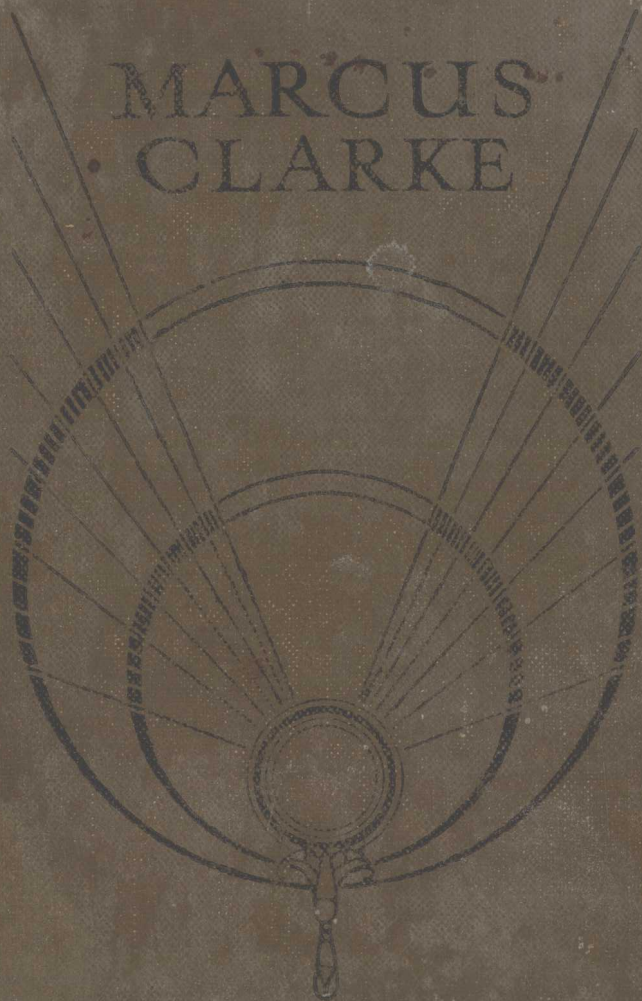


FOR THE TERM
OF HIS
NATURAL LIFE

MARCUS
CLARKE



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By
MARCUS CLARKE

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PREFACE.

THE convict of fiction has been hitherto shown only at the beginning or at the end of his career. Either his exile has been the mysterious end to his misdeeds, or he has appeared upon the scene to claim interest by reason of an equally unintelligible love of crime acquired during his experience in a penal settlement. Charles Reade has drawn the interior of a house of correction in England, and Victor Hugo has shown how a French convict fares after the fulfilment of his sentence. But no writer—so far as I am aware—has attempted to depict the dismal condition of a felon during his term of transportation.

I have endeavoured in "His Natural Life" to set forth the working and results of an English system of transportation carefully considered and carried out under official supervision; and to illustrate in the manner best calculated, as I think, to attract general attention, the inexpediency of again allowing offenders against the law to be herded together in places remote from the wholesome influence of public opinion, and to be submitted to a discipline which must necessarily depend for its just administration upon the personal character and temper of their gaolers.

Some of the events narrated are doubtless tragic and terrible; but I hold it needful to my purpose to record them, for they are events which have actually occurred, and which, if the blunders which produce them be repeated, must infallibly occur again. It is true that the British Government have ceased to deport the criminals of England, but the method of punishment, of which

that deportation was a part, is still in existence. Port Blair is a Port Arthur filled with Indian-men instead of Englishmen ; and, within the last year, France has established, at New Caledonia, a penal settlement which will, in the natural course of things, repeat in its annals the history of Macquarie Harbour and of Norfolk Island.

M. C.

MELBOURNE,

AUSTRALIA.

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HIS NATURAL LIFE

PROLOGUE

ON the evening of May 3, 1827, the garden of a large red-brick bow-windowed mansion called Northend House, which, enclosed in spacious grounds, stands on the eastern height of Hampstead Heath, between Finchley Road and the Chestnut Avenue, was the scene of a domestic tragedy.

Three persons were the actors in it. One was an old man, whose white hair and wrinkled face gave token that he was at least sixty years of age. He stood erect with his back to the wall which separates the garden from the Heath, in the attitude of one surprised into sudden passion, and held uplifted the heavy ebony cane, upon which he was ordinarily accustomed to lean. He was confronted by a man of two-and-twenty, unusually tall and athletic of figure, dressed in rough seafaring clothes, and who held in his arms, protecting her, a lady of middle age. The face of the young man wore an expression of horror-stricken astonishment, and the slight frame of the grey-haired woman was convulsed with sobs.

These three people were Sir Richard Devine, his wife, and his only son Richard, who had returned from abroad that morning.

"So, madam," said Sir Richard, in the high-strung accents which in crises of great mental agony are common to the most self-restrained of us, "you have been for twenty years a living lie! For twenty years you have cheated and mocked me. For twenty years—in company with a scoundrel whose name is a byword for all that is profligate and base—you have laughed at me for a credulous and hood-winked fool; and now, because I dared to raise my hand to that reckless boy, you confess your shame, and glory in the confession!"

"Mother, dear mother!" cried the young man, in a paroxysm of grief, "say that you did not mean those words; you said them but in anger! See, I am calm now, and he may strike me if he will."

Lady Devine shuddered, creeping close, as though to hide herself in the broad bosom of her son.

The old man continued: "I married you, Ellinor Wade, for your beauty; you married me for my fortune. I was a plebeian, a ship's carpenter; you were well born, your father was a man of fashion, a gambler, the friend of rakes and prodigals. I was rich. I had been knighted. I was in favour at Court. He wanted money, and he sold you. I paid the price he asked, but there was nothing of your cousin, my lord Bellasis and Wotton, in the bond."

"Spare me, sir, spare me!" said Lady Ellinor faintly.

"Spare you! Ay, you have spared me, have you not? Look-ye," he cried, in sudden fury, "I am not to be fooled so easily. Your family are proud. Colonel Wade has other daughters. Your lover, my lord Bellasis, even now, thinks to retrieve his broken fortunes by marriage. You have confessed your shame. To-morrow your father, your sisters, all the world, shall know the story you have told me!"

"By Heaven, sir, you will not do this!" burst out the young man.

"Silence, *bastard!*" cried Sir Richard. "Ay, bite your lips, the word is of your precious mother's making!"

Lady Devine slipped through her son's arms and fell on her knees at her husband's feet.

"Do not do this, Richard. I have been faithful to you for two-and-twenty years. I have borne all the slights and insults you have heaped upon me. The shameful secret of my early love broke from me when, in your rage, you threatened *him*. Let me go away; kill me; but do not shame me."

Sir Richard, who had turned to walk away, stopped suddenly, and his great white eyebrows came together in his red face with a savage scowl. He laughed, and in that laugh his fury seemed to congeal into a cold and cruel hate.

"You would preserve your good name then. You would conceal this disgrace from the world. You shall have your wish—upon one condition."

"What is it, sir?" she asked, rising, but trembling with terror, as she stood with drooping arms and widely opened eyes.

The old man looked at her for an instant, and then said slowly—

"That this impostor, who so long has falsely borne my name, has wrongfully squandered my money, and unlawfully eaten my bread, shall pack! That he abandon for ever the name he has usurped, keep himself from my sight, and never set foot again in house of mine."

"You would not part me from my only son!" cried the wretched woman.

"Take him with you to his father then."

Richard Devine gently loosed the arms that again clung around his neck, kissed the pale face, and turned his own—scarcely less pale—towards the old man.

"I owe you no duty," he said. "You have always hated and reviled me. When by your violence you drove me from your house, you set spies to watch me in the life I had chosen. I have nothing in common with you. I have long felt it. Now when I learn for the first time whose son I really am, I rejoice to think that I have less to thank you for than I once believed. I accept the terms you offer. I will go. Nay, mother, think of your good name."

Sir Richard Devine laughed again. "I am glad to see you are so well disposed. Listen now. To-night I send for Quaid to alter my will. My sister's son, Maurice Frere, shall be my heir in your stead. I give you nothing. You leave this house in an hour. You change your name; you never by word or deed make claim on me or mine. No matter what strait or poverty you plead—if even your life should hang upon the issue—the instant I hear that there exists on earth one who calls himself Richard Devine, that instant shall your mother's shame become a public scandal. You know me. I keep my word. I return in an hour, madam; let me find him gone."

He passed them, upright, as if upborne by passion, strode down the garden with the vigour that anger lends, and took the road to London.

"Richard!" cried the poor mother. "Forgive me, my son! I have ruined you."

Richard Devine tossed his black hair from his brow in sudden passion of love and grief.

"Mother, dear mother, do not weep," he said, "I am not worthy of your tears. Forgive! It is I—impetuous and ungrateful during all your years of sorrow—who most need forgiveness. Let me share your burden that I may lighten it. He is just. It is fitting that I go. I can earn a name—a name that I need not blush to bear nor you to hear. I am strong. I can work. The world is wide. Farewell! my own mother!"

"Not yet, not yet! Ah! see he has taken the Belsize Road. Oh, Richard! pray Heaven they may not meet."

"Tush! They will not meet! You are pale, you faint!"

"A terror of I know not what coming evil overpowers me. I tremble for the future. Oh, Richard, Richard! forgive me! pray for me!"

"Hush, dearest! Come, let me lead you in. I will write. I will send you news of me once at least, ere I depart. So—you are calmer, mother!"

* * * * *

Sir Richard Devine, knight, shipbuilder, naval contractor, and millionaire, was the son of a Harwich boat carpenter. Early left an orphan with a sister to support, he soon reduced his sole aim in life to the accumulation of money. In the Harwich boat-shed, nearly fifty years before, he had contracted—in defiance of prophesied failure—to build the *Hastings* sloop of war for His Majesty King George the Third's Lords of the Admiralty. This contract was the thin end of that wedge which eventually split the mighty oak block of Government patronage into three-deckers and ships of the line; which did good service under Pellew, Parker, Nelson, Hood; which exfoliated and ramified into huge dockyards at Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Sheerness, and bore, as its buds and flowers, countless barrels of measly pork and maggoty biscuit. The sole aim of the coarse, pushing, and hard-headed son of Dick Devine was to make money. He had cringed and crawled and fluttered and blustered, had licked the dust off great men's shoes, and danced attendance in great men's ante-chambers. Nothing was too low, nothing too high for him. A shrewd man of business, a thorough master of his trade, troubled with no scruples of honour or of delicacy, he made money rapidly, and saved it when made. The first hint that the public received of his wealth was in 1796, when Mr. Devine, one of the shipwrights to the Government, and a comparatively young man of forty-four or thereabouts, subscribed five thousand pounds to the Loyalty Loan raised to prosecute the French war. In 1805, after doing good, and it was hinted not unprofitable, service in the trial of Lord Melville, the Treasurer of the Navy, he married his sister to a wealthy Bristol merchant, one Anthony Frere, and married himself to Ellinor Wade, the eldest daughter of Colonel Wotton Wade, a boon companion of the Regent, and uncle by marriage of a remarkable scamp and dandy, Lord Bellasis. At that time, what with lucky speculations in the Funds—assisted, it was whispered, by secret intelligence from France during the stormy years of '13, '14, and '15—and the legitimate profit on his Government contracts, he had accumulated a princely fortune, and could afford to live in princely magnificence. But the old-man-of-the-sea burden of parsimony and avarice which he had voluntarily taken upon him was not to be shaken off, and the only show he made of his wealth was by purchasing, on his knighthood, the rambling but comfortable house

at Hampstead, and ostensibly retiring from active business.

His retirement was not a happy one. He was a stern father and a severe master. His servants hated, and his wife feared him. His only son Richard appeared to inherit his father's strong will and imperious manner. Under careful supervision and a just rule he might have been guided to good; but left to his own devices outside, and galled by the iron yoke of parental discipline at home, he became reckless and prodigal. The mother—poor, timid Ellinor, who had been rudely torn from the love of her youth, her cousin, Lord Bellasis—tried to restrain him, but the headstrong boy, though owing for his mother that strong love which is often a part of such violent natures, proved intractable, and after three years of parental feud, he went off to the Continent, to pursue there the same reckless life which in London had offended Sir Richard. Sir Richard, upon this, sent for Maurice Frere, his sister's son—the abolition of the slave trade had ruined the Bristol House of Frere—and bought for him a commission in a marching regiment, hinting darkly of special favours to come. His open preference for his nephew had galled to the quick his sensitive wife, who contrasted with some heart-pangs the gallant prodigality of her father with the niggardly economy of her husband. Between the houses of *parvenu* Devine and long-descended Wotton Wade there had long been little love. Sir Richard felt that the Colonel despised him for a city knight, and had heard that over claret and cards Lord Bellasis and his friends had often lamented the hard fortune which gave the beauty, Ellinor, to so sordid a bridegroom. Armigell Esmé Wade, Viscount Bellasis and Wotton, was a product of his time. Of good family (his ancestor, Armigell, was reputed to have landed in America before Gilbert or Raleigh), he had inherited his manor of Bellasis, or Belsize, from one Sir Esmé Wade, ambassador from Queen Elizabeth to the King of Spain in the delicate matter of Mendoza, and afterwards counsellor to James I, and lieutenant of the Tower. This Esmé was a man of dark devices. It was he who negotiated with Mary Stuart for Elizabeth; it was he who wormed out of Cobham the evidence against the great Raleigh. He became rich, and his sister (the widow of Henry de Kirkhaven, Lord of Hemfleet) marrying into the family of the Wottons, the wealth of the house was further increased by the union of her daughter Sybil with Marmaduke Wade. Marmaduke Wade was a Lord of the Admiralty, and a patron of Pepys, who in his diary [July 17, 1668] speaks of visiting him at Belsize. He was raised to the peerage in 1667 by the title of Baron Bellasis and Wotton, and married for his second wife Anne,

daughter of Philip Stanhope, second Earl of Chesterfield. Allied to this powerful house, the family tree of Wotton Wade grew and flourished.

In 1784, Philip, third Baron, married the celebrated beauty, Miss Povey, and had issue Armigell Esmé, in whose person the family prudence seemed to have run itself out.

The fourth Lord Bellasis combined the daring of Armigell, the adventurer, with the evil disposition of Esmé, the lieutenant of the Tower. No sooner had he become master of his fortune than he took to dice, drink, and ^{le}beauchery with all the extravagance of the last century. He was foremost in every riot, most notorious of all the notorious "bloods" of the day.

Horace Walpole, in one of his letters to Selwyn in 1785, mentions a fact which may stand for a page of narrative. "Young Wade," he says, "is reported to have lost one thousand guineas last night to that vulgarest of all the Bourbons, the Duc de Chartres, and they say the fool is not yet nineteen." From a pigeon Armigell Wade became a hawk, and at thirty years of age, having lost together with his estates all chance of winning the one woman who might have saved him—his cousin Ellinor—he became that most unhappy of all beings, a well-born blackleg. When he was told by thin-lipped, cool Colonel Wade that the rich shipbuilder, Sir Richard Devine, had proposed an alliance with fair-haired gentle Ellinor, he swore, with fierce knitting of his black brows, that no law of man nor Heaven should further restrain him in his selfish prodigality. "You have sold your daughter and ruined me," he said, "look to the consequences." Colonel Wade sneered at his fiery kinsman: "You will find Sir Richard's house a pleasant one to visit, Armigell; and he should be worth an income to so experienced a gambler as yourself." Lord Bellasis did visit at Sir Richard's house during the first year of his cousin's marriage; but upon the birth of the son who is the hero of this history, he affected a quarrel with the city knight, and cursing him to the Prince and Pains for a miserly curmudgeon, who neither dined nor drank like a gentleman, departed, more desperately at war with fortune than ever, for his old haunts. The year 1827 found him a hardened, hopeless old man of sixty, battered in health and ruined in pocket; but who, by dint of stays, hair-dye, and courage, yet faced the world with undaunted front, and dined as gaily in bailiff-haunted Belsize as he had dined at Carlton House. Of the possessions of the house of Wotton Wade, this old manor, timberless and bare, was all that remained, and its master rarely visited it.

On the evening of May 3, 1827, Lord Bellasis had been attending a pigeon match at Hornsey Wood, and having resisted the importunities of his companion, Mr. Lionel Crofton (a young gentleman-rake, whose position in the sporting world was not the most secure), who wanted him to go on into town, he had avowed his intention of striking across Hampstead to Belsize. "I have an appointment at the fir trees on the Heath," he said.

"With a woman?" asked Mr. Crofton.

"Not at all; with a parson."

"A parson!"

"You stare! Well, he is only just ordained. I met him last year at Bath on his vacation from Cambridge, and he was good enough to lose some money to me."

"And now waits to pay it out of his first curacy. I wish your lordship joy with all my soul. Then, we must push on, for it grows late."

"Thanks, my dear sir, for the 'we,' but I must go alone," said Lord Bellasis dryly. "To-morrow you can settle with me for the sitting of last week. Hark! the clock is striking nine. Good night."

* * * * *

At half-past nine Richard Devine quitted his mother's house to begin the new life he had chosen, and so, drawn together by that strange fate of circumstance which creates events, the father and son approached each other.

* * * * *

As the young man gained the middle of the path which led to the Heath, he met Sir Richard returning from the village. It was no part of his plan to seek an interview with the man whom his mother had so deeply wronged, and he would have slunk past in the gloom; but seeing him thus alone returning to a desolated home, the prodigal was tempted to utter some words of farewell and of regret. To his astonishment, however, Sir Richard passed swiftly on, with body bent forward as one in the act of falling, and with eyes unconscious of surroundings, staring straight into the distance. Half-terrified at this strange appearance, Richard hurried onward, and at a turn of the path stumbled upon something which horribly accounted for the curious action of the old man. A dead body lay upon its face in the heather; beside it was a heavy riding whip stained at the handle with blood, and an open pocket-book. Richard took up the book, and read, in gold letters on the cover, "Lord Bellasis."

The unhappy young man knelt down beside the body and raised

it. The skull had been fractured by a blow, but it seemed that life yet lingered. Overcome with horror—for he could not doubt but that his mother's worst fears had been realized—Richard knelt there holding his murdered father in his arms, waiting until the murderer, whose name he bore, should have placed himself beyond pursuit. It seemed an hour to his excited fancy before he saw a light pass along the front of the house he had quitted, and knew that Sir Richard had safely reached his chamber. With some bewildered intention of summoning aid, he left the body and made towards the town. As he stepped out on the path he heard voices, and presently some dozen men, one of whom held a horse, burst out upon him, and, with sudden fury, seized and flung him to the ground.

At first the young man, so rudely assailed, did not comprehend his own danger. His mind, bent upon one hideous explanation of the crime, did not see another obvious one which had already occurred to the mind of the landlord of the *Three Spaniards*.

"God defend me!" cried Mr. Mogford, scanning by the pale light of the rising moon the features of the murdered man, "but it is Lord Bellasis!—oh, you bloody villain! Jem, bring him along here, p'raps his lordship can recognize him!"

"It was not I!" cried Richard Devine. "For God's sake, my lord, say——" then he stopped abruptly, and being forced on his knees by his captors, remained staring at the dying man, in sudden and ghastly fear.

Those men in whom emotion has the effect of quickening circulation of the blood reason rapidly in moments of danger, and in the terrible instant when his eyes met those of Lord Bellasis, Richard Devine had summed up the chances of his future fortune, and realized to the full his personal peril. The runaway horse had given the alarm. The drinkers at the *Spaniards' Inn* had started to search the Heath, and had discovered a fellow in rough costume, whose person was unknown to them, hastily quitting a spot where, beside a rifled pocket-book and a blood-stained whip, lay a dying man.

The web of circumstantial evidence had enmeshed him. An hour ago escape would have been easy. He would have had but to cry, "I am the son of Sir Richard Devine. Come with me to yonder house, and I will prove to you that I have but just quitted it,"—to place his innocence beyond immediate question. That course of action was impossible now. Knowing Sir Richard as he did, and believing, moreover, that in his raging passion the old man had himself met and murdered the destroyer of his hon-