

## VOLUME II

### CHAPTER 10

“Look, where the holy legate comes apace  
To give as warrant from the hands of Heaven,  
And on our actions set the name of right  
With holy breath.”

—*King John.*

ON WEDNESDAY evening Mr. Wyldoates, whose aristocratic and slightly imbecile countenance bore traces of the fatigues of his long journey, was lounging in a deeply-cushioned easy-chair in the library at Kilboggan Castle, spending a bad quarter of an hour in company with the family lawyer, Mr. Hanaper, who was also Crown Solicitor for the county, and Mr. MacScutch, the agent and manager of the Kilboggan property. They were waiting the arrival of Father Corkran; and Mr. Wyldoates, whose very soul was weary, was yawning fearfully. He had brought down a select couple of friends from Dublin; and these gentlemen were occupying their leisure in looking over the billiard-room and its appurtenances. Their entertainer considered himself perfectly victimised in being forced to spend time on such humbug as canvassing. Not a creature in the county: no hunting! Not a horse fit to ride in the stable; nothing but a hack or two of MacScutch's. This last discovery was enough by itself to put him in a rage. “Like his considerateness,” he growled, thinking of his relative. It was hard work talking to these legal gentry while pool was going on in the left wing of the same house; and Mr. Wyldoates made them feel all his ill-temper.

“What's this fellow's name that's down here? Has he been here long?” he asked of his agent, in an insolent, impatient tone.

“Mr. Hogan, a Dublin barrister; he has been here since Wednesday, driving all over the place canvassing. The hill people are all promising him, I’m told.”

Mr. Wyldoates was in the act of growling a curse in reply to this intelligence, when the door opened; and Father Corkran, resplendent in a black velvet waistcoat, crossed several times by a huge gold chain, appeared.

Mr. Wyldoates rose immediately, and putting on his grand manner, advanced to meet him.

“My dear Father Corkran, you are most kind.”

“How do you do, my dear sir?” replied his reverence, with equal warmth. And the two gentlemen, who had never seen each other in their lives before, shook hands in the most cordial style. “I wish you every success in your venture.”

“Thanks,” replied the ex-dragoon. “But you see this—ah—lawyer fellow has got the start of me.”

Mr. Hanaper, a stout, tall man, with gold spectacles, glanced up an instant at the speaker in a manner that betrayed surprise, and was meant to convey a warning, and then resumed his study of the list in his hands.

“Oh dear me! never think of that,” said Father Corkran in a most confident tone; “he has been busy among the farmers; but the town is ours—our stronghold, quite—if my advice is followed.”

A discreet personage clad in black here glided in, and announced dinner, between two bows to the arm-chair in which Mr. Wyldoates’ puny figure was almost hidden.

They all adjourned to the dining-room—Mr. Wyldoates leading the way, with evident pleasure.

It was a grand chamber; panelled in black oak, and hung round with family portraits. The glittering silver and wax-lights were reflected in the mirrored buffets; and a fine epergne filled with hot-house flowers, camellias, heaths, and delicate ferns, formed a delightful *point de mire* in the centre of the table. The chairs were of antique oak and stamped leather, with the crest of the Kilboggans in raised work on the backs. The mantelpiece was a superb block of marble inlaid with *lapis lazuli*, and most beautifully carved. There was no grate; the logs burned in the pic-

turesque, old-fashioned style on the hearth-stone. The velvet curtains were closely drawn, and the room heated to the exact pitch.

Father Corkran's face beamed with delight and exultation. He was placed on the right-hand of the host, who exerted himself creditably, and did the honours of the table with an easy grace and assiduity. The two gentlemen who had accompanied him down from Dublin made their appearance hastily by the side-door, from their tour of inspection. A rapid introduction was gone through, and they took their seats near each other, keeping up an *ex-parte* conversation during dinner.

"What cook have you?" asked Mr. Wyldoates abruptly of the butler, turning over something on his plate as he spoke, and eyeing it with evident disfavour.

"Kilboggan Arms, sir," returned the man deprecatingly.

"Good Gad!" said Wyldoates, turning to Mr. Hanaper, "the place is literally falling into ruin. Telegraph to the Bilton for a cook immediately," he added; "and, Kelly, be sure you desire them to send a good one. This is truly abominable. Papillon and Germaine, are you able to eat anything?"

The two gentlemen hastily uttered disclaimers and assurances, and went on with their dinner, apparently thoroughly contented with it. Mr. Hanaper, who seemed utterly unconscious of this episode, employed a short interlude in scrutinizing the reverend Mr. Corkran's lineaments; then, clearing his throat, he in the most unctuous tones asked,—

"Father Corkran, you are, I believe, vicar-general of this diocese, under Bishop Gogarty."

"I am, sir; I have that honour."

"Indeed! and how is his lordship," went on Mr. Hanaper, in the tone of a family doctor. "I had the pleasure of meeting him on a former occasion, nearly thirty years ago. It was on the occasion of Colonel Bursford's election for the county. Do *you* remember?"

This "do *you* remember" was a fine touch, and full of subtle flattery. It was a statement by implication that the good vicar-general was not old enough to recall the events of nearly thirty years back. He was as old as Mr. Hanaper—every day; but then the latter was Crown Solicitor for the county, and had reached the top of the attorney ladder, whereas the mitre and crozier still haunted the dreams of the parish priest.

“Remember it! dear, yes. Bishop Gogarty held my parish then.” Here a little half-sigh said plainly, “Would that he held it still!” “Con. Delahunty came forward to oppose him. Fifteen hundred the colonel paid him to retire. There’s no harm saying it now.”

“None, indeed; they’re both dead. We have lived to see a great change, my dear sir—a great change indeed!”

“And we’ll see a greater yet, I’m certain. Things are come to a pretty pass indeed.” And his reverence swallowed a piece of sole *au gratin* with a snort.

Mr. Die Sele, a little dried-up man, too intensely Orange to care much for his reverence’s company, looked sympathizingly at his client, who was wearily toying with the food on his plate. “You seem very fatigued, Mr. Wyldoates: have you travelled straight on?”

“Yes; straight on from Nice, anyhow. My uncle telegraphed to me to come on, since the Reform have put forward this cad so suddenly. Otherwise, I shouldn’t have moved until—the fourteenth.” It plainly required an effort of an unusual kind for him to remember the date.

MacScutch, a northern, deeply tarred with the same brush as the little Die Sele, conversed with him in low tones.

“What’s that you’re sayin’, MacScutch? This Hogan’s a barrister in good practice, hey? Don’t believe you,” said Mr. Wyldoates, who had caught up some fragment of their speech.

“Dear, yes,” hastily interpolated Father Corkran, seeing his way to a certain effect, “Mr. O’Rooney Hogan is a barrister of standing. I assure you he distinguished himself on several occasions; and he goes into the best society in Dublin. I must do the young man that justice, though I don’t care for him myself. Of course we all know what his motives are in going into Parliament.”

“I should think so—scum!” Mr. Wyldoates’ lip curled contemptuously. What a business this Home Rule is turning out for these fellows! The Irish bar have always gone in on the stalking-horse of national politics.”

“Softly, my dear sir,” said Mr. Hanaper, in his oiliest tones, but with a sneer on his face; “what has the English bar had to do with politics? I think our men could show cleaner hands than the bigwigs over the water, past and present.”

Mr. Wyldoates turned abruptly to the attendant.

“Coffee in the library! and, Kelly, see that there’s a good fire. Germaine, were you at the levee? I did not arrive in time. If I had I’d have gone, I think.”

“Yes, of course,” replied Mr. Germaine quickly. “Everybody was there. His Ex’cy was talking to me about my mare. Would I enter her for Fairyhouse? I said I thought not; but would save her up for Punchestown. Sells better always, you know. He’s looking remarkably well.”

“Oh, ah! he loves a good horse, does his Ex’cy,” put in Mr. Hanaper, who, as a solicitor, was debarred from the honour of attending Court, but who relished “Cawstle gossip” as keenly as anybody else.

Mr. Germaine, feeling himself the central personage for the moment, surveyed the speaker through his eyeglass, and then went on in a slightly raised tone,—

“I was out with the Ward Unions on—ah—Tuesday; and Betty Martin was awfully fresh. I was taking her up a lane between two hedges, when I heard a horse coming up behind us, as if wanting to pass me. I didn’t feel like letting him; for Betty Martin doesn’t follow very kindly. So I just hallooed, ‘Keep off, will you! this horse kicks.’ ‘Do pray go on, then,’ said a voice; and I turned, and by Jove, it was his Excellency himself. I believe you, I cleared the road.”

Everybody listened with the most profound attention: even Wyldoates’ languid countenance put on a glimpse of intelligent appreciation befitting the stirring incident which the gallant hero had related about six times per diem since its occurrence.

“How did you find the billiard table?” he asked, as the party rose and moved towards the door.

“Oh, capital—capital. Are you going to try it?”

“Well, I’ll join you there directly. You can smoke here, if you like.”

The two remained in the dining-room, and the rest returned to the library. Wyldoates locked the door, and drew the heavy curtain before it. “Father Corkran,” said he, with an air and tone so business-like and decisive that it astonished the others, “let us come to an understanding. This Home Rule candidate is to be trusted for nothing, but to fill his own pockets.”

“That’s as may be. I don’t know. You see his party have a swinging majority. My dear sir, the Whigs hold the country, and will do so for—oh, who can say how long? The Tories are nowhere; they are dissolving every day more and more.”

“This means,” thought Wyldoates, who was astute enough in some matters, “that I had better come down with something handsome on the nail. His reverence prefers a bird in the hand—hum. Now, Father Corkran,” he added aloud, raising his drooped eyelids and looking steadily at his reverence, “as to Home Rule, why, we are Home Rule too. Hanaper, give me my address.”

But Father Corkran, with a knowing sort of laugh, declined to read the address. Clearly, he was not to be blinded that way. “Mr. Wyldoates,” said he sturdily, leave all that flummery there. Exert your influence with your tenants, and procure the co-operation of those who can manage the town votes.” And Father Corkran threw one leg over the other, and leaned back in his chair with the air of one who had said his say.

“Oh dear, yes,” returned Mr. Wyldoates, with a grin; “see here, Father Corkran, we are prepared to go to great lengths, I assure you.”

Then the solicitors stepped into the discussion; and the lot of ground was indicated on the map which was most suitable for the new church; and finally Mr. Wyldoates, after much preamble, signed a cheque which was filled up for him by Hanaper, and handed it ungraciously enough to his reverence, who, discontented with the amount, received it to the full as ungraciously, and stuffed it into the capacious pocket of his velvet waistcoat without acknowledgment or thanks beyond a surly bow.

The business over, he left almost at once.

“Well,” yawned Wyldoates, “that’s done; and if he is not with us he won’t be against us. You published the decision about that Sandy Row right of turf-cutting, hey, Mac-Scutch?”

Mr. Wyldoates then vanished to the more congenial society of the billiard-room, where his friends Germaine and Captain Papillon were playing.