

**SIMON RYAN:
THE PETERITE**

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Simon Ryan: The Peterite by Augustus Jessopp

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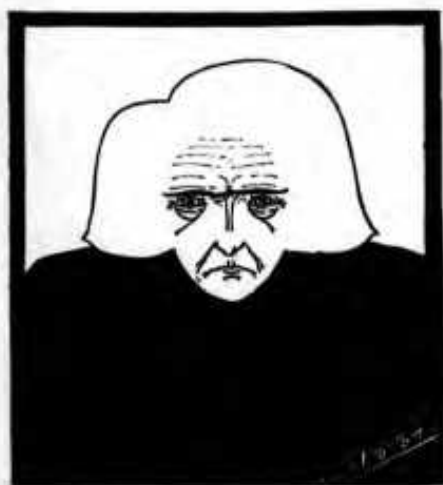
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SIMON RYAN THE PETERITE.



It is more than forty years ago since I first heard of Simon Ryan. I was a Freshman. I mean that I was in my first year at St. Boniface, and there were still stage coaches on the road in those primitive times ; at any rate, there was one which plied between Camford and Thrapston in Northamptonshire, and I found myself outside that coach one day, and occupying the box seat, with "old Topham" on the box. I quite

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forget where I was going, and I only remember two incidents on the journey. One was the sight of a tame fox in an inn yard where we changed horses, and the other was old Topham's conversation as we drove past a rather large coppice skirting the roadside for some distance. I think it was somewhere near Huntington. Mr. Topham had a grudge against that coppice; he had reason to complain of it, Tramps and thieves, he assured me, were wont to lurk there, and when the nights were dark and he had a light load of passengers, the rogues more than once had sneaked out of the wood and hung on behind the coach. Then they had contrived to get clear off with a hamper or other package for which some one

was answerable, and when he got to the end of this journey, lo! there was something missing from the way-bill. Mr. Topham expressed a strong wish that that coppice was his property; then he'd cut it down, every stick of it. "But that there Si Ryan he—he's wrong in his head. He'd never cut down a tree to save himself from the workhouse, and he ain't likely to come to that neither. If I was to ask him to cut down that copse he'd laugh at me! No! He wouldn't do that neither. He never does laugh. He's a Peterite!" I mused, and after a little while I asked timidly, "What is a Peterite, Topham?"

The old *jarvie* took his time to answer. "Bless you, sir, I don't know. They all say he's a Peterite,

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and he don't deny it. He ain't ashamed of it, anyhow. Maybe he ain't no cause to be ashamed of that."

It was dark by this time, and I have a distinct recollection of getting sleepy and of half dropping off, then of mechanically repeating to myself: "Si-Si-Si-Simon, Peter Ry-Ryan, Rite, Peterite!" After that Memory has no more that she can recall.

Seven or eight years later I found myself in temporary charge of the parish of Carlton. I had come back to the University and was in residence for a time, but I officiated in the little church on Sunday and went over once during the week to visit the people. It was a very bitter winter and the snow was deep,