

EXTRAORDINARY PROCEEDINGS IN
KENMARE.

Controversy between Rev. Wm. Aherne,
R. C. C., and Rev. Mr. Rogers.

(From the Cork Examiner.)

It is a very long time indeed since a scene similar to that which shall be detailed has occurred in this country. Religious controversy of a public nature has for many years been a thing quite unheard of, and it remained for the parish of Kenmare to the scene of its revival. To explain the scene which shall be hereafter described, and which took place at the Cross of Reen, near the town of Kenmare, on last Thursday, it will be necessary to state a few of the facts immediately connected with the occurrence.

In the parish of Kenmare it has unfortunately occurred that some disagreements have of late been rather frequent in their occurrences between the Rev. Mr. Aherne, curate of the parish of which the Very Rev. John O'Sullivan is parish priest, and the Rev. Mr. Rogers, the Protestant curate. The latter gentleman (who is but lately established as a curate in the parish, and is, it is said, a protegee of the Rev. Denis O'Mahony, a Protestant Clergyman of some wealth and a little notoriety, residing in this district) has been—at least so says general opinion—so zealous for the promulgation of his doctrines, as on several occasions to visit, uncalled for, the dwellings of parties prepared by the Roman Catholic clergymen. Great complaint was made among the poorer parishioners of this extraordinary conduct, and the Rev. Mr. Aherne thought it necessary to take an occasion of publicly expressing his opinion on it, and cautioning the people against it. Probably this occurrence reached the ears of the Rev. Mr. Rogers; at all events on the 3d of July a challenge was handed to the Rev. Mr. Aherne at the chapel gate one Sunday, by the bailiff of the parish, in the name of the Rev. Mr. Rogers, summoning him to gird up his loins, and enter the lists of controversy to do spiritual battle in defence of certain points of faith which will be mentioned hereafter. This summons he at first, by advice of the Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan, declined taking notice of; but after ten days had passed, and for reasons which were stated at the meeting, it was thought proper to accept the challenge. On the part of the rev. challenger, the Cross of Reen and the day of the 9th of August were named as the place and the time for the contest. No objection was made to the time, but many reasons were urged against the place, and against the idea of any such meeting at a spot where multitudes might congregate, and serious disturbances be the result; and it was suggested that if the use of the court-house could be obtained, it would have the great advantage of enabling the gentlemen who presided at the meeting to limit its numbers. The challenger, however, refused peremptorily to accede to this proposition, or to allow the meeting to take place in Kenmare at all, and, therefore, after some discussion on the subject, the Cross of Reen, about two miles from the town, was agreed on. Two gentlemen were appointed to act as chairmen—namely Mr. M'Carthy, of Kildrimore, and Mr. Godfrey, of Old Dro-

more. It may be easily imagined that the news of an intended meeting of so new and extraordinary a nature did not fail to travel fast or far, or to create a reasonable degree of surprise and excitement wherever it became known. In Bantry, Skibbereen, Glengarriff, in Tralee, Killarney, and Millstreet little else was talked off for many days; and even as far as the city of Cork the fame of the prospective polemical tournament made its way, and for many miles round the locality the pilgrims began to plod their way, eager to take their stands at their different sides on the great day. The authorities of course, became aware of what was going forward, and were inclined to be

a spoilsport, at once began to look round for means to "squelch" the much looked-for encounter of clerical argument and wit. The stipendiary magistrate of the district, Mr. Dillon, was most active in going amongst all the parties, and endeavouring to induce them to give up the idea, but found himself utterly inadequate to the task of persuading either party to give way. Finally discovering that to go on it should and possibly fearing that in the ardour of debate the church disputant should suddenly be converted into the church militant, the magisterial authorities had a large body of police, twenty-four in number, carbines, bayonets, and all, drafted in from Killarney to Kenmare, and kept in readiness against the moment when it was expected that the weapons of the spirit should be superseded by those of the flesh. In the meantime people kept pouring in from all parts of the country, and mighty preparations of divers descriptions were going on.

The "summa dies" at last arrived, and long before twelve o'clock, the appointed hour, arrived, the place of meeting began to be thronged. To describe in an adequate manner the appearance of the scene which presented itself at the Cross of Reen, about half-past eleven that morning, would be a task indeed of mighty difficulty. Half a dozen fairs, a horse-race, and a few faction fights knocked up together could hardly rival it. The field which was to be the scene of action was a high rugged piece of ground, commanding a magnificent view of the mountains, the bay and the town. The morning was gloriously fine—indeed the only objection which could be urged to it was that it was too intensely hot. In this field several thousand persons were collected, their horses and cars, gigs, and carts, crowding the roads around; a tent was erected near a corner of the field, where viands and liquors were courteously dispensed, for a consideration; and tables and stands for a similar purpose dotted the fields. A large platform was erected in the centre of the principal field for the accommodation of the reverend disputants, their chief supporters, and, last not least, the press. A smaller platform stood near it for all who could scramble on it. Among so large an assembly it may easily be supposed some singular characters were not wanting. One of the most remarkable was a wild-looking man dressed in an old red coat, mounted on a horse, and brandishing a huge pole, studded with divers splendid specimens of the Irish root, and surmounted with a green cross. Another was a man dressed in a long black coat, with a white neckcloth, broad brimmed hat, and carrying a ponderous bible in his hand—this evangelical-looking individual bore a large white placard, bearing the following significant inscription, "Soup, soup, soup!!! Soup gratis. Hot and ready every Friday. Apply to Patrick Conner, Scripture Reader." This worthy and his banner seemed to give universal satisfaction, and were received with loud cheers everywhere they appeared. A half-frantic, ragged fellow, suddenly mounted on the principal platform, and harangued the people for twenty minutes, in vehement Irish, in which the name of "Martin Luther," appeared to come into nearly every sentence. A strong, well-made, young man, whose name it was said was Mehegan, mounted on a ditch from time to time, and blew from a bugle he carried such points of war as woke the echoes from the mountains, every blast being followed by a new rush of eager people into the field.

An agreeable incident here diversified the tedium of delay. The platform, which had been rather hastily constructed, had given for some time slight hints of its intention to descend, which in the excitement none of those who were on it thought of attending to, while fresh oc-

cupants continued to scramble upon it every moment. At last a sudden crash was heard, followed by shouts among the crowd, and the platform, after swaying for a few minutes gracefully on its supporters, abruptly descended, and deposited its precious burden in a confused heap of legs and arms upon the ground. It happened fortunately, however, that no one was injured, farther than a few abrasions of knees and elbows—trifles in so glorious a cause—and the people around speedily set themselves to replace the ruin on a more secure foundation.

Shortly after 12 o'clock, the Rev. Mr. Rogers made his appearance, accompanied by the Rev. Nicholas Bland, Mr. Godfrey, and some other gentlemen. The rev. gentleman took his station on the platform, where, in consequence of the accident which took place, it was agreed that none but the chairmen, the disputants, and the press should be allowed. The Rev. Mr. Rogers, who is a low-sized, dark-complexioned, gentlemanly-looking man—proceeded to arrange on the table a pile of theological works and controversial tracts, with which he came loaded, like an elephant and castle; and the battle seemed really about to commence.

A slight preliminary dispute took place, on Mr. Godfrey demanding why chairs had not been provided for all the gentlemen on the platform.

Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan said Mr. Godfrey ought to have been there early in the day, as he was, and have provided these matters. He had provided a chair for Mr. M'Carthy, and chairs for the press, and he was not bound to do any more for them.

Mr. Godfrey—These matters should have been seen to.

Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan—It was your business as well as ours.

Mr. Godfrey—Well, Mr. O'Sullivan, it was not you I asked for them, nor did I speak to you at all.

Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan—I don't think you deserve any courtesy from us (cheers) This meeting has been forced upon us by persons who have come here for no purpose but to create dissension and strife, and bloodshed, I will add (great cheering and groaning).

Mr. Godfrey—Oh, really I am in the chair, and I must beg you will allow the meeting to go on.

Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan—If you are in the chair, I must have done, but I wish first of all to introduce my Scripture reader to the meeting (here the rev. gentleman brought forward the individual in black already noticed, who bowed gravely to the people, by whom he was greeted with the most terrific yells) Here is the word of God! that they are going about preaching every day; and there is the placard for the soup (great cheering and yelling). Now, Mr. Chairman, if you are in the chair, go on with your meeting.

Mr. Godfrey—Fellow-countrymen, you are all aware of the object of this meeting, and it is therefore necessary for me to mention it to you. It is not my duty nor my inclination to address any observations to you calculated to excite feelings of an angry nature; I trust and hope that the meeting will be conducted in an orderly manner. I shall now read to you the regulations entered into between the respective parties. The chairman read the following:—

"The undersigned having been appointed chairman by the Rev. Messrs. Rogers and Aherne, agree to the following terms:—

"1.—Discussion to take place on the 9th and 10th of August, on the townlands of Reen, in the parish of Templenoe, at 12 o'clock each day, and to continue till five o'clock.

"2.—Thirty minutes to be allowed to each speaker.

"3.—The subjects to be—1st. Why the word of God is withheld from the people. 2nd. The right of private judgment.

"A.—No person to address the meeting but the Rev. Messrs. Aherne and Rogers.

"EDWARD GODFREY.

"DANIEL M'Carthy."

A Voice—Will you make them shake hands before they begin (laughter and cheers).

Mr. Godfrey—Oh, you really must keep order.

Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan—Let me up on the platform, and I'll keep order. I'll not open my lips—I'll be the best behaved boy in the ship (great laughter.) The rev. gentleman then ascended the platform.

A Voice—Will you begin now? don't keep us here in the heat, the bees are eating us already (laughter.)

The Rev. Mr. Rogers then came forward, and was received with tolerable calmness. In a loud voice he then commenced to speak, and said—Fellow-countrymen, I appear before you this day as an advocate of the rights of men, and an expounder of the duties of Christians. I mean not to offer insult to any man or any body of men—I appear here in the performance of what I consider a public duty, a duty which I not only owe to you, my fellow-countrymen, but a duty which I am bound to discharge towards my God. Let it not be supposed therefore that it is with any enmity towards any of the gentlemen by whom I am surrounded, that I appear here before you this day. My only object is the attainment of the truth, and the only observations which I shall offer to you shall be such as are calculated to show that the side which I maintain is that of the truth. The subject which we are commencing to discuss this day is the most important by far which can interest mankind, as it involves the destiny of man's immortal soul it involves your destinies, not for the world, but for eternity, not for the fleeting moment, a passing season, but for countless ages, a never-ending existence, either of unbounded joy, or of unutterable woe. And I pray God, in commencing this subject, that he may grant me wisdom to speak, and you understanding to receive what shall be according to the truth. First, then I maintain that as men you have a right to every book which ever was published since the world began, which has been an heirloom to posterity, the legacy bequeathed by generations gone by to those who shall come after them.

The rev. gentleman had proceeded thus far when a stir took place among the crowd, groans and shouts were heard, and immediately after Mr. Dillon, stipendiary magistrate, and Mr. Leger, sub-inspector of police, were seen urging their way towards the platform.

Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan—Boys, make way for her Majesty's officers (great clamour and confusion).

Mr. Dillon and the sub-inspector then got on the platform, and the latter addressed some words to Mr. Rogers, which in the confusion it was impossible to hear. When the clamour had in some measure subsided, Mr. Dillon stated that informations had been sworn against the Rev. Mr. Aherne and the Rev. Mr. Rogers, as being about to commit a breach of the peace, and that consequently the latter gentleman should be arrested by the sub-inspector until such time as he could enter into recognizances to keep the peace. In the meantime the Rev. Mr. Aherne was not to be seen on the platform. The announcement of the stipendiary magistrate, as soon as it became known among the crowd, was followed by a clamour so intense that not a word spoken on the platform, although loud and angry language was being interchanged by several parties, could be possibly heard. At