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## A HUMOROUS IRISH SKETCH.

## A FAMILY GENIUS

It was not altogether the fault of Ignatius O'Hara that he had an exaggerated idea of his own importance. He had been suffering from that royal disease known as swelled head, practically from the time when he had first possessed a head at all. From the moment when he had been able to walk about with any degree of steadiness, people had been in the habit of measuring his prominent brow and throwing out dark allusions as to the possibility of some such thing as brains being concealed behind the broad expanse of forehead. Which threatened wave of intellectuality had caused Mrs O'Hara, his indulgent mother, to bring up her promising son according to the light and privileges of a family genius.

It ever there was the case of a man having greatness thrust upon him, that case was the case of Ignatius O'Hara. Let him do his best or his worst, it was all to the same purpose. His grand reputation, travelling in front of him always, made his path difficult, and raised hopes which there was no possibility of fulfilling.

That he was not a brilliant success at school, or that the teacher had great difficulty in driving anything into his wonderful head, Mrs O'Hara put down to the vagaries of genius. She would have him a genius, and nothing but a genius.

When Ignatius had arrived at an age when he might be expected to choose some trade or profession, his chief intellectual stock-in-trade consisted of an accurate and exhaustive knowledge of cock-fighting and horse-racing. With such brilliant endowments, Mrs O'Hara decided that the extraordinary talents of her son demanded nothing less than the study of medicine.

So Ignatius was sent to the city and entered at the university as a student of medicine. He spent some seven years there, during which time he exerted himself mainly in getting rid of his mother's money, contracting debts, and securing infallible racing tips. At the end of that period, Mrs O'Hara being on the verge of bankruptcy, and Ignatius receiving the gentle hint that a university was for the purpose of supplying learning and not brains, that incorrigible genius retired to his mother's farm, presumably to complete the ruin of her fortunes.

I was at this stage that the peculiar genius of Ignatius sought an entirely new field for the purpose of its development. Ignatius entered the lists of love. As he had always lived on borrowed reputations, laying claim to what was not his own, it was not to be expected that Ignatius in love would be materially different from Ignatius in school. In short, when he looked for a sweetheart, he proposed to steal one from a friend.

His despised cousin, big John Houlihan, who lived on the side of a neighbouring hill, had modest ambitions, which did not go much further than ploughing, sowing, and reaping, but which, in their narrow scope, aimed at the hand of the local beauty, Kate Carney. Ignatius, with his fine airs, had always affected to treat his big country cousin condescendingly, so it was something in the nature of a humiliation to him when he had to plead his suit as the rival of a ploughman. O'Hara's modesty, however, was not his most decided characteristic. Also, there was a dowry at stake, and he needed money badly.

The country mind, being little exercised, is slow to perceive or draw conclusions. Ignatius O'Hara had already insinuated himself into the good graces of Kate Carney, before John Houlihan, her recognised lover, became aware of the fact. Even then, it was his friend, Phil Brady, who apprised him of the fact.

"It's a terrible shame, so it is," said Brady, as he met Houlihan on the road, "the way that insignificant little body Ignatius O'Hara, does be carrying on. What would you think he'd be doing now. No less than setting his cap at Pat Carney's daughter."

"The presumptuous little spalpeen!" said Houlihan. "But sure, I'm thinking if he makes no more headway at courting than he does at book-learning, he won't do anyone much harm."

"John Houlihan," said Brady, "I've seen as purty heads as Kate Carney's

turned by fine airs before now. Do you know that it's sending her presents he is?"

"I did not," said Houlihan, with some warmth. "The dirty little individual! It'll be that ould mother of his that will be putting him up to this. Sure, if it's not one thing she has him at it's another, and if he can't earn money by any means he can marry it."

"And a brave penny it is, I'm told," said Brady.

"Three hundred pounds," said Houlihan, "and more besides. She will have five of the best heifer calves about the place the day that she goes to the altar."

"And what, I would like to know," demanded Brady, who was evidently burning to see a fight, "has this little spoiled doctor done to deserve it?"

"Nothing at all, then," said Houlihan feelingly, unless it be in giving impudence.

"I'm thinking," said Brady, "that it was small notice the same boy took of Kate Carney when he was playing the doctor in the city. But sure, her money will come in very handy for setting up the remains of a scapegrace in a respectable way."

"It will not, then," said Houlihan determinedly. "There are those who have a better right to a girl with three hundred pounds and five heifer calves. Who was it that stuck to her through thick and thin, when she was down with the fever, and her beautiful hair came out that she was so proud of?"

"Who but you, to be sure," said Brady promptly. "And it's proud I am to see that you don't intend letting your bone go with the dog."

"You may depend on it," said Houlihan. "He will never put a finger on that money, even if I should never enter Pat Carney's door again."

"It is left a fit subject for the hospital he ought to be," said Brady.

"I will never touch a hair of his head," said Houlihan, "for I wouldn't know where to hit the little spalpeen to save his life. And, besides, it's taking the law of me for assault he would be anyway."

"It would be a mortal pity to let him go unpunished," objected Brady. "Sure, he has been working for something all these years, and it would be a sin to let the opportunity pass."

"I'll leave that to somebody else," said Houlihan. "For sure, the little fellow hasn't enough brains to bless himself with, and if I can't beat him with brains, I'm not worth my salt."

"And what are you for doing, then," asked Brady, somewhat crestfallen at seeing the fight falling through, "if you're not for giving him a licking?"

"Sure, I haven't just settled it," said Houlihan, "but I promise you one thing, that I will put O'Hara from troubling Kate Carney."

"I believe you," said Brady, contemplating his friend with admiration, "as if it was done already. I'll keep my eye on that playboy O'Hara, and if you don't bate him with your fists or your head, my name's not Brady."

Phil Brady was as good as his word. His activities for some time consisted chiefly in following the movements of Ignatius O'Hara. Where there was the possibility of a fight you could always depend on Phil being in the vicinity, and he had not altogether given up hope of bringing Houlihan and O'Hara together in an exhibition of the manly art.

The immediate result of Brady's observation was something which astonished him not a little. Appearances pointed to the fact that John Houlihan and Ignatius O'Hara had discovered a sudden liking for each other, and had become fast friends. Brady, who judged appearances to be deceptive, guessed that this portended no good for O'Hara, and decided to follow close on the scent of mischief. That two friends should be constantly together is natural but that two relations should be friends is contrary to all experience.

Wherever Ignatius O'Hara went, John Houlihan was with him like his shadow or family ghost. They adapted themselves to each other's habits wonderfully, and made the most of the short time at their disposal. They talked on every-

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thing but one subject, and yet there was a suspicion that that subject was the implied object of all their conversation. The name of Miss Carney was never mentioned between the two friends.

It seemed as if Ignatius, with his city breeding and general air of refinement, had made certain of his conquest of the lady. His natural and hopelessly blind conceit would not allow him to accept the idea of defeat even as a possibility. Houlihan, on the other hand, behind a rough and simple exterior, was evidently playing a cautious game, trying to glean all the information he could get hold of, and taking good care that his rival took no undue advantage of him.

This novel and unnatural companionship did not, as might have been expected, affect the course of true love which ran between Ignatius and the lady. That egotistical gentleman still performed his devotions daily at the home of the Carneys, and continued to use up his substance—or rather his mother's—in inundating Kate with all sorts of presents. He did not even trouble to hide from Houlihan the nature of these presents, for he had the effrontery on one or two occasions to take his cousin into a drapery emporium, in the market town, to help to choose "something for his sweetheart."

Whatever inward pangs these circumstances may have occasioned John Houlihan, they did not appear to affect his intimacy with O'Hara, which seemed to become closer every day.

Phil Brady, whose system of espionage left nothing to be desired, could make very little out of the carefully camouflaged intentions of Houlihan. The latter, who now spent all his leisure moments with O'Hara had practically dropped his former acquaintances for the time being. He even became reticent towards Brady, who could extract no information from him beyond an exhortation to patience. He was evidently laying a deep scheme for the undoing of O'Hara, which admitted of no accomplice.

This stage of things had continued uninterrupted for about the space of one calendar month, when the fair at Killybracken came on. Houlihan and O'Hara were together as usual, paid their usual visit to the drapery emporium, drank rather much together, it is to be feared, and returned home together with every token of good fellowship. Phil Brady who met them on the road, could scarcely decide which was the worse case, 'til Houlihan, by a well-calculated stagger, caught him by the arm and pressed something into his hand.

This proved to be a piece of paper, which, by striking a match and making a lantern of his coat, Phil found to contain the following, written in a very illegible hand: "Meet me at Pat Carney's to-morrow evening, about the same time as Ignatius O'Hara does be in the habit of calling."

The following evening, at the time subsequent to the hour at which he was due to meet Brady, John Houlihan was still busy in his own farmyard. Apparently he had forgotten all about the appointment. Then, as the first faint shadows of night began to fall, Phil Brady in a high state of hilarious excitement entered the yard hurriedly.

"I'm not sure," said Brady, "but what I shouldn't tell you, seeing that you ought to have been there to see it for yourself."

"What is it at all, at all?" said Houlihan.

"It's the downfall of Ignatius O'Hara

I'm after witnessing with my own two eyes," said Brady breathlessly, "and him being kicked out of the house like any rat by Pat Carney."

"How did it happen?" asked Houlihan. "It was all because of the appointment," said Brady, "and following O'Hara to Carney's meaning to see yourself there. If it hadn't been for that, and me hiding under the hedge to let O'Hara get through the door first, I might have missed the fight, which with the grace of God I did not."

"What fight?" said Houlihan impatiently.

"Well, to be sure," said Brady, "it wasn't exactly a fight, being more of a massacre, but it was good value while it lasted all the same. I don't know what happened, but O'Hara had got the length of the door, and I could see Pat Carney standing in the doorway eyeing him: with a face like a thundercloud, and Kate looking through the window, not much better. O'Hara was about to speak but before he could open his mouth, he received Pat Carney's fist between the nose and the chin. There was some loud talk that I couldn't make head or tail of, but I could hear Kate's voice urging her father to kill O'Hara. Well, after O'Hara's back had made the acquaintance of the ground about a dozen times, it wasn't much of a fight. He didn't seem to enjoy much being knocked down, but after that it was as fine a foot race as you could wish to see."

"I knew it would do it," said Houlihan.

"You knew what?" asked Brady. "I knew," said Houlihan, "that the little present I sent Kate Carney yesterday would do the trick."

"I can't see," said Brady, "what that has to do with Pat Carney kicking Ignatius O'Hara out of his house."

"It has everything, then," said Houlihan. "Have you ever heard of Kate Carney having the fever?"

"I have surely," said Brady. "And of her losing her lovely hair?"

said, Houlihan.

"I've heard something of that, too," returned Brady.

"And of her wearing a wig?" continued Houlihan.

"I have not," said Brady. "Well," said Houlihan, "it's Kate's sore point that she has to wear a wig, but she doesn't like anyone to know. I sent her one yesterday from Killybracken."

"But, surely—" began Brady.

"It's how it happened this way," said Houlihan. "O'Hara bought a present in the draper's yesterday for Kate Carney—Gloves, and brushes, and combs, it was for I heard him telling the girl. When we had got outside, I told him how I had left my pipe on the counter, which was no word of a lie. I went back into the shop, and gave the girl the wig to try on with Mr O'Hara's parcel. So I was thinking, Ignatius O'Hara will not be visiting terms with Kate Carney for some time to come."

"He will not," said Brady, "for I once took him as I came down the road, with his fine linen collar hanging by a thread to the back of his neck, and he looking as if a steam-roller had passed over him, and solemnly swearing to have the hair of Pat Carney for malicious damages."

There was no sex problems in the story. Age. Primitive man fought for his mate, won, and subdued her.