

## The Dominie's Dilemma

### or Lawlessness in the Classroom - by Clach Oich (William Macphail, Gravir)

In the distant past there lived and ruled for a space of time, within the village school at 'Ceann Loch Odhairn', well remembered by the older generation under the name of 'Padruig Mor', a man whose faults and merits I can neither laud or lampoon with any degree of certainty. They are buried in oblivion with his bones. Suffice to say he was a simple, quiet, inoffensive man, truly a type of Dominie ill suited for the Herculean task of keeping the unruly element under his charge in the path of virtue and knowledge. I would not, however, have the reader imagine he was wholly unfit to rule, or that he did not exercise his exclusive privileges for the good of the school and the welfare of his pupils, as nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, he was more the plaything of fate, the victim of his own good nature and those of his predecessors' golden rule, "spare the rod, and spoil the child". Thus, sowing the thorns, which our Dominie, of a surety, was to reap.

Unfortunately for his own prestige and the dignity of his profession his 'Alma Mater' did not include among the other degrees for which he qualified the manly art of self-defence, so very essential to the Dominies of those faraway days, when lawlessness was rife in the classroom and as a consequence not being scientifically trained to meet the enemy on equal terms and with his own weapons. The Dominie's term of office was one long nightmare, his waking and sleeping hours being continually haunted and overshadowed by the sinister presence in the school of two hefty youths, well known in their day and school as 'Fionn' and 'Roshan'.

These young ruffians, who feared no man and respected no rule or law, had rendered school hours wretched and intolerable by their avowed and implacable hatred towards the Dominie, and their arrogant reaction to any prescribed rule whose aim was to curb their own freedom, and dare devil propensities. While gentle methods and kid glove tactics had ignominiously failed to bring order out of chaos or to combat their flagrant breaches of discipline which had assumed such alarming proportions as to become a daily feature of the school routine, the Dominie driven to distraction, resolved to embark upon other and more drastic measures for the purpose of counteracting this cankerous growth that was gnawing at his vitals, blasting his career and undermining the whole fabric of law and order within his jurisdiction.

Hitherto, he had spared the rod with calamitous results, but henceforth he was determined to wield the birch and use his fists indiscriminately and with severity against the aggressors who had flouted his law, scorned his rule and dragged his own and the school's good name down the gutter. Having therefore decided on his future line of action he threw down the gage of battle and when the ominous tidings were whispered from mouth to mouth in the school a fever of excitement prevailed and the climax, which could not be unduly delayed in such a tense atmosphere, came swift and sudden one day while a fight was being fought in the playground between two rival factions in the school with Fionn and Roshan acting as umpires in the fiercely contested struggle.

During this rough and tumble scrimmage with natives' weapons, hard blows were exchanged on both sides. No quarter was asked and none given. Our Dominie hearing the noise of the affray rushed forth to the scene of battle, armed with a stout oaken cudgel which he brought lustily into play on the bare pates and scanty clad backs of the more aggressive of the combatants, vanquishing some and defending himself from the fury of the rest with the courage and expertness of a much younger and more skilful exponent of the game. But alas! He was hopelessly outnumbered and the end loomed in sight with dramatic suddenness when the intrepid 'Roshan' in bold and menacing tones accused him of taking 'sides' in a quarrel that did not concern him and, deliberately butting him in the stomach, he challenged him to a bout of fisticuffs. This was 'Fionn's' chance to show his hand and likewise his mettle. The Dominie's skill and prowess with the cudgel had fanned into flame the smoldering fires of 'Fionn's' long cherished hate and envy, and rushing in among the crowd who scattered on his approach like chaff before the wind he advanced on the Dominie, now at bay with his back to the classroom wall, but still breathing defiance at his enemies and plying the cudgel to right and left with a courage born of desperation and worthy of nobler cause.

Like a savage bulldog unleashed 'Fionn' sprang at the Dominie and, snatching the cudgel out of his hands he broke it in two, throwing the pieces among the crowd who greeted the disarming of their common foe with shouts and cries of derisive laughter to the utter detriment and disdain of the Dominie, rendered desperate at the loss of his weapon and on all sides, like Samson shorn of his locks he was exposed to the fury of his enemies, yet proudly jealous of his rights and dignity.

Burning with indignation at the ignominy of this enforced outrage, in a flash his mind was made up. He would meet the ruffians with their own weapons - the bare fists - and by administering a dose of their own medicine he would satisfy the claims of justice and mete out to them the punishment they so richly deserved. Goaded by their jibes and jeers, with remarkable agility for a man of his years, the Dominie, flinging caution to the winds adopted a fighting attitude and aiming a series of uppercuts at his tormentors which however fell wide of their marks, he tried to close with them.

This resolute stand on the part of the Dominie and singular demonstration of the manly wit, that under other circumstances might have gained the applause of a less fickle and unruly mob, proved rash and presumptuous on this occasion and tended to hasten rather than impede the end fate had in store for him. He had reckoned without the nimble and unfailing qualities and the fighting instinct dominating every thought and move of the wily 'Fionn' and the elusive 'Roshan', who combined the low cunning and craftiness of the fox with the suppleness of an eel and, for youths in their adolescent years, the stubbornness of a mule, with the vigour and strength of an ox.

Those racial characteristics stood them in good stead in this, their last encounter with the Dominie. They met and repelled the first mad rush of his onslaught by concentrated action and likewise evaded and parried his strokes by skilful manoeuvring and cat like movements of their hands and bodies. Thus he was outwitted by natural cunning, and out fought to the point of exhaustion by superior fighting skills and reckless daring, attributes acquired of daily practice and the experience in the stern school of reality, and the end came with a warning shout from the crowd to confuse the Dominie and throw him of his guard. Then, with the Dominie at a disadvantage, 'Fionn' and 'Roshan' opened out simultaneously and with lightning - like rapidity sending home a number of blows to the head and body where they landed with resounding thuds. The unfortunate man groaned and for one brief moment he staggered then, sagging at the knees, he collapsed unconscious at his enemies' feet, knocked out for the count amid scenes of evident enthusiasm on the part of the frenzied mob, who in seeing their hereditary enemy lying low, rent the air with their yells and acclamations, hailing 'Fionn' and 'Roshan' as the victors and the heroes of the school.

This was the end. The measure of his misfortune was fixed up. Zero hour had arrived for the Dominie. Insulted, injured and humiliated before the whole school and by the two he feared and hated the most, the detested 'Fionn' and the despised 'Roshan', his cup of bitterness and sorrow was full to the brim and he drained to the dregs. This amazing exploit, the best of many, ended the school career of our two friends. They were expelled in due course as a pair of incorrigible undesirables.

Fionn - Mac Catrina  
Roshan - Seonni Seonaid