

Widow O'Grath's Proposal

By WILLIAM GLYNN

THE widow O'Grath long had been in love with Branagan the shoemaker across the street. That Branagan was on the shady side of forty, was bald-headed and slightly deaf, presented no impediments to her passion. The widow, being on the weather side of forty, herself had learned to respect that searing period, and having worn the weeds of widowhood for ten long years was ready to change them for the flowers of matrimony, and acknowledged with a wise inclination of her head that Michael Branagan was "moighty steddly and a man fit to airn any decent woman's livin'."

Perhaps the best reason why the widow took no objection to Branagan's personal failings, his bald head, game leg, etc., was because he never thrust them upon her—that is, never showed any signs that he regarded her worthy of attaining, except those which may have grown out of the widow's conceit, when she donned her best gown to sweep her little front veranda, and watched Branagan through the window of his shop with the corner of her eye. If Michael had waddled across the street on his poker-like limb, or uncovered his hairless head in her little parlor, the widow in the light of her own manifold charms might have found the one ungainly and the other too dazzling; but Michael, keeping the gameness of his leg and the light of his wisdom on his own side of the street, they took on to the widow almost the aspect of a *desideratum*.

The widow then had a cottage, two acres of land, one cow, one pig, six hens, a big white rooster and dreams. The dreams included Michael's little shop across the way, with Michael in it, bending over the last as the widow's lawful spouse and breadwinner, the goodly bank account which Michael was supposed to have saved in his long bachelorhood, and a new dress and bonnet for Mrs. Michael Branagan, which completely put in the background anything her neighbors had flaunted in the last decade.

The widow's dreams also had reached that point of growth where they must have either an outlet or smother the widow, and with a sneaking regard for herself she had decided to smother Michael with them. Sweeping her veranda on a bright morning in late July, and watching the flash of Michael's little bald head through his little shop window, and remembering that she had been dreaming long, and that it was leap-year, she suddenly was conscious of a strong conviction that Michael was "jist dyin'" for her, but was afraid to tell her so. This immediately was succeeded by a constraining sense of womanly duty, that such being the case she should take advantage of the leap-year prerogative and make Michael happy.

The widow was a person of energy.

The next afternoon beheld her in her Sunday togs, and a shoe in her hand, entering the door of Michael's shop.

Michael was bent over a last held between his knees. He glanced up as the door opened.

"Good-mornin' to ye, Mister Branagan," said the widow with a broad smile.

"Ah, good-mornin', Mistress O'Grath. I'm rale glad to see you," returned the shoemaker, with a joyless face, however, and a voice of unvarying monotony. He was a spiritless individual for an Irishman. With his short, pointed beard and his bulging eyes, one would have sworn, if he kept his mouth shut and the brogue in, that he was Dutch.

"Indeed! That's nice o' you, I'm sure, Mister Branagan," rejoined the widow, with a conscious blush and a coy laugh. "I've brung ye a shoe to mend."

Michael took off his spectacles, wiped them, put them on again, and put out a hand for the shoe.

"That's the spot, Mister Branagan; jist a triffin' patch there."

In showing him the place the widow's hand partially closed for a moment on Branagan's. He looked at it stupidly, and then the widow, finding his eyes on hers, withdrew it quickly with another blush and flickering of her eyelashes, which, however, had no effect of raising a like consciousness in the shoemaker.

"Troth, and that's a purty soft hand o' yours, Mistress O'Grath, for a woman's done the work you've did in your time!" he said, gazing after it as if it had been a china cup and saucer.

"Laws me! but your complimentin'!" blushed the widow, with another relapse into coyness. "I'm afraid a poor woman wud stan' small chance wid the blarney o' your tongue, Michael Branagan. Ah, you're a sly one! Go along wid you now!"

She pointed a teasing finger at him, upon which Branagan developed a slight cackle in the throat, and a peculiar distortion of his party-colored whiskers, and then as if ashamed of having been moved to such an extent, concealed his face by stooping to pick

up a last, which he proceeded to fit in the widow's boot.

The widow, delighted with the progress she had made, seated herself on the low bench beside him, with much admiration of his being "a sly one" apparent in her face.

"Sure, and it's hard to be up to you, Michael Branagan. A poor woman can hardly thrust herself wid you whilst you're mendin' her boot. Who knows but what you might be proposin' to me, since I'm a widow with property, the furst thing I know?"

Branagan raised a deprecating hand, but the widow's ogling eye was too much for him, and, delighted with his own cleverness, he cackled again.

"There, I knowed it!" exclaimed the widow, with accusing coyness. "I kind of expected you'd hev it in your moind and be up to somethin' like that. Troth, and it's the sly one you are, Michael Branagan!"



"As if I
Wouldn't
Like Me
Own Name o' Mary
From You!"

But I can rade you. You've got Mistress O'Grath to dale with; she can rade you."

Branagan's mood was hardening somewhat, and might have resulted in a denial of the widow's imputation, but Mrs. O'Grath had the eye of a diplomat.

"But sure, and it's no wonder you'd be thinkin' o' such things," she continued eloquently, "with me a lone widdler 'cross the road from you, with a nate little cottage, and land o' me own, as purty a brindle cow as you 'ver sot eyes on, and comin'-in the twentieth day of this very month, to give you good crame for your tay and butter your bread for you, to say nothing of me pig and hens—and what a foine thing an egg is for breakfast, or meself ayther, who the praisit said the day Tim O'Grath married me I was

the purttest colleen ever stood afore him, an' it's only twelve years last month, and me with Ah, Tim, it's many the one would have been glad of your widow, and gintlemen, too, if it wasn't for her respect for the dead and her dislike to seein' your place filled by a sht ranger to ye!"

The remembrance of her dead spouse, or her suitors, affected the widow so deeply that she was obliged to take refuge in a cambric handkerchief, which she applied vigorously to her eyes. Seeing the effect of her grief on Branagan, who had stopped scraping her shoe and was looking helplessly at the knife in his hand, she put her handkerchief away with a sigh.

"But that's past and gone," she continued resignedly, "and poor Tim allus had a grate respect for you, and you for him, an' it's no wonder, Michael Branagan, you should be castin' longin' eyes to the woman Tim O'Grath thought good enough to marry and to lave his property with."

Michael opened his mouth to disclaim her imputation, even in the face of the dead Tim's respect for him; but Tim's spouse with sudden playfulness leaned over and pinched his knee.

"Troth and it's kind o' you, too," she said with a meaning laugh, "to want to take care of Tim's widow and his property for him whin he's gone, and to think she mought loike you a bit better'n others when poor Tim died! The consate o' you, Michael Branagan!"

Her admiration was so profuse and the pinch on his knee so unanswerable that Michael's mouth in the very act of denial spread again into that low cackle, and he bent with heightened color and a wide grin over the widow's shoe.

"You're a steady man, Michael," said the widow after watching him a few moments at work.

"Yes."

"And desarkin' of a steady wife."

Michael made no reply to this.

"You're not a man to run through a woman's property, ayther, Michael Branagan."

Michael winced under the implication, but remained silent. The widow

was pretty near him, and he felt in some dim, occult way that an attempt at disclamation would result in another pinch, and consequent laughter on his part with its entailing humiliation and loss of self-respect; for out of any mood except one—that of unthinking gravity

—he felt childish and uncomfortable.

"And you've been cookin' your own males all this time, Michael, dear?"

asked the widow compassionately. "Yes, but I never felt it," he said with a furtive glance toward her hand.

"Never felt it, indade! Never felt anythin' but it, you mane; but you'll larn the blessedness of it, you'll larn the blessedness of it, Michael Branagan, to have a woman

get your males for you, and not stuff the cold bite into your mouth as though there warn't a fire in the worl', nor a woman to care for you. You'll know what it is to hear the kettle singin' when you come home a winter's night, and have the hot, strong tay wid the pure crame in it poured for you by a woman's hand. It's then you'll raily know the taste of tay, Michael Branagan, and have your shates aired once a week, and your suit brushed on Sundays, so you won't be lookin' as though you had just come out of a feather-bed wid it. I'll tell you when it comes right down to the undhernathe of things there's no blessedness loike a woman, Michael Branagan.

"But you'll larn, you'll larn! It's poor Tim used to be sayin' to me when he was alive, God bless him!