



(A. Orr, photo, Londonderry)

Dr. and Mrs. Smyth and family

## Dr. Smyth of Donegal\*

**I**N moments of dejection, when nothing seems worth while and nobody worth much, it is no bad thing to remember that there is more good in the world than meets the eye. Many books have been written to tell of the lives of heroes and of saints. But they have left the best untold. There can be no doubt that many a life has been lived—many a life is even now in progress—of which the beauty, the self-sacrifice, the courage, and the loving kindness are greater than those of any recorded life but one. Of all walks in life that of a doctor would provide as many instances of this unnoticed virtue as any other. Of course there are doctors who look upon their profession merely as a means to an end, and that end money. But how few of these are to be found! Let any man look back over his own experience. He has

\* Under the title of "A Hero of Donegal," Mr. F. D. How has written an interesting account of Dr. Smyth's life and work, which Messrs. Isbister are about to publish (2s. 6d. net.)

known many doctors. Some he has sought in the hour of urgent anxiety when his best beloved have been laid low. Some he has seen standing by his own bedside. To some he has owed the hope and courage which have helped to bring him back to life. To some he has unburdened himself of mental troubles which have weighed him to the ground. In few cases will he find that the doctor—the friend who has never failed him—has confined himself to the strict limit of what he might be expected to do in return for his fee. And if this is the case, what would the poor say if it were possible to ask them? What about the advice, the medicine, the ungrudging attention, for which no pecuniary return can be expected? To none have been given such opportunities of "going about doing good" as to our doctors, and nobly have they used them.

But it is one thing to give willing help and prompt relief to those who live within easy reach of the doctor's house—in the side streets of the town or within a mile or two's

drive along a splendid road: it is quite another to be ready night or day to face storm and tempest, over rugged hills or tossing sea, to reach the sick bed of a peasant in the highlands of Scotland, or among the rocky islands off the coast of Donegal. What such a life may be has been written in the "Bonnie Briar Bush," and, beautiful as the story is, there is no exaggeration. There are scores of men, thank God, working under physical conditions of the most trying kind, who spare neither health nor worldly goods in their efforts to make the simple people among whom they live a little happier, a little healthier, a little easier in their hour of pain. Now and again some special circumstance brings such a life into notoriety. Such has been the case lately with a man whom the Press has described as "a medical hero," and whose tragic end has aroused an almost world wide sympathy.

William Smyth was dispensary doctor at Burtonport—a little fishing station on the coast of Donegal exactly opposite to the island of Arranmore. The son of Dr. Samuel Smyth of Mount Charles in the same county—a place, in fact, situated on Donegal Bay itself—he had absorbed the

true feeling of the country and the people from his earliest years. By that it is not meant that he shared the religious or political beliefs of the majority of the natives for he was a staunch Protestant and loyalist. But he was absolutely at home on the wild and barren hills, on the innumerable islands round the coast, on the intricate and often stormy channels which divide them, and in the cabins of the peasantry in all the country side. He loved the people and the beasts and the birds and the fishes. He gloried in the sweep of the wind from off the wide Atlantic, and in the untamed beauty of the landscape and the sea. And in return he was loved as few men have ever been, more even, if possible, than was his father in whose footsteps he trod.

But he was not only loved, he was also the pride of Donegal. What county could show his equal? "The finest man in Ireland all out!" So was he described. And rightly. He was of splendid physique, about six feet two in height, and magnificently made. He weighed some fifteen stone, but had not an ounce of superfluous flesh. His features were finely formed, and mouth and chin gave an impression of indomitable per-



Dispensary and Courthouse, Arranmore

severance. When at Trinity College, Dublin, he was a notable athlete, obtaining the championship for the long jump, and a considerable reputation for boxing and wrestling. Afterwards, when living at Burtonport, he

splendid combination of gentleness and strength, of firmness and tenderest sympathy, which produces the most trusted and most lovable of men.

Thus and thus only is it possible to



(From a photograph by H. A. Paiey, Esq.)

Near Burtonport

was famous for his skill in taming and driving the most difficult horses, but above all for his seamanship and his handling of his yacht the *Stella* in weather which kept all other craft in harbour. Small wonder that the people were proud of him! And yet, if to-day you ask them to tell you what he was, these things are not the first to come from lips which tremble with grief as they speak of him. They tell you first of his goodness to the poor. Of his cheerful readiness to drive a dozen miles by night or day in any weather to visit a sick woman or soothe a dying child. Of his giving back his fee to provide for the wants of the family. Of his presents of money and of food. Above all, of his devotion in nursing "the fever"—the dreaded typhus—which periodically descends upon the helpless folk and takes its dreadful toll.

He was in fact an example of that

account for the fact that he retained so secure a hold upon the affections and trust of the people in spite of the fact of his religious and political opinions. The very priests themselves worked heart and soul with him, and were amongst the most sincere mourners at his funeral. They bear witness that on no single occasion did they ever hear from their people one word except in praise of "the doctor." It is probably not too much to say that there was no one in all that wide parish—and being a truly "congested district" it numbers some 7000 souls—who had not a personal liking for him even though some few treated him ill.

There has come a great change over the land since the County Council system was introduced in Ireland. In old days the various appointments were usually given to men of superior education and position, who were also loyalists and often Protestants,

Now the power of making these appointments has got into the hands of an almost unbroken majority of Nationalists, and they are busy trying to get rid of the former holders of the various offices in order to put in their own relations and friends. Much as this is to be regretted it is not unnatural, and to this must be ascribed some of the trials and difficulties with which Dr. Smyth was beset in his later years.

In spite of these things, and in spite too of assurances from many friends, leading Dublin physicians and others—that with his skill and knowledge and with his “presence” he might easily attain to a position of far greater eminence (and consequent wealth) in London or some great centre of population, he clung to his work among the scenes and the people whom he knew and loved so well. It is a matter of thankfulness that he did so. It is a grand thing to see a man doing the work which lies ready to his hand with all his might, and, further, it may be certainly affirmed that no one could do it as he did. It will be long enough before any one is found with his knowledge of the sea and of boats to visit the eight islands forming part of the district, and with his physical powers to stand the strain of long exposures followed by hours of attendance in a stifling and insanitary house. It will, perhaps, be longer yet before a man is found so oblivious of self, so devoted to the cause of others.

But there were special ties to bind him to the district. Not only was he a native himself, but his wife, too, belonged to Donegal, and of his numerous family (fourteen in all) six children lay buried in the little churchyard five miles off at Dunglow. How he loved his children! Nay, how he loved all children! Of the thousands who miss him sorely to-day, next to that partner of his life who, brave as himself, was his ever-ready assistant in all his work, the children must be reckoned chief; first his own, and then all those little ones for whom he had a word and a smile as he passed upon his way.

Time after time had this devoted man fought with the typhus foe. This fearful complaint, which improved sanitation has practically driven away from the rest of the

British Isles, still appears with unabated virulence from time to time in the West of Ireland. Doctors, priests, nurses, have fallen in their efforts to check its advance. Scenes the most awful have been witnessed. Dr. Smyth himself once attended a house where all seven inhabitants were lying upon the mud floor of the single room in the grip of the dread disease. But he was absolutely fearless, although he had said that he knew that should he be attacked he should not recover. Time after time he came out scatheless. But the day came at last when even he succumbed. For some years he had not been in such robust health as formerly, and that had probably much to do with the fatal result of the outbreak of fever on Arranmore Island last autumn.

Determined not to allow the disease to spread, if by any means it could be avoided, he would not let the district nurse attend the cases. He was nurse and doctor in one. More than that he took over the necessities of life for the patients, and lived for the time being absolutely for them. It had to be so, for no one would go near either them or him. The people in these parts are so terrified of the typhus that they leave their nearest and dearest to perish sooner than run any risk themselves. Alone, then, he rowed across the three or four miles of sea to Arranmore day after day. No friendly hand was there to help him moor his boat—no “boy” to share the load of food and medicine he bore across the hillside to the stricken houses. At the sight of him—though one and all loved him dearly—there was a general flight to a distance judged to be safe from infection.

Then came the final act. He persuaded one family to go to the Glenties hospital. This meant crossing to Burtonport, and then a drive of twenty Irish miles. The latter would be accomplished by the ambulance; but how were they to cross the sea? No boat could be had for love or money. At last an old crazy thing was bought for a couple of sovereigns, and in this Dr. Smyth and the medical officer of health for Donegal (who came at the eleventh hour to his assistance) rowed them across. It was altogether outside the necessary duty of the doctor. But,

like so many others, William Smyth had no thought of that. His only desire was to do what he could. The deed brought its reward. Every patient regained health. But what of him the nurse, the doctor, the devoted friend? On him the deadly fever laid its hold.

In a few weeks' time he was laid beside his children in the churchyard at Dunglow. Widow and children were left bereaved and helpless. A country wept. But one more heroic deed had been done, one more example set for us to follow.



## A Hedge Schoolmaster

By J. R. M'Mahon

**N**AT KELLY'S cabin was one of the familiar landmarks on my daily seven-mile ride between my father's farm and the old Foundation School at Bishopstown, County Donegal.

The cabin stood on a hillside, and its threshold was at least a couple of feet below the level of the road, its thatch was green with moss and irregular for want of repair, its chimney was a mere vent-hole, and its general appearance was tumble-down in the extreme. Such was the singular academy where Nat, in the days that I speak of, some fifty years ago, taught a dozen or so of the children of the neighbouring labourers. Often would I meet the scholars straggling along the road, each with a three-legged stool and a Reedy-ma-deesy—a cryptogram from which you will perhaps disentangle Reading Made Easy—with the addition, in winter, of a turf each for the fire. Passing a little later you would have seen, through the open upper half of Nat's door, dim figures in a mist of blue smoke, and have heard a babel of voices repeating the "Ah, Bay, Say," or the multiplication table.

Nat himself was rarely seen out of doors except in the evening, when he would, every once in a while, make his way down to a neighbouring shebeen, where, according to local report, he would on occasion hold forth "like wan possessed, wid the larin' an' poethry an' the haythen tongues just bubblin' from his lips," and at another time would be "that glum and sullen there was no draggin' a word out of him." But in either case he never failed to take home with him a jar of what he insisted on calling, my informant

said, " 'neck-tar,' though indade Clancy's 'goat's-milk' was not that bad at all."

Some opined that there was a tragedy behind him—for how else should a man who could spout Latin verse have come to that pass?—but none could affirm anything definite, and it may be that the jar held all the secret there was.

Passing always in the daytime I had never happened to see Nat on the road till one evening just before the Christmas holidays, in my last year at school. My bag of books was full—for the hope of an exhibition at Queen's next session had begun to fire me—and in my hand I carried the overflow, a bulky, leather-backed "Virgil Delphini," with which, if the truth must be told, I had been trying some circus tricks, throwing it up and catching it again as I rode—for even an impending scholarship exam. will not sober a schoolboy on the eve of the holidays. I was balancing it in one hand over my head, I remember, as I came up to Nat's, and I nearly dropped it in astonishment when the old man suddenly shambled across the road and stopped me, laying a hand on my pony's mane. I think I can see him now. On his bent shoulders hung a long, coarse linen coat, once white, now thick-stained with the soot drops that slowly gathered on rafters and wattle from the smoke of earthy peat; the face he raised to me must have been handsome once, for the forehead was good, and the nose slightly aquiline, but the outlines, that should have been keen, were somehow blurred, and the watery, red-lidded eyes told their story only too plainly. They lighted up, though, as they fell on the Virgil,