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by Charles James Lever (1806-1872)

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[NOTE: There is a list of bookmarks, or pointers, at the end of the
file for those who may wish to sample the author's ideas before making
an entire meal of them. D.W.]

THE CONFESSIONS OF HARRY LORREQUER, Volume 1

[By Charles James Lever (1806-1872)]

Dublin

MDCCCXXXIX.

[Note: Though the title page has no author's name inscribed,
this work is generally attributed to Charles James Lever.]

Volume 1. (Chapters I. to X.)

"We talked of pipe-clay regulation caps--
Long twenty-fours--short culverins and mortars--
Condemn'd the 'Horse Guards' for a set of raps,
And cursed our fate at being in such quarters.
Some smoked, some sighed, and some were heard to snore;
Some wished themselves five fathoms 'neat the Solway;
And some did pray--who never prayed before--
That they might get the 'route' for Cork or Galway."

To
Sir George Hamilton Seymour, G.C.H.
&c. &c.

My Dear Sir Hamilton,

If a feather will show how the wind blows, perhaps my dedicating to you even as light matter as these Confessions may in some measure prove how grateful I feel for the many kindnesses I have received from you in the course of our intimacy. While thus acknowledging a debt, I must also avow that another motive strongly prompts me upon this occasion. I am not aware of any one, to whom with such propriety a volume of anecdote and adventure should be inscribed, as to one, himself well known as an inimitable narrator. Could I have stolen for my story, any portion of the grace and humour with which I have heard you adorn many of your own, while I should deem this offering more worthy of your acceptance, I should also feel more confident of its reception by the public.

With every sentiment of esteem and regard,
Believe me very faithfully yours,
THE AUTHOR

Bruxelles, December, 1839.

PREFATORY EPISTLE.

Dear Public,

When first I set about recording the scenes which occupy these pages, I had no intention of continuing them, except in such stray and scattered fragments as the columns of a Magazine (FOOTNOTE: The Dublin University Magazine.) permit of; and when at length I discovered that some interest had attached not only to the adventures, but to their narrator, I would

gladly have retired with my "little laurels" from a stage, on which, having only engaged to appear between the acts, I was destined to come forward as a principal character.

Among the "miserics of human life," a most touching one is spoken of--the being obliged to listen to the repetition of a badly sung song, because some well-wishing, but not over discreet friend of the singer has called loudly for an encore.

I begin very much to fear that something of the kind has taken place here, and that I should have acted a wiser part, had I been contented with even the still small voice of a few partial friends, and retired from the boards in the pleasing delusion of success; but unfortunately, the same easy temperament that has so often involved me before, has been faithful to me here; and when you pretended to be pleased, unluckily, I believed you.

So much of apology for the matter--a little now for the manner of my offending, and I have done. I wrote as I felt--sometimes in good spirits, sometimes in bad--always carelessly--for, God help me, I can do no better.

When the celibacy of the Fellows of Trinity College, Dublin, became an active law in that University, the Board proceeded to enforce it, by summoning to their presence all the individuals who it was well known had transgressed the regulation, and among them figured Dr. S., many of whose sons were at the same time students in the college. "Are you married, Dr. S-----r?" said the bachelor vice-provost, in all the dignity and pride of conscious innocence. "Married!" said the father of ten children, with a start of involuntary horror;--"married?" "Yes sir, married." "Why sir, I am no more married than the Provost." This was quite enough--no further questions were asked, and the head of the University preferred a merciful course towards the offender, to repudiating his wife and disowning his children. Now for the application. Certain captious and incredulous people have doubted the veracity of the adventures I have recorded in these pages; I do not think it necessary to appeal to concurrent testimony and credible witnesses for their proof, but I pledge myself to the fact that every tittle I have related is as true as that my name is Lorrequer--need I say more?

Another objection has been made to my narrative, and I cannot pass it by without a word of remark;--"these Confessions are wanting in scenes of touching and pathetic interest" (FOOTNOTE: We have the author's permission to state, that all the pathetic and moving incidents of his career he has reserved for a second series of "Confessions," to be entitled "Lorrequer Married?"--Publisher's Note.)--true, quite true; but I console myself on this head, for I remember hearing of an author whose paraphrase of the book of Job was refused by a publisher, if he could not throw a little more humour into it; and if I have not been more miserable and more unhappy, I am very sorry for it on your account, but you must

excuse my regretting it on my own. Another story and I have done;--the Newgate Calendar makes mention of a notorious housebreaker, who closed his career of outrage and violence by the murder of a whole family, whose house he robbed; on the scaffold he entreated permission to speak a few words to the crowd beneath, and thus addressed them:--"My friends, it is quite true I murdered this family; in cold blood I did it--one by one they fell beneath my hand, while I rifled their coffers, and took forth their effects; but one thing is imputed to me, which I cannot die without denying--it is asserted that I stole an extinguisher; the contemptible character of this petty theft is a stain upon my reputation, that I cannot suffer to disgrace my memory." So would I now address you for all the graver offences of my book; I stand forth guilty--miserably, palpably guilty--they are mine every one of them; and I dare not, I cannot deny them; but if you think that the blunders in French and the hash of spelling so widely spread through these pages, are attributable to me; on the faith of a gentleman I pledge myself you are wrong, and that I had nothing to do with them. If my thanks for the kindness and indulgence with which these hastily written and rashly conceived sketches have been received by the press and the public, are of any avail, let me add, in conclusion, that a more grateful author does not exist than

HARRY LORREQUER

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A WORD OF INTRODUCTION.

"Story! God bless you; I have none to tell, sir."

It is now many--do not ask me to say how many--years since I received from the Horse Guards the welcome intelligence that I was gazetted to an insigniy in his Majesty's __th Foot, and that my name, which had figured so long in the "Duke's" list, with the words "a very hard case" appended, should at length appear in the monthly record of promotions and appointments.

Since then my life has been passed in all the vicissitudes of war and peace. The camp and the bivouac--the reckless gaiety of the mess-table--the comfortless solitude of a French prison--the exciting turmoils of active service--the wearisome monotony of garrison duty, I have alike partaken of, and experienced. A career of this kind, with a temperament ever ready to go with the humour of those about him will always be sure of its meed of adventure. Such has mine been; and with no greater pretension than to chronicle a few of the scenes in which I have borne a part, and revive the memory of the other actors in them--some, alas! Now no more--I have ventured upon these "Confessions."

If I have not here selected that portion of my life which most abounded in striking events and incidents most worthy of recording, my excuse is simply, because being my first appearance upon the boards, I preferred accustoming myself to the look of the house, while performing the "Cock," to coming before the audience in the more difficult part of Hamlet.

As there are unhappily impracticable people in the world, who, as Curran expressed it, are never content to know "who killed the gauger, if you can't inform them who wore his corduroys"--to all such I would, in deep

humility, say, that with my "Confessions" they have nothing to do--I have neither story nor moral--my only pretension to the one, is the detail of a passion which marked some years of my life; my only attempt at the other, the effort to show how prolific in hair-breadth 'scapes may a man's career become, who, with a warm imagination and easy temper, believes too much, and rarely can feign a part without forgetting that he is acting. Having said thus much, I must once more bespeak the indulgence never withheld from a true penitent, and at once begin my "Confessions."

CHAPTER I.

ARRIVAL IN CORK--CIVIC FESTIVITIES--PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

It was on a splendid morning in the autumn of the year 181_ that the Howard transport, with four hundred of his Majesty's 4_th Regt., dropped anchor in the beautiful harbour of Cove; the sea shone under the purple light of the rising sun with a rich rosy hue, beautifully in contrast with the different tints of the foliage of the deep woods already tinged with the brown of autumn. Spike Island lay "sleeping upon its broad shadow," and the large ensign which crowns the battery was wrapped around the flag-staff, there not being even air enough to stir it. It was still so early, that but few persons were abroad; and as we leaned over the bulwarks, and looked now, for the first time for eight long years, upon British ground, many an eye filled, and many a heaving breast told how full of recollections that short moment was, and how different our feelings from the gay buoyancy with which we had sailed from that same harbour for the Peninsula; many of our best and bravest had we left behind us, and more than one native to the land we were approaching had found his last rest in the soil of the stranger. It was, then, with a mingled sense of pain and pleasure, we gazed upon that peaceful little village, whose white cottages lay dotted along the edge of the harbour. The moody silence our thoughts had shed over us was soon broken: the preparations for disembarking had begun, and I recollect well to this hour how, shaking off the load that oppressed my heart, I descended the gangway, humming poor Wolfe's well-known song--

"Why, soldiers, why
Should we be melancholy, boys?"

And to this elasticity of spirits--whether the result of my profession, or the gift of God--as Dogberry has it--I know not--I owe the greater portion of the happiness I have enjoyed in a life, whose changes and vicissitudes have equalled most men's.

Drawn up in a line along the shore, I could scarce refrain from a smile at our appearance. Four weeks on board a transport will certainly not

contribute much to the "personnel" of any unfortunate therein confined; but when, in addition to this, you take into account that we had not received new clothes for three years--if I except caps for our grenadiers, originally intended for a Scotch regiment, but found to be all too small for the long-headed generation. Many a patch of brown and grey, variegated the faded scarlet, "of our uniform," and scarcely a pair of knees in the entire regiment did not confess their obligations to a blanket. But with all this, we shewed a stout, weather-beaten front, that, disposed as the passer-by might feel to laugh at our expense, very little caution would teach him it was fully as safe to indulge it in his sleeve.

The bells from every steeple and tower rung gaily out a peal of welcome as we marched into "that beautiful city called Cork," our band playing "Garryowen"--for we had been originally raised in Ireland, and still among our officers maintained a strong majority from that land of punch, priests, and potatoes--the tattered flag of the regiment proudly waving over our heads, and not a man amongst us whose warm heart did not bound behind a Waterloo medal. Well--well! I am now--alas, that I should say it--somewhat in the "sear and yellow;" and I confess, after the experience of some moments of high, triumphant feeling, that I never before felt within me, the same animating, spirit-filling glow of delight, as rose within my heart that day, as I marched at the head of my company down George's-street.

We were soon settled in barracks; and then began a series of entertainments on the side of the civic dignities of Cork, which soon led most of us to believe that we had only escaped shot and shell to fall less gloriously beneath champagne and claret. I do not believe there is a coroner in the island who would have pronounced but the one verdict over the regiment--"Killed by the mayor and corporation," had we so fallen.

First of all, we were dined by the citizens of Cork--and, to do them justice, a harder drinking set of gentlemen no city need boast; then we were feasted by the corporation; then by the sheriffs; then came the mayor, solus; then an address, with a cold collation, that left eight of us on the sick-list for a fortnight; but the climax of all was a grand entertainment given in the mansion-house, and to which upwards of two thousand were invited. It was a species of fancy ball, beginning by a dejeuner at three o'clock in the afternoon, and ending--I never yet met the man who could tell when it ended; as for myself, my finale partook a little of the adventurous, and I may as well relate it.

After waltzing for about an hour with one of the prettiest girls I ever set eyes upon, and getting a tender squeeze of the hand, as I restored her to a most affable-looking old lady in a blue turban and a red velvet gown who smiled most benignly on me, and called me "Meejor," I retired to recruit for a new attack, to a small table, where three of ours were quaffing "ponche a la Romaine," with a crowd of Corkagians about them,

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