

"I can't stir till Mr. Richard and Mr. Lowe comes home," Tom replied. "I must put up the horses. An' a d—d hard job I'll have uv id, for I must have 'em like a new pin."

Mat Donovan went on his way alone. There was a feeling of melancholy upon him which he could not shake off; and instead of "shortening the road" with snatches of old songs he fell into deep thought.

For the first time in his life he began to feel discontented with his lot. It was quite true, as he had just said to Tom Maher, that he never wanted for a shilling. He had constant employment, and as he was never a "spender," he found his earnings sufficient for his wants. His mother and sister were "good managers," and their poultry and eggs went far to keep them decently clothed—with the addition of even a little inexpensive finery for Nelly, who was a belle in her way—and a couple of fat pigs paid the rent. The little "garden" he held—by which we do not mean the "haggart" where Tommy Lahy had his crib set among the "curly"—gave him potatoes every second year, and a crop of wheat or barley in the intervals. The year he had the wheat or barley on his own "little spot," the potatoes were supplied by a half-acre of "dairy ground" or "dung ground." The dung ground, we may inform the uninitiated reader, is ground upon which the peasant puts his own manure, in return for which he has the potato crop—the farmer being repaid for the use of his land for one season by the corn crop of the next, for which the land, owing to the peasant's manure, is in proper condition. For the dairy ground the peasant pays a rent—and often an unconscionably high rent—the land in this case either being manured by the farmer, or capable of yielding potatoes without manure—generally a "bawn" or newly-ploughed pasture field.

Mat Donovan labored cheerfully during the six days of the week, returning generally at night to his own house, where he sat by the bright little hearth as happy as a king. But this evening we find him returning to that happy fireside with something very like a heavy heart. Let us listen to him, and we may be able to divine the cause of this:

"I know," said Mat Donovan, looking towards a hill on the left-hand side of the road—"I know she has a respect for me, an' always had; an' she was never a-shy or ashamed to show id either. She kem and sot next to me the night at Mrs. Murphy's, an' her grandfather an' a lot uv farmers and decent people there." And here Mat raised his head with a decidedly consequential look: for he remembered when the reckoning was called after "the night at Mrs. Murphy's," he, Mat Donovan, flung down half-a-crown, while many of the farmers gave only a shilling, and it required some screwing to get an additional sixpence out of them when it was found the collection fell short of the sum required. "She did then," continued Mat, "an' didn't mind 'em wan taste; but talked to myself so pleasant and friendly; and reminded me uv the time, long ago, when she was a little thing goin' to school, when I used to throw the churries over the hedge to her. An' faith," he added, "I b'lieve 'tis lookin' at her copy paper, when I'd meet her on the road in the evenin', that made me able to read writin', as Barney said I was—for 'tis little I minded id when I was goin' to school myse'f. My heart warned to her when she kem up to me at Mrs. Murphy's, wud such a smile, and shook hands wud me, after not seein' a sight uv her for goin' an two years, while she was at her aunt's, in Dublin. But, sure, I know a poor man like me have no right to think uv her. An' for all, her smile is before me every hour uv the day; an' bad cess to me but I think, this blessed minit, 'tis her hand I have a houl't uv instead uv this flail that I am bringin' home to put a new gad on id. 'Tis droll," he continued, shaking his head. "I, that had my fling among 'em all, an' never lost a wink uv sleep on account uv any girl that ever was born, to be this way! Sally Mockler called me a rag on every bush, no later than last night. Faith, I wish it was thrue for her—but for all that," he added, with another shake of the head and a sorrowful smile, "I b'lieve if I could thrive her from my mind in the mornin' I wouldn't thry."

"God save you, Mat!" exclaimed two or three young

men who came up with him. "Faith, you're takin' your time."

"God save you kindly, b'ys. I am takin' the world aisy."

"Any strange news?"

"No, then," Mat replied; "nothin' worth relatin'."

"Is Ned Brophy's match settled for certain?"

"Well, I b'lieve so."

"Sure, you ought to know. But there was talks uv id bein' broke."

"Well, no; 'tis all settled. They're to be married next Wednesday."

"People wor sayin' he was thinkin' uv Nancy Hogan—but she hadn't the shiners."

"People say many things," replied Mat, as if he wished to dismiss the subject.

"Begor, Naney'd be good enough for him; she's the purtiest girl in the parish. Was he long afther this wan he's gettin'?"

"I don't say there was much coortship between 'em," said Mat. "But as you're afther remindin' me uv id I'll run into Phil Lahy's to see have he my coat made—as I'm to be Ned's sidesman."

"Wisha, now!" exclaimed one of the young men, looking at Mat with evident surprise; for it was somewhat unusual for a snug farmer, like Ned Brophy, to pay such a compliment to a "laboring man."

"Good night, b'ys," said Mat, on coming to the beech-tree opposite Phil Lahy's door.

"Good night, Mat—good night," they responded, cheerily, as they quickened their pace and passed on through the hamlet without stopping.

"Now, I wondher what are they up to?" said Mat to himself. "I thought 'twas goin' to play for the pig's head they wor, but there they're off be the bog road. A wondher they never said where they wor goin'. Might id be for the lend uv long John's greyhound?"

Guessing was no use, however; so putting his arm over Honor Lahy's half-door, and pushing back the bolt, he passed through the shop into the kitchen, which was also the tailor's workshop.

Mat was gratified to find Phil Lahy sitting cross-legged on his shop-board. But his smile gave place to a rather blank look of inquiry when he saw that Phil, instead of plying his needle, was poring over a soiled and dog-eared volume which rested on his knee.

"God save all here!" said Mat, looking around him as if he didn't know well what to think.

"God save you kindly, Mat," replied Honor Lahy, placing a chair for him near the well-swept hearth. "Sit down on' rest."

But Phil was too deeply absorbed in his book to take any notice whatever of the visitor.

"Phil," said Mat, after a moment's silence, "are you goin' to disappoint me?"

"Is that iron hot?" Phil asked, without raising his eyes from his book.

Tommy, who was reading too—crouching upon his elbows and knees on the shop-board—jumped down, and seizing the padding of an old coat-collar, which served the purpose of "holder," snatched the iron from the fire. Testing whether it was heated in a manner which we do not deem it necessary to describe—though we grieve to say we have seen the same test applied when the smoothing-iron was of smaller dimensions than the tailor's goose, and when the hand that held it was very much fairer than Tommy Lahy's—he brought it to his father, who attempted to take hold of the handle with its woollen cover without raising his eyes from the dog-eared volume. But his finger coming in contact with the hot iron, Phil Lahy said "hop," and commenced slapping his thigh in a rather frantic fashion. After rubbing the burned finger in the hair of his head, Phil reached to the further end of the shop-board, and to Mat Donovan's great relief and comfort pulled from under some other articles, by which it had been accidentally concealed from view, a new blue body-coat with gilt buttons. Seizing his lap-board he commenced "pressing" the coat with great energy and briskness of action.

Mat Donovan left his chair and stood close to the shop board, trying to look unconcerned and perfectly indifferent.

We'd like to see the individual who ever was indifferent under such circumstances.