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THE ANNESLEY CASE.

When the Captain of the Great Britain that unfortunate vessel on to the sands of Dúnmore Bay, it was urged in his excuse, that so many marvellous tales are told about Ireland, that he was justified in concluding that no obstacle lay in his road from the Isle of Man to New York; that Dublin was no fabulous as a city; and that the Mountrath mountains had no more real existence than the loadstone hill which proved fatal to the ship of Sinbad. The story we are about to tell, might almost justify such incredulity; yet it is one of many equally strange and equally well authenticated.

In the year 1760, Arthur Lord Altham, a needy and dissolute Irish peer, married Mary Sheffield, an illegitimate daughter of the Duke of Buckingham. They lived together for three years; but in 1769 Lord Altham went to Ireland, leaving his wife in England, where she remained until 1778, when she joined her husband in Dublin. From that time until 1778, she resided together, principally at Dunmaine, in the neighborhood of Ross, in the county of Wexford. In 1778 they separated, under circumstances which we shall presently have occasion to notice more minutely, and never met again. In 1727 Lord Altham died, and was succeeded in his title and estates by his brother Richard Annesley, who remained in undisturbed possession of both for a period of thirteen years. Lady Altham survived her husband for about two years, which were passed in sickness and poverty, but does not appear ever to have taken any steps to prevent Richard Annesley's assumption of the character of her husband, to which, of course, he would have had no title if she had a son living at the time of Lord Altham's death. In the year 1779, however, a young man of about four-and-twenty years of age, made his appearance in the fleet which, under the command of Admiral Vernon, was lying off Porto-Bello. He called himself James Annesley, stated that he was the son of Lord Altham, that he had been educated and acknowledged as such son until he was nine or ten years of age; that upon the death of his father he had been kidnapped and sold for a slave in America, that he had passed thirteen years in servitude, and that last (after a series of romantic and not very credible adventures, which have nothing to do with our present subject) had effected his escape. Admiral Vernon furnished him with the means of proceeding to England, where he arrived shortly afterwards. On his arrival in England he went to lodge at Staines, in the neighborhood of Windsor, and here a circumstance occurred which had no doubt a considerable effect on the subsequent proceedings. One of his associates, a man of the name of Redding, was gamekeeper to Sir John Dolbin, the Lord of the Manor. One morning James Annesley went out with a gun shooting small birds; when Redding called him to assist in capturing a net with which a man of the name of Egglestone was fishing in the river; Annesley's gun unfortunately went off in the scuffle, and mortally wounded Egglestone. There could be little doubt that the discharge of the gun was purely accidental; but Lord Anglesea (for Richard, Lord Altham, had in the meantime succeeded to that title also) seized the opportunity to destroy, as he thought, the claimant of his title and estates. He instituted a prosecution against James Annesley for murder; he was prodigal of money and promises amongst the witnesses; and he declared that he would willingly give ten thousand pounds to get him hanged. The jury at the Old Bailey acquitted Annesley, and Lord Anglesea's machinations recoiled upon himself; for there can be no doubt that they greatly influenced both the court and jury against him on the subsequent trial.

On the 11th of November 1743 the trial for the recovery of the estates came on in the Court of Exchequer in Dublin. It lasted fifteen days, and above ninety witnesses were examined. The issue between the parties was of the simplest and boldest character. On the one hand, it was asserted that, in the spring of the year 1715, Lord Altham had been delivered at Dunmaine of a son and heir; that all the customary solemnities and rejoicings had taken place; that the child was uniformly acknowledged and treated both by Lord and Lady Altham as their son; that he was shown and spoken of as such to visitors and friends; that when the separation between his parents took place, the mother passionately entreated that she might be permitted to take the child with her, which the father refused, keeping the boy and educating him as the heir to his title and estate. On the other hand, it was denied that Lady Altham ever had a child at all. It was asserted that the child of the separation was the illegitimate son of her husband and the daughter of her bearing no heir; that it was known to every relation and visitor, to every servant in the house, that Lady Altham never had a child; that the servant who had attended her from her arrival in Dublin to the hour of her death, who had dressed and undressed her every morning and evening, and had never been absent for more than one single week during the whole of that period, was living, and would prove, not only that no child

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Every conceivable confirmation, however, was given. Friends of Lord Altham's swore that conversational with him, in which he had spoken in the most open manner of his brother's expectations of being his heir. Witnesses were produced who had been present and assisting at the very birth of the child; and it is very remarkable that although these witnesses were drawn from every rank of life, no successful attempt was made to impeach the credibility of any of them, nor was any inconsistency discovered in their testimony further than might be satisfactorily accounted for by the long period that had elapsed between the events of which they spoke and the time when they gave their evidence. We now come, however, to the most remarkable conflict of testimony which occurs in the whole case. A woman of the name of Joan Laffan was called. She deposed that she entered Lord Altham's service in 1715; that she was employed as nursemaid to attend on the child as soon as he came from the wet-nurse; that he was at the time three or four months old, and was in her charge for about a year and a half; that he was treated in all respects as their child by both Lord and Lady Altham, who showed great fondness for him, and into whose bedroom she was in the habit of bringing the child in the morning.

She then gave an account of the separation between Lord and Lady Altham. "It was," she said, "on account of Tom Palliser." My Lord had had a plot against him, and on one Sunday morning pretended to my lady that he was obliged to go out to dinner. That Mr. Palliser breakfasted with my lord, and they had a bottle of mulled wine for breakfast. As soon as my lord was gone out, Mr. Palliser went into my lady's room, and the plot having been laid before a signal was made that brought my lord back; that my lord ran up with his sword, and brought him out of the room, and the groom came to Palliser and said to him, "Is this the way you keep my lady company?" and took out a case-knife in order to cut his nose, but he was ordered only to cut his ear. That deponent was standing by in the room, and she had the child in her hand, and she showed her the blood out of Palliser's ear; it was the soft part of the ear that was cut, and the child pointed at the blood that came out of the ear." The same witness deposed that "she was present when my lord and lady parted; that she saw my lady at the door with the child in her arms; that my lord came out of the house in a great rage, and asked where the child was, and upon being told that he was with his mother, he ran up to her and snatched the child out of her arms; that my lady begged very hard she might take the child along with her, but my lord swore her no consideration; that my lady finding she could not prevail, burst out crying, and begged she might at least give the child one parting kiss; that my lord, with some difficulty, consented, and then my lady drove away to Ross."

Such is Joan Laffan's story, and we must keep in mind that at a subsequent period it was confirmed by another witness; but in the mean time, let us turn to Palliser's account of the same transaction.

He stated that when he was very young, he spent much of his time at Dunmaine, which was within about three miles of his father's residence, and used to ride Lord Altham's horses hunting. That one day as they were returning home, Lord Altham told him that he was determined to part with his lady; and upon deponent's asking him his reasons, my lord replied, "I find Lord Anglesea will not be in friendship with me while I am called by his name, and I have no mind to give it part with her." Palliser then gave an account, in all material circumstances, of the same John Laffan's story of his being entrapped by Lord Altham into his wife's room, and falsely accused of being there for an improper purpose; he takes off his wig and shows the jury where his ear was cut, solemnly avers the innocence of Lady Altham, and declares not only that no child was present upon that occasion, but that "he never saw a child in the house." Upon this the Court apprehended that there was some contradiction between the evidence of Palliser and that of Joan Laffan; as indeed they well might, ordered Laffan to be recalled, and the two witnesses to be confronted. Each repeated the story, each was equally clear, distinct, and positive. We have said that Joan Laffan's evidence was subsequently confirmed by another witness, who deposed to having been present at the parting of Lady Altham and her child. The same is, however, the case with the testimony of Palliser, which was confirmed by Mary Heath, Lady Altham's woman, who went with her in the carriage to Ross, and who swore most positively, that no such child ever existed in existence. It is to be observed that Palliser and Laffan agree in the charge against Lady Altham which she attributes to the deponent, and more probably a motive of a determination on the part of Lord Altham, to get rid of a wife from whom he hoped for no heir—a motive which, we have seen, gave rise to some of the darkest domestic tragedies that have marked the annals of England. It would seem almost needless to strengthen the evidence of Major Fitzgerald and

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