... there's a perfectly good reason for this sign.

It seems there

BY LORD DUNSANY

ILLUSTRATED BY DUNCAN MACPHERSON

It is some years ago now that I stopped on a road that runs through the south of England and went into an inn for a cup of tea. I was walking, and so I was thirsty, and it was a warm day, though right at the end of the summer, and the partridges were calling from the fields. The inn sign was a rather crude picture of two men shaking hands, and the name of the inn was written above the picture, The Inn Of The Two Adventurers. There in its parlor I had tea and a couple of boiled eggs, and had the company of seven or eight farmers to cheer me, men whose interest was in the earth and in man's business with it, and whose occupation was revealed by their talk, to anyone unable to see it in the very look of the men themselves. In conversation with them I learned many things that I do not record here, because the world is losing interest in them and their work, and cares more for machinery. But one thing that I asked of one of them was the reason for the name of the inn in which we sat, and partly from him and bit by bit from all of them I got the story. And it was this.

There was a ship of the Gray Funnel line out from an English port, heading for Biarritz with a cargo of pig iron and carrying a few passengers. A little beyond Biarritz lies the mystery and romance of Spain, both greatly intensified then by the civil war that was at that time raging there. And among the passengers were two men, an Irishman and an Englishman, whose names were O'Neill and Farringay. And in the way that opposites sometimes will, they made friends at once. For the Irishman was all bright fancies, with a certain splendor of phrases, but the Englishman was a practical man and one sparing of words.

Something perhaps in the faces of both men, some eagerness as they both gazed from the deck, seeking for the first shadow on the horizon that would be the Pyrenees, may have brought the two together; that I was not told, only that they were soon in conversation.

The Irishman spoke first. He spoke of the hills of Ireland, low ranges grey above green slopes that ran down to the red bog. He spoke of the red bog going from the green feet of the hills all the way to the skyline, and over it and beyond his knowledge. He spoke of its myriad pools with their green and crimson mosses, and of the heather rising above them, dropping its withered blooms into the bog while the histories of empires were being written, and long before that. Of where he was going he never said a word.

The Englishman made no comments beyond, "Yes," and, "I suppose so," until something in the Irishman's glorification of his land led him to speak of his land too. The Irishman had spoken only of one thing, of Nature nude among her hills; but the Englishman spoke of the blend of Nature in her everlasting valleys with the work of man in his fields. He spoke of hedgerows and hawthorn and wild roses, and of old elms brooding above them; he spoke of the hazel woods when they filled with anemones, of the hyacinths that followed them and the songs of the blackbirds, of thyme appearing in summer like carpets thrown on the downs, and haystacks and farms and England. And he spoke of these things with the same odd wistfulness that the Irishman had shown when he spoke of his land, almost as though they each of them were separated from his home by something more than the few hundred miles that actually lay between them and the shores they had left.

He too said never a word of where he was going. It was not until two shadows on the rim of the sky were identified all at once as peaks of the Pyrenees that the two men started, and the Irishman blurted out that he was going to fight in Spain. And the Englishman swung around and took him by the hand, and they saw that they were on the same errand. They did not speak yet of the war, but again of the lands they were leaving. The Irishman spoke now of the voices of the bog, the shrill shriek of the snipe, the wild cry of the heron, and, most of all, of the call of the curlew, musically haunting the low clouds of Ireland, and singing in his heart still. He spoke of these **continued on page 39**

was once an Irishman and an Englishman on their way to fight a war in Spain...

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"Shouldn't we fight somehow?" said the Englishman. "Can't we manage something on this ship?"

things wistfully as though he would know them no more. And the Englishman spoke of the twilight coming down over hedgerow and haystack, and swifts above roofs of the villages, sailing the luminous air. He too spoke as though he would see these things no more. For a while both men were silent, thinking of these things.

"But we must go," said the Irishman.

The Englishman nodded.

"The saints themselves called me," the Irishman said.

"The saints?" said Farringay.

"Sure, it was to save their churches," said O'Neill. "The churches and the monasteries that are pillaged."

For a moment the Englishman was puzzled; but he did not pursue the point, since he never discussed religion. He only said, "Yes. Spain must be free."

And they spoke of the glory of Spain and of the romance of her story, and how tyranny there would be sacrilege. They each had rifles in their luggage and plenty of ammunition, and were well supplied with money to pay the costs, as they said, of getting them through the customs; but costs seemed to be merely a euphemy for what must have been an attempt at bribery.

"Hasn't Spain the most ancient culture that Europe ever had?" said O'Neill.

And the Englishman agreed.

"It must be fertile soil," said O'Neill, as he grew more eloquent, "to grow all that glory. And, if tyranny is allowed to thrive where they have planted it there, it will overshadow all Europe. We have got to fight it."

"That is so," said the Englishman.

"We have got to uproot it and end it," O'Neill went on.

Farringay nodded.

"Ah, but the blue hills," said the Irishman, "and the miles of the red bog, that I shall never see again."

"Yes, it's a pity," said the Englishman. "But it's like that in war. And I'd like to see the hazel woods on our hills. But we must fight. That's the only way to keep liberty."

One or two more wistful remarks they each of them made; and then, as the peaks of the mountains grew larger and clearer, peering over the edge of the sea, they began to talk of the immediate business of landing their rifles and getting across the frontier into Spain with them. And then Farringay made a remark that to the Irishman was like an iceberg suddenly showing dead ahead.

"We can manage that all right," he said. "Our people control the frontier."

O'Neill stood still without speaking. And Farringay seeing his stillness knew what it was that he had suddenly seen, and which was now reflected from the Irishman's face back on himself. They were on opposite sides.

"Then we are . . ." he started to say, and said no more.

"Yes," said O'Neill.

FOR A long while they both stood silent. And then the Englishman said, "Oughtn't we to fight each other somehow? I mean, what is the use of going all that way and taking all that trouble to shoot at each other from opposite hills? Why not do it now?"

"Begob, you're right," said the Irishman, turning back to an old oath of his youth.

"Well, now, how can we manage it?" said Farringay.

"Haven't we got our rifles?" said O'Neill.

"We can't get at them here," Farringay answered. "And getting them through the customs isn't going to be too easy either. Can't we manage something a little quieter on board this ship?"

"It would save a lot of trouble," said O'Neill.

"It certainly would," said Farringay. "Some sort of a duel, I should think."

"We had them in Ireland until not so long ago," said O'Neill. "All sorts of duels. But they always have to have seconds."

"Where can we find them?" asked Farringay.

"I don't know," said O'Neill.

"I tell you what," said Farringay. "We'll get the captain. He looks a good sensible fellow. He has plenty of war medals. He is not a pacifist or a maiden aunt, and he won't interfere with our duel. And he'll probably arrange it all for us if we ask him."

"That's one," said O'Neill. "What about the other?"

"One's enough," said Farringay. "I'll not bother about a second. You can have him."

"That's very good of you," said O'Neill. "But it was always usual to have two."

"I'll not bother with them," said Farringay.

"Then what kind of a duel shall we have?" the Irishman asked.

"Let's leave all that to the captain," Farringay said. "He's no fool. He's a man of the world, accustomed to arranging all kinds of businesses: a captain of a ship must be."

"Very well, then, let's go to him," said O'Neill. "But let's have a drink before we go. We've been friends for a bit, and it's only the sacred duty of each of us that's made us for to be enemies. Let's have a drink."

"I don't mind if I do," said the Englishman.

So they had their drink, and then together they went to the captain. And the explanation was left to O'Neill, because he seemed the handier with his tongue. And he said, "It is this way, Captain: my friend and I are going to fight in Spain, in the war they are having there. But it turns out we are on different sides. So what would be the use of going all that way to fight each other, when we can do it here? Now, would you help us to fight it out quietly, without giving any trouble to anyone?"

And the captain said, "I would be glad to help you in any way that I could."

"I knew you would, Captain," said O'Neill. "I knew you would. I saw by the cut of you, the moment I set eyes on you, that you were not the man to make trouble about a thing like that, as some people would most surely have done."

"I would be glad to help you," the captain repeated, "to help you both. At the same time have you quite realized what kind of a risk you are taking?"

"We are risking our lives," said O'Neill.

And the Englishman nodded.

"I wasn't thinking of that," said the captain. "But do you realize that you are risking the life of one man and his rifle to one of the armies, without any chance of shooting back? I am taking no sides; but one of the armies will be one short and won't even have his rifle, and all through the carelessness of one of you."

"We never thought of that," said O'Neill.

And the Englishman could think of nothing to say at all.

"Then what are we going to do?" said O'Neill.

"I'll tell you what to do," said the captain. "You mustn't risk a loss to either army. All you have to do is to pair, to pair like what they do in parliament. Both of you go home in the Iruna Cortes, which is sailing from Biarritz in two days' time, and neither of your brave armies will lose anything."

At that the Englishman stood silent, thinking. And for once the Irishman found nothing to say. And it seems that after a long while the Englishman shot out a hand and the Irishman took it, and the captain shook hands with them both and went back to his bridge.

What happened after that was that it turned out that Farringay had been given a good deal of money for his journey and to buy arms in France. I don't know who provides such money, and I don't think even he did; but he hunted about for a long time for some representative of the Communist army, to which he had been going, and sought high and low for someone to whom to hand back the money. But his side were utterly scattered and he could find nobody in authority any longer, and was much worried about the money. And in the end he pooled it with what O'Neill had been given, whom he found less worried about finding out to whom it should be returned; and they bought a derelict farmhouse and fitted it up as an inn and prosperously ran it together as soon as they got a license, except for certain seasons when a yearning to see his heathery land again under its green-grey hills comes on O'Neill, and he goes away for some weeks and comes back again with a new light in his eyes to The Inn Of The Two Adventurers, in whose parlor I got this story. ★