

IMPRESSIONS IN A STORM.

By the Rev. P. A. Sheehan, D.D.,
in The Dolphin.

We had a terrible magnetic storm last night. Wise people who understand the eternal laws of Nature, and the marvelous interdependence of suns and planets, foresaw it. For there were, all this year, spots in the sun, great rents in the photosphere here and there, into whose horrible jaws you might fling thousands of pebbles, such as this little earth of ours, without the chance of satiating them. So I told my little children in the convent schools here. They received the information with a smile of pitying incredulity. Then there was some magnificent auroras, up there in hyperborean regions—great plumes of light cast up from an unseen cauldron in the blazing heavens, and stretched out in a great fan of colors, frail and iridescent as a rainbow's. So we said to ourselves: Something is coming. This is but the stage scenery. When will the performance commence? Sure enough, yesterday afternoon there were some deep grumbings in that half bronze, half copper sky, which always holds in its hollows untold terrors. These were the prelude to the mighty nocturnal oratorio of the heavens. It commenced, as oratorios do, ever so softly and gently, mere susurrus of sound, echoed down along the bases of the black mountains and fading away to invisible distances. But every two seconds the sky was a sheet of blue flame, fitful and flickering, and yet broad and deep and permanent enough to show every outline—leaf and bough, and trunk, of the belt of forest trees opposite my window, and every ripple in the river beneath. There was no sleeping now. I arose. So did everyone in the village except the little children in their innocence, who slept a right through the storm; and a tramp, who was drunk. I lighted my candle, and tried to read. It was useless. Those broad, blue flashes flickering like swallows' wings across my windows, forbade it. There was nothing for it but to witness in awe and with strained nerves the explosion in fire and fury of the elements of heaven.

Then it struck me that my stables were in danger. I passed out into the yard to examine them and so powerful is the force of imagination I distinctly saw fire flickering across the ridges of some thatched roofs outside my garden walls. Next day, I was surprised to find that these cottages were not burned to the ground. I returned, and sat patiently watching the play of the electric fluid across the heaven and athwart the landscape. Hitherto, no rain had fallen, but about 2 a.m. the flashes became more frequent, as if the whole heavens were a tremendous battery, belching out blue flame at every moment. And the deep diapason of the thunder came nearer and broke in deeper and longer volleys reverberating across the valley and shattered against the black mountains far away. The strain became severe; and I prayed for one drop of rain to certify that nature was melting away in its own terrific anger. But not a drop, only the swift wings of light beating across sky and earth, and the deep growl of the thunder coming nearer and nearer. Up to this the town was as still as death—still with the silence under which all souls are hushed in terror, as if there were no escape, and nothing remained but to wait and pray. About three o'clock, however, as the storm deepened in intensity, a poor half-demented creature rushed wildly into the streets and cried: "The town is on fire! the town is on fire." It was ghastly, that lonely cry in the stillness and dread.

It was so like the cry of the angels who abandoned Jerusalem in the crisis of its fate. Let us go hence! Let us go hence! But a more startling sound struck the ears of the trembling people. Two poor jennets who had been out feeding on the highways in defiance of the law, tore madly across the bridge and into the streets, screaming madly in terror; and their cry resembled so exactly the wail of women, despairing and stricken, that it seemed for a moment as if the whole town had gone mad from fright and rushed like maniacs

abroad. At last a about 4 a.m. a few drops of rain fell and I said thank God! But the storm was reaching its climax. The blue flashes broad and gleaming gave way before the terrific artillery that now broke right above our heads; and great blood-red and forked javelins of fire stabbed here and there through the inky blackness. It was horrible—those fire missiles flung at us we know not from where, and running zigzag now in the heavens above, now in the earth beneath; and every flash such a crash of thunder that one could well believe that the end of all things had come; that the fountains of the great deep were broken up; and that Earth and Heaven were rushing together pell mell into chaos. And the one hope was that the rain was now pouring in deluge from the skies; and the splash from roof and housetop and gully was almost equal in horror to the weird music in the heavens. At last about 4:30 a.m. there was a flash of blinding light, as if hell had opened and shut, then a moment's pause; and then such a snarl of sound overhead, such a malignant fendish growl as of a thousand maddened beasts that I involuntarily put my fingers in my ears, and murmured: "Election!" It was the last bar in the great oratorio of the heavens. The sounds rumbled and died far down on the head of the horizon; the skies cleared; and nought was heard, only the unseen cataracts pouring down their floods from the broken reservoirs of Heaven.

A few days later I read, with surprise, that this frightful cataclysm was limited to a narrow belt of atmosphere, not half a mile in depth. Beyond and above, the eternal stars shone peacefully.

About six o'clock the evening before the storm, a tramp came into my garden, where I was reading. My servant said: A gentleman wanted to see me! So I said: Send him up. We are so polite in Ireland that everyone is a gentleman or a lady, when they are not noblemen. I saw at a glance at his boots that he was a tramp. Now I like tramps just as I like everything planetary and wandering. It is because I am such a precisian, that I could not sit down to dinner if a picture was hung awry, or a book misplaced on a shelf, that I love irregularities in others. A piece of torn paper on my carpet will give me a fit of epilepsy; but I can tranquilly contemplate the awful chaos of another's study, and even congratulate him on his splendid nerves. So tramps, comets, variable stars, wandering lights of philosophy, stars of the outer darkness, flotsam and jetsam of heaven and earth—I have a curious sympathy with them all, as fate or fortune blows them about in eccentric orbits. This wayfarer told me he was from my native town, (which was a lie); that he was a tradesman out of employment (which was another); that he was hungry and thirsty (which was half-and-half). I gave him sixpence, which he instantly transmuted into whiskey. Then he lay down under an open archway; and slept all through that terrific storm. I have no doubt but that the electric fluid shot through that open arch again and again during the night; but the Eudaemon, who presides over drunken people, warded off the bolts. He woke next morning, stiff, but sound and whole; and was utterly amazed at the universal consternation. And there are people in the world still who say that drink is an unmitigated evil!

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PROTESTANTISM AND PROSPERITY.

(Catholic Times (English))

Whatever else may be the outcome of Mr. Balfour's and Mr. Chamberlain's fiscal proposals, these two gentlemen have dealt a severe blow at one of the most venerable controversial arguments that Protestantism ever possessed. Heretofore it was quite customary for members of the Established Church, when engaged in religious discussions with Catholics, to point to the unquestioned progress and prosperity of the British Empire as proof positive that Protestantism surpassed in worth and beneficence any and every other form of faith. Compared with Catholicism, its splendor shone with the glory of the noonday sun. Wherever the Catholic Church held sway over men there was poverty and wretchedness, backwardness or decay. The results of professing Protestantism or Catholicism could be seen at a glance, and no one with an eye could fail to see that, judged by the standard of common sense and worldly wisdom, Protestantism was immensely superior to its rival and foe. The argument was not very logical, perhaps, and the test certainly was one which no thoughtful philosopher would accept as conclusive; for what natural alliance, what necessary connection was there between supernatural faith and material prosperity? However, the argument did duty on scores of platforms, and as a theme for the pulpit was never hackneyed, because always flattering. Alas for arguments, and premisses which have no foundation in fact! All the logic in the world won't save them from Humpty-Dumpty's fate when he fell from the wall. This reasoning from Protestant material prosperity to Protestant religious truth has fallen on evil days. Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain and scores of politicians besides lift up their voices and cry out alarmingly to their fellow countrymen, warning them that England's prosperity has passed or is quickly passing away, and that, unless they adopt new fiscal methods, Great Britain's day is done. All this prophecy may, or may not be true; it may be a wily dodge to escape the judgment of the country on their scandalous wickedness and mismanagement during the late war; but, at all events, people believe them, and a large following accepts their views as correct and asserts that they are warranted by facts.

If these things are so; if the prosperity of this country really has passed or is passing away, then with it has gone or is fast going the strongest, because the most popular defense of Protestantism as a religious creed. No other argument in defense of the Established Church ever exercised an influence comparable to this. It was an argument which men could see with their eyes, handle with their hands. It met them in every place and in every form. At home and abroad, in town and in country, on sea and land, England's power and prosperity, her wealth, her progress, her industry, her genius, came before them in turn, and, as being material, were calculable and impressive. To the man in the street

(Continued on page six).

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