

THOMAS IRWIN.

SCOTCH-IRISHISM AND ITS ORIGIN.

The Poet of the Early Nation—The Great Change in His Ideas—Blaming in Old Age the Heroes of His Youth.

"The most wearisome times" say a travelling friend "is that of expectancy." The phrase was a curious one, and rather puzzling in its meaning. The word expectancy had on one occasion brushed up the ire of six gray beards against an insurance company. I was loath to plead ignorance of an ordinary looking sentence in my mother-tongue, and would have much rather preferred, to do as so many American critics are wont to call it a "happy phrase with a mystical meaning" only clear to my all-absorbing ego. Criticism comes by art, curiosity by nature. Flout as you will nature is more natural than art, hence you will not wonder that my curiosity tempted me to ask. Sir what do you mean by such a phrase. The mantle of Bishop has not fallen on me, and without it, how do you expect me to translate into plain speech your Emersonian riddles. "Ah" says the friend "that of expectancy" means simply this, when you have finished your business in a town, packed up your things, paid your hotel-bills it is most wearisome to loiter around hotel-corridors, or idly gaze at the passers through the big glass window, until train or boat time." The author of the phrase, strange, as it may seem, was a commercial traveller. In our democratic way by the curtailment of an adjective, a process having the sanction of the high priest of transcendentalism, my friend was a drummer. I believe the word was taken from an analogy between them and the woodpecker. It is well known that bird will drum a tree, as long as there is a chance for a grub, while drummers drum as long as there is a chance for an order. Our young land likes that kind of perseverance, which hostile critics have termed brazen impudence. A fig for your critics: the drummer was right.

THE TIME OF EXPECTANCY

is most wearisome, as I found in Dublin. I wished a dozen times for the Liverpool boat, but if wishes were horses beggars might ride. I had an invitation to visit Mr. Eugene Davis and a party of literary young Irishmen at the Angel by two. As it was only nine, breakfast over, and a Patrick Henry blown into curling blue smoke, now and then relieved with pray, the effect of a prolonged puff, what was I to do. Sticking my hands in my trousers' pockets and leaning against a strong pillar, it was as a sweet singer sung:

"A frightful ordeal, but yet
Dire evils pass, if boldly met."

As I was about to boldly meet this one by walking into the rain, a little playful shadow on the opposite wall hove in view. "Coming events cast their shadows before," for soon a little tattered rosy-faced urchin, with roguish gray eyes, slid up to me, saying, "I say, Mister, isn't your name Lecky?" It is, my little man. "Well, here's a letter from Mr.——" I slipped a coin in his dumpy little sooty hand. He puffed out his apple cheeks, curved his dainty mouth, and whistled "Shan O'Farrell." I watched the little prints of his bare feet on the winter mud, and turning to a glum-looking Unionist, said, there's your conquerors, there's hope for Ireland yet. The Unionist, cur-like, snarled. Afterwards, I learned that he was a land agent. The grunt was native to his class. Tearing the envelope I found a letter from an Irish novelist, whose friendship is one of the most treasured gifts of my Irish journey. It read: "Tynan glad to meet you; make date. Irwin alive; copy-holder for Times. I believe he has abandoned his early convictions. Do not know him intimately; but send letter of T. C., introducing you." The Tynan here referred to is the poetess, whose volume of poems entitled "Sham-rocks," made us expect so much.

WHO IS IRWIN?

It is the aim of this paper to tell. Thomas Caulfield Irwin was of that canny race that inhabit Ulster, a race that has supplied more than the average share of intellect to every Irish movement. Some superficial writers have called these northern people Scotch-Irish, a meaningless term. A horde of senseless bigots in the States have a peculiar fondness for the term. Every year they fondle it in

convention with strange speeches. How any safe historian can make anything out of the people of Ulster, save Irishmen, the present writer is at a loss to know. These bigots adduce their names, but from a list lying before me it is safe to say that not one of them in every ten can claim an ancestry from the land of cakes and broom. Some of the names are hardly Celtic in their origin, but let it be borne in mind that such names as Tower, Greenfield, Kiln, Hood-house, Grove, Burndale were begun on Irish soil. The process is a curious one, and as I have never met with a description of it, even at the cost of a little delay, in my subject I will describe it. In the North of Ireland, as most of the Scotch-Irish should know, there is a prevalent custom, the origin of many of their curiously constructed names. When a young girl is unfortunate enough to become a mother, the offspring of her shame is wrapped in woollens and placed in wicker baskets and then deposited in some frequented place. The discovered babe is called after the place where it was found. If in a grass field, Greenfield; if in one covered with snow, Whitfield; if by a lime-kiln, Kiln; and, as the hedge schoolmaster said of the stars seen by one of his pupils during a sound thrashing. "These, sir, can be made *ad infinitum*." These curiously-named children are sent to the work-houses, and, after a time,

FARMED OUT.

to Baptists, Wesleyans, etc., and by them inoculated with those bizarre notions of Christianity, that bigots take for charity. Crossing the Atlantic, they found Scotch-Irish families, hence the meetings in our land every year, and the denunciation of all things Irish. This pride of Scotch Irishism is something akin to that described by the witty farce.

"Although it had fifty hobbles to ride
Had really no foundation;
But like the fabrics that gossips devise,—
Those single stories that often arise
And grow till they reach a four story size,—
Was merely a fancy creation."

Irwin was born in Warrensport Co. Down, May 4, 1823. His father was a well to do physician, if one may credit an American biographic sketch of the poet. "He joined the Nation during the days of Davis, and was a valued contribution" is another sentence extracted from the same source. So the man whose memory might give many a bit of news to be treasured by after time, was really alive, a few steps from my hotel. The letter of T. C. another brother of the tuneless quill would surely make the old man thaw to the young American. That my grandfather was born a few miles from his native town, and had often been his father's companion in his country drives, was noted as a good second point to make, if the letter was a failure. But toning my frieze coat to my neck, I whistled "Marching through Georgia," to cheer me, and set out to find T. C. Irwin. A few minutes walk and I stood at the cashier's desk in the office of the Irish Times. An amiable red-headed, weak-eyed young man, twitched his scrub-growth of beard, and in a usual drawl informed me that

"UP STAIRS AND A TURN TO THE LEFT GETS HIM."

This information was copious; it wanted to be localized. Up stairs I went, with my heart in a little flurry, to see the poet. A workman, with a white apron, curiously eyed me. "Is Mr. Irwin here?" "Aye, that the old fellow holding copy," rejoined the workman, and passed on. Little respect me thought for a bard, but prophets are ignored at home, and familiarity breeds contempt. To the "old fellow" I went and handed him my note. While he reads let me snap my kodax. This is the picture. Head large, forehead expansive; eyes, large, keen and snapping; face, oval commonplace and covered with a few weeks growth of bristling scrubby down; head thatched with long, unkempt, straggling hair. His height and form are not given in the picture as he was seated in a crouched position on a rickety bamboo-chair. Perhaps, owing to the oscillatory nature of his sitting apparatus, he dared not move, fearful that his dignity as an Irish poet, might come to the ground, in the presence of an American globe trotter. The letter made him smile. "I hardly know this T. C.," said the bard. "I thought he was your friend," I mildly answered. "Young man," said the bard, "when you are as old as I am, that word friend will not be so lightly used, it is a sacred word." I nodded assent to the wisdom of this ancient man. Youth has many faults, impulsiveness is one of the

most attractive. It is the most dangerous, mutters a blue-sticking. Madam, danger is an attraction. Why do you chatter so much of the valor of the Light Brigade while other charges are unnoticed. "The Light Brigade is more attractive," why? "It was more dangerous." With that impulsiveness that gives to youth a charm, and to old age a nervous shock,

I SILENCED THE POET

in the midst of a monologue that seemed to sweetly tinkle in his ears. "What do you think of Parnell?" His eyes snapped, and the mouth took on a curious curve. Said I to that inner self, Lecky, the old warrior will cleave you to the ground for such an insolent interruption of his garrulous monologue. Do you not know that the sweetest music in some ears is the music played by choice on their own mouth organs? "Sir," said the knight of poetry, "I am not here to answer such questions." A long silence and the bard has forgiven by youth. "Parnell is a poor figure. What does he mean? He has no talent; followed by a troop of course fellows, he wills to destroy the little guarantee of safety that our present condition warrants." "But, Mr. Irwin, did you not belong to the Nation in the paling days, when it was a preaching total separatist of the extreme type." "I say," said the bard, steadying himself on his rickety foundation, "the Nation was an intellectual movement, whose doctrines were noble and generous." And then, with charming naivete, "I had the honor to edit that paper for years. This new movement is not in the line laid down by us. It means bloodshed, confusion, the wrecking of homes." "To me, Mr. Irwin, it means peace and happiness, the consummation of this new movement. You say it is not on the lines of the Nation. Time change, aims change, men change. The means of one age will not fit the one succeeding. We grow, the garments of the child will not fit the man. The Nation was of its time, and apt in that time. Time is not as the sphinx, standing always in the same place. Your Nation, with its fiery articles in a kind of maddening prose, its wild, untrammelled songs, would be

OUT OF PLACE IN OUR TIME.

We have lived down the spasmodic school in poetry and the physical force school in revolution. I believe, sir, we are wiser than our fathers, but whether you concede this or not, you will admit that—

New men, new lights:
And the father's code the sons may never brook.

What is liberty now were license then;
Their freedom our yoke would be.
And each new decade must have new men
To determine its liberty.

He scratched his hairless skull and muttered something about "destroyers of his country." What a pitiable sight to see the young, generous poet dwindled into an old foggy, recanting the best work of his life, and blaming men, who would have been his heroes in his manhood. I pitied him. I always pity a man that sickness and poverty have driven into the pessimists' camp. Irwin spent the best part of his life for his country, and the callous jade deserted him in old age. He went to the enemy for bread and not for love.

Enthusiasts who have plenty of money cannot understand how a man may, in old age, wear lightly the togger of youth. If they were reduced to stony crust and water for some years, they would discover that the stomach plays leading lady in the comedy of life. Fill it well with haunches of meat juicy and sweet, with port or XXX wash it down, and your Orsini and other long-haired "protectors of society" would become models for a Peace League. Confusion in this world is made by men whose stomachs are empty, and who like Micawber, are waiting for something to turn up, in order that they may fill them. The bard was equally averse to talk of the men and things that were of his time. They had flown from his memory, while mandarin arguments for the stability of the Union remained. How true that—

"Memory locks her chaff in bins
And throws away the grain."

Of his own poetry he was full. Most poets are. He was never weary of reading his poems, a practice that the

Philestines abhor. In this respect, Plato must rank as one of them. In his dream of a Republic he banished bards, and the only real reason one may conjecture their practice of waylaying the unsuspecting traveller, by reading tragedies, comedies, lyric bursts, etc., fresh from their anvil. Irwin held that poetry was his life-play, and

"If you choose to play—is my principle?
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize be it what it will."

Poor fellow his prize sought for in five or six little books of verse, has been harsh old age under the rule of that hideous hag poverty. The way of most Irish singers has been a via dolorosa and for none more than the subject of this sketch. The country that refuses to assuage his ills by bread, may cover his grave with marble, for such is the fickleness of men.

WALTER LECKY.

Montreal, November 1891. I was suffering for three months from an obstinate cough, pricking in my throat, night sweats and a general debility, which caused me to fear consumption of the throat. I am now perfectly well, and owe my cure to Dr. Larivoy's Syrup of Turpentine. I took four small bottles of 25 cents each. FELIX SAUVAGEAU, General Contractor, No. 179 St. Antoine Street.

City Clerk's Office, City Hall, Montreal, March 5th 1892. Dr. Larivoy, Montreal. My Dear Doctor. Your Syrup of Turpentine is without a doubt a marvellous remedy, one whose absolute efficacy will certainly not be long in becoming generally known. I was suffering for several days from acute bronchitis which caused weakening fits of coughing day and night, to such an extent that I was entirely unable to sleep and it became almost an impossibility for me to attend to my business. After having tried various remedies without any relief, I bought a bottle of your Syrup of Turpentine and in two days there remained not the slightest trace of my bronchitis. I may add that I address you this attestation of my own accord and without having been asked for it by any one. Your sincerely, RENE BAUSET.

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