseless tumult fascinated him. It was not until long after dark that he allowed the curtains to be drawn and the lamp lit.

CHAPTER VI

IT has been noted in comic papers and elsewhere that all the inhabitants of England, Ireland, and Scotland talk about the weather when they meet each other. Their conduct in this respect is entirely natural, because the eccentricities of the climate of these islands positively clamour for remark. The superior people in Great Britain, the people of education and culture, despise those who talk about the weather, holding the topic to be a cheap one. In Ireland nobody regards a remark about the weather as contemptible. We do not any of us suppose that we are educated or cultured. On the contrary, we are never tired of clamouring for education and appealing to the gentlemen at Westminster, who kindly manage our affairs, to provide us with universities and schools. Also our weather is really much more remarkable even than the kind they have in England. It is less disciplined.