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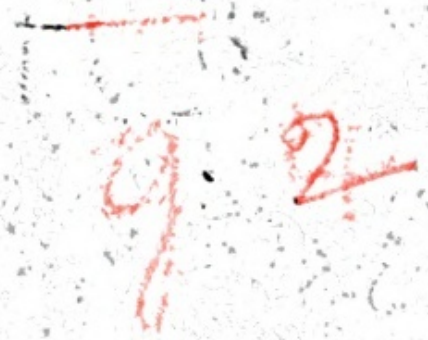

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THE PURCELL PAPERS.

BY THE LATE

JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF 'UNCLE SILAS.'

With a Memoir by

ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.
1880.

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MEMOIR

OF

JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU.

A NOBLE Huguenot family, owning considerable property in Normandy, the Le Fanus of Caen, were, upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, deprived of their ancestral estates of Mandeville, Sequeville, and Cresseron; but, owing to their possessing influential relatives at the court of Louis the Fourteenth, were allowed to quit their country for England, unmolested, with their personal property. We meet with John Le Fanu de Sequeville and Charles Le Fanu

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de Cresseron, as cavalry officers in William the Third's army; Charles being so distinguished a member of the King's staff that he was presented with William's portrait from his master's own hand. He afterwards served as a major of dragoons under Marlborough.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, William Le Fanu was the sole survivor of his family. He married Henrietta Raboteau de Puggibaut, the last of another great and noble Huguenot family, whose escape from France, as a child, by the aid of a Roman Catholic uncle in high position at the French court, was effected after adventures of the most romantic danger.

Joseph Le Fanu, the eldest of the sons of this marriage who left issue, held the office of Clerk of the Coast in Ireland. He married for the second time Alicia, daughter of Thomas Sheridan and sister of Richard Brinsley Sheridan; his brother, Captain Henry Le Fanu, of Leamington, being united to the only other sister of the great wit and orator.

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Dean Thomas Philip Le Fanu, the eldest son of Joseph Le Fanu, became by his wife Emma, daughter of Dr. Dobbin, F.T.C.D., the father of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, the subject of this memoir, whose name is so familiar to English and American readers as one of the greatest masters of the weird and the terrible amongst our modern novelists.

Born in Dublin on the 28th of August, 1814, *he did not begin to speak until he was more than two years of age; but when he had once started, the boy showed an unusual aptitude in acquiring fresh words, and using them correctly.*

The first evidence of literary taste which he gave was in his sixth year, when he made several little sketches with explanatory remarks written beneath them, after the manner of Du Maurier's, or Charles Keene's humorous illustrations in 'Punch.'

One of these, preserved long afterwards by his mother, represented a balloon in mid-air, and two aëronauts, who had occupied it, falling

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headlong to earth, the disaster being explained by these words: 'See the effects of trying to go to Heaven.'

As a mere child, he was a remarkably good actor, both in tragic and comic pieces, and was hardly twelve years old when he began to write verses of singular spirit for one so young. At fourteen, he produced a long Irish poem, which he never permitted anyone but his mother and brother to read. To that brother, Mr. William Le Fanu, Commissioner of Public Works, Ireland, to whom, as the suggester of Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Phaudrig Croohore' and 'Shamus O'Brien,' Irish ballad literature owes a delightful debt, and whose richly humorous and passionately pathetic powers as a raconteur of these poems have only doubled that obligation in the hearts of those who have been happy enough to be his hearers—to Mr. William Le Fanu we are indebted for the following extracts from the first of his works, which the boy-author seems to have set any store by:

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'Muse of Green Erin, break thine icy slumbers!
Strike once again thy wreathèd lyre!
Burst forth once more and wake thy tuneful numbers!
Kindle again thy long-extinguished fire!

'Why should I bid thee, Muse of Erin, waken?
Why should I bid thee strike thy harp once more?
Better to leave thee silent and forsaken
Than wake thee but thy glories to deplore.

'How could I bid thee tell of Tara's Towers,
Where once thy sceptred Princes sate in state—
Where rose thy music, at the festive hours,
Through the proud halls where listening thousands sate?

'Fallen are thy fair palaces, thy country's glory,
Thy tuneful bards were banished or were slain,
Some rest in glory on their deathbeds gory,
And some have lived to feel a foeman's chain.

'Yet for the sake of thy unhappy nation,
Yet for the sake of Freedom's spirit fled,
Let thy wild harpstrings, thrilled with indignation,
Peal a deep requiem o'er thy sons that bled.

'O yes! like the last breath of evening sighing,
Sweep thy cold hand the silent strings along,
Flash like the lamp beside the hero dying,
Then hushed for ever be thy plaintive song.'

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To Mr. William Le Fanu we are further indebted for the accompanying specimens of his brother's serious and humorous powers in verse, written when he was quite a lad, as valentines to a Miss G. K.:

'Life were too long for me to bear
If banished from thy view;
Life were too short, a thousand year,
If life were passed with you.

'Wise men have said "Man's lot on earth
Is grief and melancholy;"
But where thou art, there joyous mirth
Proves all their wisdom folly.

'If fate withhold thy love from me,
All else in vain were given;
Heaven were imperfect wanting thee,
And with thee earth were heaven.'

A few days after, he sent the following sequel:

'My dear good Madam,
You can't think how very sad I'm.
I sent you, or I mistake myself foully,
A very excellent imitation of the poet Cowley,
Containing three very fair stanzas,
Which number Longinus, a very critical man, says,

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And Aristotle, who was a critic ten times more caustic,
To a nicety fits a valentine or an acrostic.
And yet for all my pains to this moving epistle,
I have got no answer, so I suppose I may go whistle.
Perhaps you'd have preferred that like an old monk I
had pattered on
In the style and after the manner of the unfortunate Chatterton;
Or that, unlike my reverend daddy's son,
I had attempted the classicalities of the dull, though immortal Addison.
I can't endure this silence another week;
What shall I do in order to make you speak?
Shall I give you a trope
In the manner of Pope,
Or hammer my brains like an old smith
To get out something like Goldsmith?
Or shall I aspire on
To tune my poetic lyre on
The same key touched by Byron,
And laying my hand its wire on,
With its music your soul set fire on
By themes you ne'er could tire on?
Or say,
I pray,
Would a lay
Like Gay
Be more in your way?
I leave it to you,
Which am I to do?
It plain on the surface is
That any metamorphosis,

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To affect your study
You may work on my soul or body.
Your frown or your smile makes me Savage or Gay
In action, as well as in song;
And if 'tis decreed I at length become Gray,
Express but the word and I'm Young;
And if in the Church I should ever aspire
With friars and abbots to cope,
By a nod, if you please, you can make me a Prior—
By a word you render me Pope.
If you'd eat, I'm a Crab; if you'd cut, I'm your Steel,
As sharp as you'd get from the cutler;
I'm your Cotton whene'er you're in want of a reel,
And your livery carry, as Butler.
I'll ever rest your debtor
If you'll answer my first letter;
Or must, alas, eternity
Witness your taciturnity?
Speak—and oh! speak quickly
Or else I shall grow sickly,
And pine,
And whine,
And grow yellow and brown
As e'er was mahogany,
And lie me down
And die in agony.

P.S.—You'll allow I have the gift
To write like the immortal Swift.'

But besides the poetical powers with which he

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was endowed, in common with the great Brinsley, Lady Dufferin, and the Hon. Mrs. Norton, young Sheridan Le Fanu also possessed an irresistible humour and oratorical gift that, as a student of Old Trinity, made him a formidable rival of the best of the young debaters of his time at the 'College Historical,' not a few of whom have since reached the highest eminence at the Irish Bar, after having long enlivened and charmed St. Stephen's by their wit and oratory.

Amongst his compeers he was remarkable for his sudden fiery eloquence of attack, and ready and rapid powers of repartee when on his defence. But Le Fanu, whose understanding was elevated by a deep love of the classics, in which he took university honours, and further heightened by an admirable knowledge of our own great authors, was not to be tempted away by oratory from literature, his first and, as it proved, his last love.

Very soon after leaving college, and just when

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he was called to the Bar, about the year 1838, *he bought the 'Warder,' a Dublin newspaper, of which he was editor, and took what many of his best friends and admirers, looking to his high prospects as a barrister, regarded at the time as a fatal step in his career to fame.*

Just before this period, Le Fanu had taken to writing humorous Irish stories, afterwards published in the 'Dublin University Magazine,' such as the 'Quare Gander,' 'Jim Sulivan's Adventure,' 'The Ghost and the Bone-setter,' etc.

These stories his brother William Le Fanu was in the habit of repeating for his friends' amusement, and about the year 1837, *when he was about twenty-three years of age, Joseph Le Fanu said to him that he thought an Irish story in verse would tell well, and that if he would choose him a subject suitable for recitation, he would write him one. 'Write me an Irish "Young Lochinvar,"' said his brother; and in a few days he*

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handed him 'Phaudrig Croohore'—Anglicè, 'Patrick Crohore.'

Of course this poem has the disadvantage not only of being written after 'Young Lochinvar,' but also that of having been directly inspired by it; and yet, although wanting in the rare and graceful finish of the original, the Irish copy has, we feel, so much fire and feeling that it at least tempts us to regret that Scott's poem was not written in that heart-stirring Northern dialect without which the noblest of our British ballads would lose half their spirit. Indeed, we may safely say that some of Le Fanu's lines are finer than any in 'Young Lochinvar,' simply because they seem to speak straight from a people's heart, not to be the mere echoes of medieval romance.

'Phaudrig Croohore' did not appear in print in the 'Dublin University Magazine' till 1844, *twelve years after its composition, when it was included amongst the Purcell Papers.*

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To return to the year 1837. *Mr. William Le Fanu, the suggester of this ballad, who was from home at the time, now received daily instalments of the second and more remarkable of his brother's Irish poems—'Shamus O'Brien' (James O'Brien) —learning them by heart as they reached him, and, fortunately, never forgetting them, for his brother Joseph kept no copy of the ballad, and he had himself to write it out from memory ten years after, when the poem appeared in the 'University Magazine.'*

Few will deny that this poem contains passages most faithfully, if fearfully, picturesque, and that it is characterised throughout by a profound pathos, and an abundant though at times a too grotesquely incongruous humour. Can we wonder, then, at the immense popularity with which Samuel Lover recited it in the United States? For to Lover's admiration of the poem, and his addition of it to his entertainment, 'Shamus O'Brien' owes its introduction into America, where it is now so popular. Lover

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added some lines of his own to the poem, made Shamus emigrate to the States, and set up a public-house. These added lines appeared in most of the published versions of the poem. But they are indifferent as verse, and certainly injure the dramatic effect of the poem.

'Shamus O'Brien' is so generally attributed to Lover (indeed we remember seeing it advertised for recitation on the occasion of a benefit at a leading London theatre as 'by Samuel Lover') that it is a satisfaction to be able to reproduce the following letter upon the subject from Lover to William le Fanu:

'Astor House,

'New York, U.S. America.

'Sept. 30, 1846.

'My dear Le Fanu,

'In reading over your brother's poem while I crossed the Atlantic, I became more and

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more impressed with its great beauty and dramatic effect—so much so that I determined to test its effect in public, and have done so here, on my first appearance, with the greatest success. Now I have no doubt there will be great praises of the poem, and people will suppose, most likely, that the composition is mine, and as you know (I take for granted) that I would not wish to wear a borrowed feather, I should be glad to give your brother's name as the author, should he not object to have it known; but as his writings are often of so different a tone, I would not speak without permission to do so. It is true that in my programme my name is attached to other pieces, and no name appended to the recitation; so far, you will see I have done all I could to avoid "appropriating," the spirit of which I might have caught here, with Irish aptitude; but I would like to have the means of telling all whom it may concern the name of the author, to whose head and heart it does so much honour. Pray, my dear Le Fanu, inquire,

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and answer me here by next packet, or as soon as convenient. My success here has been quite triumphant.

'Yours very truly,

'SAMUEL LOVER.'

We have heard it said (though without having inquired into the truth of the tradition) that 'Shamus O'Brien' was the result of a match at pseudo-national ballad writing made between Le Fanu and several of the most brilliant of his young literary confrères at T. C. D. But however this may be, Le Fanu undoubtedly was no young Irelander; indeed he did the stoutest service as a press writer in the Conservative interest, and was no doubt provoked as well as amused at the unexpected popularity to which his poem attained amongst the Irish Nationalists. And here it should be remembered that the ballad was written some eleven years before the outbreak of '48, *and at a time when a* '98 *subject might*

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fairly have been regarded as legitimate literary property amongst the most loyal.

We left Le Fanu as editor of the 'Warder.' He afterwards purchased the 'Dublin Evening Packet,' and much later the half-proprietorship of the 'Dublin Evening Mail.' Eleven or twelve years ago he also became the owner and editor of the 'Dublin University Magazine,' in which his later as well as earlier Irish Stories appeared. He sold it about a year before his death in 1873, *having previously parted with the 'Warder' and his share in the 'Evening Mail.'*

He had previously published in the 'Dublin University Magazine' a number of charming lyrics, generally anonymously, and it is to be feared that all clue to the identification of most of these is lost, except that of internal evidence.

The following poem, undoubtedly his, should make general our regret at being unable to fix with certainty upon its fellows:

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'One wild and distant bugle sound
Breathed o'er Killarney's magic shore
Will shed sweet floating echoes round
When that which made them is no more.

'So slumber in the human heart
Wild echoes, that will sweetly thrill
The words of kindness when the voice
That uttered them for aye is still.

'Oh! memory, though thy records tell
Full many a tale of grief and sorrow,
Of mad excess, of hope decayed,
Of dark and cheerless melancholy;

'Still, memory, to me thou art
The dearest of the gifts of mind,
For all the joys that touch my heart
Are joys that I have left behind.

Le Fanu's literary life may be divided into three distinct periods. During the first of these, and till his thirtieth year, he was an Irish ballad, song, and story writer, his first published story being the 'Adventures of Sir Robert Ardagh,' which appeared in the 'Dublin University Magazine' of 1838.

In 1844 *he was united to Miss Susan Bennett,*

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the beautiful daughter of the late George Bennett, Q.C. From this time until her decease, in 1858, *he devoted his energies almost entirely to press work, making, however, his first essays in novel writing during that period. The 'Cock and Anchor,' a chronicle of old Dublin city, his first and, in the opinion of competent critics, one of the best of his novels, seeing the light about the year* 1850. *This work, it is to be feared, is out of print, though there is now a cheap edition of 'Torlogh O'Brien,' its immediate successor. The comparative want of success of these novels seems to have deterred Le Fanu from using his pen, except as a press writer, until* 1863, *when the 'House by the Churchyard' was published, and was soon followed by 'Uncle Silas' and his five other well-known novels.*

We have considered Le Fanu as a ballad writer and poet. As a press writer he is still most honourably remembered for his learning and brilliancy, and the power and point of his sarcasm, which long made the 'Dublin Evening

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Mail' one of the most formidable of Irish press critics; but let us now pass to the consideration of him in the capacity of a novelist, and in particular as the author of 'Uncle Silas.'

There are evidences in 'Shamus O'Brien,' and even in 'Phaudrig Croohore,' of a power over the mysterious, the grotesque, and the horrible, which so singularly distinguish him as a writer of prose fiction.

'Uncle Silas,' the fairest as well as most familiar instance of this enthralling spell over his readers, is too well known a story to tell in detail. But how intensely and painfully distinct is the opening description of the silent, inflexible Austin Ruthyn of Knowl, and his shy, sweet daughter Maude, the one so resolutely confident in his brother's honour, the other so romantically and yet anxiously interested in her uncle—the sudden arrival of Dr. Bryerly, the strange Swedenborgian, followed by the equally unexpected apparition of Madame de la Rougière, Austin Ruthyn's painful death, and the reading

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of his strange will consigning poor Maud to the protection of her unknown Uncle Silas—her cousin, good, bright devoted Monica Knollys, and her dreadful distrust of Silas—Bartram Haugh and its uncanny occupants, and foremost amongst them Uncle Silas.

This is his portrait:

'A face like marble, with a fearful monumental look, and for an old man, singularly vivid, strange eyes, the singularity of which rather grew upon me as I looked; for his eyebrows were still black, though his hair descended from his temples in long locks of the purest silver and fine as silk, nearly to his shoulders.

'He rose, tall and slight, a little stooped, all in black, with an ample black velvet tunic, which was rather a gown than a coat. . . .

'I know I can't convey in words an idea of this apparition, drawn, as it seemed, in black and white, venerable, bloodless, fiery-eyed, with its singular look of power, and an expression so

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bewildering—was it derision, or anguish, or cruelty, or patience?

'The wild eyes of this strange old man were fixed on me as he rose; an habitual contraction, which in certain lights took the character of a scowl, did not relax as he advanced towards me with a thin-lipped smile.'

Old Dicken and his daughter Beauty, old L'Amour and Dudley Ruthyn, now enter upon the scene, each a fresh shadow to deepen its already sombre hue, while the gloom gathers in spite of the glimpse of sunshine shot through it by the visit to Elverston. Dudley's brutal encounter with Captain Oakley, and vile persecution of poor Maude till his love marriage comes to light, lead us on to the ghastly catastrophe, the hideous conspiracy of Silas and his son against the life of the innocent girl.

It is interesting to know that the germ of Uncle Silas first appeared in the 'Dublin University Magazine' of 1837 *or* 1838, *as the short tale, entitled, 'A Passage from the Secret*

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History of an Irish Countess,' which is printed in this collection of Stories. It next was published as 'The Murdered Cousin' in a collection of Christmas stories, and finally developed into the three-volume novel we have just noticed.

There are about Le Fanu's narratives touches of nature which reconcile us to their always remarkable and often supernatural incidents. His characters are well conceived and distinctly drawn, and strong soliloquy and easy dialogue spring unaffectedly from their lips. He is a close observer of Nature, and reproduces her wilder effects of storm and gloom with singular vividness; while he is equally at home in his descriptions of still life, some of which remind us of the faithfully minute detail of old Dutch pictures.

Mr. Wilkie Collins, amongst our living novelists, best compares with Le Fanu. Both of these writers are remarkable for the ingenious mystery with which they develop their plots, and for the absorbing, if often over-sensational, nature

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of their incidents; but whilst Mr. Collins excites and fascinates our attention by an intense power of realism which carries us with unreasoning haste from cover to cover of his works, Le Fanu is an idealist, full of high imagination, and an artist who devotes deep attention to the most delicate detail in his portraiture of men and women, and his descriptions of the out-door and indoor worlds—a writer, therefore, through whose pages it would be often an indignity to hasten. And this more leisurely, and certainly more classical, conduct of his stories makes us remember them more fully and faithfully than those of the author of the 'Woman in White.' Mr. Collins is generally dramatic, and sometimes stagy, in his effects. Le Fanu, while less careful to arrange his plots, so as to admit of their being readily adapted for the stage, often surprises us by scenes of so much greater tragic intensity that we cannot but lament that he did not, as Mr. Collins has done, attempt the drama, and so furnish another

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ground of comparison with his fellow-countryman, Maturin (also, if we mistake not, of French origin), whom, in his writings, Le Fanu far more closely resembles than Mr. Collins, as a master of the darker and stronger emotions of human character. But, to institute a broader ground of comparison between Le Fanu and Mr. Collins, whilst the idiosyncrasies of the former's characters, however immaterial those characters may be, seem always to suggest the minutest detail of his story, the latter would appear to consider plot as the prime, character as a subsidiary element in the art of novel writing.

Those who possessed the rare privilege of Le Fanu's friendship, and only they, can form any idea of the true character of the man; for after the death of his wife, to whom he was most deeply devoted, he quite forsook general society, in which his fine features, distinguished bearing, and charm of conversation marked him out as

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the beau-idéal of an Irish wit and scholar of the old school.

From this society he vanished so entirely that Dublin, always ready with a nickname, dubbed him 'The Invisible Prince;' and indeed he was for long almost invisible, except to his family and most familiar friends, unless at odd hours of the evening, when he might occasionally be seen stealing, like the ghost of his former self, between his newspaper office and his home in Merrion Square; sometimes, too, he was to be encountered in an old out-of-the-way bookshop poring over some rare black letter Astrology or Demonology.

To one of these old bookshops he was at one time a pretty frequent visitor, and the bookseller relates how he used to come in and ask with his peculiarly pleasant voice and smile, 'Any more ghost stories for me, Mr. ——— ?' and how, on a fresh one being handed to him, he would seldom leave the shop until he had looked it through. This taste for the supernatural

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seems to have grown upon him after his wife's death, and influenced him so deeply that, had he not been possessed of a deal of shrewd common sense, there might have been danger of his embracing some of the visionary doctrines in which he was so learned. But no! even Spiritualism, to which not a few of his brother novelists succumbed, whilst affording congenial material for our artist of the superhuman to work upon, did not escape his severest satire.

Shortly after completing his last novel, strange to say, bearing the title 'Willing to Die,' Le Fanu breathed his last at his home No. 18, *Merrion Square South, at the age of fifty-nine.* 1873

'He was a man,' writes the author of a brief memoir of him in the 'Dublin University Magazine,' 'who thought deeply, especially on religious subjects. To those who knew him he was very dear; they admired him for his learning, his sparkling wit, and pleasant conversation, and loved him for his manly virtues, for his noble and generous qualities, his gentleness,

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and his loving, affectionate nature.' And all who knew the man must feel how deeply deserved are these simple words of sincere regard for Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.

Le Fanu's novels are accessible to all; but his Purcell Papers are now for the first time collected and published, by the permission of his eldest son (the late Mr. Philip Le Fanu), and very much owing to the friendly and active assistance of his brother, Mr. William Le Fanu.

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THE PURCELL PAPERS.

THE GHOST AND THE BONE-SETTER.

IN looking over the papers of my late valued and respected friend, Francis Purcell, who for nearly fifty years discharged the arduous duties of a parish priest in the south of Ireland, I met with the following document. It is one of many such; for he was a curious and industrious collector of old local tra-

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