

THE SAVING OF BENEDICK

They were stirring times in Saint Ninian's. For two weeks the rich baritone of Father O'Reilly of the Society of Jesus had urged the people to be generous with God and had stressed that even a late vocation would be pleasing to Him. Father also told the Scots parishioners that the only place greener or more blessed than the Island was Erin itself. The homely wooden church was crowded with people and mosquitoes every night; it was not often they had a mission. They had scarcely settled back into their usual, contented lives when Father Mac got up on the altar and disturbed their complacency.

"There are too many people in this parish who are selfish with their God. They do not do what they could and should do because they won't take the necessary means to save their souls."

He took out a large handkerchief, wiped his face, and continued, "Most of the people in this parish are meant to get married, and almost all the rest to be priests, or brothers, or sisters. There are too many bachelors in this parish! We had a lot of those birds in the past but," the volume increased, "we don't want them in Saint Ninian's".

The padre relaxed a bit and continued more quietly, "My dear people, during the month of October then, let us ask Our Blessed Mother to assist our brethren so that we may one day be together in the heavenly home her Son has prepared for us." Father Mac made the sign of the cross, genuflected, and waited for the little altar boys to scurry in front of him while the mothers down below gathered their offsprings' clothes together.

While the people of Saint Ninian's were having their souls retouched, the old brick parochial house, which had not been painted since one of the parishioners in the preceding regime had painted over the grease on the kitchen ceiling with a whitewash brush, was being gilded by a brawny Irishman, Murphy by name. Benedick MacDonald, a native of the parish, was doing the carpentering. Soon after the mission, Murphy was doing some of the trim on the woodwork in the hall when he noticed Benedick reading a pamphlet in the study. When Benedick left to drink some tea and tease Nora, the housekeeper, Murphy sneaked in and took a look. Father Mac happened along with his breviary and said to him, "What are you reading, Murphy?"

Murphy jumped out of his seat and said, "What? Glory be to God and it's an awful scare you gave me, Father."

"I see that's one of Benedick's books you are reading; have you the same plans, Murph?" asked Father Mac.

"And what plans would Benedick be having?" Murphy scented some news.

"Didn't you know?" Father Mac persisted. "He's going to join the Christian Brothers!"

"God bless my soul, not Benedick. You're pulling me leg, Father," said Murphy.

Father declared solemnly, "You must pray for him, Murphy," so he was convinced.

It was absolutely necessary that Murphy spread the news. Purely by accident, he found that he needed turpentine in the village; he just stopped in at the restaurant to get some smokes. There sat old Rory Dan Donald of the bristling eyebrows and pious tongue.

Rory who was feeling no pain,, called out, "Murphy, how is the painting coming? God bless your heart, my boy, and you're doing a fine job, yes, yes a fine job. Is Benedick MacDonald still helping you?"

"I could tell you a thing or two about Benedick, but it's a secret," Murphy said with a wise air.

"It's no wonder, him backing it at his age. Glory be to God and what's the news? It'll never go farther than old Rory, Lord love you, my boy."

"Have you noticed how quiet he's been lately, and never even a small lie?"

"Yes, yes, yes he won't even talk politics," Rory agreed.

"It's the Christian Brothers he's going to join."

"Lord bless my soul! Benedick! He has been carpentering these twenty-five years." Rory could not believe it.

"I have it from Father Mac himself. He's going to see the Bishop right away," said Murphy in self-satisfied tones.

Just then some of the boys came in and Rory told them all about it. They could scarcely believe it, but Father Mac. . .

"Well," said Gabriel, Rory Dan Donald's son-in-law, "my brother Jule back home, he went and joined the Christian Brothers two, three years ago."

"Was that before or after he raise the five kids, Gaby?" one of the Over North lads asked.

"Don't you make fun of the people back home. It was my brother Philippe who raised such a fine family and my brother Pierre who we call Big Pete."

They watched Benedick very closely the next few days. Someone asked him what the Conservatives were doing now, and instead of spouting the usual line on the greatness of Diefenbaker, he said he didn't know. Didn't know what the Conservatives were doing! And him a Tory so long he looked like Sir John A. with his long Scottish face and big nose. He was either sick or giving up the world in earnest. One of the boys reported that he was Benedick going into the Basilica about the first of November, all dressed up. Then one day the news spread that he finally had left and his nephew was driving his battered old car.

Murphy continued to paint and answer questions freely, happy in his new importance. They had thought him just another Irishman whose tongue was so silver he even believed his own tales; now 'twas different. He had ecclesiastical backing, you might say, living at the parochial house and all. Besides, the new housekeeper, who had replaced Nora, listened gravely to all he said. Soon Murphy could bring the glad tidings; Father Mac had a letter saying that Brother Ben would be home for Christmas.

At last the great day came. Father Mac drove to the airport to meet his newly reformed lamb. A whole carload of villagers drove in just to see him. The little plane landed and discharged its gay vacationers. With much confusion a member, with his attractive wife, and family got their belongings together and scrambled out; then came two Franciscans in brown robes and sandals, next the Honourable Mr. Hamish Mac somebody and his retinue, and last of all came Benedick, looking twenty years younger, with his bride Nora.

The villagers were a wee bit disappointed but someone recollected that George Billy Paddy was in jail for Christmas, so off they went to visit him.

—ELLEN REDDIN '63

REBELS

Grey smoke drifting,
floating through the room,
Walls hung with craggy art,
Night air filled with sound.
Boom of the bongo
wail of the saxophone.
Weird rythms,
Cool, cool jazz,
Twanging guitars.
Broken seats and beer bottles,
Mad joint, mad.
This is the gas house.