

The Last Heir of Castle Connor

By Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

Being a third Extract from the legacy of the late Francis Purcell, P. P. of Drumcoolagh.

There is something in the decay of ancient grandeur to interest even the most unconcerned spectator--the evidences of greatness, of power, and of pride that survive the wreck of time, proving, in mournful contrast with present desolation and decay, what WAS in other days, appeal, with a resistless power, to the sympathies of our nature. And when, as we gaze on the scion of some ruined family, the first impulse of nature that bids us regard his fate with interest and respect is justified by the recollection of great exertions and self-devotion and sacrifices in the cause of a lost country and of a despised religion--sacrifices and efforts made with all the motives of faithfulness and of honour, and terminating in ruin--in such a case respect becomes veneration, and the interest we feel amounts almost to a passion.

It is this feeling which has thrown the magic veil of romance over every roofless castle and ruined turret throughout our country; it is this feeling that, so long as a tower remains above the level of the soil, so long as one scion of a prostrate and impoverished family survives, will never suffer Ireland to yield to the stranger more than the 'mouth honour' which fear compels.¹ I who have conversed *viva voce et propria persona* with those whose recollections could run back so far as the times previous to the confiscations which followed the Revolution of 1688--whose memory could repeople halls long roofless and desolate, and point out the places where greatness once had been, may feel all this more strongly, and with a more vivid interest, than can those whose sympathies are awakened by the feebler influence of what may be called the PICTURESQUE effects of ruin and decay.

There do, indeed, still exist some fragments of the ancient Catholic families of Ireland; but, alas! what VERY fragments! They linger like the remnants of her aboriginal forests, reft indeed of their strength and greatness, but proud even in decay. Every winter thins their ranks, and strews the ground with the wreck of their loftiest branches; they are at best but tolerated in the land which gave them birth--objects of curiosity, perhaps of pity, to one class, but of veneration to another.

The O'Connors, of Castle Connor, were an ancient Irish family. The name recurs frequently in our history, and is generally to be found in a prominent place whenever periods of tumult or of peril called forth the courage and the enterprise of this country. After the accession of William III., the storm of confiscation which swept over the land made woeful havoc in their broad domains. Some fragments of property, however, did remain to them, and with it the building which had for ages formed the family residence.

About the year 17--, my uncle, a Catholic priest, became acquainted with the inmates of Castle Connor, and after a time introduced me, then a lad of about fifteen, full of spirits, and little dreaming that a profession so grave as his should ever become mine.

¹ This passage serves (*mirabile dictu*) to corroborate a statement of Mr. O'Connell's, which occurs in his evidence given before the House of Commons, wherein he affirms that the principles of the Irish priesthood 'ARE democratic, and were those of Jacobinism.'--See digest of the evidence upon the state of Ireland, given before the House of Commons.

The family at that time consisted of but two members, a widow lady and her only son, a young man aged about eighteen. In our early days the progress from acquaintance to intimacy, and from intimacy to friendship is proverbially rapid; and young O'Connor and I became, in less than a month, close and confidential companions-- an intercourse which ripened gradually into an attachment ardent, deep, and devoted-- such as I believe young hearts only are capable of forming.

He had been left early fatherless, and the representative and heir of his family. His mother's affection for him was intense in proportion as there existed no other object to divide it--indeed-- such love as that she bore him I have never seen elsewhere. Her love was better bestowed than that of mothers generally is, for young O'Connor, not without some of the faults, had certainly many of the most engaging qualities of youth. He had all the frankness and gaiety which attract, and the generosity of heart which confirms friendship; indeed, I never saw a person so universally popular; his very faults seemed to recommend him; he was wild, extravagant, thoughtless, and fearlessly adventurous--defects of character which, among the peasantry of Ireland, are honoured as virtues. The combination of these qualities, and the position which O'Connor occupied as representative of an ancient Irish Catholic family--a peculiarly interesting one to me, one of the old faith-- endeared him to me so much that I have never felt the pangs of parting more keenly than when it became necessary, for the finishing of his education, that he should go abroad.

Three years had passed away before I saw him again. During the interval, however, I had frequently heard from him, so that absence had not abated the warmth of our attachment. Who could tell of the rejoicings that marked the evening of his return? The horses were removed from the chaise at the distance of a mile from the castle, while it and its contents were borne rapidly onward almost by the pressure of the multitude, like a log upon a torrent. Bonfires blared far and near-- bagpipes roared and fiddles squeaked; and, amid the thundering shouts of thousands, the carriage drew up before the castle.

In an instant young O'Connor was upon the ground, crying, 'Thank you, boys-- thank you, boys;' while a thousand hands were stretched out from all sides to grasp even a finger of his. Still, amid shouts of 'God bless your honour--long may you reign!' and 'Make room there, boys! clear the road for the masher!' he reached the threshold of the castle, where stood his mother weeping for joy.

Oh! who could describe that embrace, or the enthusiasm with which it was witnessed? 'God bless him to you, my lady-- glory to ye both!' and 'Oh, but he is a fine young gentleman, God bless him!' resounded on all sides, while hats flew up in volleys that darkened the moon; and when at length, amid the broad delighted grins of the thronging domestics, whose sense of decorum precluded any more boisterous evidence of joy, they reached the parlour, then giving way to the fulness of her joy the widowed mother kissed and blessed him and wept in turn. Well might any parent be proud to claim as son the handsome stripling who now represented the Castle Connor family; but to her his beauty had a peculiar charm, for it bore a striking resemblance to that of her husband, the last O'Connor.

I know not whether partiality blinded me, or that I did no more than justice to my friend in believing that I had never seen so handsome a young man. I am inclined to think the latter. He was rather tall, very slightly and elegantly made; his face was oval, and his features decidedly Spanish in cast and complexion, but with far more vivacity of expression than generally belongs to the beauty of that nation. The extreme delicacy of his features and the varied animation of his countenance made him appear even younger than his years--an illusion which the total absence

of everything studied in his manners seemed to confirm. Time had wrought no small change in me, alike in mind and spirits; but in the case of O'Connor it seemed to have lost its power to alter. His gaiety was undamped, his generosity unchilled; and though the space which had intervened between our parting and reunion was but brief, yet at the period of life at which we were, even a shorter interval than that of three years has frequently served to form or DEform a character.

Weeks had passed away since the return of O'Connor, and scarce a day had elapsed without my seeing him, when the neighbourhood was thrown into an unusual state of excitement by the announcement of a race-ball to be celebrated at the assembly-room of the town of T----, distant scarcely two miles from Castle Connor.

Young O'Connor, as I had expected, determined at once to attend it; and having directed in vain all the powers of his rhetoric to persuade his mother to accompany him, he turned the whole battery of his logic upon me, who, at that time, felt a reluctance stronger than that of mere apathy to mixing in any of these scenes of noisy pleasure for which for many reasons I felt myself unfitted. He was so urgent and persevering, however, that I could not refuse; and I found myself reluctantly obliged to make up my mind to attend him upon the important night to the spacious but ill-finished building, which the fashion and beauty of the county were pleased to term an assembly-room.

When we entered the apartment, we found a select few, surrounded by a crowd of spectators, busily performing a minuet, with all the congees and flourishes which belonged to that courtly dance; and my companion, infected by the contagion of example, was soon, as I had anticipated, waving his chapeau bras, and gracefully bowing before one of the prettiest girls in the room. I had neither skill nor spirits to qualify me to follow his example; and as the fulness of the room rendered it easy to do so without its appearing singular, I determined to be merely a spectator of the scene which surrounded me, without taking an active part in its amusements.

The room was indeed very much crowded, so that its various groups, formed as design or accident had thrown the parties together, afforded no small fund of entertainment to the contemplative observer. There were the dancers, all gaiety and good-humour; a little further off were the tables at which sat the card-players, some plying their vocation with deep and silent anxiety--for in those days gaming often ran very high in such places --and others disputing with all the vociferous pertinacity of undisguised ill-temper. There, again, were the sallow, blue-nosed, grey-eyed dealers in whispered scandal; and, in short, there is scarcely a group or combination to be met with in the court of kings which might not have found a humble parallel in the assembly-room of T----.

I was allowed to indulge in undisturbed contemplation, for I suppose I was not known to more than five or six in the room. I thus had leisure not only to observe the different classes into which the company had divided itself, but to amuse myself by speculating as to the rank and character of many of the individual actors in the drama.

Among many who have long since passed from my memory, one person for some time engaged my attention, and that person, for many reasons, I shall not soon forget. He was a tall, square-shouldered man, who stood in a careless attitude, leaning with his back to the wall; he seemed to have secluded himself from the busy multitudes which moved noisily and gaily around him, and nobody seemed to observe or to converse with him. He was fashionably dressed, but perhaps rather extravagantly; his face was full and heavy, expressive of sullenness and stupidity, and marked with the lines of strong vulgarity; his age might be somewhere between forty and fifty. Such as I have endeavoured to describe him, he remained motionless, his

arms doggedly folded across his broad chest, and turning his sullen eyes from corner to corner of the room, as if eager to detect some object on which to vent his ill-humour.

It is strange, and yet it is true, that one sometimes finds even in the most commonplace countenance an undefinable something, which fascinates the attention, and forces it to recur again and again, while it is impossible to tell whether the peculiarity which thus attracts us lies in feature or in expression. or in both combined, and why it is that our observation should be engrossed by an object which, when analysed, seems to possess no claim to interest or even to notice. This unaccountable feeling I have often experienced, and I believe I am not singular. but never in so remarkable a degree as upon this occasion. My friend O'Connor, having disposed of his fair partner, was crossing the room for the purpose of joining me, in doing which I was surprised to see him exchange a familiar, almost a cordial, greeting with the object of my curiosity. I say I was surprised, for independent of his very questionable appearance, it struck me as strange that though so constantly associated with O'Connor, and, as I thought, personally acquainted with all his intimates, I had never before even seen this individual. I did not fail immediately to ask him who this gentleman was. I thought he seemed slightly embarrassed, but after a moment's pause he laughingly said that his friend over the way was too mysterious a personage to have his name announced in so giddy a scene as the present; but that on the morrow he would furnish me with all the information which I could desire. There was, I thought, in his affected jocularity a real awkwardness which appeared to me unaccountable, and consequently increased my curiosity; its gratification, however, I was obliged to defer. At length, wearied with witnessing amusements in which I could not sympathise, I left the room, and did not see O'Connor until late in the next day.

I had ridden down towards the castle for the purpose of visiting the O'Connors, and had nearly reached the avenue leading to the mansion, when I met my friend. He was also mounted; and having answered my inquiries respecting his mother, he easily persuaded me to accompany him in his ramble. We had chatted as usual for some time, when, after a pause, O'Connor said:

'By the way, Purcell, you expressed some curiosity respecting the tall, handsome fellow to whom I spoke last night.'

'I certainly did question you about a TALL gentleman, but was not aware of his claims to beauty,' replied I.

'Well, that is as it may be,' said he; 'the ladies think him handsome, and their opinion upon that score is more valuable than yours or mine. Do you know,' he continued, 'I sometimes feel half sorry that I ever made the fellow's acquaintance: he is quite a marked man here, and they tell stories of him that are anything but reputable, though I am sure without foundation. I think I know enough about him to warrant me in saying so.'

'May I ask his name?' inquired I.

'Oh! did not I tell you his name?' rejoined he. 'You should have heard that first; he and his name are equally well known. You will recognise the individual at once when I tell you that his name is--Fitzgerald.'

'Fitzgerald!' I repeated. 'Fitzgerald! --can it be Fitzgerald the duellist?'

'Upon my word you have hit it,' replied he, laughing; 'but you have accompanied the discovery with a look of horror more tragic than appropriate. He is not the monster you take him for--he has a good deal of old Irish pride; his temper is hasty, and he has been unfortunately thrown in the way of men who have not made allowance for these things. I am convinced that in every case in which Fitzgerald has fought, if the truth could be discovered, he would be found to have acted throughout upon the defensive. No man is mad enough to risk his own life, except

when the doing so is an alternative to submitting tamely to what he considers an insult. I am certain that no man ever engaged in a duel under the consciousness that he had acted an intentionally aggressive part.'

'When did you make his acquaintance?' said I.

'About two years ago,' he replied. 'I met him in France, and you know when one is abroad it is an ungracious task to reject the advances of one's countryman, otherwise I think I should have avoided his society--less upon my own account than because I am sure the acquaintance would be a source of continual though groundless uneasiness to my mother. I know, therefore, that you will not unnecessarily mention its existence to her.'

I gave him the desired assurance, and added:

'May I ask you. O'Connor, if, indeed, it be a fair question, whether this Fitzgerald at any time attempted to engage you in anything like gaming?'

This question was suggested by my having frequently heard Fitzgerald mentioned as a noted gambler, and sometimes even as a blackleg. O'Connor seemed, I thought, slightly embarrassed. He answered:

'No, no--I cannot say that he ever attempted anything of the kind. I certainly have played with him, but never lost to any serious amount; nor can I recollect that he ever solicited me--indeed he knows that I have a strong objection to deep play. YOU must be aware that my finances could not bear much pruning down. I never lost more to him at a sitting than about five pounds, which you know is nothing. No, you wrong him if you imagine that he attached himself to me merely for the sake of such contemptible winnings as those which a broken-down Irish gentleman could afford him. Come, Purcell, you are too hard upon him--you judge only by report; you must see him, and decide for yourself.--Suppose we call upon him now; he is at the inn, in the High Street, not a mile off.'

I declined the proposal drily.

'Your caution is too easily alarmed,' said he. 'I do not wish you to make this man your bosom friend: I merely desire that you should see and speak to him, and if you form any acquaintance with him, it must be of that slight nature which can be dropped or continued at pleasure.'

From the time that O'Connor had announced the fact that his friend was no other than the notorious Fitzgerald, a foreboding of something calamitous had come upon me, and it now occurred to me that if any unpleasantness were to be feared as likely to result to O'Connor from their connection, I might find my attempts to extricate him much facilitated by my being acquainted, however slightly, with Fitzgerald. I know not whether the idea was reasonable--it was certainly natural; and I told O'Connor that upon second thoughts I would ride down with him to the town, and wait upon Mr. Fitzgerald.

We found him at home; and chatted with him for a considerable time. To my surprise his manners were perfectly those of a gentleman, and his conversation, if not peculiarly engaging, was certainly amusing. The politeness of his demeanour, and the easy fluency with which he told his stories and his anecdotes, many of them curious, and all more or less entertaining, accounted to my mind at once for the facility with which he had improved his acquaintance with O'Connor; and when he pressed upon us an invitation to sup with him that night, I had almost joined O'Connor in accepting it. I determined, however, against doing so, for I had no wish to be on terms of familiarity with Mr. Fitzgerald; and I knew that one evening spent together as he proposed would go further towards establishing an intimacy between us than fifty morning visits could do. When I arose to depart, it was with feelings almost favourable to Fitzgerald; indeed I was more than half ashamed to acknowledge to my companion how complete a revolution in my

opinion respecting his friend half an hour's conversation with him had wrought. His appearance certainly WAS against him; but then, under the influence of his manner, one lost sight of much of its ungainliness, and of nearly all its vulgarity; and, on the whole, I felt convinced that report had done him grievous wrong, inasmuch as anybody, by an observance of the common courtesies of society, might easily avoid coming into personal collision with a gentleman so studiously polite as Fitzgerald. At parting, O'Connor requested me to call upon him the next day, as he intended to make trial of the merits of a pair of greyhounds, which he had thoughts of purchasing; adding, that if he could escape in anything like tolerable time from Fitzgerald's supper-party, he would take the field soon after ten on the next morning. At the appointed hour, or perhaps a little later, I dismounted at Castle Connor; and, on entering the hall, I observed a gentleman issuing from O'Connor's private room. I recognised him, as he approached, as a Mr. M'Donough, and, being but slightly acquainted with him, was about to pass him with a bow, when he stopped me. There was something in his manner which struck me as odd; he seemed a good deal flurried if not agitated, and said, in a hurried tone:

'This is a very foolish business, Mr. Purcell. You have some influence with my friend O'Connor; I hope you can induce him to adopt some more moderate line of conduct than that he has decided upon. If you will allow me, I will return for a moment with you, and talk over the matter again with O'Connor.'

As M'Donough uttered these words, I felt that sudden sinking of the heart which accompanies the immediate anticipation of something dreaded and dreadful. I was instantly convinced that O'Connor had quarrelled with Fitzgerald, and I knew that if such were the case, nothing short of a miracle could extricate him from the consequences. I signed to M'Donough to lead the way, and we entered the little study together. O'Connor was standing with his back to the fire; on the table lay the breakfast-things in the disorder in which a hurried meal had left them; and on another smaller table, placed near the hearth, lay pen, ink, and paper. As soon as O'Connor saw me, he came forward and shook me cordially by the hand.

'My dear Purcell,' said he, 'you are the very man I wanted. I have got into an ugly scrape, and I trust to my friends to get me out of it.'

'You have had no dispute with that man--that Fitzgerald, I hope,' said I, giving utterance to the conjecture whose truth I most dreaded.

'Faith, I cannot say exactly what passed between us,' said he, 'inasmuch as I was at the time nearly half seas over; but of this much I am certain, that we exchanged angry words last night. I lost my temper most confoundedly; but, as well as I can recollect, he appeared perfectly cool and collected. What he said was, therefore, deliberately said, and on that account must be resented.'

'My dear O'Connor, are you mad?' I exclaimed. 'Why will you seek to drive to a deadly issue a few hasty words, uttered under the influence of wine, and forgotten almost as soon as uttered? A quarrel with Fitzgerald it is twenty chances to one would terminate fatally to you.'

'It is exactly because Fitzgerald IS such an accomplished shot,' said he, 'that I become liable to the most injurious and intolerable suspicions if I submit to anything from him which could be construed into an affront; and for that reason Fitzgerald is the very last man to whom I would concede an inch in a case of honour.'

'I do not require you to make any, the slightest sacrifice of what you term your honour,' I replied; 'but if you have actually written a challenge to Fitzgerald, as I suspect you have done, I conjure you to reconsider the matter before you despatch it. From all that I have heard you say, Fitzgerald has more to complain of in the altercation which has taken place than you. You owe it to your only surviving parent not to thrust yourself thus wantonly upon--I will say it, the most

appalling danger. Nobody, my dear O'Connor, can have a doubt of your courage; and if at any time, which God forbid, you shall be called upon thus to risk your life, you should have it in your power to enter the field under the consciousness that you have acted throughout temperately and like a man, and not, as I fear you now would do, having rashly and most causelessly endangered your own life and that of your friend.'

'I believe, Purcell, you are right,' said he. 'I believe I HAVE viewed the matter in too decided a light; my note, I think, scarcely allows him an honourable alternative, and that is certainly going a step too far--further than I intended. Mr. M'Donough, I'll thank you to hand me the note.'

He broke the seal, and, casting his eye hastily over it, he continued:

'It is, indeed, a monument of folly. I am very glad, Purcell, you happened to come in, otherwise it would have reached its destination by this time.'

He threw it into the fire; and, after a moment's pause, resumed:

'You must not mistake me, however. I am perfectly satisfied as to the propriety, nay, the necessity, of communicating with Fitzgerald. The difficulty is in what tone I should address him. I cannot say that the man directly affronted me--I cannot recollect any one expression which I could lay hold upon as offensive--but his language was ambiguous, and admitted frequently of the most insulting construction, and his manner throughout was insupportably domineering. I know it impressed me with the idea that he presumed upon his reputation as a DEAD SHOT, and that would be utterly unendurable'

'I would now recommend, as I have already done,' said M'Donough, 'that if you write to Fitzgerald, it should be in such a strain as to leave him at perfect liberty, without a compromise of honour, in a friendly way, to satisfy your doubts as to his conduct.'

I seconded the proposal warmly, and O'Connor, in a few minutes, finished a note, which he desired us to read. It was to this effect:

'O'Connor, of Castle Connor, feeling that some expressions employed by Mr. Fitzgerald upon last night, admitted of a construction offensive to him, and injurious to his character, requests to know whether Mr. Fitzgerald intended to convey such a meaning.

'Castle Connor, Thursday morning.'

This note was consigned to the care of Mr. M'Donough, who forthwith departed to execute his mission. The sound of his horse's hoofs, as he rode rapidly away, struck heavily at my heart; but I found some satisfaction in the reflection that M'Donough appeared as averse from extreme measures as I was myself, for I well knew, with respect to the final result of the affair, that as much depended upon the tone adopted by the SECOND, as upon the nature of the written communication.

I have seldom passed a more anxious hour than that which intervened between the departure and the return of that gentleman. Every instant I imagined I heard the tramp of a horse approaching, and every time that a door opened I fancied it was to give entrance to the eagerly expected courier. At length I did hear the hollow and rapid tread of a horse's hoof upon the avenue. It approached--it stopped--a hurried step traversed the hall--the room door opened, and M'Donough entered.

'You have made great haste,' said O'Connor; 'did you find him at home?'

'I did,' replied M'Donough, 'and made the greater haste as Fitzgerald did not let me know the contents of his reply.'

At the same time he handed a note to O'Connor, who instantly broke the seal. The words were as follow:

'Mr. Fitzgerald regrets that anything which has fallen from him should have appeared to Mr. O'Connor to be intended to convey a reflection upon his honour (none such having been meant), and begs leave to disavow any wish to quarrel unnecessarily with Mr. O'Connor.
'T---- Inn, Thursday morning.'

I cannot describe how much I felt relieved on reading the above communication. I took O'Connor's hand and pressed it warmly, but my emotions were deeper and stronger than I cared to show, for I was convinced that he had escaped a most imminent danger. Nobody whose notions upon the subject are derived from the duelling of modern times, in which matters are conducted without any very sanguinary determination upon either side, and with equal want of skill and coolness by both parties, can form a just estimate of the danger incurred by one who ventured to encounter a duellist of the old school. Perfect coolness in the field, and a steadiness and accuracy (which to the unpractised appeared almost miraculous) in the use of the pistol, formed the characteristics of this class; and in addition to this there generally existed a kind of professional pride, which prompted the duellist, in default of any more malignant feeling, from motives of mere vanity, to seek the life of his antagonist. Fitzgerald's career had been a remarkably successful one, and I knew that out of thirteen duels which he had fought in Ireland, in nine cases he had **KILLED** his man. In those days one never heard of the parties leaving the field, as not unfrequently now occurs, without blood having been spilt; and the odds were, of course, in all cases tremendously against a young and unpractised man, when matched with an experienced antagonist. My impression respecting the magnitude of the danger which my friend had incurred was therefore by no means unwarranted.

I now questioned O'Connor more accurately respecting the circumstances of his quarrel with Fitzgerald. It arose from some dispute respecting the application of a rule of piquet, at which game they had been playing, each interpreting it favourably to himself, and O'Connor, having lost considerably, was in no mood to conduct an argument with temper--an altercation ensued, and that of rather a pungent nature, and the result was that he left Fitzgerald's room rather abruptly, determined to demand an explanation in the most peremptory tone. For this purpose he had sent for M'Donough, and had commissioned him to deliver the note, which my arrival had fortunately intercepted.

As it was now past noon, O'Connor made me promise to remain with him to dinner; and we sat down a party of three, all in high spirits at the termination of our anxieties. It is necessary to mention, for the purpose of accounting for what follows, that Mrs. O'Connor, or, as she was more euphoniously styled, the lady of Castle Connor, was precluded by ill-health from taking her place at the dinner-table, and, indeed, seldom left her room before four o'clock.² We were sitting after dinner sipping our claret, and talking, and laughing, and enjoying ourselves exceedingly, when a servant, stepping into the room, informed his master that a gentleman wanted to speak with him.

'Request him, with my compliments, to walk in,' said O'Connor; and in a few moments a gentleman entered the room.

² It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader, that at the period spoken of, the important hour of dinner occurred very nearly at noon.

His appearance was anything but prepossessing. He was a little above the middle size, spare, and raw-boned; his face very red, his features sharp and bluish, and his age might be about sixty. His attire savoured a good deal of the SHABBY-GENTEEL; his clothes, which had much of tarnished and faded pretension about them, did not fit him, and had not improbably fluttered in the stalls of Plunket Street. We had risen on his entrance, and O'Connor had twice requested of him to take a chair at the table, without his hearing, or at least noticing, the invitation; while with a slow pace, and with an air of mingled importance and effrontery, he advanced into the centre of the apartment, and regarding our small party with a supercilious air, he said:

'I take the liberty of introducing myself--I am Captain M'Creagh, formerly of the--infantry. My business here is with a Mr. O'Connor, and the sooner it is despatched the better.'

'I am the gentleman you name,' said O'Connor; 'and as you appear impatient, we had better proceed to your commission without delay.'

'Then, Mr. O'Connor, you will please to read that note,' said the captain, placing a sealed paper in his hand.

O'Connor read it through, and then observed:

'This is very extraordinary indeed. This note appears to me perfectly unaccountable.'

'You are very young, Mr. O'Connor,' said the captain, with vulgar familiarity; 'but, without much experience in these matters, I think you might have anticipated something like this. You know the old saying, "Second thoughts are best;" and so they are like to prove, by G--!'

'You will have no objection, Captain M'Creagh, on the part of your friend, to my reading this note to these gentlemen; they are both confidential friends of mine, and one of them has already acted for me in this business.' 'I can have no objection,' replied the captain, 'to your doing what you please with your own. I have nothing more to do with that note once I put it safe into your hand; and when that is once done, it is all one to me, if you read it to half the world--that's YOUR concern, and no affair of mine.'

O'Connor then read the following:

'Mr. Fitzgerald begs leave to state, that upon re-perusing Mr. O'Connor's communication of this morning carefully, with an experienced friend, he is forced to consider himself as challenged. His friend, Captain M'Creagh, has been empowered by him to make all the necessary arrangements.

'T---- Inn, Thursday.'

I can hardly describe the astonishment with which I heard this note. I turned to the captain, and said:

'Surely, sir, there is some mistake in all this?'

'Not the slightest, I'll assure you, sir.' said he, coolly; 'the case is a very clear one, and I think my friend has pretty well made up his mind upon it. May I request your answer?' he continued, turning to O'Connor; 'time is precious, you know.'

O'Connor expressed his willingness to comply with the suggestion, and in a few minutes had folded and directed the following rejoinder:

'Mr. O'Connor having received a satisfactory explanation from Mr. Fitzgerald, of the language used by that gentleman, feels that there no longer exists any grounds for misunderstanding, and wishes further to state, that the note of which Mr. Fitzgerald speaks was not intended as a challenge.'

With this note the captain departed; and as we did not doubt that the message which he had delivered had been suggested by some unintentional misconstruction of O'Connor's first billet, we felt assured that the conclusion of his last note would set the matter at rest. In this belief, however, we were mistaken; before we had left the table, and in an incredibly short time, the captain returned. He entered the room with a countenance evidently tasked to avoid expressing the satisfaction which a consciousness of the nature of his mission had conferred; but in spite of all his efforts to look gravely unconcerned, there was a twinkle in the small grey eye, and an almost imperceptible motion in the corner of the mouth, which sufficiently betrayed his internal glee, as he placed a note in the hand of O'Connor. As the young man cast his eye over it, he coloured deeply, and turning to M'Donough, he said:

'You will have the goodness to make all the necessary arrangements for a meeting. Something has occurred to render one between me and Mr. Fitzgerald inevitable. Understand me literally, when I say that it is now totally impossible that this affair should be amicably arranged. You will have the goodness, M'Donough, to let me know as soon as all the particulars are arranged. Purcell,' he continued, 'will you have the kindness to accompany me?' and having bowed to M'Creagh, we left the room.

As I closed the door after me, I heard the captain laugh, and thought I could distinguish the words--'By ---- I knew Fitzgerald would bring him to his way of thinking before he stopped.'

I followed O'Connor into his study, and on entering, the door being closed, he showed me the communication which had determined him upon hostilities. Its language was grossly impertinent, and it concluded by actually threatening to 'POST' him, in case he further attempted 'to be OFF.' I cannot describe the agony of indignation in which O'Connor writhed under this insult. He said repeatedly that 'he was a degraded and dishonoured man,' that 'he was dragged into the field,' that 'there was ignominy in the very thought that such a letter should have been directed to him.' It was in vain that I reasoned against this impression; the conviction that he had been disgraced had taken possession of his mind. He said again and again that nothing but his DEATH could remove the stain which his indecision had cast upon the name of his family. I hurried to the hall, on hearing M'Donough and the captain passing, and reached the door just in time to hear the latter say, as he mounted his horse:

'All the rest can be arranged on the spot; and so farewell, Mr. M'Donough-- we'll meet at Philippi, you know;' and with this classical allusion, which was accompanied with a grin and a bow, and probably served many such occasions, the captain took his departure.

M'Donough briefly stated the few particulars which had been arranged. The parties were to meet at the stand-house, in the race-ground, which lay at about an equal distance between Castle Connor and the town of T----. The hour appointed was half-past five on the next morning, at which time the twilight would be sufficiently advanced to afford a distinct view; and the weapons to be employed were PISTOLS--M'Creagh having claimed, on the part of his friend, all the advantages of the CHALLENGED party, and having, consequently, insisted upon the choice of 'TOOLS,' as he expressed himself; and it was further stipulated that the utmost secrecy should be observed, as Fitzgerald would incur great risk from the violence of the peasantry, in case the affair took wind. These conditions were, of course, agreed upon by O'Connor, and M'Donough left the castle, having appointed four o'clock upon the next morning as the hour of his return, by which time it would be his business to provide everything necessary for the meeting. On his departure, O'Connor requested me to remain with him upon that evening, saying that 'he could not bear to be alone with his mother.' It was to me a most painful request, but at the same time one which I could not think of refusing. I felt, however, that the difficulty at least of the task

which I had to perform would be in some measure mitigated by the arrival of two relations of O'Connor upon that evening.

'It is very fortunate,' said O'Connor, whose thoughts had been running upon the same subject, 'that the O'Gradys will be with us to-night; their gaiety and good-humour will relieve us from a heavy task. I trust that nothing may occur to prevent their coming.' Fervently concurring in the same wish, I accompanied O'Connor into the parlour, there to await the arrival of his mother.

God grant that I may never spend such another evening! The O'Gradys DID come, but their high and noisy spirits, so far from relieving me, did but give additional gloom to the despondency, I might say the despair, which filled my heart with misery-- the terrible forebodings which I could not for an instant silence, turned their laughter into discord, and seemed to mock the smiles and jests of the unconscious party. When I turned my eyes upon the mother, I thought I never had seen her look so proudly and so lovingly upon her son before--it cut me to the heart--oh, how cruelly I was deceiving her! I was a hundred times on the very point of starting up, and, at all hazards, declaring to her how matters were; but other feelings subdued my better emotions. Oh, what monsters are we made of by the fashions of the world! how are our kindlier and nobler feelings warped or destroyed by their baleful influences! I felt that it would not be HONOURABLE, that it would not be ETIQUETTE, to betray O'Connor's secret. I sacrificed a higher and a nobler duty than I have since been called upon to perform, to the dastardly fear of bearing the unmerited censure of a world from which I was about to retire. O Fashion! thou gaudy idol, whose feet are red with the blood of human sacrifice, would I had always felt towards thee as I now do!

O'Connor was not dejected; on the contrary, he joined with loud and lively alacrity in the hilarity of the little party; but I could see in the flush of his cheek, and in the unusual brightness of his eye, all the excitement of fever--he was making an effort almost beyond his strength, but he succeeded--and when his mother rose to leave the room, it was with the impression that her son was the gayest and most light-hearted of the company. Twice or thrice she had risen with the intention of retiring, but O'Connor, with an eagerness which I alone could understand, had persuaded her to remain until the usual hour of her departure had long passed; and when at length she arose, declaring that she could not possibly stay longer, I alone could comprehend the desolate change which passed over his manner; and when I saw them part, it was with the sickening conviction that those two beings, so dear to one another, so loved, so cherished, should meet no more.

O'Connor briefly informed his cousins of the position in which he was placed, requesting them at the same time to accompany him to the field, and this having been settled, we separated, each to his own apartment. I had wished to sit up with O'Connor, who had matters to arrange sufficient to employ him until the hour appointed for M'Donough's visit; but he would not hear of it, and I was forced, though sorely against my will, to leave him without a companion. I went to my room, and, in a state of excitement which I cannot describe, I paced for hours up and down its narrow precincts. I could not-- who could?--analyse the strange, contradictory, torturing feelings which, while I recoiled in shrinking horror from the scene which the morning was to bring, yet forced me to wish the intervening time annihilated; each hour that the clock told seemed to vibrate and tinkle through every nerve; my agitation was dreadful; fancy conjured up the forms of those who filled my thoughts with more than the vividness of reality; things seemed to glide through the dusky shadows of the room. I saw the dreaded form of Fitzgerald--I heard the hated laugh of the captain--and again the features of O'Connor would appear before me, with ghastly distinctness, pale and writhed in death, the gouts of gore clotted in the mouth, and the

eye-balls glared and staring. Scared with the visions which seemed to throng with unceasing rapidity and vividness, I threw open the window and looked out upon the quiet scene around. I turned my eyes in the direction of the town; a heavy cloud was lowering darkly about it, and I, in impious frenzy, prayed to God that it might burst in avenging fires upon the murderous wretch who lay beneath. At length, sick and giddy with excess of excitement, I threw myself upon the bed without removing my clothes, and endeavoured to compose myself so far as to remain quiet until the hour for our assembling should arrive.

A few minutes before four o'clock I stole noiselessly downstairs, and made my way to the small study already mentioned. A candle was burning within; and, when I opened the door, O'Connor was reading a book, which, on seeing me, he hastily closed, colouring slightly as he did so. We exchanged a cordial but mournful greeting; and after a slight pause he said, laying his hand upon the volume which he had shut a moment before:

'Purcell, I feel perfectly calm, though I cannot say that I have much hope as to the issue of this morning's rencounter. I shall avoid half the danger. If I must fall, I am determined I shall not go down to the grave with his blood upon my hands. I have resolved not to fire at Fitzgerald--that is, to fire in such a direction as to assure myself against hitting him. Do not say a word of this to the O'Gradys. Your doing so would only produce fruitless altercation; they could not understand my motives. I feel convinced that I shall not leave the field alive. If I must die today, I shall avoid an awful aggravation of wretchedness. Purcell,' he continued, after a little space, 'I was so weak as to feel almost ashamed of the manner in which I was occupied as you entered the room. Yes, I--I_ who will be, before this evening, a cold and lifeless clod, was ashamed to have spent my last moment of reflection in prayer. God pardon me! God pardon me!' he repeated.

I took his hand and pressed it, but I could not speak. I sought for words of comfort, but they would not come. To have uttered one cheering sentence I must have contradicted every impression of my own mind. I felt too much awed to attempt it. Shortly afterwards, M'Donough arrived. No wretched patient ever underwent a more thrilling revulsion at the first sight of the case of surgical instruments under which he had to suffer, than did I upon beholding a certain oblong flat mahogany box, bound with brass, and of about two feet in length, laid upon the table in the hall. O'Connor, thanking him for his punctuality, requested him to come into his study for a moment, when, with a melancholy collectedness, he proceeded to make arrangements for our witnessing his will. The document was a brief one, and the whole matter was just arranged, when the two O'Gradys crept softly into the room.

'So! last will and testament,' said the elder. 'Why, you have a very BLUE notion of these matters. I tell you, you need not be uneasy. I remember very well, when young Ryan of Ballykealey met M'Neil the duellist, bets ran twenty to one against him. I stole away from school, and had a peep at the fun as well as the best of them. They fired together. Ryan received the ball through the collar of his coat, and M'Neil in the temple; he spun like a top: it was a most unexpected thing, and disappointed his friends damnably. It was admitted, however, to have been very pretty shooting upon both sides. To be sure,' he continued, pointing to the will, 'you are in the right to keep upon the safe side of fortune; but then, there is no occasion to be altogether so devilish down in the mouth as you appear to be.'

'You will allow,' said O'Connor, 'that the chances are heavily against me.'

'Why, let me see,' he replied, 'not so hollow a thin,, either. Let me see, we'll say about four to one against you; you may chance to throw doublets like him I told you of, and then what becomes of the odds I'd like to know? But let things go as they will, I'll give and take four to one, in pounds and tens of pounds. There, M'Donough, there's a GET for you; b--t me, if it is

not. Poh! the fellow is stolen away,' he continued, observing that the object of his proposal had left the room; 'but d---- it, Purcell, you are fond of a SOFT THING, too, in a quiet way--I'm sure you are --so curse me if I do not make you the same offer--is it a go?'

I was too much disgusted to make any reply, but I believe my looks expressed my feelings sufficiently, for in a moment he said:

'Well, I see there is nothing to be done, so we may as well be stirring. M'Donough, myself, and my brother will saddle the horses in a jiffy, while you and Purcell settle anything which remains to be arranged.'

So saying, he left the room with as much alacrity as if it were to prepare for a foxhunt. Selfish, heartless fool! I have often since heard him spoken of as A CURSED GOOD-NATURED DOG and a D---- GOOD FELLOW; but such eulogies as these are not calculated to mitigate the abhorrence with which his conduct upon that morning inspired me.

The chill mists of night were still hovering on the landscape as our party left the castle. It was a raw, comfortless morning --a kind of drizzling fog hung heavily over the scene, dimming the light of the sun, which had now risen, into a pale and even a grey glimmer. As the appointed hour was fast approaching, it was proposed that we should enter the race-ground at a point close to the stand-house--a measure which would save us a ride of nearly two miles, over a broken road; at which distance there was an open entrance into the race-ground. Here, accordingly, we dismounted, and leaving our horses in the care of a country fellow who happened to be stirring at that early hour, we proceeded up a narrow lane, over a side wall of which we were to climb into the open ground where stood the now deserted building, under which the meeting was to take place. Our progress was intercepted by the unexpected appearance of an old woman, who, in the scarlet cloak which is the picturesque characteristic of the female peasantry of the south, was moving slowly down the avenue to meet us, uttering that peculiarly wild and piteous lamentation well known by the name of 'the Irish cry,' accompanied throughout by all the customary gesticulation of passionate grief. This rencounter was more awkward than we had at first anticipated; for, upon a nearer approach, the person proved to be no other than an old attached dependent of the family, and who had herself nursed O'Connor. She quickened her pace as we advanced almost to a run; and, throwing her arms round O'Connor's neck, she poured forth such a torrent of lamentation, reproach, and endearment, as showed that she was aware of the nature of our purpose, whence and by what means I knew not. It was in vain that he sought to satisfy her by evasion, and gently to extricate himself from her embrace. She knelt upon the ground, and clasped her arms round his legs, uttering all the while such touching supplications, such cutting and passionate expressions of woe, as went to my very heart.

At length, with much difficulty, we passed this most painful interruption; and, crossing the boundary wall, were placed beyond her reach. The O'Gradys damned her for a troublesome hag, and passed on with O'Connor, but I remained behind for a moment. The poor woman looked hopelessly at the high wall which separated her from him she had loved from infancy, and to be with whom at that minute she would have given worlds, she took her seat upon a solitary stone under the opposite wall, and there, in a low, subdued key, she continued to utter her sorrow in words so desolate, yet expressing such a tenderness of devotion as wrung my heart.

'My poor woman,' I said, laying my hand gently upon her shoulder, 'you will make yourself ill; the morning is very cold, and your cloak is but a thin defence against the damp and chill. Pray return home and take this; it may be useful to you.'

So saying, I dropped a purse, with what money I had about me, into her lap, but it lay there unheeded; she did not hear me.

‘Oh I my child, my child, my darlin’, she sobbed, ‘are you gone from me? are you gone from me? Ah, mavourneen, mavourneen, you’ll never come back alive to me again. The crathur that slept on my bosom--the lovin’ crathur that I was so proud of--they’ll kill him, they’ll kill him. Oh, voh! voh!’

The affecting tone, the feeling, the abandonment with which all this was uttered, none can conceive who have not heard the lamentations of the Irish peasantry. It brought tears to my eyes. I saw that no consolation of mine could soothe her grief, so I turned and departed; but as I rapidly traversed the level sward which separated me from my companions, now considerably in advance, I could still hear the wailings of the solitary mourner.

As we approached the stand-house, it was evident that our antagonists had already arrived. Our path lay by the side of a high fence constructed of loose stones, and on turning a sharp angle at its extremity, we found ourselves close to the appointed spot, and within a few yards of a crowd of persons, some mounted and some on foot, evidently awaiting our arrival. The affair had unaccountably taken wind, as the number of the expectants clearly showed; but for this there was now no remedy.

As our little party advanced we were met and saluted by several acquaintances, whom curiosity, if no deeper feeling, had brought to the place. Fitzgerald and the Captain had arrived, and having dismounted, were standing upon the sod. The former, as we approached, bowed slightly and sullenly-- while the latter, evidently in high good humour, made his most courteous obeisance. No time was to be lost; and the two seconds immediately withdrew to a slight distance, for the purpose of completing the last minute arrangements. It was a brief but horrible interval--each returned to his principal to communicate the result, which was soon caught up and repeated from mouth to mouth throughout the crowd. I felt a strange and insurmountable reluctance to hear the sickening particulars detailed; and as I stood irresolute at some distance from the principal parties, a top-booted squireen, with a hunting whip in his hand, bustling up to a companion of his, exclaimed:

“Not fire together!--did you ever hear the like? If Fitzgerald gets the first shot all is over. M’Donough sold the pass, by----, and that is the long and the short of it.’

The parties now moved down a little to a small level space, suited to the purpose; and the captain, addressing M’Donough, said:

‘Mr. M’Donough, you’ll now have the goodness to toss for choice of ground; as the light comes from the east the line must of course run north and south. Will you be so obliging as to toss up a crown-piece, while I call?’

A coin was instantly chucked into the air. The captain cried, ‘Harp.’ The HEAD was uppermost, and M’Donough immediately made choice of the southern point at which to place his friend--a position which it will be easily seen had the advantage of turning his back upon the light--no trifling superiority of location. The captain turned with a kind of laugh, and said:

‘By ----, sir, you are as cunning as a dead pig; but you forgot one thing. My friend is a left-handed gunner, though never a bit the worse for that; so you see there is no odds as far as the choice of light goes.’

He then proceeded to measure nine paces in a direction running north and south, and the principals took their ground.

‘I must be troublesome to you once again, Mr. M’Donough. One toss more, and everything is complete. We must settle who is to have the FIRST SLAP.’

A piece of money was again thrown into the air; again the captain lost the toss and M’Donough proceeded to load the pistols. I happened to stand near Fitzgerald, and I overheard the captain,

with a chuckle, say something to him in which the word 'cravat' was repeated. It instantly occurred to me that the captain's attention was directed to a bright-coloured muffler which O'Connor wore round his neck, and which would afford his antagonist a distinct and favourable mark. I instantly urged him to remove it, and at length, with difficulty, succeeded. He seemed perfectly careless as to any precaution. Everything was now ready; the pistol was placed in O'Connor's hand, and he only awaited the word from the captain.

M'Creagh then said:

'Mr. M'Donough, is your principal ready?'

M'Donough replied in the affirmative; and, after a slight pause, the captain, as had been arranged, uttered the words:

'Ready--fire.'

O'Connor fired, but so wide of the mark that some one in the crowd exclaimed:

'Fired in the air.'

'Who says he fired in the air?' thundered Fitzgerald. 'By ---- he lies, whoever he is.' There was a silence. 'But even if he was fool enough to fire in the air, it is not in HIS power to put an end to the quarrel by THAT. D---- my soul, if I am come here to be played with like a child, and by the Almighty ---- you shall hear more of this, each and everyone of you, before I'm satisfied.'

A kind of low murmur, or rather groan, was now raised, and a slight motion was observable in the crowd, as if to intercept Fitzgerald's passage to his horse. M'Creagh, drawing the horse close to the spot where Fitzgerald stood, threatened, with the most awful imprecations, 'to blow the brains out of the first man who should dare to press on them.'

O'Connor now interfered, requesting the crowd to forbear, and some degree of order was restored. He then said, 'that in firing as he did, he had no intention whatever of waiving his right of firing upon Fitzgerald, and of depriving that gentleman of his right of prosecuting the affair to the utmost--that if any person present imagined that he intended to fire in the air, he begged to set him right; since, so far from seeking to exort an unwilling reconciliation, he was determined that no power on earth should induce him to concede one inch of ground to Mr. Fitzgerald.'

This announcement was received with a shout by the crowd, who now resumed their places at either side of the plot of ground which had been measured. The principals took their places once more, and M'Creagh proceeded, with the nicest and most anxious care, to load the pistols; and this task being accomplished, Fitzgerald whispered something in the Captain's ear, who instantly drew his friend's horse so as to place him within a step of his rider, and then tightened the girths. This accomplished, Fitzgerald proceeded deliberately to remove his coat, which he threw across his horse in front of the saddle; and then, with the assistance of M'Creagh, he rolled the shirt sleeve up to the shoulder, so as to leave the whole of his muscular arm perfectly naked. A cry of 'Coward, coward! butcher, butcher!' arose from the crowd. Fitzgerald paused.

'Do you object, Mr. M'Donough? and upon what grounds, if you please?' said he.

'Certainly he does not,' replied O'Connor; and, turning to M'Donough, he added, 'pray let there be no unnecessary delay.'

'There is no objection, then,' said Fitzgerald.

'I object,' said the younger of the O'Gradys, 'if nobody else will.'

'And who the devil are you, that DARES to object?' shouted Fitzgerald; 'and what d--d presumption prompts you to DARE to wag your tongue here?'

'I am Mr. O'Grady, of Castle Blake,' replied the young man, now much enraged; 'and by ----, you shall answer for your language to me.'

‘Shall I, by ----? Shall I?’ cried he, with a laugh of brutal scorn; ‘the more the merrier, d--n the doubt of it--so now hold your tongue, for I promise you you shall have business enough of your own to think about, and that before long.’

There was an appalling ferocity in his tone and manner which no words could convey. He seemed transformed; he was actually like a man possessed. Was it possible, I thought, that I beheld the courteous gentleman, the gay, good-humoured retailer of amusing anecdote with whom, scarce two days ago, I had laughed and chatted, in the blasphemous and murderous ruffian who glared and stormed before me!

O’Connor interposed, and requested that time should not be unnecessarily lost.

‘You have not got a second coat on?’ inquired the Captain. ‘I beg pardon, but my duty to my friend requires that I should ascertain the point.’

O’Connor replied in the negative. The Captain expressed himself as satisfied, adding, in what he meant to be a complimentary strain, ‘that he knew Mr. O’Connor would scorn to employ padding or any unfair mode of protection.’

There was now a breathless silence. O’Connor stood perfectly motionless; and, excepting the death-like paleness of his features, he exhibited no sign of agitation. His eye was steady--his lip did not tremble--his attitude was calm. The Captain, having re-examined the priming of the pistols, placed one of them in the hand of Fitzgerald.--M’Donough inquired whether the parties were prepared, and having been answered in the affirmative, he proceeded to give the word, ‘Ready.’ Fitzgerald raised his hand, but almost instantly lowered it again. The crowd had pressed too much forward as it appeared, and his eye had been unsteadied by the flapping of the skirt of a frieze riding-coat worn by one of the spectators.

‘In the name of my principal,’ said the Captain, ‘I must and do insist upon these gentlemen moving back a little. We ask but little; fair play, and no favour.’

The crowd moved as requested. M’Donough repeated his former question, and was answered as before. There was a breathless silence. Fitzgerald fixed his eye upon O’Connor. The appointed signal, ‘Ready, fire!’ was given. There was a pause while one might slowly reckon three--Fitzgerald fired--and O’Connor fell helplessly upon the ground.

‘There is no time to be lost,’ said M’Creagh; ‘for, by ----, you have done for him.’

So saying, he threw himself upon his horse, and was instantly followed at a hard gallop by Fitzgerald.

‘Cold-blooded murder, if ever murder was committed,’ said O’Grady. ‘He shall hang for it; d--n me, but he shall.’

A hopeless attempt was made to overtake the fugitives; but they were better mounted than any of their pursuers, and escaped with ease. Curses and actual yells of execration followed their course; and as, in crossing the brow of a neighbouring hill, they turned round in the saddle to observe if they were pursued, every gesture which could express fury and defiance was exhausted by the enraged and defeated multitude.

‘Clear the way, boys,’ said young O’Grady, who with me was kneeling beside O’Connor, while we supported him in our arms; ‘do not press so close, and be d--d; can’t you let the fresh air to him; don’t you see he’s dying?’

On opening his waistcoat we easily detected the wound: it was a little below the chest--a small blue mark, from which oozed a single heavy drop of blood.

‘He is bleeding but little--that is a comfort at all events,’ said one of the gentlemen who surrounded the wounded man.

Another suggested the expediency of his being removed homeward with as little delay as possible, and recommended, for this purpose, that a door should be removed from its hinges, and the patient, laid upon this, should be conveyed from the field. Upon this rude bier my poor friend was carried from that fatal ground towards Castle Connor. I walked close by his side, and observed every motion of his. He seldom opened his eyes, and was perfectly still, excepting a nervous WORKING of the fingers, and a slight, almost imperceptible twitching of the features, which took place, however, only at intervals. The first word he uttered was spoken as we approached the entrance of the castle itself, when he said; repeatedly, 'The back way, the back way.' He feared lest his mother should meet him abruptly and without preparation; but although this fear was groundless, since she never left her room until late in the day, yet it was thought advisable, and, indeed, necessary, to caution all the servants most strongly against breathing a hint to their mistress of the events which had befallen.

Two or three gentlemen had ridden from the field one after another, promising that they should overtake our party before it reached the castle, bringing with them medical aid from one quarter or another; and we determined that Mrs. O'Connor should not know anything of the occurrence until the opinion of some professional man should have determined the extent of the injury which her son had sustained --a course of conduct which would at least have the effect of relieving her from the horrors of suspense. When O'Connor found himself in his own room, and laid upon his own bed, he appeared much revived--so much so, that I could not help admitting a strong hope that all might yet be well.

'After all, Purcell,' said he, with a melancholy smile, and speaking with evident difficulty, 'I believe I have got off with a trifling wound. I am sure it cannot be fatal I feel so little pain--almost none.'

I cautioned him against fatiguing himself by endeavouring to speak; and he remained quiet for a little time. At length he said:

'Purcell, I trust this lesson shall not have been given in vain. God has been very merciful to me; I feel--I have an internal confidence that I am not wounded mortally. Had I been fatally wounded-- had I been killed upon the spot, only think on it'--and he closed his eyes as if the very thought made him dizzy--'struck down into the grave, unprepared as I am, in the very blossom of my sins, without a moment of repentance or of reflection; I must have been lost--lost for ever and ever.'

I prevailed upon him, with some difficulty, to abstain from such agitating reflections, and at length induced him to court such repose as his condition admitted of, by remaining perfectly silent, and as much as possible without motion.

O'Connor and I only were in the room; he had lain for some time in tolerable quiet, when I thought I distinguished the bustle attendant upon the arrival of some one at the castle, and went eagerly to the window, believing, or at least hoping, that the sounds might announce the approach of the medical man, whom we all longed most impatiently to see.

My conjecture was right; I had the satisfaction of seeing him dismount and prepare to enter the castle, when my observations were interrupted, and my attention was attracted by a smothered, gurgling sound proceeding from the bed in which lay the wounded man. I instantly turned round, and in doing so the spectacle which met my eyes was sufficiently shocking.

I had left O'Connor lying in the bed, supported by pillows, perfectly calm, and with his eyes closed: he was now lying nearly in the same position, his eyes open and almost starting from their sockets, with every feature pale and distorted as death, and vomiting blood in quantities that were frightful. I rushed to the door and called for assistance; the paroxysm, though violent, was

brief, and O'Connor sank into a swoon so deep and death-like, that I feared he should waken no more.

The surgeon, a little, fussy man, but I believe with some skill to justify his pretensions, now entered the room, carrying his case of instruments, and followed by servants bearing basins and water and bandages of linen. He relieved our doubts by instantly assuring us that 'the patient' was still living; and at the same time professed his determination to take advantage of the muscular relaxation which the faint had induced to examine the wound--adding that a patient was more easily 'handled' when in a swoon than under other circumstances.

After examining the wound in front where the ball had entered, he passed his hand round beneath the shoulder, and after a little pause he shook his head, observing that he feared very much that one of the vertebrae was fatally injured, but that he could not say decidedly until his patient should revive a little. 'Though his language was very technical, and consequently to me nearly unintelligible, I could perceive plainly by his manner that he considered the case as almost hopeless.

O'Connor gradually gave some signs of returning animation, and at length was so far restored as to be enabled to speak. After some few general questions as to how he felt affected, etc., etc., the surgeon, placing his hand upon his leg and pressing it slightly, asked him if he felt any pressure upon the limb? O'Connor answered in the negative--he pressed harder, and repeated the question; still the answer was the same, till at length, by repeated experiments, he ascertained that all that part of the body which lay behind the wound was paralysed, proving that the spine must have received some fatal injury.

'Well, doctor,' said O'Connor, after the examination of the wound was over; 'well, I shall do, shan't I?'

The physician was silent for a moment, and then, as if with an effort, he replied:

'Indeed, my dear sir, it would not be honest to flatter you with much hope.'

'Eh?' said O'Connor with more alacrity than I had seen him exhibit since the morning; 'surely I did not hear you aright; I spoke of my recovery--surely there is no doubt; there can be none--speak frankly, doctor, for God's sake--am I dying?'

The surgeon was evidently no stoic, and his manner had extinguished in me every hope, even before he had uttered a word in reply.

'You are--you are indeed dying. There is no hope; I should but deceive you if I held out any.'

As the surgeon uttered these terrible words, the hands which O'Connor had stretched towards him while awaiting his reply fell powerless by his side; his head sank forward; it seemed as if horror and despair had unstrung every nerve and sinew; he appeared to collapse and shrink together as a plant might under the influence of a withering spell.

It has often been my fate, since then, to visit the chambers of death and of suffering; I have witnessed fearful agonies of body and of soul; the mysterious shudderings of the departing spirit, and the heart-rending desolation of the survivors; the severing of the tenderest ties, the piteous yearnings of unavailing love--of all these things the sad duties of my profession have made me a witness. But, generally speaking, I have observed in such scenes some thing to mitigate, if not the sorrows, at least the terrors, of death; the dying man seldom seems to feel the reality of his situation; a dull consciousness of approaching dissolution, a dim anticipation of unconsciousness and insensibility, are the feelings which most nearly border upon an appreciation of his state; the film of death seems to have overspread the mind's eye, objects lose their distinctness, and float cloudily before it, and the apathy and apparent indifference with which men recognise the sure

advances of immediate death, rob that awful hour of much of its terrors, and the death-bed of its otherwise inevitable agonies.

This is a merciful dispensation; but the rule has its exceptions--its terrible exceptions. When a man is brought in an instant, by some sudden accident, to the very verge of the fathomless pit of death, with all his recollections awake, and his perceptions keenly and vividly alive, without previous illness to subdue the tone of the mind as to dull its apprehensions-- then, and then only, the death-bed is truly terrible.

Oh, what a contrast did O'Connor afford as he lay in all the abject helplessness of undisguised terror upon his death-bed, to the proud composure with which he had taken the field that morning. I had always before thought of death as of a quiet sleep stealing gradually upon exhausted nature, made welcome by suffering, or, at least, softened by resignation; I had never before stood by the side of one upon whom the hand of death had been thus suddenly laid; I had never seen the tyrant arrayed in his terror till then. Never before or since have I seen horror so intensely depicted. It seemed actually as if O'Connor's mind had been unsettled by the shock; the few words he uttered were marked with all the incoherence of distraction; but it was not words that marked his despair most strongly, the appalling and heart-sickening groans that came from the terror-stricken and dying man must haunt me while I live; the expression, too, of hopeless, imploring agony with which he turned his eyes from object to object, I can never forget. At length, appearing suddenly to recollect himself, he said, with startling alertness, but in a voice so altered that I scarce could recognise the tones:

'Purcell, Purcell, go and tell my poor mother; she must know all, and then, quick, quick, quick, call your uncle, bring him here; I must have a chance.' He made a violent but fruitless effort to rise, and after a slight pause continued, with deep and urgent solemnity: 'Doctor, how long shall I live? Don't flatter me. Compliments at a death-bed are out of place; doctor, for God's sake, as you would not have my soul perish with my body, do not mock a dying man; have I an hour to live?'

'Certainly,' replied the surgeon; 'if you will but endeavour to keep yourself tranquil; otherwise I cannot answer for a moment.'

'Well, doctor,' said the patient, 'I will obey you; now, Purcell, my first and dearest friend, will you inform my poor mother of--of what you see, and return with your uncle; I know you will.'

I took the dear fellow's hand and kissed it, it was the only answer I could give, and left the room. I asked the first female servant I chanced to meet, if her mistress were yet up, and was answered in the affirmative. Without giving myself time to hesitate, I requested her to lead me to her lady's room, which she accordingly did; she entered first, I supposed to announce my name, and I followed closely; the poor mother said something, and held out her hands to welcome me; I strove for words; I could not speak, but nature found expression; I threw myself at her feet and covered her hands with kisses and tears. My manner was enough; with a quickness almost preternatural she understood it all; she simply said the words: 'O'Connor is killed;' she uttered no more.

How I left the room I know not; I rode madly to my uncle's residence, and brought him back with me--all the rest is a blank. I remember standing by O'Connor's bedside, and kissing the cold pallid forehead again and again; I remember the pale serenity of the beautiful features; I remember that I looked upon the dead face of my friend, and I remember no more.

For many months I lay writhing and raving in the frenzy of brain fever; a hundred times I stood tottering at the brink of death, and long after my restoration to bodily health was assured, it appeared doubtful whether I should ever be restored to reason. But God dealt very mercifully

with me; His mighty hand rescued me from death and from madness when one or other appeared inevitable. As soon as I was permitted pen and ink, I wrote to the bereaved mother in a tone bordering upon frenzy. I accused myself of having made her childless; I called myself a murderer; I believed myself accursed; I could not find terms strong enough to express my abhorrence of my own conduct. But, oh! what an answer I received, so mild, so sweet, from the desolate, childless mother! its words spoke all that is beautiful in Christianity--it was forgiveness--it was resignation. I am convinced that to that letter, operating as it did upon a mind already predisposed, is owing my final determination to devote myself to that profession in which, for more than half a century, I have been a humble minister.

Years roll away, and we count them not as they pass, but their influence is not the less certain that it is silent; the deepest wounds are gradually healed, the keenest griefs are mitigated, and we, in character, feelings, tastes, and pursuits, become such altered beings, that but for some few indelible marks which past events must leave behind them, which time may soften, but can never efface; our very identity would be dubious. Who has not felt all this at one time or other? Who has not mournfully felt it? This trite, but natural train of reflection filled my mind as I approached the domain of Castle Connor some ten years after the occurrence of the events above narrated. Everything looked the same as when I had left it; the old trees stood as graceful and as grand as ever; no plough had violated the soft green sward; no utilitarian hand had constrained the wanderings of the clear and sportive stream, or disturbed the lichen-covered rocks through which it gushed, or the wild coppice that over-shadowed its sequestered nooks--but the eye that looked upon these things was altered, and memory was busy with other days, shrouding in sadness every beauty that met my sight.

As I approached the castle my emotions became so acutely painful that I had almost returned the way I came, without accomplishing the purpose for which I had gone thus far; and nothing but the conviction that my having been in the neighbourhood of Castle Connor without visiting its desolate mistress would render me justly liable to the severest censure, could overcome my reluctance to encountering the heavy task which was before me. I recognised the old servant who opened the door, but he did not know me. I was completely changed; suffering of body and mind had altered me in feature and in bearing, as much as in character. I asked the man whether his mistress ever saw visitors. He answered:

‘But seldom; perhaps, however, if she knew that an old friend wished to see her for a few minutes, she would gratify him so far.’

At the same time I placed my card in his hand, and requested him to deliver it to his mistress. He returned in a few moments, saying that his lady would be happy to see me in the parlour, and I accordingly followed him to the door, which he opened. I entered the room, and was in a moment at the side of my early friend and benefactress. I was too much agitated to speak; I could only hold the hands which she gave me, while, spite of every effort, the tears flowed fast and bitterly.

‘It was kind, very, very kind of you to come to see me,’ she said, with far more composure than I could have commanded; ‘I see it is very painful to you.’

I endeavoured to compose myself, and for a little time we remained silent; she was the first to speak:

‘You will be surprised, Mr. Purcell, when you observe the calmness with which I can speak of him who was dearest to me, who is gone; but my thoughts are always with him, and the recollections of his love’--her voice faltered a little--‘and the hope of meeting him hereafter enables me to bear existence.’

I said I know not what; something about resignation, I believe.

'I hope I am resigned; God made me more: so,' she said. 'Oh, Mr. Purcell, I have often thought I loved my lost child TOO well. It was natural--he was my only child--he was----' She could not proceed for a few moments: 'It was very natural that I should love him as I did; but it may have been sinful; I have often thought so. I doated upon him--I idolised him--I thought too little of other holier affections; and God may have taken him from me, only to teach me, by this severe lesson, that I owed to heaven a larger share of my heart than to anything earthly. I cannot think of him now without more solemn feelings than if he were with me. There is something holy in our thoughts of the dead; I feel it so.' After a pause, she continued--'Mr. Purcell, do you remember his features well? they were very beautiful.' I assured her that I did. 'Then you can tell me if you think this a faithful likeness.' She took from a drawer a case in which lay a miniature. I took it reverently from her hands; it was indeed very like--touchingly like. I told her so; and she seemed gratified.

As the evening was wearing fast, and I had far to go, I hastened to terminate my visit, as I had intended, by placing in her hand a letter from her son to me, written during his sojourn upon the Continent. I requested her to keep it; it was one in which he spoke much of her, and in terms of the tenderest affection. As she read its contents the heavy tears gathered in her eyes, and fell, one by one, upon the page; she wiped them away, but they still flowed fast and silently. It was in vain that she tried to read it; her eyes were filled with tears: so she folded the letter, and placed it in her bosom. I rose to depart, and she also rose.

'I will not ask you to delay your departure,' said she; 'your visit here must have been a painful one to you. I cannot find words to thank you for the letter as I would wish, or for all your kindness. It has given me a pleasure greater than I thought could have fallen to the lot of a creature so very desolate as I am; may God bless you for it!' And thus we parted; I never saw Castle Connor or its solitary inmate more.