

A Vision of Connaught in the Thirteenth Century.

James Clarence Mangan

"Et moi, j'ai été aussi en Arcadie."— And I, I, too, have been a dreamer. —
Inscription on a Painting by Poussin.

I WALKED entranced
Through a land of Morn ;
The sun, with wondrous excess of light,
Shone down and glanced
Over seas of corn
And lustrous gardens aleft and right.

Even in the clime
Of resplendent Spain,
Beams no such sun upon such a land ;
But it was the time,
'Twas in the reign,
Of Cáhal Mór of the Wine-red Hand.

Anon stood nigh
By my side a man
Of princely aspect and port sublime.
Him queried I,
" O, my Lord and Khan, [1]
What clime is this, and what golden time ?"
When he — "The clime
Is a clime to praise.
The clime is Erin's, the green and bland ;
And it is the time.
These be the days.
Of Cáhal Mór of the Wine-red Hand!"

Then saw I thrones,
And circling fires,
And a Dome rose near me, as by a spell,
Whence flowed the tones
Of silver lyres,
And many voices in wreathed swell ;
And their thrilling chime
Fell on mine ears
As the heavenly hymn of an angel-band —
"It is now the time.
These be the years.
Of Cáhal Mór of the Wine-red Hand!"

I sought the hall,
And, behold ! . . . a change
From light to darkness, from joy to woe !
King, nobles, all.

Looked aghast and strange ;
The minstrel-group sate in dumbest show !
Had some great crime
Wrought this dread amaze.
This terror ? None seemed to understand !
'Twas then the time.
We were in the days.
Of Cáhal Mór of the Wine-red Hand.

I again walked forth ;
But lo ! the sky
Showed fleckt with blood, and an alien sun
Glared from the north.
And there stood on high,
Amid his shorn beams, A SKELETON !
It was by the stream
Of the castled Maine,
One Autumn eve, in the Teuton's land,
That I dreamed this dream
Of the time and reign
Of Cáhal Mór of the Wine-red Hand!

[1] *Ceann*, the Gaelic title for a chief.

James Clarence Mangan : His life, Poetry and Death

I have undertaken also to give some account of his life ; or rather his two lives : for never was a creature on this earth whose existence was so entirely dual and double ; nay, whose two lives were so hopelessly and eternally at war, racking and desolating the poor mortal frame which was the battle-ground of that fearful strife. Yet I ask myself, What would Mangan think and feel now, if he could know that a man was going to write his life ? Would he not rise up from his low grave in Glasnevin to forbid ? Be still, poor ghost ! Gently and reverently, and with shoes from off my feet, I will tread that sacred ground.

And first, of the mere material and visible life. Mangan was not born in the aristocratic rank. Moore's father was a grocer in Aungier-street ; Beranger was brought forth in the shed of his grandfather, a tailor. Of Mangan's parentage little more is known than that his father was one James Mangan, a native of Shanagolden, in Limerick county ; who in 1801 was married to Catharine Smith, of Fishamble-street, Dublin. In the same street, and in 1803, James Clarence Mangan was born, his father being then a shopkeeper of the grocer species, and unfortunate in his business. In the short sketch of Mangan's life prefixed to Mr. O'Daly's publication, called "The Poets and Poetry of Munster," it is said, touching this unprosperous grocer parent, "that being of a restless disposition he removed to another locality, having consigned the Establishment and his son to the care of his brother-in-law, whom he induced to come from London for that purpose." Those who knew Clarence Mangan in later days had a vague sort of knowledge that he had a brother, a sister, and a mother still living ; some of whom survived him, and that their scanty sustenance depended, at least partly, upon him. In the older part of Dublin, between the castle and the river Liffey, runs off from Werburgh-street a narrow alley which brings you into a small square of dismal brick houses, called "Derby-square." Very few

of the wealthier and more fashionable inhabitants of Dublin know the existence of this dreary quadrangle. The houses are high and dingy : many of the windows are patched with paper ; clothes-lines extend across from window to window, and on the whole the place has an air of having seen better days — better, but never very good. In this Derby-square, it appears, was a boys' school ; and here Clarence Mangan received what scholastic training he ever had. Then, for seven years, he laboured as a copyist in a scrivener's office at a weekly salary ; a mechanical employment which had at least one advantage for him, — that his mind could wander. Eye and finger once set steadily to their task, the soul might spread her wings and soar beyond all the spheres —

Then Fancy bore him to the palest star,
Pinnacled in the lofty aether dim.

After that, for two or three years he gained his living and maintained his wretched household as an attorney's clerk. The name of that particular member of the Society of the King's Inns who doled out a few shillings a week to so remarkable a clerk, is not known to fame ; and my researches upon this important point will be forever in vain.

At what age he devoted himself to this drudgery, at what age he left it, or was discharged from it, does not appear : for his whole biography documents are wanting, the man having never for one moment imagined that his poor life could interest any surviving human being, and having never, accordingly, collected his biographical assets, and appointed a literary executor to take care of his posthumous fame. Neither did he ever acquire the habit, common enough among literary men, of dwelling upon his own early trials, struggles, and triumphs. But those who knew him in after years can remember with what a shuddering and loathing horror he spoke, when at rare intervals he could be induced to speak at all, of his labours with the scrivener and the attorney. He was shy and sensitive, with exquisite sensibility and fine impulses ; eye, ear, and soul open to all the beauty, music, and glory of heaven and earth ; humble, gentle, and unexacting; modestly craving nothing in the world but celestial glorified life, seraphic love, and a throne among the immortal gods (that's all), — and he was eight or ten years scribbling deeds, pleadings, and bills in chancery. Know all men by these presents, that it was "a very vile life," if indeed his true life were spent there and so ; but there was another, an inner and a higher life for him : and in those years of quill driving, amongst gross and ill-conditioned fellow-clerks, whose naughty ways long after made him tremble to think of, that subtle spirit wandered and dwelt afar. At this time he must have been a great devourer of books, and seems to have early devoted himself to the exploration of those treasures which lay locked up in foreign languages. Mangan had no education of a regular and approved sort ; neither, in his multifarious reading had he, nor could brook any guidance whatever. Yet the reader of his poems will probably find in them ample proof of culture both high and wide, both profound and curiously exquisite. How he came by these acquirement's; by what devoted and passionate study, deep in the night, like the wrestle of Jacob with a god, this poor attorney's clerk brought down the immortals to commune with him, is not recorded. He has not made provision, as was remarked before, for satisfying the laudable curiosity of the public on these points.

— *from* Biographical Introduction by **John Mitchel**.

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