

"The Way of Peace"

by

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I knew both Michael Hennessey and his wife Katty, though under the local pronunciation of the surname-Hinnessey. I had often gone into the little farmhouse to smoke a pipe with the old man, and to have, before I came away, a glass of milk from the old woman's clean, cool dairy. I had always understood that they were looked upon as a model couple; and it was within my knowledge that a little more than a year ago they had celebrated their golden wedding. But when old Lord Killendell - "The Lard" as they called him locally - suggested that I should ask old Michael how it was that they had lived such a happy life, there was something in his tone and the quiet laugh which followed it, which made me take the advice to heart. More especially when Lady Killendell, who had always been most kind to me, added with an approving smile -

"Do! You are a young man and a bachelor; you will learn something which may be of some service to you later on in your life."

The next time I was near Hennessey's farm the advice occurred to me, and I went in. The two old folk were alone in the house. Their work for the day - the strenuous work - was done, and they were beginning the long evening of rest, which is the farmer's reward for patient toil. We three sat round the hearth enjoying the glowing fire, and the aromatic smell of the burning turf, which is the only fuel used in that part of Ireland.

I gradually led conversation round to the point of happy marriages by way of the Golden Wedding, which was not yet so far off as to have lost interest to the old folk.

"They tell me," I said presently, "that you two are the happiest couple in the Country. I hope that is so? You look it anyway; and every time I have seen you the idea has been with me."

"That's true, God be thanked!" said Michael, after a pause.

"Amin!" joined in Katty, as she crossed herself.

"I wish you'd tell me how you do it?" I asked. Michael smiled this time, and his wife laughed.

"Why do ye want to know, acushla?" she said in reply. This put me in a little personal difficulty. As a matter of fact, I was engaged to be married, but I had been enjoined not to say anything about it - as yet. So I had to put my request on general grounds, which is never so appealing as when such information is asked for personal reasons.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Hennessey," I said, stumbling along as well as I could, "a man would always like to know a secret like that. It is one which might - at some time in his life - be - be useful to him. He - "

"Begob it might, yer 'ann'r," broke in Michael. "Divil recave me if a young man beginnin' life wid a knowledge like that mightn't have all the young women iv a township follyin' round afther him like a flock iv geese afther a ghander." He was interrupted in turn by Katty -

"Ay, or th' ould wans too!" Then she turned to me -

"An' so ye're goin' to be married, yer 'ann'r. More power to ye; an' as many childher as there's days in the month."

"Hold hard there, ma'am!" I retorted. "That would be an embarras de richesse." She winced at the foreign phrase, so I translated it - "too much of a good thing - as the French say. But why do you think I'm going to be married?"

"Ah, go on out iv that wid ye! For what would a young man like yer 'ann'r want to know how marrid people does get on wid wan another, unless he's ceasin' to be a bhoy himself!" (In Ireland a man is a "bhoy" so long as he remains a bachelor. I have myself known a "bhoy" over ninety.) Her inductive ratiocination was too much for me; I remained silent.

"Begob, surr, Katty was wan too many for ye there!" chuckled the old man.

"Quite right, Michael, so she was!" I said. "But now that she has found me out, mayn't I have the price of the discovery? Won't you tell me how you have lived together so happily for so many years?"

"Ay, surr, there hasn't been a harrd wurrd betune us since the day afther we was married."

"The day after you were married?" I commented. "I wonder you didn't begin on the wedding-day itself!"

"Now that's all right, surr, an' mayhap so we would if we was beginnin' life out iv a book. Mayhap it was that we found out the way for ourselves, bekase we wasn't lookin' for it on any particular road. I'm thinkin' that that's the usual way for threasures bein' found 'Tisn't always - aye or mostly - the people that goes about shtickin' rods into places or knockin' chunks wid hammers from off iv other people's property that finds hidden money. Sure 'tis thim that goes about mindin' their own business that comes across it whin they're laste expectin' it." This was a long speech for Michael; and Katty, with her instinctive wish to please, expressed herself in subtle flattery given in an overt aside -

"Mind ye, the wisdom iv him. It does come bubblin' up, like a spring out iv a big book full iv writin' what no man can undhershtand!" Then I joined in myself -

"That is a good idea, Michael. The knowledge that can make two people happy is indeed a treasure. Won't you tell me how to find it? The finding, of course, a man must do for himself. But where there is a road, it is wise to know something about it before you start on a journey."

"Thru for ye, surr. But I'm misdoubtin' meself if there's a road at all - a high-road iv coorse, I mane. But mind ye, 'tisn't on the high-roads that happiness walks. 'Tis the boreens in a man's own houldin' - nigh to his own home - an' his own heart!" This time Katty's comment was made directly to her husband -

"Begob, Mike, but it's a pote ye're becomin' in yer ould age. Boreens in yer heart! indade! An' here have I been thrampin' for half a century up an' down our own boreen; an' sorra wance have I seen happiness walkin' there more than on the mail-road itself."

This new philosophy was taking us away from the subject, so I led them back to it - "

"Well, even if there isn't a high-road - a road for all - won't you tell me what road you and Katty took? Then I may be able - some day - to find a road like it." The old man winked at me and chuckled; taking the pipe from his lips he jerked the mouth-piece backward over his shoulder.

"Ask her, surr. 'Tis she that can tell you - av she plases."

"Won't you tell me, Katty?" I asked.

"Wid all the plisure in life, yer 'ann'r. 'Tis not much to tell for sure - an' mayhap not worth the tellin'; but av ye wish ye shall hear.

"As that ould man there says, it began the mornin' afther he was married on to me. Mind ye, at the beginnin' - I don't want ye to decave yerself about that bekase that's part iv the shtory - we was mighty fond of aich other. My! but he was the fine bhoy! Tall an' big an' shtrong an' masterful; an' 'tis the proud girrl I was whin he ixprised himself to me. I was that proud that I kem home leppin' so that me mother noticed it an' said: 'Katty, has that impident villin Mike Hinessey been tellin' ye that ye're a good-lookin' girleen?' - for mind ye I wasn't thin grown up but only a shtep afther a skeuneuch. 'H'm'!' sez I. ' 'Tis more than that; he has asked me no less than to be married on to me.' That fetched her up, I can tell ye. 'Glory be,' sez she. 'What is the childher comin' to at all at all? You to be marrid that has no more to yer feet nor yer back than a flapper duck on the bog; an' him that can't bring a thing to the fair that he can't carry. Him that has but only yisterday left his father's cabin an' got one for himself; widout a shtick in it but the thruckle he lies on, an' the creel he ates aff.' "

Instinctively I looked round the fine farm-kitchen in which we sat, with its good, solid, oak furniture, its plentitude of glass and crockery all daintily clean and bright. Michael noticed my look and said, gravely nodding his head as he spoke -

"That's all her doin', surr. That's Katty's!"

"Don't mind him, surr! 'Tis the kind good heart iv him that says it. But it's not my doin'. That's Michael's own work. Surely I only was careful wid the money that he arn'd!" Here I harked back to the main subject with a hint -

"And you said to your mother - ?"

"Well, yer 'ann'r, I shtood right up to her - wasn't Michael worth it? - an' sez I: 'Michael is the bist man nor iver I see; an' I'm for him an' for no one else. He's poor I know, an' so am I. But plaze God he'll not be poor always; an' I'll wait for him if 'tis all me life!' Well, me mother was a good woman, an' she seen the tears in me eyes an' knew I was in arnest. She kem an' put her arms round me an' sez she: 'That's right, me child. That's the way to love; an' it's worth all the rist iv the wurld. He's a good bhoy is Michael; an' 'tis right sure I am that he loves ye. An' whin the both iv ye think the time has come 'tis not me nor yer poor dead father that'll shtand betune ye.' I knew - faix only too well - what a harrd time

me poor mother had, for the times was bad. That was the year of the potato-rot, an' throughout the counthry min an' weemin - an' worse still, the poor childhers - was dyin' be shcores. An' Michael knew too; an' ere long he sez to me: 'Katty, come wid me soon. Sure, acushla, if 'tis nothin' else 'twill be wan mouth less for yer poor mother to feed.' When Michael shpoke like that I wasn't the wan to say him nay."

Both were silent and I waited a while, till, seeing that they considered the tale as told, I ventured to recall them once again -

"But you haven't told me about the road yet."

"Oh, that, surr," said Katty with a laugh - "that was simple enough - may I tell him, Michael?"

"Go an, woman! Go an!" he answered with a growl.

"As Michael tould ye, surr, it began the day afther our weddin'. Ye know, surr, people like us didn't go off on honeymoons in thim days - not like they do now, poor or rich. Whin a woman kem into her husband's home she took life as 'twas to be foreninst her. I cooked Michael's supper an' me own on our weddin' night, just as I've done iver since. I knew that the fair at Killen was on the nixt day an' that Michael was lookin' to goin' to it; an' I made up me mind that he'd not go that day. So in the mornin' whin I done me hair - for a coorse I got up first to get the breakfast - I hid the rack. . . ."

"The rack? Pardon my interrupting, but I don't understand." She was not offended but proceeded to explain -

"The rack-comb, surr. The thing ye brush yer hair wid. Wid poor folk it's all the brush-an'-comb they have. It was not thin like it is now whin ivery wan in a house has their own. Why, me son from Ameriky when he kem to shtay wid us had what he called a 'dressin'-bag' wid brushes an' combs enough to clane the heads iv all the parish. But in thim times if the house had wan that was all that was needed. When I looked back Michael was up an' was shavin' himself.

" 'Gettin' ready for the fair?' sez I to him.

" 'Yiz!' sez he, not sayin' much for the lip iv him was that twitched up to get smooth for the razor.

" 'Ye're not!' sez I.

" 'I am!' sez he.

" 'Ye're not!' sez I again.

"I don't suppose ye undhershtand, surr, the feelin' iv a young wife when she knows that her man is her own. I had only been marrid on the yisterday, an' whin I knew how Michael loved me I thought I was him as well as meself too. When a woman is marrid she thinks - an' never more than the day afther - that what she wishes is fixed an' done. She manes so well be her man - an' for all her life, mind ye - that she has no thought that everything isn't right. She has to larn! She has to larn; an' the sooner that she larns the betther for herself an' ivery wan else! Whin Michael had wiped his razor he put his hand on the windy-sill to take up the rack where it always lay. Not findin' it, he sez to me -

" 'Katty, where's the rack?'

" 'I won't tell ye,' sez I. I was up in meself afther me wan day iv a wife.

" 'I want the rack, Katty,' he sez quite quiet.

" 'Ye'll not get it,' sez I. . . . 'Ye're not goin' to the fair today!'

" 'I'm goin' to the fair to-day, an' ivery day I like!' he sez quieter nor iver, 'an' I want the rack.'

" 'Ye'll not get it,' sez I. Wid that he took me face in his hands an' kissed me on the mouth. An' thin whin I let him go afther I had giv it back, he fetched me a shlap on the side iv me head that made me think that the house was full iv bells all clattherin' away at wanst, as sez he -

" 'Katty, bring me the rack!'

She stopped and sat down, resuming her knitting as though she had said all she intended.

"And then?" I ventured to hint. She looked up at me and then over at Michael and said -

"Well, I wint acoorse an' brung him the rack. An' from that day to this we niver had a harrd wurrd wan for th'other." Michael chuckled.

"That's the road, surr. Some wan must be masther iv th' house. That time it had got to be me. An' I was - an' I am!" Here he stood up and bent over and kissed the old lady heartily. "An', surr, take it to mind that there's been no happier woman in Ireland - no, nor out of it - nor Katty."

It didn't seem quite a sufficient charting of the Road, so I ventured to appeal to Mrs. Hennessey again: -

"Did he go to the fair?" She had evidently been thinking, for she began almost at my first word. Since then, in trying to find a motive for her interruption, I have concluded

that she thought her words might put Michael in a bad light; as one who was more or less of a bully.

"He combed his hair an' his moustache, an' he put on his coat wid the tails, an' shtuck his pipe in the front iv his caubeen, an' tuk his blackthorn. Thin he kissed me an' wint out. I looked out iv the door afther him, an' saw him turn the comer; an' then I kem in an' began to tidy up the house.

"Thin the door darkened, an' in kem Michael. He flung his caubeen an' his blackthorn in the corner, an' tuk me in his arms, an' sez he -

" 'Katty, alana-ma-chree, I'm not goin' to the fair this day. Bekase ye don't wish it, me darlin', not bekase ye merely want to kape me from it. Shure I love you alone, an' I wouldn't do nothin' to hurt ye. But always remimber that I'm a man an' used to man's ways; an' a man doesn't like bein' ordhered about be any wan - even be a wife that he loves an' that loves him.' " Her eyes were soft and shiny, and she looked affectionately at the sturdy old man. Then she turned to me and went on -

"An' that's the sort iv man that I've kep the peace wid for all these years. An' isn't he worth it? An' doesn't he deserve it - a man like that? I tell ye, surr, that's the way to thrate a woman; an' that's the way that a woman ought to be thrated. Sure, afther all, they're but childher iv a bigger kind. An' what's the way to thrate childher? 'Tisn't all done be shmiles an' pettin', an' be bread an' sugar. They want to get the hard hand now and again, an' they does the same whin they're grown into min and weemin. 'Tis the hand iv the mother that's the most tindher. Thin, whin that's not enough, the father has to give thim a clip on the ear if it's a girrl, or a cut wid a switch if it's a bhoy.

"An', mind ye, that's the aisiest punishment they iver gits. Whin they don't larn things from them 'tis harder they git it whin they come to larn from the world!"