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"Lepers Man," Secretary, Lepers Trust Board
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THE FOUNDERS

—A Memoir by JOHN BUCKLEY

IN my boyhood when my people lived
in Hawke's Bay an old man whom we
will call James Casey lived not far from
us with his wife. They were a dreadful
couple. Neither of them had the slight-
est self-control. We boys used to gather
by their gate to listen to their quarrels.
Quarrels is a mild word. They fre-
quently resorted to blows and the old
lady was quite as proficient as Casey and
well able to hold her own. But it was
their language which delighted their
young audience. They would describe
each other with a wealth of obscenity
and an ingenuity of malice which amazed
us, and did not, I fear, horrify us. They
did not mind an audience. When an
Irishman misconducts himself he goes
the whole way.

We children were most strictly for-
bidden to go near them so we frequently
made up to visit them, sometimes in
pairs, often in parties. Casey had been
a magnificent physical specimen. He was
six feet four or five, broad and tapering,
long legs with great length of thigh. He
was fair with aquiline features, had a
fine nose, a wide mouth, very straight
and thin-lipped. The features were spoilt
by an appearance of obliquity, and a
leering cunning look. He was 74 years
of age when I knew him but looked
about 60. Some years before, when lying
in a bullock track dead drunk he had
been run over by a bullock wagon and
so crippled that he moved with difficulty.
This was a handicap when conjugal
assaults were in progress. It did not pre-
vent him throwing heavy objects, how-
ever, with great accuracy and venom.

I became quite friendly with him and
learned his story. He was born in Tip-
perary and was the son of a peasant
tenant farmer. During the sixties his
father fell behind with the rent and was
evicted. Casey, Senior, seems to have
been foolish and spiritless although hard
working, respectable and pious. And any-
way the times were bad, the land poor
and their luck of the worst. Well, they
were evicted; and their miserable be-
longings thrown out of their miserable

shanty. The wife and four children were
thrown out too. James Casey was the
eldest; unruly, tempestuous and not in-
duced to imitate the devout resignation
of his parents to the Will of God. So it
came about on that unfortunate day that
a drizzle of cold rain began to fall on
the wretched family and its scattered
bedding. Casey Senior sent James to a
village some five miles off to get help
from a relative. On the way he met the
landlord and his agent. These two had
not, of course, been at the eviction. They
knew of it only casually in fact. Evic-
tions were common enough and regarded
as a matter of course. The landlord was
on a visit from England. Young Casey
saw the gig and attacked the hated agent
at once. The gig was backed into the
ditch. The landlord came to his servant's
help and was killed by the first blow of
Casey's heavy blackthorn. The agent was
severely injured. This absentee landlord
and Casey were quite unknown to each
other. Now at the eviction there had
been police present and some cavalry
but on this lonely Tipperary lane there
were no witnesses whatever.

Casey went on to his relatives without
any hurry and apparently without the
least realisation that he would be hanged
next session if the ordinary course of
events followed. But his uncle was an
alert, active man. He had some means
and was a member of the Land League.
He acted promptly and with decision
and got his nephew first to Cork and
then over to France within the next
three days. Thanks to warnings from the
organisation young Casey was able to
evade also the French police who were
promptly communicated with from Dub-
lin. The hue and cry continued through
France and Germany and finally to Italy.
In Milan they nearly had him, for the
chase was pursued with great diligence.
(The landlord was influential, a K.C.B.
or something.) Here, however, he met a
friend. He had been interrogated by the
Milan police but most unaccountably re-
leased again. Possibly it was carelessness.

LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS

*CHILL falls the fog on Islington,
Red Lion Square lies shivering to the sky;
Leaves rattle in Lambs Conduit Street.
See! Silently the barristers go by.*

*Dim forms moulded in mist,
Knights of the old, the cold battles of yesterday.
Wigs waving over the stony fields
Of catch-throat easty London grey.*

*Peacock, Pike and Elphinstone,
Venner, Tooth and Baird,
Cuff, Maguire and Venables,
Spurgeon, Pope and Laird.*

*(All these glorious names are gone
And John Smith, Junior, carries on.)*

*Pause with a sympathetic tear,
For Scrope is still crusading here,
Last of all the mighty line
Of Bloodworth, Scrope and Palatine.*

*Ghostly in the grass they walk,
Shadows under dripping trees.
Here a deed-box, there a quill,
Figures in a frieze.*

*Fog from the fierce toil of a great city,
Sweat of her striving, dark dew of her brain.
Hard and tender, ruthless, full of pity,
London! Your children visit you again.*

—Peggy Ashton



"It wasn't long before he owned his own
ten-ox team"

possible the police were not sure. Casey
pretended he was a German for by then
he had a few words of that language. He
did not return to his work or his lodgings
but sought out a priest to whom he told
the whole story and asked for help. The
priest hid him for six weeks and then
sent him south to Rome. Big cities are
the best hiding places but Milan was too
hot. Italy was just then passing through
troubled times and Garibaldi was march-
ing on Rome. Casey joined the Papal
forces. He met with other Irish some
of whose experiences were not unlike
his own. When Rome fell several of
them including Casey went to sea. He
served in various ships for three years,
Italian, Greek and Dutch and finally,
like most seamen, in a British ship. At
the end of a voyage to Sydney he de-
serted and went inland. He worked as a
bullock driver and bushman for two
years and again went to sea. He deserted
again at Auckland and followed his old
occupation of bushman for some time
in that province and drifted later to
Hawke's Bay. It wasn't long before he
owned his own ten-ox team, a wagon and
sledge.

At this time he was working, carting
timber with his team and a sledge, from
bush to mill. About once a month he
went into Woodville for supplies. There
was a homestead on the way for which
he also collected goods from town. Now
the daughter of this household was a
pretty girl and one of the most
accomplished in the district. She used
to take tea out to the men and she and
the bullock driver formed an acquaint-
ance. He was a fine looking fellow, quiet
in his manners and good humoured but
he had no education and had developed
a liking for liquor. She was 18 and
rather self-willed.

The parents soon came to know and
they objected. They were English, well
connected, wealthy and would in time
be wealthier. They weren't having any
Irish bullock-driver. However, the girl
was spoilt and headstrong. She ran away
with him. This was the Mrs. Casey I
later knew.

After leaving home Mrs. Casey never
heard of her parents again. Casey
swooped his team for some horses and
headed north. Their first child was born
during the journey (in the wagon in
fact) and without medical aid.

I don't know their history since, ex-
cept what one could gather from their
faces and habits. Casey's fondness for
liquor proved permanent. He always re-
mained tough and liquor did not (as
often happens) make him soft and rubi-
cund. He ill-treated his wife but she
gave I think as good as she got. I don't
know whether they were a happy couple.
I wouldn't call them an ideal couple.
They both died in 1919.