

# The Book

By Christopher Blayre

I happened to be in our Registrar's room one day, and quite unconsciously I produced "an effect." I had some letters in my hand, and when I had finished with Blayre, I referred casually to one of them. I said:

"Do you know anything of a man called Max Carlyon?"

He sprang to his feet and almost shouted:

"Do I?—what do you know about him?—ask Amboyne! Where is he?"

To this singularly confused address I had no direct answer to make. What I said was:

"I don't know anything about him? Preserve your capillary decoration against the time when age shall commit indiscretions regarding your bumps. There is a letter from him—he appears to have dropped very unexpectedly into a Baronetcy and some books. Whatever may be his views about the Baronetcy, it is clear he does not care a hang about the books. He wants to sell them, so as to repair his house, which would appear to be mouldy. That's all. Now *you* tell me about him."

The Registrar had re-seated himself, and looked rather ashamed of his demonstration. He said rather wearily:

"Oh! nothing in particular—but what a small place the world is! Amboyne and I came across Max Carlyon years ago, under very painful and unpleasant circumstances. Fancy *him* a Baronet! I thought he must have died of alcoholic poisoning by now. I hope he hasn't got any children."

"Sir," said I, "you interest and excite me. Shall I ask him to call? You might gather up the threads of what appears to have been a very pleasant acquaintance."

"Don't play the fool—it isn't a matter to laugh about. What are you going to do about it?"

"Well—I shall put the matter before the Council, and then—I hope—I shall go and see the books. He says there are hundreds of volumes of early Medicine and Science—especially Occult Science. It sounds like a very interesting lot."

"Whatever you do, don't have him here, I couldn't stand the sight of him," thus the Registrar, uneasily.

To pass over the preliminary and intermediate stages, I went in due course to Clough-Iveagh in the North of Ireland, where I met the new Baronet. I have never learned what were his relations with our Registrar and the Regius Professor of Medicine, but I agreed with every word they had not said. He was an appalling Beast. Fortunately for me, after the day of my arrival I saw no more of him. The house was empty save for the books, and was in wrack and ruin. Sir Max Carlyon left next morning for an unknown destination, and I put up at the village Inn, which was unpretentious and comfortable. Still more fortunately for me I found that the pastor of the parish was an old college friend, Fergus MacDermott, of whom I had lost sight for years. I spent my evenings with him, and he told me—in sections—the amazing story which I am going to write down.

The Library, which was kept partially clean by an old Irishman and his wife who lived in the Lodge, was a Bookman's Paradise. The books were wonderful. I found the *editiones principes* of all the rarest works of 16th and 17th Century Science and Medicine, but what made my inspection lengthy and tedious was the remarkable fact that, though they were all in contemporary bindings, they were all lettered on the backs as Theological Works, Lives of the

Saints, Commentaries, Biblical Exegesis and the like, and every volume had to be taken down and examined separately. It puzzled me extremely until I heard the 'story' from MacDermott.

I asked him if he knew anything about the Beast.

"Divil a word," he replied, "and don't want to, but his great-uncle married my great-aunt. You know"—course I didn't—"my father and grand-father were parsons here before me—that's how it is I'm here."

Mac did not appear to be much impressed by the advantages of his hereditary cure of souls—but he had a friendly parish, an efficient stable, and an excellent cellar.

"You know," said he—of course I didn't—"this man is an unexpected arrival from Heaven knows where. He wasn't on speaking terms with any of the family—that's why he has only got the place, strictly entailed. The Carlyon title seems never to pass direct from father to son; it spurts about like a firework cracker, you never know whom it will hit next. By the way, you ought to spend the night in that library."

"Not for the wealth of the Indies!"

"Don't interrupt—in that library on the 13th of August. You'd see the Family Ghost, and, with luck, might have your brains bashed out."

"Thanks—no. But tell me about it.

And he told me. The following is the gist of it, extracted from Mac under the influence of much tobacco and the generous wine of the country. I seldom had to interrupt him, excepting for the verification of genealogical details, which in his discourse had a tendency to become confused.

"Way back in the early 19th century the then Sir Willoughby Carlyon died without male heirs, and it was ascertained that his brother Charlton had died in Rio de Janeiro, years before, leaving a son, Erule, who was a briefless barrister in London, and than whom no one was more surprised at his unexpected accession to the title and estate. His father had never addressed speech or letter to his elder brother since, as a lad, he had betaken himself to Brazil; but even if he had remained in England it is probable that the surviving Carlyon would have been equally isolated from the rest of his family.

"This condition of affairs requires some explanation, and the explanation is as follows: — When His Majesty King James the First instituted the perpetuity of Knighthood by conferring the new title of Baronet upon such gentlemen as were willing to aid him in his Irish reforms,' one of the first to assume the dignity of the new Order was Mr. Carlyon of Clough-Iveagh. The Carlyons of Clough-Iveagh were said to be the oldest, proudest, and wealthiest of the Catholic families in the north of Ireland—that they were old, and proud, and wealthy, there is no doubt, but whether they were entitled to the superlative is a question upon which Milesian genealogists have been divided.

"Anyhow, the Canyons who succeeded one another had one fetich which was embodied in the emblazonment of the family escutcheon; to wit: 'On a field argent, a crucifix proper, supported dexter and sinister by a hand gules, bearing a sword,' with the motto 'To the Faith, faithful.' From this it may be gathered that the Carlyons were Catholic to the backbone, and every tradition of the family was in some way connected with, or the outcome of, their devotion to the Church. Two of the Canlyons had been Cardinals, and the family tree positively bristled with Priors, Monsignores and Bishops of the Holy See—more than once the family had been threatened with extinction by the celibacy of these holy men, and had the baronetcy been conferred upon Mr. Carlyon of Clough-Iveagh in fee-tail it would have become extinct in the third generation. As it was, the succession was unhampered, and fell from generation to

generation upon the nearest living male heir of the late baronet. It was thus that one morning Erule Carlyon woke in his chambers in Lincoln's Inn to find himself entitled to the Red Hand of Ulster upon his armoial bearings, and, what was of more importance to a briefless barrister, to the house and estate of Clough-Iveagh.

It was a complete surprise to him, for, from the day he was born in Rio de Janeiro, he had never held any communication with, and had never seen, his uncle, Sir Willoughby, and for this—to them—all-sufficient reason. His father whilst a lad at Oxford had fallen in love with a Protestant maiden, the daughter of the Dean of his College, and had announced to his brother his intention of marrying the lady. The elder brother had promptly, with the traditional bigotry of the Carlyons, informed his younger brother that, should he disgrace the family by union with 'the heretic woman,' he would be disowned on the spot by all other members of the family; and moreover he was warned that the lady would never be recognised by them, or by the Church, as his wife. Deeply wounded, and boiling with fury, young Carlyon formally cut himself adrift from his brother, who, in turn, ruled a crimson line through his name on the pedigree that was preserved at Clough-Iveagh.

"Married to his 'sweet heretic,' and, in due course, father of a baby boy, the image of his mother, it is hardly surprising that Carlyon embraced the Protestant faith; and young Erule was duly baptized a Protestant, in defiance of a last strenuous effort on the part of his uncle and sundry ecclesiastical 'collaterals' to save his young soul from inevitable hell-fire. The breach had been complete, and Erule Carlyon had grown to man's estate, and had been called to the Bar, conscious indeed of the fact that he was the nephew of Sir Willoughby Carlyon of Clough-Iveagh, but beyond that knowing nothing of his family, save in the remembrance of his mother who had died when he was a child, and of his father who had followed her some ten years later to the grave.

"One warm spring afternoon, therefore, in the year of grace 18— Sir Erule Carlyon arrived, a stranger, and, in the eyes of his tenantry, a heretic, at Clough-Iveagh, the first avowed Protestant Carlyon who had trodden the ancestral halls. I say the first 'avowed Protestant,' for there dwelt in the memory of Sir Erule a story that had been told him, years ago, by his father, of a great-grand-uncle Spencer, who had been regarded by the family as having heretical tendencies, and as having in some mysterious way come to a bad end in consequence. So far as he could gather the details of the story were as follows:

"Sir Spencer Carlyon had been a student. He lived at Clough-Iveagh a solitary life, unbroken by any companionships save that of his chaplain-confessor, a young priest, distantly connected with the family, and noted in the Roman Catholic Church, despite his youth, for his exemplary piety and fanatic austerity. It was not without an object that His Eminence Cardinal Willoughby Carlyon, principal of the Benedictine confraternity at Monte Cassino, had appointed Monsignore Whiston to the Chaplaincy of Clough-Iveagh. Rumours had reached him in Rome to the effect that the devotion of Sir Spencer Carlyon to the interests of his Church left much to be desired, and he hoped that the propinquity and example of Monsignore Whiston would effectually check the tendency that, according to rumour, Sir Spencer betrayed to dabble in the Occult Sciences, Mediæval Magic, and other studies forbidden to her children by the Church of Rome. It was even whispered that he had leanings towards the doctrines of Luther and Calvin! Accordingly the young priest had been installed at Clough-Iveagh as the custodian of Sir Spencer's orthodoxy, and, two years later, the winter sun shone in upon a ghastly scene in the Library.

"The first servant to enter in the morning was greeted by the spectacle of his master sitting in his accustomed chair, his head lying on the table before him, his brains beaten out. A window

behind him was wide open, the shrubs outside were torn and trampled, beneath the casement a blood-bespattered paperweight was found, which had evidently been the instrument of Sir Spencer's murder, and from that day Monsignore Whiston had never been seen or heard of.

"Sir Spencer having died a bachelor, the baronetcy descended to his younger brother Charlton, who consequently relinquished his purpose of entering the Church.

Of all his ancestors 'the heretic Sir Spencer' was the one whose history interested most deeply the young Sir Erule on his accession to the title. That his great-grand-uncle had been murdered in a fit of fanatic frenzy by his Chaplain, he never for one moment doubted. He deeply regretted that he had never been able to discover, indirectly or otherwise, the nature of the studies that had been brought to a close by his ancestor's death. That he had been engrossed in study at the moment of his murder there seemed no doubt, but whatever had been the books or papers that had cumbered the desk at which the corpse was found, either they had been taken away with him by the murderer, or had been destroyed. The library consisted almost entirely of Theological Works, and no folio, quarto, octavo, duodecimo or pamphlet on the shelves seemed in any way to savour of the forbidden studies which had led to his ancestor's destruction. Often, late at night, whilst Sir Erule sat in that same chair at that same desk, immersed in his literary work, he would lean back, lost in thought on this subject, his eyes fastened upon the darkness before him, which his single working lamp was powerless to pierce.

"It was on one of these occasions, a few months after his arrival at Clough-Iveagh, that he was made the victim of a terrifying and wholly inexplicable incident.

"Quite suddenly, without the slightest shadow of warning, he was seized with a sensation of deathly sickness and apprehension. He was overwhelmed with a conviction that *Something* stood behind his chair, but, paralyzed with terror, he seemed unable to move. At last, by a strong effort of will, he turned in his chair, and, as he did so, it seemed to him that he caught a momentary glimpse of a tall figure, robed in the black cassock of a Benedictine Monk, standing behind his chair. The face of the Apparition was deathly white, the eyes, like flaming jet, stood out against its pallor. The right arm was raised above its head in a menacing gesture. That was all he could catch, as the Figure faded in the shadows of the heavily curtained window behind his desk.

"To put it mildly he was severely shaken up, and turning back to the desk he became aware of a spot of pale light in a far corner of the Library. As he watched it, fascinated, and frankly terrified, it moved, and appeared to wander up and down the book-cases and along the shelves. He pulled himself together with a violent effort and advanced towards the wandering light. He reached it.

"There-within a few feet of him, suspended in the air and sharply outlined against the surrounding gloom—was the Spectre of a Human Hand, bearing a taper. The taper was alight, but the whole hand and the taper seemed to be, of themselves, luminous, as they wandered from shelf to shelf as when one searches for a volume in the dark.

"His brain reeled. It was dawn when he found himself awaking from unconsciousness in one of the deep chairs of the Library, and crept away to bed.

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"Sir Erule Carlyon was eight and twenty, sound in mind and limb, and of exemplary habits of life. The idea of his being frightened by a ghost was preposterous to his daylight senses—yet, the impression of the preceding night had been too startlingly vivid for him to pass it by without a further thought. Naturally his mind reverted to the fate of 'the heretic Sir Spencer,' and on the

following afternoon he sought the Chapel of Clough-Iveagh and found the tablet commemorative of Sir Spencer's death. It read simply:—

*Sacred to the Memory of*

SPENCER WILLOUGHBY CARLYON,

VIIth Baronet,

*who departed this life on*

*the 13th August, 1787.*

*R.I.P.*

“He started as he read: it was now the 14th August. The preceding night had been the anniversary of his great-grand-uncle's murder!

“That night, and on many nights after, he watched in the Library for the re-appearance of the Apparition and of the Searching Hand. In vain. No supernatural happening disturbed his work, and as days formed weeks, and weeks grew into months, the incident became blurred amid later impressions. More completely was it obliterated by the fact that Sir Erule was on the eve of taking to himself a wife, the daughter of the Protestant rector of the neighbouring village. (‘My grand-aunt,’ commented Mac, as he paused to refill his pipe.—and eke his glass. ‘that was the foundation of the ‘Protestant succession’ at Clough-Iveagh.’)”

After a moment or two Mac went on.

“They were married on the 15th of August that year. On the 13th Carlyon was sitting, reading, in the Library, not thinking at all about the Ghost, as you may suppose, when suddenly he felt creeping over him the same sensation that had terrified him a year ago. The date flashed into his mind, and in an instant the whole thing came back to him, and he sprang from his chair, turning as he did so.

“There, as in the year gone by, stood the Apparition—the spectral form of a Romish Priest, whose coal-black eyes seemed to burn into his own. Mastering himself with a supreme effort, he sprang forward as the Spectre raised his arm. Then he saw that the hand held one of the square leaden paper-weights that our fore-fathers were accustomed to use. As he sprang *into the space occupied by the Apparition*, a sensation of icy coldness and faintness gripped his whole body—in another second he had recovered from the shock—and he was alone.

“Quickly he turned towards the point where he had seen the Hand on the former occasion: there it was—wandering from shelf to shelf. He came close and watched it as it roamed over the bookcases.

“The books that became visible in turn as the luminosity of the Severed Hand reached them, were all of the most orthodox kind. Carlyon noted some of the titles lettered on the backs. There were the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of Gulielmus Durandus, printed at Venice in 1559; Ducange's *Glossarium*; the complete works of the Abbé Fleury in the edition of 1739; the Life of the Arch-Romanist Julien de la Rovère, Pope Julius I., who paved the way for Leo X.; the Amsterdam, 1755, edition of the *Testament* of Richelieu. All these details he noted as the ghostly taper passed the volumes, and then, suddenly—even as he looked—a great folio edition of the

*Commentaries* of Origen disappeared before his eyes! As the volume vanished, the hand holding the taper also disappeared, and Sir Erule, bathed in a cold perspiration, was left in absolute darkness in the corner of the Library.

“He had watched too long to be content to abandon his investigation there. He returned to his former place, and, bringing his chair and the lamp into the corner, he deposited the latter upon a stool and seated himself to watch the empty space in the shelf whence the Origen had been rapt by an unseen hand. For an hour he kept his eyes fastened upon the gap, and then, hypnotised by the fixity of his gaze, and worn out by the reaction of his nerves, he fell fast asleep.

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“When he awoke it was broad day. The lamp had gone out, and—the Origen was back in its place!

“With a stifled exclamation he drew it from the shelves and carried it to the table. There he opened it.

“It was Origen only as to its outer cover. Enclosed in the binding that might once have contained the early Christian Commentary, was the *Parva Naturalia* of Albertus Magnus, the corner-stone of Mediæval Magic.

“*This* must have been the work in which Sir Spencer Carlyon had been engrossed when the blow, treacherously delivered from behind, had hurried his unshriven soul into the presence of his Maker. Feverishly he turned its leaves to find whether any papers or notes were concealed within. About half-way through, two leaves were stuck together: cautiously he began to separate them; they adhered to one another with a clotted, sticky, brown substance, now dried and hardened by the lapse of time.

“Sir Erule started back. *This* had been the page at which his ancestor’s studies had been brought to a termination. His brains and blood served the purpose of a ghastly book-marker to identify the place!

“Shuddering, the Master of Clough-Iveagh restored the volume—the silent witness of Sir Spencer’s murder—to its place in the dark corner of the Library, and stood there wrapped in thought.

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“Well,” concluded Mac, “he married my great-aunt the following day, and my father says she wondered for years why he seemed so grave and grey on that important occasion.

“But he never told her of his vigil in the Library; and to the day of her death she never knew why, at night-fall on the 13th of August in every year, the Library was locked up by her husband, who kept the key himself until he re-opened it on the morning of the 14th.”

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We bought the books. I did not think it essential to point out in my report that the majority of them would require to have the backs re-lettered. There was an awful row over the expense of this.

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*(Note.—Reading over this Record after the lapse of many years, I think it proper to add here that Sir Max Carlyon died some years after the sale of the Library at Clough-Iveagh, childless, and as there appeared to be no living representative of the family, the property, in a shameful condition of decay, escheated to the Crown.—C.B.)*