

# The Carmelite News

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WHITEFRIARS · FAVERSHAM · KENT

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

**T**HE membership fees of the St. Jude and the Holy Child Societies have now been advanced to 5/- per year.

We are sorry to have to do this, but the cost of wages and paper have risen so much that our overheads frighten us. We try to send out to each member, a well printed Novena booklet in full colour, and the *Carmelite News*, five times a year.

The yearly postage costs on that proposition alone are over 1/-.

We hope our members will not object to the increase, and that they will continue to support us.

Please let us know if you still require the *Carmelite News*, as extra costs allow us to print only what is required.



## OLD JIM FARRELL

**M**OST mountainy men are individualists. They see far and clear. They develop that quarter deck look in their eyes at an early age. Their lives are simple, unhurried and uneventful. It was a long way to Mass on a Sunday, sometimes seven or ten miles, but it was the one chance they had of meeting their neighbours. Sometimes they didn't want to meet them, they just wanted to look at them. Maybe they wanted to find out which of them was going to die first.

Old Jim Farrell lived in the heart of the mountains near Glenmalure, in a little thatched house beside a waterfall. The noise of the tumbling waters went on day and night, and he had long since ceased to hear it except when it changed its rhythm after a storm.

Like most other men he was married, because a house without a woman is not a house at all. A man can't live with a woman and can't live without her. It is a matter of compromise. I think that his courting days must have been simple indeed. She died long before him, leaving two sons as craggy as himself.

I can picture him sitting in his high chair in front of the fire when the neighbours came in to console him in his loss.

They would say, as the custom is in the hills, "A good woman, none better, God rest her soul!" "She was a dacent woman, and look at her two fine boys!" (Both of them by that time had beards.) Another one would chime in, "Yes, she was the finest woman who ever tripped the ridges of these hills!" The old man replied, "Yes, several times in her life I wanted to tell her so, but her hard tongue stopped me. Life is hard! A woman should be aisy and soft." "Sometimes I thought that she wasn't born at all; that she was quarried out of the stones of Glenmalure."

She went! She was carried to the graveyard in a horse's cart, and her old bones didn't mind it, because she had never ridden any softer in her life.

Old Jim was not a poor man. He ran some six to eight hundred head of sheep on the slopes of Lugnaquilla. He sold his lambs every year and the wool brought in good money, and the ewes in the autumn. For the rest, some potatoes, a few heads of cabbage, some carrots and swede turnips supplied the simple needs of the table. There was plenty of fresh milk, there was plenty of butter, and of course, there were hens, hares and rabbits.

The arrangement of the house was patriarchal. In the firelight old Jim sat in the high backed chair in front of the peat fire with his hat on. His two sons sat upon wooden seats beside the fire, and they had their hats on too. Their sheep dogs crouched beside their feet, while they rested their hands on an ash plant that stood between their knees. Their beards were a blackish brown, speckled, with white. The old man smoked a pipe; the two sons chewed tobacco. One of them had a front tooth missing which he had never bothered to replace. During the day time, the big chair was pulled aside from in front of the fire. There was cooking to be done, but after a morning on the hills, home would come the sons with their dogs and sticks and sit in their accustomed places. The old man slept up in a one room loft, the two boys slept in a room beneath. When his pipe had gone out he would ascend the stairs with his hat still on and retire for the night. He came back to earth in the morning with his hat still securely on his head.

In every Irish cottage of that kind there is a half door, to keep the chickens out. Contrary to general belief, a chicken has brains. When chickens are small, the door keeps them out, but when they grow up, they can fly up and perch on the half door and hop down on the kitchen floor. White leghorns, those lovely graceful birds built like greyhounds. Every time a chicken landed on the half door, two coloured jets of tobacco juice went out from the chimney place. If one missed, he would look at the other without speaking a word, as much as to say, "You are not as good as you used to be." You could see the chickens running round in the yard stained with tobacco juice and sometimes I think the nicotine blinded one of their eyes; because some of them had to back round to see me. <sup>41</sup>

Three days in the year were special. In September when the sheep were gathered down from the hills, and the ewes were singled out for sale. The mountains are poor land; but down in the County Wexford, or in County Kildare and Westmeath, all you have to do is put out a mountain ewe, and she will grow fat as you look at her, and if you don't look at her she will probably have twins. The herd men of the mountains provide the raw material for the fat of the midlands. Ireland is like a saucer, high in the rim,

low in the centre; poor in the rim, rich in the midlands. Fair enough, you cannot have it both ways! The midland buyers came to the mountain sales to pick the stock they will carry over the winter. This is a very important thing in the life of a sheep farmer.

Old Jim had a prejudice. He did not like to sell his sheep to anyone but my father. He would not admit that to anyone until the bargain was made. They liked each other and took the measure of each other's cunning. These autumn sales were the high light of the year. To old Jim it was a social event and he put his hand out in no unmistakable fashion. Twelve bottles of whisky—two for each man. If you wanted water with it, you had to go to the well. You could have it, of course, but that was letting the side down. Just a drop maybe!

You got there before nightfall of an evening and your bottle was put in front of you. Next morning you were up at crack of dawn. You could ride it or foot it; but by nightfall, maybe a thousand sheep or more, would be congregated down in the lowlands. Not all of them belonged to old Jim; in fact, they belonged to all the people in the hills. Boundaries were vague.

You may not believe this, but these sheep herders in the Wicklow mountains know a sheep almost as you know your next door neighbour. Some of them would be able to recognise a sheep they had sold five years before. I thought that that was a long story, but it is nothing of the kind. Next day the sheep would be sorted out. They were put through a chute and the ultimate number to be sold was estimated. Three, four hundred, maybe more.

Then the fun began! The buyer was entitled to reject any one of the sheep that went through the chute. One that was too old and had escaped the round up of last year, a duck billed ewe—a hairy old maiden that had seen her best years. One rejection in ten, was a generous allowance. Of course, the buyer went round with a look on his face that showed he wanted to reject the lot—"not worth buying." "The worst I have ever seen." "A disgrace to offer them for sale." "Couldn't make a penny on them if I tried." "It has been a terrible winter for sheep." Maybe now you can see the

reason for the bottle of whisky—two bottles for each man. But finally, argument ended.

At the end of the day, all gathered around a table to a meal that would have astonished the gods; chicken, ham, turkey, black and white puddings, potatoes and greens. It was not one of your in and out jobs. It would start at about seven in the evening and end about midnight. A man had time to digest the first part of the meal before he arrived at the end, and as the evening went on, courtesy increased. Instead of Mr. Lynch, it became Pat; instead of a hard bargain about sheep, it became an arrangement between friends—almost a mutual gift, and "Good luck to you!" When they went home there was the old Irish saying, "May the road rise with you!" "May your fire never go out!" "God and Mary bless you!"

Jim Farrell's wife had a brother down in the County Kildare, and there is nothing a Wicklowman likes more than to inherit a farm in the County Kildare; to get down on the good flat ground. When this brother of his wife died, she inherited the farm. It was not very big, but it was good, and it gave her the inch ahead that she had always wanted from the day she was born. What was she going to do with it? Should she sell it, or give it away? Or would she just rent it out to somebody? She wouldn't say. That woman became so dumb that she couldn't even hear the birds sing. She was deaf to all innuendos, every cagey suggestion. Plain downright statements of fact simply went right over her head. She became the dumbest woman that ever lived within the range of the seven churches.

She went on her way, thinking deeply. It was the first time in her life that she had ever had anything she could call her own, and she was determined that old Jim would not have it. She dug up a long lost nephew down in the County Wexford. She met him secretly in the town and together they concocted a will by which he would inherit the farm and meanwhile move in as tenant. Well, she was smart, but not smart enough. She made the will and signed it, and allowed him to sign it as well. She found another witness to add his name. Of course the will was invalid. You cannot inherit under a will that you have signed yourself. One day she died and the will was unfolded,

and old Jim, as the next of kin, inherited the farm. He went round looking like the cat that had just eaten the canary.

Of course, the nephew was very much annoyed—I would have been annoyed myself. But the lad had heard that I had some influence with old Jim, and that maybe if I went to see him, everything would be all right. I knew the old codger and that screwy look in his eye that came on when he thought you were trying to put something over on him. I scouted all round the question. What a lucky man he was! I even quoted the Scriptures. "To him that hath, it shall be given, and to him that hath not, it shall be taken away, even that which he hath." I pointed out to him how comfortable he was, and that he really didn't want another farm. He was like a wise old terrier. He wagged his tail, but would not come to heel. Finally, I said to him, "Jim, don't you know it was never the will of your wife that you should have that farm?" He looked at me and said, "Father, if it wasn't *her* will, it was the will of God."

I retired from the contest. Never argue with an Irish farmer about land. In fact, never argue with an Irish farmer at all, because he will hoist you with your own petard, just to prove that if the world began in theology, it will end in smoke.

The nephew got the land in the end. It took a long time for the grace of God to penetrate down into Jim's tough old soul. He did more good than he foresaw. I had the pleasure of seeing a young thriving couple with four children living where just one man lived before.

These Wicklow Mountains are always in my dreams, and I say, "God send me back to you in summer time." One day an Irish government will drive a high road through the hills from Dublin down through Roundwood, Glendalough and Rathdrum; right through the hills where lived the "most rebelly crew" that ever played hide and go seek with the Hessians in '98. It will be one of the finest high roads in Europe.

But what a change there is! The sheep are gone from the mountains and the men who looked after them. Now it is all forest. Thousands and thousands of acres of deep olive green conifers shoot their spires into the mist. The fox and the deer call from the hillsides, and it is lonely. The people are gone—far, far

