

BACK OF ODELL

John Cronin sat at an early morning breakfast in his hotel room and quickly glanced over his personal mail. One bore the caption, "Duncan & Bell, Attorneys-At-Law." This was without doubt from Aunt Mary's lawyers. He had received word the previous week from Aunt Mary's secretary of the old lady's demise at the advanced age of eighty-five. Half smiling with pleasant anticipation, he slit the envelope and took out a sheet of paper bearing three or four type-written lines. As his mind fumbled for a clearer understanding of the tersely constructed sentences, he rose unsteadily from his lounging chair and placed his forehead against the window pane. His glance came to linger on the wide street below the silk draped windows. His face, as he gazed rigidly out, was set in lines of anger, his features sharp with disappointment. He looked all of his fifty-three years.

A cold glint of rage replaced the usual gleam in his brown eyes which made him so attractive to his more important clients and the exclusive society bodies of Harrington. His impeccably tailored pinestripe, and silver-grey hair accented his distinguished features—the portrait of a successful business man. As the head of a large Real Estate firm, he was fast making his presence felt in the economic life of the city, and being unmarried, was rated as an excellent "catch" by many of Harrington's smart set who had hitherto been unsuccessful in the matrimonial market. In public and private life, he was noted for his reserve and self-control; at the office he was held in awe by his staff. As business increased and its permanence became more assured, they were beginning to refer to him as "old J. R."

Abruptly, his reverie ended, and his face set in lines of determination. Soon he was threading his way through the business section towards the suburbs.

As a boy John Cronin was brought up in the little village of Odell, about sixty miles east of the city. With his younger brother, Hugh, he graduated from the village high school, where he had specialized in mathematics and other subjects suited to his keen mind. Both boys went on to the city and soon made a start in Real Estate. But Hugh's dislike for the city and his hankerings for country life led him to go back home, where he married and made a start in the rich farming country "back of Odell." This was a severe blow to his brother John, because in their partnership John's business acumen was more than equalled by his brother's

pleasing personality, which was so necessary in their business operations. But he struggled on and came out of the war a wealthy man. By now, time, distance, and the disparity of the worlds they lived in, had made the brothers strangers. He had made one visit up "back of Odell" but the sight of poverty and sickness which had greeted him there was repulsive to his nature. His one family tie was Old Aunt Mary, and he felt he had done his duty by her. He had had his secretary remember her regularly with flowers, on birthdays and anniversaries, and he also paid her perfunctory visits. For Aunt Mary was very wealthy and he felt it would be very fitting for her inheritance to augment his fortune. It was all he needed to make him the city's leading financier. But the letter which weighed so heavily in his pocket had dealt him a severe blow. It stated that Aunt Mary had left him the big old fashioned house, where she lived, in the most out dated section of the city. His brother, Hugh, would fall into the bulk of the estate.

As he sped countrywards in his highpowered automobile diverse schemes were running through his mind. He felt that if he talked to his brother in the right vein, the money could at least be divided among them. For the next half-hour he planned, tirelessly, how he would approach his brother, hardly noticing the awakening of spring in the verdant countryside. Knowing his brother's simple habits he felt he could easily be persuaded. With an unsophisticated country girl as his wife, and such a ridiculously large family, he had no doubt that they were living in a slough of poverty, and would never be able to adjust themselves to the manner of living fitting to the possessor of the Blake fortunes.

Still absorbed in thought, he sped through little towns and across rivers, past people toiling in the fields, until soon familiar landmarks loomed up. For a mile along the highway he threaded his way through government workers and machines, in the process of making a new road. Two road machines met and he had to stop for a few seconds. He saw the car-door open suddenly, and a tiny old woman, whom he had noticed on the road, got in beside him. She wished him a cheery good morning in a cracked voice, deposited her bundles upon the seat, and appeared quite oblivious of his astonishment. The simple-hearted woman believed he had stopped to give her a lift into the village of Odell where she was going to market her basket of baking. When she found that he was going beyond the village, she fired a barrage of questions that even his cold reserve could not escape. Feeling annoyed at himself, he found himself telling her who he was and what was his destination. Im-

mediately the old woman launched into a train of reminiscence. She knew Hugh Cronin well. A fine family he had raised. Did he happen to see his boys pictures in the Clarke County Herald when they were decorated for bravery? Suddenly, John Cronin remembered a telephone call he had received one day from his brother's son. The boy had been in the city on business and had called the office to get in touch with his uncle. But he was then involved in a business conference and had directed his secretary to tell him that there were no positions available in the office.

Without further encouragement, she painted in glowing terms a description of Hugh Cronin's family, and the part he played in the community life of the populous countryside. Then she recounted his trials and troubles during the depression years. John Cronin, too, remembered his visit to the farm when his brother was ill, and the signs of poverty and neglect had so dismayed him. He could have given his brother a loan to carry him over for a couple of years, but at that time he was angling for membership in an exclusive club and needed to keep his purse well lined.

As the village of Odell came in sight, and they passed through the quiet streets, vivid scenes of his youth flashed across his memory. His rapid pace unconsciously was slowed as he noted the changes which had taken place. The old lady was let out at the old market building. Just outside the village was his brother's home. He drove more slowly so that he would have time to think. On either side were farm homes, their buildings fresh with paint, and surrounded by trees and shrubs. People he met on the road raised their hands in greeting; he met children running on their way to school.

Hugh Cronin's place was sheltered by a grove of maples and birches on a hilltop, and as he drove near it he was struck with the natural beauty of the place. Slowly he entered the driveway and drove up the shrub bordered avenue to the house. Hugh Cronin held the morning mail in his hand and was just taking out the letters. John knew he must see him before he opened the letter from Aunt Mary's attorneys. He jumped out, and walked quickly up the walk; he met Hugh face to face at the kitchen door. Hugh had just finished reading the letter. He raised his eyes to look at the stranger approaching. The contrast was striking. Hugh Cronin was short and thickly built. He was clad in blue jeans and plaid shirt, and a straw hat was at a rakish angle on the back of his head. His feet, in big boots, were planted squarely in front of the doorstep. But yet his features proved to be almost identical with his brother's —

the same nose and heavy eyebrows. He stood facing the sun, squinting at the stranger; then a light of recognition came into his eyes and his hand shot out to grasp his brother's. John Cronin was at a loss for words. Conflicting emotions worked in his face. He gestured feebly towards the open letter, and said, "You've read it!"

Calmly and clearly Hugh Cronin replied, "Yes, poor Aunt Mary has gone, God rest her soul. But come inside. I think I smell the Missus' coffee on the stove. Why'nt you come down to see us oftener. Got a fine place here now — we're doin' mighty good." Without protest, John Cronin was led through the open door into the sunlit kitchen. That was that!

—PATRICIA PENDERGAST '48

VAIN PURSUIT

A sense of loneliness upon me creeps,
A longing for some thing yet unattained.
I've sought it oft; my soul in boundless leaps
Pursues it still through long years undismayed.
I see it hover o'er horizon bright;
Oft times to worldly things it seems allied.
I strive toward that goal so near in sight,
But reaching there — it has a newer bride.
Once more I ask in vain, without reply,
"Through all my life, must I be so distraught?
Must all desires their noble ends belie?
Illusive something, can'st thou ne'er be caught?"
A voice within me comforts my distress:
In God at last we'll find true happiness.

—C. SINNOTT '49

ALL ABOARD

So this was the Murray Harbour train. Often had I heard its fame noised over the Island, as well as the Mainland, but never, until December 20, 1946, did I have the opportunity of viewing it with my own eyes, and of experiencing some of the thrills that attend a ride on this fabulous train. That is why I shall always look upon this particular day as a milestone in my life; I travelled from Charlotte-