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"Truth is Catholic; proclaim it ever, and God will effect the rest."—BALMEZ.

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THOMAS SEXTON, M.P.

One of the Most Interesting Figures Among Irish Leaders.

A BRILLIANT ORATOR, BUT SOCIALLY A RECLUSE.

During the tremendous struggle of the civil war in the United States, the hosts of the ultra-war and negrophile party were led by a gentleman called Thad Stephens. Whenever the cry of conciliation raised its voice; whenever natural humanity, starting back in horror from the terrible bloodshed, demanded peace; whenever any question arose as to whether the negro should be placed in absolute predominance over the whites of the South—the voice of Thad rose loud and raucous, and by its very vehemence and strength imposed its own irreconcilability upon weaker natures, says the London Weekly Sun. And I remember, when all the world had become familiar with the despotic omnipotence of this strange, wonderful, terrible man, reading one day that he lived in a few bare rooms, and had no companion but a single colored servant.

Two natures more dissimilar than that of Mr. Sexton and the old abolitionist leader could not well be imagined. The breadth, the frigidity, and also the Irish geniality of Mr. Sexton's judgment would probably have ranged him in the civil war of America on the side of peace, toleration and gentle treatment; but the reason an article on him suggests to me this early recollection is that in the absolute absorption in a great struggle, in the loneliness and isolation of their personal lives, there is something very like in the careers of the two men. For Mr. Sexton has no life outside the life of the House of Commons. In the ridiculous and idiotic mud-slinging which opened the great Parnell split, an inspired assailant of Mr. Sexton ascribed his hostility to Parnell to his love of the sweetbreads which are, as everybody knows, a standing dish in the houses of the great. As a matter of fact Mr. Sexton has

NEVER BEEN SEEN AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION in London in the whole course of his life. In all the fifteen years he has lived in this city, the man is yet to be produced who can say that he had seen Mr. Sexton at his own or at any other dining table. About three or four times he has been persuaded into attending semi-official dinners given by his own party. In the old days of Parnell's unbroken leadership there used to be nearly always a dinner to the chief on his birthday, and these dinners Mr. Sexton used to attend. But with these exceptions Mr. Sexton has remained as much aloof from the convivial companionship of his fellow-men as if he were one of the early ascetics, who sought their salvation in the lonely desert, and not one of the most prominent figures in a great imperial Legislature.

This absorption in parliamentary life has not made Mr. Sexton a happy man; indeed, the more I have seen of the prominent men of political struggle the more am I driven to the conviction

that happiness and political eminence are rarely united. But it is this absorption which has made Mr. Sexton the mighty parliamentarian he is. When Mr. Sexton comes down to the House of Commons he has already spent a morning in parliamentary work. As he sips the cup of tea which is his only sustenance till dinner time, he goes carefully over the newspapers of the day; reads all questions and the orders, glances over any blue book which may bear upon the questions in which he is interested and takes laborious, carefully-arranged and tabulated notes. Whenever he rises to make a speech, even if it be a brief one, he has in his hands a couple of sheets of note paper, on which you see written, in a hand as small and almost

AS BEAUTIFUL AS THAT OF THACKERAY, all the facts, arguments and sequence of the question. If there be quotations to be made, they have been cut out from the newspaper or the blue book, and are pasted in as carefully as though the great Parliamentarian were a scissors-and-paste sub-editor. There is no sloppiness about any work that Mr. Sexton does. He is not a hit-or-miss kind of combatant. I do not suppose he has ever risen in the House of Commons in all the years he has been there, and, in spite of all the speeches he has made, without having mastered all the facts of the subject on which he spoke.

And this thoroughness he carries out in everything he does. Sometimes it is hard to understand how the small, delicate, almost fragile frame is able to pass through the gigantic demands which are made upon its energies. And often as the name of Mr. Sexton appears in the public press, this gives but a faint idea of the amount of labor and devotion he gives to the work. At this moment he is the chief advocate of the Irish claim at the commission which is inquiring into the financial relations of Great Britain and Ireland. And just think what labor there is in working up every single serious item of expenditure in the budgets that have regulated the relations of England and Ireland during the ninety-five years which have elapsed since the act of union! It is a peculiarity—it is to a certain extent even a weakness—of the mind of Mr. Sexton to let no detail escape him. The smallest, tiniest cranny or nook of subject he explores with the same relentless, tireless and scrutinizing investigation as the largest and most palpable; and now and then perhaps, as a result, he loses something of the sense of proportion.

BUT WHAT A HEAVENLY GIFT it is to a nation like Ireland. There, alas! all the training of the expert and the official ability, with rare exceptions, is on the side of the government. For once all this trained ability has met its match; and Irish claims are doggedly and efficiently and stubbornly advocated by a man like Mr. Sexton, who brings to these discussions about figures a talent and a memory for statistics that would do credit to one who had spent his life at a clerk's desk in the treasury. Talent of such a kind in a country where no Nationalist has any chance of public appointment and official training is as rare as it is precious; and I sometimes think, with all the splendid honor and the universal homage paid

to Mr. Sexton's genius and services, that his own countrymen do not do full justice to this side of his work.

While Mr. Sexton spends hours once or twice a week in the commission of inquiry, he is as constant as ever in his attendance in the House of Commons. There is something very native and most childlike in the way he sticks to the House of Commons. To most old parliamentarians the place becomes insufferably tiresome; its charm is still as fresh with Mr. Sexton as when he entered the place almost a youth. He is always present throughout question time; he rarely passes a day without having some question in the paper himself, and he is always there, watchful, attentive, sleepless, to intervene with a supplemental question whenever there is an opportunity of striking an enemy or helping a friend of Ireland. He never leaves the building, and though he may dally for an hour or so over a cigar—the one luxury that breaks the asceticism of his life after dinner—he is usually to be found in the House even during the dreary dinner hour; and if he be not there he is to be found in the library laboriously getting through the piles of correspondence with which all busy men are assailed. When midnight is passed, and every human being is yawning and restless to get off, Mr. Sexton may still be seen in his place—the order paper before him, those

WONDROUS KEEN AND PRACTICAL EYES of his gazing at everybody who is making any movement, and those sharp ears of his open. Friends whose companionship he loves may tempt him with a walk or a drive home together; but Mr. Sexton is not to be moved. Not until the motion for adjournment is put, and already the ghastliness and spectral emptiness of night has cast its anticipatory shadow over the House of Commons, can Mr. Sexton be got to rise from his seat.

And what are the qualities in addition to those I named which make Mr. Sexton the great parliamentarian he is? I should put in the forefront the perfectly extraordinary readiness with which the word answers with him to the thought. Not even in the case of Mr. Gladstone was that readiness so complete and so extraordinary. His mind seems to be one of those alert and positive ones which at once see clearly, and the word rushes to the tongue as clearly as the vision to the mind. I have rarely heard him hesitate for a moment to find words to express his ideas—even when the ideas were of a complex order and required subtlety and delicate shadings of expression. It is also one of the results of this extraordinary alertness and lightning like rapidity of expression that Mr. Sexton should—again Mr. Gladstone is the only one who can be likened to him—be never fogged or bewildered in the labyrinth of the longest sentence. There are few speakers I know—even among those who can be classed as orators—who do not now and then find it difficult to get out of the thicket of speech into which they are occasionally betrayed in the course of speaking, and who do not leave a ragged, an unfinished or a confused sentence. This has never happened to Mr. Sexton, in my experience, in the whole course of his political life. His oratory would probably strike the stranger with some surprise who heard him for the first time.

The tradition still lingers that Irishmen are extremely florid or extremely vehement orators. Listen to Mr. Sexton—mark the deliberate, slow—almost too slow—articulation, that deadly calm, scarcely ever broken except when an argument has to be pressed home by a certain elevation of voice and emphasis of manner—and you will be inclined to the conclusion that the

FROID, LOGICAL, BUSINESS LIKE ORATORY of the House of Commons is to be found in its perfection on the Irish rather than on the English benches. I have seen Mr. Sexton lift the House of Commons to the empyrean—impress both sides of it so profoundly that there came that deadly silence which only the very perfection of oratory can procure; and yet it is curious that this orator is at the same time one of the greatest business men in the House of Commons. His mastery of figures is as instinctive and as immediate as his readiness of expression. I have been told that when he was a school-boy his powers in rapid calculations of mental arithmetic were already so well known that his school fellows used to give puzzling questions to him for their amusement. I remember one night Sir George Trevelyan brought in a complicated bill, I think it was when he was chief secretary. Standing up immediately after, Mr. Sexton had already done a complicated sum in his mind, and was also able to tell to a penny the result of these elaborate calculations. The chief secretary at once declared that Mr. Sexton's figures were exactly and emphatically right.

What I want to impress upon the reader above all things is THE ESSENTIALLY PRACTICAL CHARACTER of Mr. Sexton's genius. He speaks when need be; but he does not love speaking. What he loves above all things is to get the work in which he believes done; and there are few tasks he has ever taken up in which he does not succeed.

And what gratification does Mr. Sexton get from all these services to Ireland—tireless, persistent, incalculable? Like most of his colleagues, he has to pass through a period of misunderstanding—sometimes of downright and brutal calumny—during the saddened years which have followed the golden era when all Irishmen were united; and his nature—thoughtful, gentle, philosophic rather than combative and pushing—has felt the blows, and will ever bear the scars. But he was too manly and too tenacious a nature to be driven from his work by public misunderstanding. Sad, lonely, highminded, busy in the public cause through every second of every day, he is one of the most interesting, one of the purest, one of the most pathetic figures in even the tragic picture gallery of Ireland's leaders.

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