

CATCHING A COLONEL.

The colonel of the Red Hussars was an Irishman, who was as proud of his nationality as it is possible for an Irishman to be, and that is not saying a little by any means. He carried his patriotism so far as to aver that not only were the Irish the finest, the most courageous, the most gifted, of the four nationalities, but that nearly all the really great Englishmen were really Irishmen. He justified the Hibernianism by a mode of reasoning that was highly original, but not wholly convincing. It would have provoked shouts of laughter in the mess if it had proceeded from the lips of a subaltern, but the colonel was an altogether different person to deal with. It would be dangerous to quarrel with him, and he was as peppery as a London frog, or an old maid who has been vilified by the curate. It was considered far more advisable "to give him his head," and let him exhaust himself by the violence of his own efforts.

When he launched out on his favourite topic, therefore, he was listened to in disrespectful silence by his subordinates, but in revenge it was the greatest delight of the wags of the regiment to mimic his voice and manner, and to represent him as uttering the most astounding Hibernian falsehoods, garnished with numerous expressions of a wholly profane character. This was called "doing Old Pat." and was a very popular amusement in every mess-room where the colonel's personality was known. His real name, of course, [as the army list will tell you, was Col. Dominick Sydney Power, but this is a trifling detail. He had been nicknamed "Old Pat" at a very early stage of his military career, and "Old Pat" of the Red Hussars was almost as well known throughout the service as Cox's Bask or the cold-meat train to working.

Therefore, when the Red Hussars heard that Sir James Macleod had been gazetted from the Blues to their own regiment, conjecture ran very rife among the officers whether Sir John would contrive to hit it off amicably with "Old Pat." It was generally felt that the stranger would prove a Scotchman of the deepest dye, with a very large allotment of Scotch pride and patriotism, while, no doubt, after his experience in the Blues, he would be inclined to regard a mere colonel in a Hussar regiment with more compassion than reverence. Under these circumstances, there seemed to be every prospect of some lively scenes when the colonel should deem it fitting to take the Scotch baronet into his confidence on the important subject of national distinctions.

"It will be great fun if he goes for Old Pat, and gives it him hot when he begins his usual rot," said young Fanshawe, with a broad grin, and it was generally agreed among the junior officers of the regiment that it would be great fun indeed.

While his subordinates were coming to this insubordinate decision, Col. Dominick Power was engaged in reading a long letter from an old schoolfellow of his, and a former brother-officer of Sir James Macleod's to whom he had written in order to make some inquiries with regard to the new importation into the mess-room of the Red Hussars, and the baronet's motives for effecting the exchange.

"A woman is at the bottom of it, as usual,"

wrote Capt. Fletcher, of the Blues. "Macleod was very hard hit, and she threw him over for no reason that any one can divine. Pure devilry, that is all. He knew that you were ordered abroad, and he wants to get out of the country without appearing to run away. That's the bait. He is a capital fellow, no damned nonsense about him in any way, is a good sportsman, A1 shot, and very popular in the regiment. There is only one point on which I had better caution you. Don't bet with him. He is a very devil at bets, and always wins."

"Is he, indeed?" mused Colonel Power; "and he may be the very devil himself for all he'll get out of me. It's meself that would like to see the colonel of the regiment betting with a mere whipper-snapper of a subaltern." Sir James Macleod proved to be a tall, fair young man, whose long features and high cheek-bones testified very clearly that the place of his birth lay beyond the Tweed. He was not remarkably good-looking, but he carried himself with such an air of distinction that it seemed wonderful, as young Fanshawe said, that any woman could throw over "such a dasher, and a real, live baronet to boot." His manner, however, was that of a man of the world; and it is not remarkable, under the circumstances, that he got on at once with the young men who were to be his companions for the future.

"We thought you would be no end of a heavy swell," said young Fanshawe, in a day or two, during which friendship had ripened into familiarity, "but you ain't a bit."

Whereat Sir James Macleod laughed good-humoredly. "What shall you do when Old Pat begins his usual rot," continued Fanshawe, in a confidential tone, "about Ireland being the finest country in the universe, and everybody else being miserable scarecrows and outsiders? Shall you stick up for 'Auld Reekie?' I wish you would. It would make Pat so sick."

"What do you mean?" inquired the other. Young Fanshawe explained his meaning at some length.

"And you think that he would be furious if any one contradicted him?" inquired Macleod, fixing a very wary gray eye on the other.

"Furious! I think he would have a fit." Macleod deliberated for a moment with the same wary expression of eye, and then he said quietly: "I should like to make a bet with you. I will lay you two ponies to a five-pound note that, if you will draw the colonel out on his favorite topic, I will contradict him on every point, we will have a most angry discussion, and at the end the colonel will be as good-humored and pleased as if—well, as if I had put a hundred pounds in his pocket."

"You don't know Old Pat," replied Fanshawe, shaking his head. "He'll make the regiment too hot to hold you in less than no time."

"Well, shall I book the bet?" suggested Macleod, blandly.

"No; I won't bet on a certainty."

"Are you sure," inquired Macleod, with an air of doubt, "that it isn't that you don't feel—quite—up—to drawing Old Pat?"

"You may book the bet," cried Fanshawe, haughtily, and his cheek flushed with anger.

"And if you lose, you will have no one to thank but yourself."

"Quite so," said Macleod, calmly, and he made the entry in his pocket book in the most business-like way. "And if I lose—well, at any rate I shall afford you some amusement."

And so it came about that that same evening, after dinner, when the wine was circulating pretty freely, and a mellow glow was beginning to make its appearance on the colonel's ripe visage, young Fanshawe, to the consternation of the mess, introduced the

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subject of a deceased Irish politician. "What a scoundrel that fellow was!" said young Fanshawe, a propos of nothing, and dragging the dead leader into the conversation precisely as Mr. Dick used to hoist King Charles the First's head into the "Memorial."

The other subs looked at young Fanshawe with an expression of amazement. Had he gone out of his senses, or had the wine got into his head? Closer inspection, however, showed that he looked unnaturally sober and unusually intelligent. Then there must be some game on—some game at the colonel's expense. This would probably be good sport, and it would be as well to be in at the death. Every eye was therefore fixed on the colonel. Old Pat was not to be drawn by a young Fanshawe. He snorted indignantly, but reserved his steel for worthier foes.

The circle of watchful eyes now turned to Fanshawe. What would be his next move? "My pater has just bought a hoghead of the finest Scotch whiskey," said the youth, coming up to time with commendable alacrity and a cheerful smile. He launched out into some details on the subject concluding with the following significant remark: "I hate Irish whiskey. It is such sickening, soapy stuff. I think Scotch is much the best."

A joyful gleam shone in the attentive optics. This was getting interesting. Young Fanshawe was actually of malice prepense "going for" old Pat. "Hooray! Yoicks! Tallyho! Go it, young Fanshawe!" were the sentiments reflected in the breasts of that hopeful youth's brother-subalterns; while even the major, who certainly ought to have known better, grinned with intense enjoyment.

"Don't you think so, Macleod?" said young Fanshawe to the Scotchman, who was cracking walnuts with the utmost insouciance.

"Don't I think what?" he replied.

"That Scotch whiskey is better than Irish?"

"Why, of course. Can there be any doubt? Does any one dispute it?"

This sally was too much for Old Pat. He plunged at once into the fray, and a heated discussion ensued. At least it was heated on his side, for Macleod retained an appearance of judicial calm that would have put Job himself in a bad temper. Young Fanshawe, it may be added, at once seized the opportunity to retire from the frontier of the battle, and took up the safe position of an interested spectator.

In a comparatively short time a great deal of unpalatable information was shot upon the colonel. He was told that not only was Scotch whiskey far more pleasing to the taste than Irish, but it was less injurious to the health, and there was less illicit distillation in Scotland than in Ireland. Warming apparently to his subject, and totally regardless of Old Pat's passionate and profane defence, Macleod went on to enunciate the view that all was really good and great in the Irish nation was English or Scotch in origin, that the Irish colonies in English towns formed the most criminal and degraded portion of the population, and that there was actually something in the climate or the soil of Ireland which deteriorated the physical and moral character of the inhabitants. He said this with the calm utterance of a lecturer who demonstrates facts. There was even a softer undertone perceptible now and then, as if he pitied the advocate of so miserable a cause.

The colonel became almost incoherent with rage. His face assumed a deep purple hue. He manifested an inclination to foam at the mouth.

"For proof of this," continued Macleod, "it is quite enough to refer to a well-known and incontrovertible fact. Whether it is do to the potatoes that they eat or the bog-water that they drink, I don't know; but it is quite enough for my purpose that every Irishman of anything like ancient descent has a black roof to his mouth. You will bear me out in that colonel, I am sure."

The mess in vain endeavoured to preserve a dignified demeanor. They were nearly choking with suppressed laughter. Young Fanshawe contrived to upset a decanter in hide his emotion. Another young scapegrace was obliged to go to the sideboard, where he gurgled subteraneously for several minutes with his back to the company.

"It's a lie!" roared the colonel, whose eyes were nearly starting out of his head. "An infernal lie!"

"How? A lie, colonel? Do you mean to deny what I have stated?"

"I mean," shrieked Old Pat, "that the Powers of Ballycoran are one of the oldest families in Ireland; that they were on intimate terms with Brian Boru; and that when the blissed St. Patrick came that way, 'twas me own ancestors that gave him the Cead mille tailthe to Ballycoran; and if ye can find a single black roof in the mouths of the intire family, may the devil fly off with the soul of the dirty varmin."

And with these words the colonel struck the table a blow that made the glasses ring.

"This is very interesting indeed," replied Macleod, gazing at the colonel as if that dignitary were the missing link, or a new form of butterfly. "I had no idea that any one—even an Irishman—would dispute it. Now, I dare say that you have never thought of examining your own mouth?"

The colonel's reply was of a nature that would have been an expensive one, had he made it in the presence of a magistrate who enforced the penalties against swearing.

"Strange, very strange," said Macleod, who was still quite calm. "Now, I think I will lay you two to ore in ten-pound notes that I am right."

A wolfish light shone in the colonel's eyes, but he held back with the most praiseworthy control. It would be undignified to bet with a mere sub—and on such a subject.

"I will make it five to one in twenty-pound notes," continued Macleod, with an air of great confidence, "that you yourself have a black roof to your mouth."

"I will take that bet," spluttered the colonel, who was now in a white heat of rage. "By me soul, I will take that same, just to teach you not to bet on subject of which you know nothing. It will be a useful lesson. And how do you propose to decide the bet?"

(To be Continued.)

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George (thoroughly alarmed)—"My gracious! What's happened? Has your father failed?"

Clara (hysterically)—"Worse. Far worse."

George (much relieved)—"Tell me all, my angel; I can bear it."

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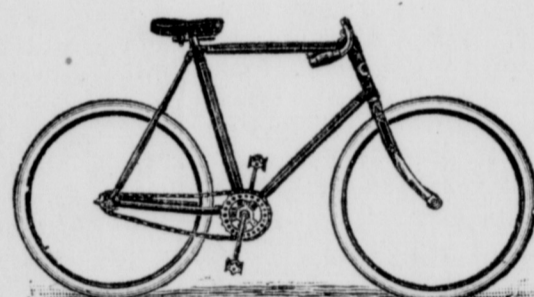
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