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.

It partakes of that roistering and thoroughly inconsistent character which the Victorian novelists declare to be natural to our people. In England things called anti-cyclones occasionally take possession of the sky, and then there are several consecutive days of sunshine or frost. In Ireland, and especially in the west of Ireland, an anti-cyclone is as rare as a capitalist. Good, steady, fixed weather hardly ever comes to Connacht. Probably it is afraid to come. Like other stable and respectable things and people it seems to have accepted the belief that we are a fickle and naughty people, who would boycott or otherwise ill-treat it if it did come. Very likely it reads *The Times*. A thing with a fine, high-sounding name like anti-cyclone ought to read *The Times*, and if it does its avoidance of Ireland is quite natural.

Yet our freakish weather is not without its charm. On Sunday in Dhulough, and generally over the region west of the Shannon, a storm raged exceedingly. It dragged green leaves off the trees and scattered them. When the leaves, being young and tenacious of life, refused to be dragged, it broke off the twigs on which they grew. It battered all things with chilly deluges of rain. On Monday morning the weather repented and became unexpectedly gentle and delightful. The leaves which survived spread themselves in the sunshine, and the birds, rejoicing in a quiet which made it possible for them to hear each other, sang outrageously cheerful songs.

"There is," said Father Staunton to his housekeeper, when she brought in his breakfast, "a feeling of spring in the air."

He sat down to his bacon and coffee exceedingly well content. The post had brought him among other things a copy of a review published by a learned company of Benedictines. It contained an article on Cyprian's Letters, which

promised to be deeply interesting. Father Staunton knew a great deal about Cyprian. He propped the review up against the coffee-pot, intending to feed body and mind together. But the charming inconsistency of the change from savage tempest to warm sunshine brought restlessness to Father Staunton. He tore the wrapper off a catalogue of second-hand books and set it up in front of the review. The announcement of a really desirable edition of the works of St. Ambrose caught his eye. It was in four large octavo volumes. It was bound in calf. Its backs were gilt. The price was 10s. 6d. for each volume. He rose and wandered round his bookshelves. There was a gap beside *Fleury's Ecclesiastical History*. And Fleury, every volume of him, was bound in calf and had gilt backs. St. Ambrose would fill the gap well. Father Staunton knew something about St. Ambrose, and wished to know more. Ten and sixpence for each of four volumes would come to two guineas. He sat down again and ate thoughtfully.

"If it wasn't for the curate," he said, and sighed.

The Bishop of the diocese, a bustling man filled with a spirit new to Father Staunton, had some years previously announced that a curate would be desirable in the parish of Dhulough. Father Staunton had to pay the curate, and therefore he was not sure that he could afford two guineas for St. Ambrose. He sighed again, recollecting that neither his first curate nor his second had cared much about Cyprian and Ambrose, or shown any appreciation of books with fine bindings and gilt backs. Father Staunton had been educated in France and Rome, and he was a old man. The curates were young, and came from Maynooth. It was not to be denied that they knew a great deal, but somehow their knowledge did not seem to produce in them that delight in the delicate accessories of scholarship which made fine bind-

ings and Benedictine learning dear to Father Staunton. The curates were, so the old priest fancied, a little contemptuous of his library. He tried hard not to be a little contemptuous of their lack of culture.

Father Staunton finished his breakfast and took, with great enjoyment, two pinches of snuff. Then he opened the window, and with equal enjoyment inhaled deep breaths of the warm air. The housekeeper entered and began to clear away the breakfast things.

"There is," said Father Staunton, without remembering that he had made the same remark before, "a feeling of spring in the air."

The housekeeper, a kindly woman, did not contradict him.

"I think," said the priest after a short silence, "that I'll go out to see Rafferty to-day."

"Is it out across the sea, Father?"

"It is. I'll take Johnny Darcy's boat and I'll row myself out. You can put the remains of the loaf and a bit of cold meat in a basket, and I'll take them with me. Rafferty's a poor man, and he couldn't get in to mass yesterday through the storm, and it's likely he'll have little enough to eat to-day."

"And what about your own dinner?"

The housekeeper was a kindly woman, but her heart was soft towards Father Staunton, not towards Rafferty. She had meant to make the bit of cold meat into a stew and the bone of it into soup. She did not approve of feeding Rafferty.

"An idle spalpeen," so she described Rafferty to her friends, "that's here to-day and might be gone to-morrow, no, but ought to be gone to-morrow, for there's small signs of his going so long as the people feed him, and his reverence would take the bit out of his own mouth for him. Never a hand's turn he'll do for himself."

She was unjust to Rafferty. The man's occupa-

tion was gone—swept away from him without his fault by the new conditions of life. Once he had taught boys and girls—taught them by cabin firesides, in barns, in the open air in fine weather. He had earned scanty fees, shelter and food, but he had been content. While he taught the children he preached Fenianism to the grown men. He carried copies of Kickham's paper about in his pockets, and circulated them in out-of-the-way places to the disquieting of country gentlemen and the angering of parish priests. In the end the Government itself took notice of Rafferty. He was seized by policemen, put in gaol, thundered at by a barrister, lectured by a judge, and finally set to purge his felony by hard labour in a convict prison. The law was merciful to Rafferty. He was a free man in five years, but he found that his occupation was gone. The country was dotted over with schools, and a new race of schoolmasters taught children to read English books, to recite Mrs. Hemans' poems, and to say the multiplication table. Rafferty in his day had spent little time or pains on the multiplication table, and none at all on English books or Casabianca. He had preferred an ancient Irish translation of Homer as an educational instrument. When he found a clever boy he taught him to appreciate the roll of the original hexameters, and even put him in the way of guessing pretty accurately at their meaning. But a new generation cared little for the old Irish culture, and less for the beauty of the classics. Rafferty's pupils had never been fit to keep the books of shopkeepers. And what good are great thoughts to boys and girls when the thing most desirable is gentility? Rafferty found no new pupils. After nearly starving for two years, he had found his way to Dhulough. He built himself a little shelter in a ruined cottage on Ilaun an Anama, the Island of Souls, which the English, making maps of their Irish possessions,

marked down as the Island of Soles. They scorned to understand the language in which the island was named, and the translation when they got it suggested to their minds fried fish and not the spiritual part of man. Here Rafferty settled down to live on the scraps the people gave him when he went round to their houses after mass on Sundays and holidays. Indeed he would have fared badly, for people are forgetful, and might have gone very hungry in bad weather if he had not found a friend in Father Staunton, and later on one not less staunch in Mr. Hegarty. But the likelihood of going hungry had very little terror in it for old Rafferty. Stored safe in a heap of dry bracken he had a pile of tattered Irish manuscripts—wonderful poems, stories, histories, the collection of a lifetime—preserved safe for him during his imprisonment by men who loved and respected him, though they never cared to read his books. With these were his printed books—an old Homer in folio, dragged for many years with immense toil from place to place as he wandered through the country seeking pupils; a Virgil and a Horace. These were for reading when daylight permitted him to read. In the winter nights he scarcely missed candle or lamp, for he had long passages ready for recitation, and a mind charged with more Irish poetry, legends, prayers, and charms than even his manuscripts

"And what about your own dinner?" said Father Staunton's housekeeper again.

"You can have it ready for me at five," said the priest.

He offered no suggestion as to a substitute for the cold meat. It was the housekeeper's business to see to such details. And she knew him too well to complain or remonstrate. Only when she reached the kitchen and found old Biddy Cassidy, a sympathetic soul, taking an air at the fire, did she put her grievance into words.

"Me that has his reverence's shirt to wash,

this being Monday, and two pairs of his socks with holes in them, and the dust lying as thick as you could dip your finger into it on all the full of an ass cart of books, for it's just on a day like to-day that you'd see the dust and it gathering maybe for weeks without your noticing on account of the weather that does be in it. It's no easy job I have of it, Biddy Cassidy, so I tell you, and now nothing will do himself, his reverence I mean, God bless him, but to take the bit of meat that's in the house and away with him out to old Rafferty. And I must put my shawl on me and be going down the road to Patsy Conway's and get something for him for the dinner, and the way things is these times it's likely as not he'll have nothing but some old end of a joint, or maybe a chop that'll be as tough to eat as the flap of a saddle, and his reverence with not more than a pair of decent teeth in his head, for nobody could chew with that contraption they put into his mouth last time he was up in Dublin with the dentist."

"Musha, God help you for an afflicted woman," said Biddy Cassidy. "It's a queer world, so it is; and it's often your mother that's gone, God rest her soul, said that same to me when I did be going in and out doing turns for her."

Father Staunton, with his basket on his arm, started on his walk towards the lake. On his way he went through the village and then on past the rectory gate. He saw Mr. Hegarty in front of him with fishing-tackle in his hand and a basket slung across his shoulders. Father Staunton was a man who liked companionship. He quickened his pace and overtook Mr. Hegarty.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Hegarty. You're going out fishing, I see."

The parson turned. There was a smile on his face at the sound of the priest's voice. Many people smiled when Father Staunton spoke to

them, not because he said specially amusing things or because there was anything comic in his way of speaking. They smiled in sheer pleasure at the sympathetic kindness that was in the man's voice.

"You can't object to that," said Mr. Hegarty. "It was the occupation of the apostles."

"Of St. Peter," said Father Staunton. "But you wouldn't want to set up St. Peter for an example. It's St. Paul you hold by. Come now, can you quote me a text out of any of the epistles that would lead you to think St. Paul ever hooked a fish in his life?"

"You have me there. But I'll split the difference with you. We'll both abide by St. John, whatever we may say about the other two. And you can't deny that he was a fisherman."

"St. John had more sense than to go fishing with an ebbing tide and with no bait on his hook. You'll not get a coal fish, if that's what you're after, before five o'clock in the afternoon, and well you know it. Unless, maybe, you'll be making yourself out the equal of the blessed apostles and expecting a miracle."

"There's no deceiving you at all, Father Staunton. It's true enough that I'm going down to take the loan of Johnny Darcy's boat. But indeed I'm not much set on fishing. I was thinking of rowing over and having a chat with old Rafferty."

"Upon my honour, Mr. Hegarty, I'll have to denounce you off the altar if you go on pursuing my parishioners like that. I believe you're bent on bribing the man to change his religion. There's more going out in that basket of yours than is likely to come home in it, however you fish. The strap looks mighty tight on your shoulder to be supporting an empty creel."

Mr. Hegarty blushed. He had in fact half a loaf of soda bread, three eggs, and a large bottle of milk in the basket.

"But I'll acquit you of any evil designs," went on the priest; "more especially as neither priest nor parson will ever make much hand of converting Rafferty to any kind of Christianity. He comes to mass, and I'll give him the last rites when his time comes, if I'm spared so long. But the man's an old Fenian, and those Fenians were a stiff generation, with no great love for the clergy. Besides, he's a pagan in his heart. He believes in his fairies and his charms a lot more firmly than he does in the saints or the sacraments, and he has them all mixed up with the old gods of the classical times."

Mr. Hegarty sighed. He was a Protestant, and Protestantism has little tolerance for the primitive superstitions of mankind. It was not Protestantism or the Protestant spirit which drew pagan Europe into the gospel net. It was a faith less narrowly virile, which could afford to smile when men went on praying by their holy wells, which baptized heathen festivals, even, they say, heathen heroes with new names, so that the western world became Catholic almost without knowing it.

"Where are you going yourself?" asked Mr. Hegarty.

"It's very odd now, but I was going just the same way as you were. Only, because I'm not blessed with a wife, I didn't have to make a hypocrite of myself by taking a fishing-line with me. I've a trifle in this basket myself for old Rafferty. What would you say, now, if we went together? You're a younger man than I am, and I wouldn't be sorry to have your help with the oars. There'll be a bit of a swell after the storm yesterday."

"I'll row you out with pleasure."

"Are you sure, now, that you won't be ashamed to be seen in the boat with a Papist and a priest? What will your parishioners say of you?"

The two clergymen arrived at the little bay

in which Johnny Darcy kept his boat. Father Staunton bailed her out with an old tin canister, while Mr. Hegarty fetched the oars from behind the big rock where they were hidden. Then they launched her and got on board. Father Staunton settled himself in the stern with the two baskets at his feet. Mr. Hegarty, stripped of his coat and waistcoat, took the oars. Outside the shelter of the little bay the boat swung slowly over the great smooth waves which, passing under her, rolled sullenly towards the shore, and broke in crashes against the rocks and hard sand. Father Staunton, sitting in the stern, could see the spray rising in brilliant clouds over the Island of Souls, and the white fringe of surf along even the nearer sheltered shore. There was no wind, and the surface of the water round about the boat lay unbroken in the sunshine, save where Mr. Hegarty dipped his oars; or a puffin, frightened by their approach, dived suddenly; or a cormorant, flying low, splashed with his wing tips. So smooth were the backs of the great rollers and the hollows between them that the boat left a widening track of ripples behind her, as she advanced slowly, her blunt bows forcing a way for her. For a while the two men sat silent. Then, half a mile from the shore, Mr. Hegarty stopped rowing.

"Tired already?" asked Father Staunton. "Give me a turn. She's a heavy old tub, and she leaks like a sieve."

"No. I'm not tired. But I want to speak to you. I'd like to ask your advice. You're an older man than I am, and you know more of the world. At least I suppose you must know more. You can't well know less."

He turned round, took his coat from the seat behind him, and drew an envelope from the pocket of it.

"I found this envelope and the parchment in-

side it," he said, "in an old iron chest where my parish registers are kept."

He handed it to Father Staunton.

"Am I to read it?" said the priest.

"Yes. But wait a moment. Did you ever hear the story of old Stephen Butler and the oath he took before the altar the year of the Union?"

"I did, of course. There's not a man in the county but knows that story."

"Did you know that he laid it on his son and his grandson and every generation of his descendants never to rest content with the English rule of this country?"

"I heard that too," said the priest.

"Well, that's a copy of the oath in your hand. You may read it. You'll see it's signed by old Stephen Butler and witnessed by a predecessor of mine, a man called Moneypenny."

The priest took the paper from the envelope and read it slowly.

"It's an interesting document," he said. "But what has it got to do with you or me?"

"Ah! That's just what I want your advice about. Ought I to hand it over to the young man—this Stephen Butler who's come to live among us now—or ought I to lock it up again and keep it to myself? You'll think me a fool, no doubt, but I came out with it in my pocket to-day to think the matter over by myself out on the sea. It seemed to me I might come to some sort of conclusion about what was right to do under the open sky with the water round me."

"I do not think you a fool for that," said the priest. "Maybe the Spirit of God is nearer us here than anywhere else. And it was His Spirit you were looking to to guide you, I suppose? But I don't see the difficulty. Of course, you'll show him the paper. Why not?"

"Why not? Don't you see that if this Stephen Butler accepts the—the trust—I mean

if he comes to believe that it's his duty to try to work for the freedom of Ireland from the English rule, he'll have a life of toil and trouble and disappointment before him, and he can only fail in the end."

"Well," said the priest, "in the first place, he'll hear the story whether you give him the paper or not. You can't help that. And in the next place, are you sure that he'll fail in the end? I'm no politician, thank God, but I'm an Irishman, and I don't believe my country is going to disappear altogether and be just an English county. Some day she'll be a nation again and have a glory of her own among the peoples of the world. Do you believe that?"

"I'm not sure that I do. We're going under, we Irish. Every year there are fewer of us. Every year we get weaker, more apathetic, more hopeless. I don't see what we are to look forward to but just the going on of the decay until the end."

"And if what you say is true—and God forbid that it should be—wouldn't it still be better for this young man to spend his life in a good cause, to be trying to do something even if he fails in the end? Wouldn't it be better for him than just to fold his hands and be content to watch things go to ruin, like the rest of us? But what's the good of our talking? His life is in his own hands. Neither you nor I can make him act if he's a coward, or keep him from doing his best if he's the right sort of man. And I hope he is. He comes of a good stock. There was always fine stuff in the Butlers. Give him the paper, Mr. Hegarty, as soon as ever you get the chance. What right have you to keep it back from him?"

Hegarty bent over his oars again and rowed in silence till the boat grounded on the sand in the one sheltered bay of the island, the landing-place below old Rafferty's hermitage.