

As famine ravages the land, two men are

Called to Account



Frank Parker

Based on real events

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Introduction

I like to imagine Arthur Kennedy and Crofton Vandeleur each about to embark on his journey to Cork for the assizes at which the charge of slander was to be heard. Each looks in a mirror – shaving, perhaps, or combing a beard; adjusting the tilt of a hat or the folds of a neckerchief – and reflects on the similarities in the other's background to their own. Each was the son of a Protestant landowner, each grew up on the shores of an estuary – one on the North East coast of Ireland, the other in the South West. Both were about the same age; both lost a parent whilst still young: Vandeleur his father, Kennedy his mother.

It is from there that their life paths diverge. Vandeleur inherited his father's estates. He was an entrepreneur, determined to further his father's vision of Kilrush as a port to rival Limerick. An ambition that was thwarted by the onset of famine.

As the fourth son, Kennedy had no expectation of an inheritance, although two older brothers died before their father and it was the third son who inherited the property. Arthur had to rely on his intelligence, and an ability to negotiate, in order to carve a career for himself. The famine would provide for him a stepping-stone to an illustrious career in the diplomatic service, governing, successively, several far flung territories of the British Empire. Whether he imagined that possibility as he prepared for the court case is hard to know. The possibility that his next post, as Her Majesty's representative in Sierra Leone, had been at least hinted at cannot be discounted. There is no doubting the fact that the case represented the final act in what had been a period of enormous significance in his life.

The conversations and internal monologues that follow are entirely imaginary, as are those events that take place beyond the