

## I.

BUTTNER SMUGGE had been some odd thirty years in the Civil Service, and had put a round half century of years over his head, which head, by the way, was fast losing its fine reddish appearance and assuming an unwelcome greyness—it looked like a cluster of November leaves after a slight fall of snow. Buttner, or Butty—to give him the name by which he was best known to his colleagues—had lived a quiet, self-contained, cautious life of frugal epicureanism. He pampered to satiation that paltry little god, Ego; considered himself somewhat of a wit and philosopher; and, above all, fostered the droll notion that in affairs of the heart he was a lady-queller, a veritable beau-ideal. Withal—it follows of course—he was a bachelor. Why should such a splendid knight be condemned to mere domestic subservience—he who might emulate the Great Mogul or perform deeds of chivalric and romantic heroism equal to those recorded of Shibli Bagarag! But to drop the grandiloquent and take our hero as the Civil Servant, he is found considering how best to spend a summer's vacation. Having chosen July, he was next in a quandary as to where those long golden days and mellow evenings should be spent. He resolved to go out of the beaten way. What of some wild picturesque ocean-lashed shore away out in the West—over there in Connacht? It would do! Procuring a map of the County Mayo he scanned it keenly. "Yes, yes, that will suit you, Buttner, old chap," said he musingly. "It will be quite a treat after the many holidays spent at Douglas and Llandudno. Here are rivers, lakes, mountains, bare-legged princesses and goat's milk!" And the picture so fascinated Butty that his rotund little person shook with the intensity of his delighted ecstasies. Having located a stretch of seaboard that looked inviting, he bought another map of the district on a still larger scale, and then joyfully shouted "Eureka!"

"Culleenafinndooneen," whispered he poetically. The very name was redolent of romance and primitiveness; it threw a glamour over the sated appetite; it called to whatever was left of the spiritual and imaginative in Butty. And so Culleenafinndooneen was chosen, and not long afterwards Buttner Smugge, of a glorious July evening, found himself stepping out of the train at Leam Station, *en route* to Culleen.

The genial dapper Butty sauntered along the road that led to Culleenafinndooneen, having left his luggage at the little railway station. The broad breast of the Atlantic lay to his left, and on his right were the towering peaks of Maulshark. Lakes, like large pieces of silver, gleamed here and there, and clear sparkling rivers sang their way to the ocean. An unseen lark thrilled forth its joyous song; sweet odours of new-mown hay were wafted on the softly-sighing breeze that came from inland. To be sure, Butty could not with a poet's eye see the inner and mystical meaning of the picturesque landscape, nor was he at all likely to gushingly enthuse after the manner of released school-girls. The time, the scene, the fresh health-giving air and the vivid anticipations he had formed conspired however to lift him higher than probably he had ever been. He was radiant.

"This is Culleenafinndooneen—heigh-ho!" said he, looking around and wiping away the big beads of perspiration that stood on his forehead. A cluster of a dozen or more neat houses nestled under the brow of Maulshark and looked smilingly out to sea. Buttner contemplated them for a moment, and then, looking a little farther off, espied other and better houses. Towards these he bent his steps. A girl of surpassing beauty, with that touch of Spanish hauteur and charm which is sometimes observable in the women of the West, stood by the wicket-gate of a substantially built villa-like residence. Her lustrous black eyes, deep and sparkling,

full of roguishness and mirth—and there was, Butty thought, a suspicion of suppressed laughter—met his. It was like looking into the heart of the midday sun—the brilliancy was more than he could meet without quailing.

“May I,” said he, “enquire whether——” She smiled, and he suddenly stopped, feeling at a loss for words; and for an old man of unemotional quiet disposition he looked decidedly radiant. Oh, thought he, had I met this nymph some thirty golden years ago!

“You want to procure lodgings?” said she, in soft, silvery tones, giving at the same time a sly look and pretty heave of the stately head.

Buttimer confessed that that was his present quest.

“My aunt lives here,” said she, “and if you follow me you may enquire of her. She keeps boarders during the summer months.” Leading the way inside and up the neatly gravelled walk she went, Butty following like a man in a dream. It was soon arranged that for his stay at Cullenafinn-looneen “Strand Lodge,” as it was called, should be his headquarters.

How he hugged himself that night (and in imagination maybe the dark eyed girl, too), for having the courage and originality to prospect and carry into effect the idea that first suggested itself of spending a holiday in an out-of-the-way place. For long he could not induce sleep, and it was only when he allowed his roused and love-smitten heart to say, “I’ll win her!” that nature’s soft nurse took him in her arms to fields Elysium.

## II.

The people of the cottages saw the stranger pass, and threw out all manner of guesses as to who he could be.

“It’s Lord Racke’s bailiff,” said one.

“No, then,” said another; “I’m inclined to think it’s the new chef at the Atlantic Hotel in Bealtra.”

“Arrah, go ’way,” rejoined a third

triumphantly, “isn’t it that jolly stout little man who comes round here every year about this time doing what they call ‘revising’—though God only knows what that is.”

“Here comes Tim Lacy, and you’ll find he knows who it is. I’ll bet he was in at ‘Strand Lodge,’ for they say Nuala Neligan and he are very great,” said the first speaker. And Tim, putting in an appearance, was interrogated. The opportunity was not to be lost on Tim—the opportunity of having retaliation on the small, fat, impudent little coxcomb for having dared to monopolise Nuala’s attention—as he did—the first evening of his arrival.

“Who is he, you ask?” repeated Tim. “Then you ought to know, for it’s long enough you’ve been waiting for him.”

“The inspector! Surely ’tisn’t the inspector come to divide up Kildoon?”

“Isn’t it, though,” tersely commented Tim, as he sauntered off, not by any means in a pleasant frame of mind. That this stranger should dare get between him and Nuala, even for an hour, set his blood aboiling. And against the erstwhile adored one he felt some resentment, which feeling made him miserable.

The women of the cottages agreed that Tim was right, and some of the men shortly afterwards returning from the fields and the fishing boats were informed that “thank God! the inspector, so long looked for, had at last arrived.”

“And where is he?” asked Johnny Noone.

“In Durkan’s,” rejoined his good spouse.

“In Durkan’s! Surely he’s made a mistake. And the Durkans the chief obstacle in the way for years!”

“Oh, be that as it may, there he is. It’s likely enough he has an eye for a pretty face. Nuala Neligan was at the gate and he went in along with her.”

“Then we must send a deputation to him this very night, or all our efforts and agitation and resolutions will have been in vain. If one can believe Tim Lacy—and he ought to know, being a Civil Servant himself—it’s many a square upside down sort of a thing these buckos do.”

"We want to speak to the inspector, Miss," said the head of the deputation later that evening, addressing Nuala Neligan, the black-eyed, red-lipped goddess.

"What inspector?" said she.

"Oh, come, come. Tell the gentleman we desire to speak to him, that we are some of the tenants on the Kildoon estate to whom the farm yonder is to be distributed."

Nuala saw at once that her own Tim, whom she loved to tease, had a hand in the matter in return for the slight he had had. She did not wait any longer, but hurriedly sought the newly-created "inspector."

"You are not an inspector from any public Board in Dublin?" said she.

"No," rejoined Butty affably, "I am here on vacation."

"That may be so, but it won't go down with the men who are waiting to see you at the door. It will come easier to see them than to drive them away. They are stubborn; any idea they get into their foolish heads remains there. Take my advice," and the smile that accompanied the words delighted Butty, "just receive them genially and say that you'll consider their claims. If you follow your own will this house may be wrecked before to-morrow morning and you taken out and pitched into the sea."

Buttimer, to humour the winsome girl, whose graces, at least, he hoped to gain at once, received the land-hungry men and promised them all the untenanted land in the parish—aye, in the barony, if they required it. That was all very well; but when the foreman stiffly said that the house of a grabber was not a proper place for the "Board's inspector," Buttimer's brows contracted. With an evasive answer he dismissed the deputation, and for days and evenings, and on every available occasion thereafter, courted Nuala rapturously. She yielded and withdrew, pouted, gushed, laughed and put on an air of seriousness—she was becoming incomprehensible to Butty, who for that very reason, if no other, became the prey of a strong infatuation. The wretched "uneconomic" holdings of those who formed the deputation were wholly for-

gotten. A paragraph in a local paper hinted at the whole proceeding and rather ambiguously at "black eyes." Butty began to fear.

It may be guessed that Tim Lacy was not going to allow the pudgy little man of fifty from Dublin to take away such a prize as Nuala Neligan. And whether he or Nuala, or both, had a hand in it, one evening as Buttimer came across the fields from the seashore, where he had been bathing, he was accosted by the self-same expectant and now angry men who had previously interviewed him. "Go on now," said one of the party with a frown, "and mark out the boundaries."

"In the name of God," said Buttimer, beginning to realise that these people were taking seriously what was merely a joke, "What do you want? I'm not the inspector you expected."

"You said you were yourself when we waited on you. Oh, you've been bought over by ould Durkan and his niece. Do you think that Durkan, who has already over a hundred acres of excellent land, is going to hold the Kildoon farm as a grazing ranch whilst we till the rocks! Out of this you can't stir till you've done what you were sent to do."

What was Buttimer to do. He was a prisoner and suspected of partisanship with Durkan. If he were to go through the formality of dividing up the lands that were the bone of contention these people would believe the partition *bona fide*, and in that event refuse to allow the rightful occupier any claim to them. But if he remained obdurate an enraged people would perhaps do him some bodily harm—and poor Butty was one of those timid and credulous individuals who believe most Irishmen to be quite indifferent as to taking a man's life. It was a nice fix to be in; and that one of his Majesty's Civil Servants should be treated in this outrageous manner was beyond endurance. He cursed heartily the evil moment that he first entertained the idea of coming to Culleenafinndoonen. Irresolute he stood. Next moment on his ears were borne the sounds of a car proceeding along the road that led to the railway station. The car contained two passengers—Nuala and another; that other (oh, the perfidy of woman), had his arm round Nuala's waist and both laughed very

## A SPOILED HOLIDAY

heartily as they looked in his direction. Buttimer's resolution was taken; he would, to the satisfaction of all these lawless men, distribute the lands of Kildoon. That would be turning the tables on Miss Nuala Neligan and her old uncle. Had he but known how little the black-eyed nymph cared he might have desisted; but a slighted angry man is not in a mood to act with judgment. As the parties had, it would seem, already allotted the farm amongst themselves Buttimer's task was easy; and cursing the whole province of Connacht he took the first train to Dublin, leaving hell behind him, for old Durkan and the intruders waged incessant war, which spread to neighbouring townlands and parishes, till the whole county had to be proclaimed.

The following month Buttimer Smugge nearly fainted as he opened the morning paper and read that Mr. Gasse, M.P., the representative of Culleenafinndoonen, had asked the Chief Secretary, in the House of Commons, if he could state who was the gentleman that visited Culleenafinndoonen a few weeks previously and distributed the lands of Kildoon without authority. The reply was that the whole thing was merely a joke perpetrated by some Dublin wag. Another version gave it that the party responsible had no other alternative but do as commanded. He regretted that he could not give the name of the individual as the authorities had no official cognisance of same. But everyone in Butty's office knew who was guilty, for was not Tim Lacy aware of the identity of Buttimer from the start; and were not Tim (who belonged to the Zig-zag Department) and Meph MacDoyle, the evil genius of Butty's office, bosom friends! How far the whole thing was prearranged remains a puzzle, but any way it put an end to Butty's troubadour spirit of adventure and nipped in the bud a splendid passion.

DIARMAID MAC EOIN.