

Chapter I

Childhood

I WAS BORN IN 1813, on the 3d of February, at the Camp Hill Cottage on my father's farm, Lower Castletown, parish of Cappaigh, county Tyrone, Ireland.¹ The small farm of twenty-three acres on which the cottage stands was a part of my grandfather's larger farm, which he cut off and allotted to my father in view of his approaching marriage. The cottage itself was built by my father with the assistance of his brother Archy, chiefly by the labor of their own hands. It is a nice little place on the bank of the river Strule, about a half mile below Cappaigh bridge. The river here is about two hundred feet wide, and after receiving Cappaigh Burn and the Morn and Derg waters, empties into Lough Foyle at Londonderry, some twenty miles below our place. It was here I first saw the light, and where I remained till in my fifth year; and what has ever seemed strange to me is the fact that its picture has always remained fresh in my mind, with all its details of location and scenery. So much so that when my son James visited Ireland fifty-six years after I left it, I was able to give him a plot and description of it so correct that he recognized it at sight; and when I revisited it myself in 1882, sixty-four years after I had left it, there was not the slightest correction to be made in my mental map. It was all there in every particular, as I had seen it when a child and still remembered it, except the spring well on the croft brae, which it surprised me not to find until the owner of the place informed me he had displaced it by sub-drainage to improve the land for cultivation.

The vivid and permanent impression which that place and its surroundings made upon my mind at so early a period affords me an interesting subject of speculation. Why is it, a memory not very tena-

cious in other respects in after life should receive such clear impressions, even to the minutest details of form and landscape, at so early a period, and retain them fresh and unimpaired ever afterwards? It must not only be true, as metaphysicians teach, that we learn more in the first five years of life than in any ten years afterwards, but also that we retain whatever we learn in those five years incomparably better than anything we learn at a later date. There is this about it, perhaps: the fact of the objects being all fresh in my mind, and at once permanently cut off from view afterwards, may have acted in a manner to preserve the impression distinct and unconfused, similar to the effect of closing the camera suddenly on receiving the impression on the metallic plate.

I remember also many incidents of my early Irish life quite clearly.

On one occasion, when my father and mother went to the neighboring market town, they left me and the dog to keep house, giving me strict orders to remain inside with the door bolted, and to let no one in on any account; and after seeing that I had bolted it securely on the inside, they left to return at noon. Beggars were numerous at the time, mostly thieves—tramps we call them here. It was a bright summer day, but gloomy in the house. I stood the solitary confinement very well for a while, but at length hours seemed to stretch out into days, and I saw from the window a plaything which I coveted greatly, and the longer I looked the more I desired to have it. There could be no harm in opening the door just long enough to run out and get it. No tramps were in sight. My good resolution was unable to resist the temptation. I disobeyed commands and fell from duty. I remember the trepidation of heart to this day with which I drew the bolt and peeped out to see that the coast was clear. Then I made the plunge, secured the coveted object, and turned to re-enter; but there an entirely unexpected obstacle presented itself. It was my first experience of the truth that “the way of the transgressor is hard.” The dog which was shut up with me had a stricter sense of duty, even if his discretion was poor. He was a remarkably sagacious and faithful watch dog, such as were highly prized at that time, robbery in the neighborhood being of almost nightly occurrence. What stock he was of I cannot say; all that I remember is that he was greatly valued by my father. He had been shut up with me as a reserve force against tramps; and, as my misfortune proved, was literally faithful to his trust, and no respecter of persons. He would not let me recross the threshold, nor come outside himself.

The dog and I had always been the best of friends; he had been my constant companion in the hunt after water rats, and, according to report, had once saved my life by dragging me out of a ditch filled with water into which I had stumbled. At first I was indignant, but found threats useless. Then I tried coaxing; but after exhausting all manner of blandishments upon him he was still inexorable. There he stood in the centre of the doorway with his fore feet on the sill, showing his teeth and growling vigorously at every effort on my part to enter. This performance went on till I became desperate. Tramps might appear any moment or, what was nearly as bad, the time was approaching for the return of my parents who might thus find me unfaithful to my charge. I well remember how this thought tormented me; and in desperation, like the old man in the fable, I resolved to try what virtue there was in stones, hurling them at him with all the force and rapidity I could muster. But all to no purpose: what blows he could not dodge he received with patience, but did not flinch a jot. At last one went wide of the mark and smashed through a pane of glass in the front window. This capped the climax of my distress. I remembered no more, but when my parents returned they found the dog at his post in the open doorway, holding the fort; and found me lying asleep in the front yard near by, with my face all smeared with tears and dust.

I remember another rather ludicrous occurrence in which I figured shortly afterwards. Mark Mellon, a neighbor and relative, called to complain about our cattle breaking into his oats field. Mark was very negligent about repairing fences, but quite ready to complain of trespass. My father was not at home; and when he and my mother got into a heated altercation, I hastened to the back room where my father kept his arms and uniform—he was an officer in a local militia company at the time—and, taking his sword from where it stood behind the door, I ran out and in great excitement presented it to my mother. This circumstance changed the contention into merriment, and they parted in good humor.

I also well remember numerous visits to my grandfather's place a very short distance down the lane, and the good times I had with my uncles and aunts there; and the tribulations and conflicts I was often involved in with a flock of geese belonging to a family who lived on the way between the two places. I always supplied myself with a long rod or brush; but at hatching time, and when the goslings were young and

the geese cross, the ganders were often too bold to respect my switch, and if they attacked me there was nothing for it but to run till I could procure some one to escort me past them.

But the time came when my grandparents and the residue of the family, excepting my father, concluded to follow those who had gone before to America. I remember well the procession on the occasion of their departure. They had sold the farm and farm stock—all except such household goods as were packed to take along—and their neighbors and friends were on hand to see them off and bid them farewell. The jaunting car with the female portion of the family going before, and the carts with the goods following, then a long escort on foot, resembled a funeral procession more than anything else, and was pretty much the same in feeling. At the top of a hill on the road, about a mile distant, was the place of parting. That was the last point from which the old homestead could be seen: a homestead which had sheltered the family and their ancestors for so many generations. It was sad to look back upon it for the last time. After a great deal of tear shedding and hand shaking, and good wishes and blessings, the kind hearted crowd turned homeward, and the little emigrant party continued their solitary way onward with sad hearts.

The Scotch-Irish, as well as the Celts, are an exceedingly tender hearted people. The occasion of whole families emigrating to America in those days was frequent. It was regarded as a final parting—as much so indeed as could be effected by death, as no return was expected; and on such occasions the whole country round about assembled to bid the departing ones godspeed and farewell, which always produced an outburst of emotion on both sides. They so much resembled funerals that they were called “living wakes,” to distinguish them from the other class.

My parents and I were with the returning crowd: they with sad hearts, I without any due appreciation of the gravity of the occasion. Uncle Samuel and my father alone of the family now remained behind. My father was regarded as provided for; comfortably fixed or comparatively so as to his neighbors. He had a wife and child to care for, and it was deemed best for him not to give up certainty for hope, or incur the risks of emigration to seek his fortune in the New World. Samuel remained behind only to settle up some business which could not be closed in time to accompany the others; but he expected to be able to

leave also in a few months. Then none but my father would remain. It was not the rule for families in affluent circumstances to emigrate, or for any one reasonably provided for to do so. Whilst my grandfather was in comfortable circumstances so long as his family remained single and under his own roof, yet they were too numerous to give each a start in the world for a new family. Armour, the oldest son, had already married and would have been given the Camp Hill farm instead of my father, but he married against the will of his parents; and although the lady was respectable there was a slight unpleasantness which induced him to leave with his young wife to join his uncle John in America. He did not find his uncle in Westmoreland county where he expected to meet him; but he remained there, and almost the entire family followed and settled in the same neighborhood some years afterwards, as heretofore related.²

People born and raised in the New World can hardly realize in imagination the conditions of life in the Old. In the New World hitherto young people may marry with little or no provision or calculation for the support of a family. If without property or income, the opportunities for employment and for procuring the means of living are so abundant that they can ignore the fear of starvation and want; but it is not so in the old country. There the wages of labor are so low, and opportunities of remunerative employment so scarce, that to maintain a wife and children on the ordinary wages of a laborer or mechanic is hardly possible; and to rise above a laborer's condition is equally difficult. Among the middle classes, farms are divided into the smallest portions which will produce the necessaries of life of the cheapest kind under rigid economy; and without such a farm, or some business equally lucrative, a man who would marry without means to emigrate would have want and starvation staring him in the face.

But returning to my life in Ireland: Although it was a settled point when my grandparents left that we should remain permanently at the old place, my father soon began to entertain thoughts of following his family. Letters from America were eagerly looked for, and gazetteers and books of geography descriptive of the country and its resources eagerly read. I well remember the long winter nights which were spent by my parents perusing and discussing descriptions of different parts of America, and the products of the land, and opportunities for bettering the condition of settlers there. In the course of two years they had

fully made up their minds to leave. Then came much talk and consultation about selling the farm, and disposing of the stock and settling up affairs. It all resulted in the aggregation of about two hundred guineas in gold coin, equal to one thousand dollars. These were carefully stitched in a belt which my mother fastened around her waist, with which to sink or swim as the case might be in our voyage over the stormy sea. At last there was a busy time of preparation. My uncle Joe Wauchob came over from Kinkitt and took me away with him on his return home. He was to meet my parents with me at an appointed time and place on their way to Derry. I rode behind him on his horse, and I remember it was very rough, as he dashed along rapidly; but he stopped at a public house in Newtonstewart, where he partook of some refreshments, and from there rode home harder than ever. It was all I could do to keep my seat by holding on to him; and, as a safeguard perhaps, he kept hold of me by the arm. It was a Tam O'Shanter ride,³ and I must have been badly scared and shaken up when we arrived at his house because my aunt took him to task for treating the child so roughly, as she said; which he excused as being the right thing to accustom the lad to hardships. I remained there about two weeks and had a good time frolicking with my cousin John and his sister Elinor, about my own age. In a spirit of mischief we made frequent excursions across the cotter's potato garden, which annoyed him greatly; but he ended our sport by seizing and imprisoning us under a creel. The punishment subdued us. A creel is a large, square basket, holding a cart load of farm vegetables or other matter, and used as a cart or car bed.

The appointed day arrived however, and I was delivered over to my parents as agreed on. I remember very well our journey to Derry, which we entered by the bridge across the Foyle. We were to go aboard ship the next day but were prevented by an event of a serious nature. My father's trouble and worry incident to the settlement of affairs and the labor of packing up and preparing to leave, had brought on a fever which did not develop until after we arrived in Derry. For a few days he had complained of pains in his limbs, and a ringing sound in his ears; but on the day we were to go on board a high fever had set in, and the ship's surgeon excluded him on the ground of illness. This was a serious disappointment; but not so serious as our apprehensions regarding the illness. Our means were not such as to justify the expense of costly board or lodging and medical treatment; and indeed, my

father had become so ill that a hotel or boarding house would not have cared to admit him. The physician pronounced it a dangerous and probably a protracted attack.

My mother was equal to the emergency however; I remember going with her from place to place until she found two suitable upstairs rooms which she engaged as lodging rooms. She then had her baggage removed, and bedding unpacked and adjusted; and had my father conveyed from the lodging house where we had stopped, and placed as comfortably as circumstances would allow in this new temporary home in Derry. She then procured an attentive and skillful physician recommended by Mr. Buchanan, the owner of the vessel in which we had taken passage. This Buchanan was the uncle of the late President of the United States of that name. Here my father lay in a helpless and at last almost hopeless condition for nearly four weeks. But the physician's care, and my mother's nursing, finally brought him through. At one time he was so low that the physician gave him up, and my mother wrote a letter to his father's family in America, informing them of our distress and asking their advice: whether in case of his death they would advise her to go on with me and join them, or to return to her own people at Kinkitt. The turn came however and he began to convalesce; and I remember, after he was able to walk out of doors with a cane, his usual stroll with me by the hand was along the top of Derry walls, where I thought it very strange to be able to look down into the chimney tops. And I remember of our examining Roaring Meg, and the other celebrated old guns which had done such execution in the siege of Derry.⁴ Derry must have been supplied with hydrants at that time much resembling those in present use, as I was greatly surprised at one which stood on the pavement near our lodging house. There was a pool of water at and around its base, which was the only supply visible to me; and how so large a supply of water could be obtained from so small a source, and why the water of its own accord flowed up and out of the spout, were mysteries which excited my curiosity. I remember very well also the appearance of an old woman who sat at the open gate of the city wall, beside a stand of candies and sea *dulce*.⁵ Her table afforded an irresistible temptation to my scarce half-pennies.

But time wore on, and at last we were in condition to embark, and did so in one of the same line of ships. Our destination was St. Johns, New Brunswick. England at that time was in no friendly mood towards

the United States, and would clear no ships except to ports in her own dominions. We were a trifle over twelve weeks on the voyage, many instances of which I remember but they are not worth relating now.

All I remember of St. Johns is seeing fields covered with fish split open to dry. And here I first saw and tasted the cucumber, and saw negroes.

We soon obtained passage in a coasting vessel and reshipped for Baltimore, which we reached in about two weeks. The day we arrived in the bay below Baltimore was exceedingly hot to our fresh experience, as nothing like it ever prevails in Ireland. We were quarantined there for a whole tedious, hot day; and, while lying there, my father with others went on shore in the ship's yawl and brought back a lot of fine, red, ripe peaches. This was our first taste of the peach; and, whilst agreeable, the flavor was remarkably strange to my palate, such as I shall never forget; but it lost its novelty afterwards.

At last we landed in Baltimore at Fell's Point, on or about the 1st of October, 1818; and here I may regard my childhood as ended, and boyhood commenced.