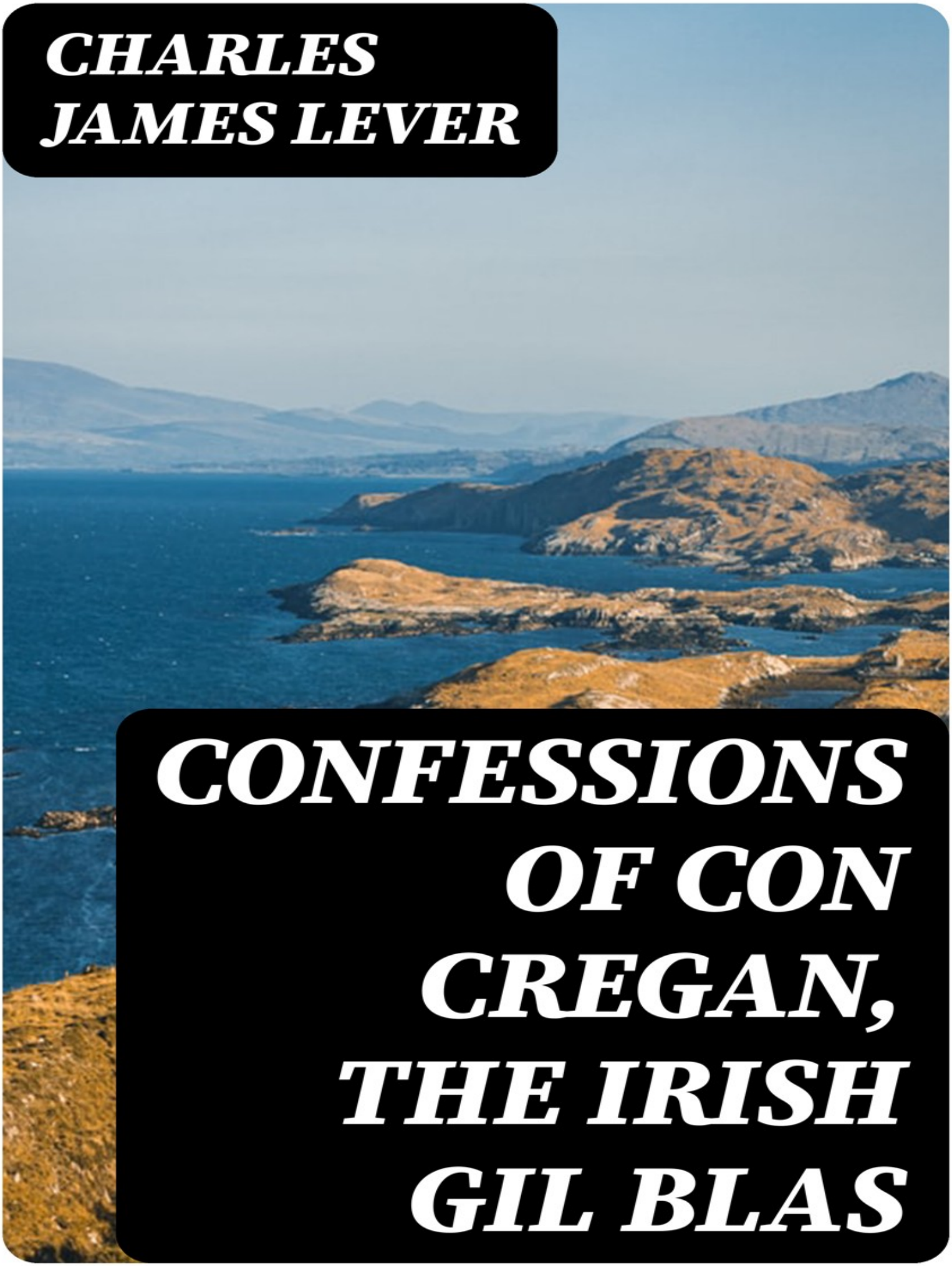

CHARLES JAMES LEVER

CONFESSIONS OF CON CREGAN, THE IRISH GIL BLAS

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PREFACE.

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An eminent apothecary of my acquaintance once told me that at each increase to his family, he added ten per cent to the price of his drugs, and as his quiver was full of daughters, Blackdraught, when I knew him, was a more costly cordial than Curaçoa.

To apply this to my own case, I may mention that I had a daughter born to me about the time this story dates from, and not having at my command the same resource as my friend the chemist, I adopted the alternative of writing another story, to be published contemporaneously with that now appearing—“The Daltons;” and not to incur the reproach so natural in criticism—of over-writing myself—I took care that the work should come out without a name.

I am not sure that I made any attempt to disguise my style; I was conscious of scores of blemishes—I decline to call them mannerisms—that would betray me: but I believe I trusted most of all to the fact that I was making my monthly appearance to the world in another story, and with another publisher, and I had my hope that my small duplicity would thus escape undetected.

I was aware that there was a certain amount of peril in running an opposition coach on the line I had made in some degree my own; not to say that it might be questionable policy to glut the public with a kind of writing more remarkable for peculiarity than perfection.

I remember that excellent Irishman Bianconi, not the less Irish that he was born at Lucca—which was simply a “bull,”—once telling me that to popularize a road on which few people were then travelling, and on which his daily two-

horse car was accustomed to go its journey, with two or at most three passengers, the idea occurred to him that he would start an opposition conveyance, of course in perfect secrecy, and with every outward show of its being a genuine rival. He effected his object with such success that his own agents were completely taken in, and never wearied of reporting, for his gratification, all the shortcomings and disasters of the rival company.

At length, and when the struggle between the competitors was at its height, one of his drivers rushed frantically into his office one day, crying out, “Give a crown-piece to drink your honor's health for what I done to-day.”

“What was it, Larry?”

“I killed the yallow mare of the opposition car; I passed her on the long hill, when she was blown, and I bruk her heart before she reached the top.”

“After this I gave up the opposition,” said my friend; “'mocking was catching,' as the old proverb says; and I thought that one might carry a joke a little too far.”

I had this experience before me, and I will not say it did not impress me. My puzzle was, however, in this wise: I imagined I did not care on which horse I stood to win; in other words, I persuaded myself that it was a matter of perfect indifference to me which book took best with the public, and whether the reader thought better of “The Daltons” or “Con Cregan,” that it could in no way concern me.

That I totally misunderstood myself, or misconceived the case before me, I am now quite ready to own. For one notice of “The Daltons” by the Press, there were at least three or four of “Con Cregan,” and while the former was dismissed with a few polite and measured phrases, the latter was largely praised and freely quoted. Nor was this all. The critics discovered in “Con Cregan” a freshness and a vigor

which were so sadly deficient in “The Daltons.” It was, they averred, the work of a less practised writer, but of one whose humor was more subtle, and whose portraits, roughly sketched as they were, indicated a far higher power than the well-known author of “Harry Lorrequer.”

The unknown—for there was no attempt to guess him—was pronounced not to be an imitator of Mr. Lever, though there were certain small points of resemblance; for he was clearly original in his conception of character, in his conduct of his story, and in his dialogues, and there were traits of knowledge of life in scenes and under conditions to which Mr. Lever could lay no claim. One critic, who had found out more features of resemblance between the two writers than his colleagues, uttered a friendly caution to Mr. Lever to look to his laurels, for there was a rival in the field possessing many of the characteristics by which he first won public favor, but a racy drollery in description and a quaintness in his humor all his own. It was the amusement of one of my children at the time to collect these sage comments and torment me with their judgments, and I remember a droll little note-book, in which they were pasted, and read aloud from time to time with no small amusement and laughter.

One or two of these I have even now before me:—

“Our new novelist has great stuff in him.”—*Bath Gazette*.

“'Con Cregan'—author unknown—begins promisingly; his first number is a decided hit.”—*Cambridge Chronicle*.

“The writer of 'Con Cregan' is a new hand, but we predict he will be a success”.”—*Cambridge Advertiser*.

“A new tale, in a style with which Lever and his followers have made us acquainted.”—*Hampshire Advertiser*.

“This tale is from the pen of an able Irish writer. The dialogue is very smartly written, so much so—and we cannot pay the writer a more genuine compliment—that it

bespeaks the author to be an Irishman, &c.”—*Somerset Gazette*.

“'Con Cregan '—by an unnamed author—is a new candidate for popularity,” &c.—*Northern Whig*, Belfast.

“The writer must be an Irishman.”—*Nottingham Gazette*.

“A new bark, launched by an unknown builder.”—*Cheltenham Chronicle*.

“That the author's name is not disclosed will not affect the popularity of this work—one of the most attractive,” &c.—*Oxford Journal*.

“This is a new tale by the pen of some able Irish writer, the first part of which is only published.”—*Ten Town Messenger*.

“Another new candidate for popular fame, and 'Harry Lorrequer' had better look to his laurels. There is a poacher in the manor in the person of the writer of 'Con Cregan.'”—*Yorkshireman*.

“'Con Cregan' promises to become as great a fact as 'Harry Lorrequer.' “—*People's Journal*.

“The author of 'Con Cregan,' whoever he be, is no ordinary man.”

“Another daring author has entered the lists, and with every promise of success.”—*Exeter Post*.

It may sound very absurd to confess it, but I was excessively provoked at the superior success of the unacknowledged book, and felt the rivalry to the full as painfully as though I had never written a line of it. Was it that I thought well of one story and very meanly of the other, and in consequence was angry at the want of concurrence of my critics? I suspect not. I rather imagine I felt hurt at discovering how little hold I had, in my acknowledged name, on a public with whom I fancied myself on such good terms; and it pained me to see with

what little difficulty a new and a nameless man could push for the place I had believed to be my own.

“The Daltons” I always wrote, after my habit, in the morning; I never turned to “Con Cregan” until nigh midnight; and I can still remember the widely different feelings with which I addressed myself to the task I liked, and to a story which, in the absurd fashion I have mentioned, was associated with wounded self-love.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say that there was no plan whatever in this book. My notion was, that “Con Cregan,” once created, would not fail to find adventures. The vicissitudes of daily poverty would beget shifts and contrivances; with these successes would come ambition and daring. Meanwhile a growing knowledge of life would develop his character, and I should soon see whether he would win the silver spoon or spoil the horn. I ask pardon in the most humble manner for presuming for a moment to associate my hero with the great original of Le Sage.

But I used the word “Irish” adjectively, and with the same amount of qualification that one employs to a diamond, and indeed, as I have read it in a London paper, to a “Lord.”

An American officer, of whom I saw much at the time, was my guide to the interior of Mexico; he had been originally in the Santa Fé expedition, was a man of most adventurous disposition, and a love of stirring incident and peril, that even broken-down health and a failing constitution could not subdue.

It was often very difficult for me to tear myself away from his Texan and Mexican experiences, his wild scenes of prairie life, or his sojourn amongst Indian tribes, and keep to the more commonplace events of my own story; nor could all my entreaties confine him to those descriptions of places and scenes which I needed for my own characters.

The saunter after tea-time, with this companion, generally along that little river that tumbles through the valley of the Bagno di Lucca, was the usual preparation for my night's work; and I came to it as intensely possessed by Mexico—dress, manner, and landscape—as though I had been drawing on the recollection of a former journey.

So completely separated in my mind were the two tales by the different parts of the day in which I wrote them, that no character of “The Daltons” ever crossed my mind after nightfall, nor was there a trace of “Con Cregan” in my head at my breakfast next morning.

None of the characters of this story have been taken from life. The one bit of reality in the whole is in the sketch of “Anticosti,” where I myself suffered once a very small shipwreck, but of which I retain a very vivid recollection to this hour.

I have already owned that I bore a grudge to the story as I wrote it; nor have I outlived the memory of the chagrin it cost me, though it is many a year since I acknowledged that “Con Cregan” was by the author of “Harry Lorrequer.”


CONFESSIONS
OF
CONCREGAN
CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER I. A PEEP AT MY FATHER

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When we shall have become better acquainted, my worthy reader, there will be little necessity for my insisting upon a fact which at this early stage of our intimacy, I deem it requisite to mention; namely, that my native modesty and bashfulness are only second to my veracity, and that while the latter quality in a manner compels me to lay an occasional stress upon my own goodness of heart, generosity, candor, and so forth, I have, notwithstanding, never introduced the subject without a pang—such a pang as only a sensitive and diffident nature can suffer or comprehend. There now, not another word of preface or apology!

I was born in a little cabin on the borders of Meath and King's County. It stood on a small triangular bit of ground, beside a cross-road; and although the place was surveyed every ten years or so, they were never able to say to which county we belonged; there being just the same number of arguments for one side as for the other—a circumstance, many believed, that decided my father in his original choice of the residence; for while, under the “disputed boundary question,” he paid no rates or county cess, he always made a point of voting at both county elections! This may seem to indicate that my parent was of a naturally acute habit; and indeed the way he became possessed of the bit of ground will confirm that impression.

There was nobody of the rank of gentry in the parish, nor even “squireen;” the richest being a farmer, a snug old fellow, one Henry M'Cabe, that had two sons, who were always fighting between themselves which was to have the old man's money—Peter, the elder, doing everything to

injure Mat, and Mat never backward in paying off the obligation. At last Mat, tired out in the struggle, resolved he would bear no more. He took leave of his father one night, and next day set off for Dublin, and 'listed in the “Buffs.” Three weeks after, he sailed for India; and the old man, overwhelmed by grief, took to his bed, and never arose from it after.

Not that his death was any way sudden, for he lingered on for months long—Peter always teasing him to make his will, and be revenged on “the dirty spalpeen” that disgraced the family, but old Harry as stoutly resisting, and declaring that whatever he owned should be fairly divided between them.

These disputes between them were well known in the neighborhood. Few of the country people passing the house at night but had overheard the old man's weak, reedy voice, and Peter's deep, hoarse one, in altercation. When at last—it was on a Sunday night—all was still and quiet in the house—not a word, not a footstep, could be heard, no more than if it were uninhabited—the neighbors looked knowingly at each other, and wondered if the old man was worse—if he was dead!

It was a little after midnight that a knock came to the door of our cabin. I heard it first, for I used to sleep in a little snug basket near the fire; but I did n't speak, for I was frightened. It was repeated still louder, and then came a cry, “Con Cregan! Con, I say, open the door! I want you.” I knew the voice well; it was Peter M'Cabe's; but I pretended to be fast asleep, and snored loudly. At last my father unbolted the door, and I heard him say, “Oh, Mr. Peter, what's the matter? Is the ould man worse?”

“Faix that's what he is, for he 's dead!”

“Glory be his bed! when did it happen?”

“About an hour ago,” said Peter, in a voice that even I from my corner could perceive was greatly agitated. “He

died like an ould haythen, Con, and never made a will!”

“That's bad,” says my father; for he was always a polite man, and said whatever was pleasing to the company.

“It is bad,” said Peter; “but it would be worse if we could n't help it. Listen to me now, Corny, I want ye to help me in this business; and here's five guineas in goold, if ye do what I bid ye. You know that ye were always reckoned the image of my father, and before he took ill ye were mistaken for each other every day of the week.”

“Anan!” said my father; for he was getting frightened at the notion, without well knowing why.

“Well, what I want is, for ye to come over to the house, and get into the bed.”

“Not beside the corpse?” said my father, trembling.

“By no means, but by yourself; and you 're to pretend to be my father, and that ye want to make yer will before ye die; and then I 'll send for the neighbors, and Billy Scanlan the schoolmaster, and ye 'll tell him what to write, laving all the farm and everything to me—ye understand. And as the neighbors will see ye, and hear yer voice, it will never be believed but that it was himself that did it.”

“The room must be very dark,” says my father.

“To be sure it will, but have no fear! Nobody will dare to come nigh the bed; and ye 'll only have to make a cross with yer pen under the name.”

“And the priest?” said my father.

“My father quarrelled with him last week about the Easter dues, and Father Tom said he 'd not give him the 'rites,' and that's lucky now! Come along now, quick, for we 've no time to lose; it must be all finished before the day breaks.”

My father did not lose much time at his toilet, for he just wrapped his big coat 'round him, and slipping on his brogues, left the house. I sat up in the basket and listened

till they were gone some minutes; and then, in a costume as light as my parent's, set out after them, to watch the course of the adventure. I thought to take a short cut, and be before them; but by bad luck I fell into a bog-hole, and only escaped being drowned by a chance. As it was, when I reached the house, the performance had already begun.

I think I see the whole scene this instant before my eyes, as I sat on a little window with one pane, and that a broken one, and surveyed the proceeding. It was a large room, at one end of which was a bed, and beside it a table, with physic-bottles, and spoons, and teacups; a little farther off was another table, at which sat Billy Scanlan, with all manner of writing materials before him. The country people sat two, sometimes three, deep round the walls, all intently eager and anxious for the coming event. Peter himself went from place to place, trying to smother his grief, and occasionally helping the company to whiskey, which was supplied with more than accustomed liberality.

All my consciousness of the deceit and trickery could not deprive the scene of a certain solemnity. The misty distance of the half-lighted room; the highly wrought expression of the country people's faces, never more intensely excited than at some moment of this kind; the low, deep-drawn breathings, unbroken save by a sigh or a sob—the tribute of affectionate sorrow to some lost friend, whose memory was thus forcibly brought back; these, I repeat it, were all so real that, as I looked, a thrilling sense of awe stole over me, and I actually shook with fear.

A low, faint cough, from the dark corner where the bed stood, seemed to cause even a deeper stillness; and then, in a silence where the buzzing of a fly would have been heard, my father said, “Where's Billy Scanlan? I want to make my will!”

“He's here, father!” said Peter, taking Billy by the hand and leading him to the bedside.

“Write what I bid ye, Billy, and be quick; for I hav'n't a long time afore me here. I die a good Catholic, though Father O'Rafferty won't give me the 'rites '!”

A general chorus of muttered “Oh! musha, musha!” was now heard through the room; but whether in grief over the sad fate of the dying man, or the unflinching severity of the priest, is hard to say.

“I die in peace with all my neighbors and all mankind!”

Another chorus of the company seemed to approve these charitable expressions.

“I bequeath unto my son Peter—and never was there a better son, or a decenter boy!—have you that down? I bequeath unto my son Peter the whole of my two farms of Killimundoonery and Knocksheboora, with the fallow meadows behind Lynch's house; the forge, and the right of turf on the Dooran bog. I give him, and much good may it do him, Lanty Cassara's acre, and the Luary field, with the limekiln; and that reminds me that my mouth is just as dry; let me taste what ye have in the jug.” Here the dying man took a very hearty pull, and seemed considerably refreshed by it. “Where was I, Billy Scanlan?” says he; “oh, I remember, at the limekiln; I leave him—that's Peter, I mean—the two potato-gardens at Noonan's Well; and it is the elegant fine crops grows there.”

“An't you gettin' wake, father, darlin'?” says Peter, who began to be afraid of my father's loquaciousness; for, to say the truth, the punch got into his head, and he was greatly disposed to talk.

“I am, Peter, my son,” says he; “I am getting wake; just touch my lips again with the jug. Ah, Peter, Peter, you watered the drink!”

“No, indeed, father; but it's the taste is leavin' you,” says Peter; and again a low chorus of compassionate pity murmured through the cabin.

“Well, I'm nearly done now,” says my father; “there's only one little plot of ground remaining; and I put it on you, Peter—as ye wish to live a good man, and die with the same easy heart I do now—that ye mind my last words to ye here. Are ye listening? Are the neighbors listening? Is Billy Scanlan listening?”

“Yes, sir. Yes, father. We're all minding,” chorused the audience.

“Well, then, it's my last will and testament, and may—Give me over the jug.” Here he took a long drink. “And may that blessed liquor be poison to me if I 'm not as eager about this as every other part of my will. I say, then, I bequeath the little plot at the cross-roads to poor Con Cregan; for he has a heavy charge, and is as honest and as hard-working a man as ever I knew. Be a friend to him, Peter, dear; never let him want while ye have it yourself; think of me on my death-bed whenever he asks ye for any trifle. Is it down, Billy Scanlan? the two acres at the cross to Con Cregan and his heirs in *secla seclorum*. Ah, blessed be the saints! but I feel my heart lighter after that,” says he; “a good work makes an easy conscience. And now I 'll drink all the company's good health, and many happy returns—”

What he was going to add, there 's no saying; but Peter, who was now terribly frightened at the lively tone the sick man was assuming, hurried all the people away into another room, to let his father die in peace.

When they were all gone Peter slipped back to my father, who was putting on his brogues in a corner. “Con,” says he, “ye did it all well; but sure that was a joke about the two acres at the cross.”

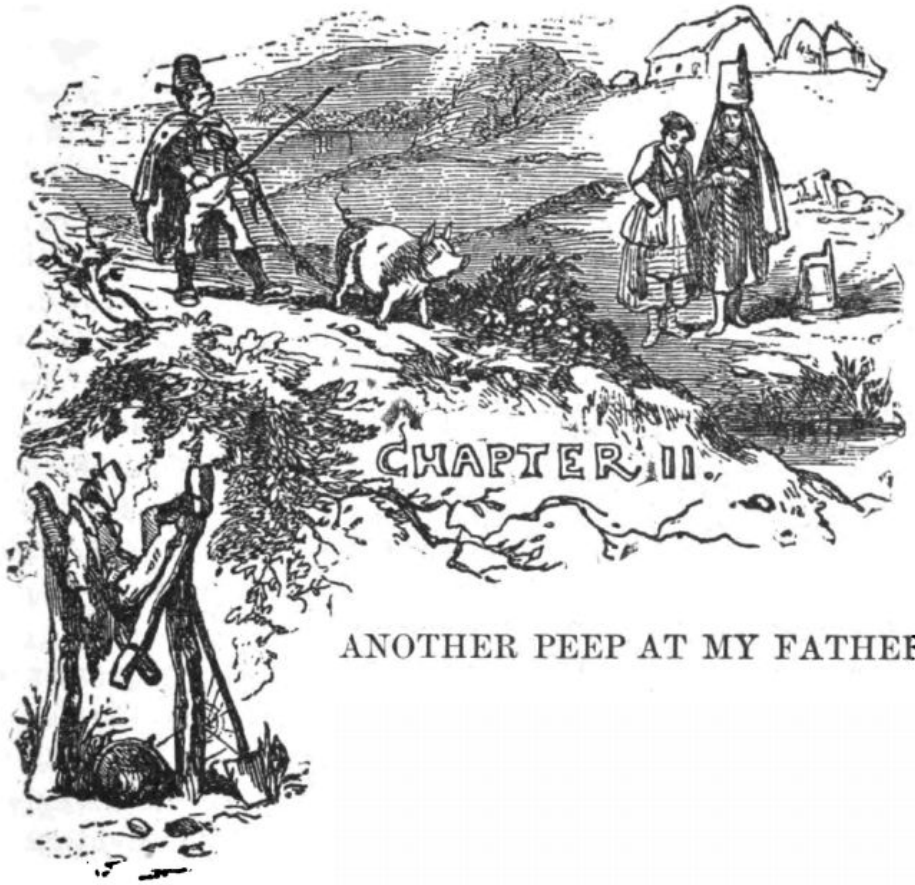
“Of course it was, Peter,” says he; “sure it was all a joke, for the matter of that. Won't I make the neighbors laugh hearty to-morrow when I tell them all about it!”

“You wouldn't be mean enough to betray me?” says Peter, trembling with fright.

“Sure ye would n't be mean enough to go against yer father's dying words,” says my father—“the last sentence ever he spoke? And here he gave a low, wicked laugh, that made myself shake with fear.

“Very well, Con!” says Peter, holding out his hand; “a bargain's a bargain; yer a deep fellow, that's all!” And so it ended; and my father slipped quietly home over the bog, mighty well satisfied with the legacy he left himself.

And thus we became the owners of the little spot known to this day as Con's Acre; of which, more hereafter.



ANOTHER PEEP AT MY FATHER.

CHAPTER II. ANOTHER PEEP AT MY FATHER

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My father's prosperity had the usual effect it has on similar cases.

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It lifted him into a different sphere of companionship and suggested new habits of life. No longer necessitated to labor daily for his bread, by a very slight exercise of industry he could cultivate his “potato-garden;” and every one who knows anything of Ireland well knows that the potato and its corollary, the pig, supply every want of an Irish cottier household.

Being thus at liberty to dispose of himself and his time, my parent was enabled to practise a long-desired and much-coveted mode of life; which was to frequent “sheebeens” and alehouses, and all similar places of resort—not, indeed, for the gratification of any passion for drink, for my father only indulged when he was “treated,” and never could bring himself to spend a farthing in liquor himself, but his great fondness for these places took its origin in his passion for talk. Never, indeed, lived there a man—from Lord Brougham himself downwards—who had a greater taste for gossip and loquaciousness than my father. It mattered little what the subject, he was always ready; and whether it were a crim. con. in the newspapers, a seizure for rent, a marriage in high life, or a pig in the pound—there he was, explaining away all difficult terms of law and jurisprudence; and many a difficulty that Tom Cafferty, the

postmaster, had attempted in vain to solve was, by a kind of “writ of error,” removed to my father's court for explanation and decision.

That he soon became a kind of authority in the neighboring town of Kilbeggan need not excite any surprise. It is men of precisely his kind, and with talents of an order very similar to his, that wield influence in the great cities of the earth. It is your talking, pushing, forward men, seeming always confident in what they say, never acknowledging an error nor confessing a defeat, who take the lead in life. With average ability, and ten times the average assurance, they reach the goal that bashful merit never even so much as gets within sight of.

His chief resort, however, was the Court of Quarter Sessions, where he sat from the first opening case to the last judgment, watching with an intense interest all the vacillating changes of the law's uncertainty, which unquestionably were not in any way diminished by the singular individual who presided in that seat of justice. Simon Ball, or, as he was better known at the bar, Snow Ball —an epithet he owed to his white head and eyebrows—had qualified himself for the Bench by improving upon the proverbial attribute of justice. He was not only blind but deaf. For something like forty-five years he had walked the hall of the Four Courts with an empty bag, and a head scarcely more encumbered, when one morning—no one could guess why—the “Gazette” announced that the Lord Lieutenant had appointed him to the vacant chairmanship of Westmeath—a promotion which had the effect of confounding all political animosity by its perfect unaccountableness.

It is a law of Nature that nothing ever goes to loss. Bad wine will make very tolerable vinegar; spoiled hay is converted into good manure; and so, a very middling lawyer often drops down into a very respectable judge. Had the

gods but acknowledged Mr. Ball's abilities some years earlier, doubtless he had been an exception to the theory.

They waited, however, so long that both sight and hearing were in abeyance when the promotion came. It seemed to rally him, however, this act of recognition, although late. It was a kind of corroboration of the self-estimate of a long life, and he prepared to show the world that he was very different from what they took him for. No men have the bump of self-esteem like lawyers; they live, and grow old, and die, always fancying that Holts, and Hales, and Mansfields are hid within the unostentatious exterior of their dusty garments; and that the wit that dazzles, and the pathos that thrills, are all rusting inside, just for want of a little of that cheering encouragement by which their contemporaries are clad in silk and walk in high places. Snow Ball was determined to show the world its error, and with a smart frock and green spectacles he took the field like a “fine old Irish barrister,” with many a dry joke or sly sarcasm curled up in the wrinkles beside his mouth. However cheap a man may be held by his fellows in the “Hall,” he is always sure of a compensation in the provinces. There the country gentlemen looked upon their chairman as a Blackstone—not alone a storehouse of law, but a great appeal upon questions of general knowledge and information. I should scarcely have ventured upon what some of my readers may regard as a mere digression, if it were not that the gentleman and the peculiar nature of his infirmities had led to an intimate relation with my father. My parent's fondness for law, and all appertaining to it, had attached him to the little inn where Mr. Ball usually put up at each season of his visit; and gradually, by tendering little services, as fetching an umbrella when it rained, hastening for a book of reference if called for, searching out an important witness, and probably by a most frequent and respectful use of the title “my lord,” instead of the humble

“your worship,” he succeeded in so ingratiating himself with the judge that, without exactly occupying any precise station, or having any regular employment, he became in some sort a recognized appendage, a kind of “unpaid attaché to the court” of Kilbeggan.

My father was one of those persons who usually ask only a “lift” from Fortune, and do not require to be continually aided by her. From being the humble attendant on the judge, he soon succeeded to being his privy councillor; supplying a hundred little secret details of the neighborhood and its local failings, which usually gave Mr. Ball's decisions on the bench an air approaching inspiration, so full were they of a knowledge of individual life. As confidence ripened, my father was employed in reading out to the judge of an evening the various depositions of witnesses, the informations laid, and the affidavits sworn—opportunities from which he did not neglect to derive the full advantage; for while he usually accompanied the written document with a running commentary of his own to Mr. Ball, he also contrived to let the suitor feel how great was his knowledge of the case, and what a powerful influence behind the scenes he wielded over the fortunes of the cause; insomuch that it became soon well known that he who had Con Cregan on his side was better off than with the whole Bench of country magistrates disposed to favor him.

My father's prudence did not desert him in these trying circumstances. Without any historical knowledge of the matter, he knew by a species of instinct that pride was the wreck of most men, and that, to wield real, substantial power, it is often necessary to assume a garb of apparent inefficiency and incapacity. To this end, the greater the influence he possessed, the humbler did he affect to be; disclaiming everything like power, he got credit for possessing a far greater share than he ever really enjoyed.

That the stream of justice did not run perfectly pure and clear, however, may not be a matter of surprise; for how many rocks, and shoals, and quicksands, are there in the channel! and certainly my father was a dangerous hand at the wheel. Litigation, it must be owned, lost much of its vacillation. The usual question about any case was, “What does Con say? Did Con Cregan tell ye ye 'll win?” That was decisive; none sceptical enough to ask for more!

At the feet of this Gamaliel I was brought up; nothing the more tenderly that a stepmother presided over the “home department.” As I was a stout boy, of some thirteen or fourteen at this period of my father's life, and could read and write tolerably well, I was constantly employed in making copies of various papers used at the Sessions. Were I psychologically inclined, I might pause here to inquire how far these peculiar studies had their influence in biassing the whole tenor of my very eventful life; what latent stores of artifice did I lay up from all these curious subtleties; how did I habituate my mind to weigh and balance probabilities, as evidence inclined to this side or that; above all, how gratified was I with the discovery that there existed a legal right and wrong, perfectly distinct from the moral ones—a fact which served at once to open the path of life far wider and more amply before me.

I must, however, leave this investigation to the reader's acuteness, if he think it worth following out; nor would I now allude to it save as it affords me the opportunity, once for all, of explaining modes of thinking and acting which might seem, without some such clue, as unfitting and unseemly in one reared and brought up as I was.

Whether the new dignity of his station had disposed him to it or not, I cannot say; but my father became far more stern in his manner and exacting in his requirements as he rose in life. The practice of the law seemed to impart some feature of its own peremptory character to himself, as he

issued his orders in our humble household with all the impressive solemnity of a writ—indeed, aiding the effect by phrases taken from the awful vocabulary of justice.

If my stepmother objected to anything the answer was, usually, she might “traverse in prox” at the next Sessions; while to myself every order was in the style of a “mandamus.” Not satisfied with the mere terrors of the Bench, he became so enamoured of the pursuit as to borrow some features of prison discipline for the conduct of our household; thus, for the slightest infractions of his severe code I was “put” upon No. 3 Penitentiary diet—only reading potatoes *vice* bread.

There would seem to be something uncongenial to obedience in any form in the life of an Irish peasant; something doubtless in the smell of the turf. He seems to imbibe a taste for freedom by the very architecture of his dwelling, and the easy, unbuttoned liberty of his corduroys. Young as I was, I suppose the Celt was strong within me; and the “Times” says, that will account for all delinquencies. I felt this powerfully; not the less, indeed, that my father almost invariably visited me with the penalty of the case then before the Court; so that while copying out at night the details of the prosecution, I had time to meditate over the coming sentence. It was, perhaps, fortunate for me that capital cases do not come under the jurisdiction of a “sitting barrister;” otherwise I verily believe I might have suffered the last penalty of the law from my parent's infatuation.

My sense of “equity” at last revolted. I perceived, that no matter who “sued,” I was always “cast;” and I at length resolved on resistance. I remember well the night this resolution was formed; it was a cold and cheerless one of January. My father had given me a great mass of papers to copy, and a long article for the newspapers to write out, which the “Judge” was to embody in his address to the Bench. I never put pen to either, but sat with my head

between my hands for twelve mortal hours, revolving every possible wickedness, and wondering whether in my ingenuity I could not invent some offences that no indictment could comprise. Day broke, and found me still unoccupied. I was just meditating whether I should avow my rebellion openly, and “plead” in mitigation, when my father came in.

My reader must excuse me if I do not dwell on what followed. It is enough to say that the nature of my injuries are unknown to the criminal statute, and that although my wounds and bruises are familiar to the prize-ring, they are ignored by all jurisprudence out of the slave states. Even my stepmother confessed that I was not fit to “pick out of the gutter;” and she proved her words by leaving me where I lay.

Revenge must be a very “human” passion; my taste for it came quite naturally. I had never read “Othello” nor “Zanga;” but I conceived a very clear and precise notion that I had a debt to pay, and pay it I would. Had the obligation been of a pecuniary character, and some “bankrupt commission” been in jurisdiction over it, I had doubtless been called upon to discharge it in a series of instalments proportional to my means of life; being a moral debt, however, I enjoyed the privilege of paying it at once, and in full; which I did thus: I had often remarked that my father arose at night and left the cabin, crossing a little garden behind the house to a little shed, where our pig and an ass lived in harmony together; and here, by dint of patient observation, I discovered that his occupation lay in the thatch of the aforesaid shed, in which he seemed to conceal some object of value.

Thither I now repaired, some secret prompting suggesting that it might afford me the wished-for means of vengeance. My disappointment was indeed great that no compact roll of bank-notes, no thick woollen stocking close packed with

guineas, or even crown-pieces, met my hand. A heavy bundle of papers and parchment was all I could find; and these bore such an unhappy family resemblance to the cause of all my misfortunes that I was ready to tear them to pieces in very spite. A mere second's reflection suggested a better course. There was a certain attorney in Kilbeggan, one Morissy, my father's bitterest enemy; indeed, my parent's influence in the Session court had almost ruined and left him without a client. The man of law and precedents in vain struggled against decisions which a secret and irresponsible adviser contrived beforehand, and Morissy's knowledge and experience were soon discovered to be valueless. It was a game in which skill went for nothing.

This gentleman's character at once pointed him out as the fitting agent of vengeance on my father, and by an hour after daybreak did I present myself before him in all the consciousness of my injured state.

Mr. Morissy's reception of me was not over gracious.

“Well, ye spawn of the devil,” said he, as he turned about from a small fragment of looking-glass, before which he was shaving, “what brings ye here? Bad luck to ye; the sight of ye's made me cut myself.”

“I'm come, sir, for a bit of advice, sir,” said I, putting my hand to my hat in salutation.

“Assault and battery!” said he, with a grin on the side of his mouth where the soap had been shaved away.

“Yes, sir; an aggravated case,” said I, using the phrase of the Sessions.

“Why don't ye apply to yer father? He's Crown lawyer and Attorney-General; faith, he 's more besides—he 's judge and jury too.”

“And more than that in the present suit, sir,” says I, following up his illustration; “he's the defendant here.”

“What! is that his doing?”

“Yes, sir; his own hand and mark,” said I, laughing.

“That's an ugly cut, and mighty near the eye! But sure, after all, you 're his child.”

“Very true, sir; it's only paternal correction; but I have something else!”

“What's that, Con my boy?” said he; for we were now grown very familiar.

“It is this, sir,” said I; “this roll of papers that I found hid in the thatch—a safe place my father used to make his strong-box.”

“Let us see!” said Morissy, sitting down and opening the package. Many were old summonses discharged, notices to quit withdrawn, and so on; but at last he came to two papers pinned together, at sight of which he almost jumped from his chair. “Con,” says he, “describe the place you found them in.”

I went over all the discovery again.

“Did ye yourself see your father put in papers there?”

“I did, sir.”

“On more than one occasion?”

“At least a dozen times, sir.”

“Did ye ever remark any one else putting papers there?”

“Never, sir! none of the neighbors ever come through the garden.”

“And it was always at night, and in secret, he used to repair there?”

“Always at night”

“That'll do, Con; that 'll do, my son. You'll soon turn the tables on the old boy. You may go down to the kitchen and get your breakfast; be sure, however, that you don't leave

the house to-day. Your father mustn't know where ye are till we're ready for him.”

“Is it a strong case, sir?” said I.

“A very strong case—never a flaw in it.”

“Is it more than a larceny, sir?” said I.

“It is better than that.”

“I'd rather it didn't go too far,” said I, for I was beginning to feel afraid of what I had done.

“Leave that to me, Con,” said Mr. Morissy, “and go down to yer breakfast.”

I did as I was bid, and never stirred out of the house the whole day, nor for eight days after; when one morning Morissy bid me clean myself, and brush my hair, to come with him to the Court-house.

I guessed at once what was going to happen; and now, as my head was healed, and all my bruises cured, I'd very gladly have forgiven all the affair, and gone home again with my father; but it was too late. As Mr. Morissy said, with a grin, “The law is an elegant contrivance; a child's finger can set it in motion, but a steam engine could not hold it back afterwards!”

The Court was very full that morning; there were five magistrates on the bench, and Mr. Ball in the middle of them. There were a great many farmers, too, for it was market-day; and numbers of the townspeople, who all knew my father, and were not sorry to see him “up.” Cregan versus Cregan stood third on the list of cases; and very little interest attached to the two that preceded it. At last it was called; and there I stood before the Bench, with five hundred pair of eyes all bent upon me; and two of them actually looking through my very brain—for they were my father's, as he stood at the opposite side of the table below the Bench.