

IRISH LITERATURE.

THREE CONTEMPORANEOUS CLASSES.

Sources of the National Literary Outbreak of 1818: writing for the English Public; Pope Hennessy's Opinion; The Occasion is the Stage.

There runs a story of an Irish Bishop who once delivered a lecture remarkable for brevity and truth. This lecture was entitled "Snakes in Ireland." The title tickled the people's fancy and as on such occasions they flocked to hear him. How disappointed they must have been when the scholarly and pious man finished his lecture in one sentence "There are no snakes in Ireland." Irish literature as a title whets the appetite, makes one pull the chair closer to the rostrum. What uneasiness and feet shuffling when we become as brief as the Bishop? Ladies and gentlemen Ireland has no contemporary literature. The Irish peasant recognizes three kinds of wearing material; silk for his masters, homespun that so admirably fits himself, and shoddy that through no fault of his has been so often his garment. These three divisions admirably answers my purpose in dealing with

IRISH LITERATURE.

By the first fabric we may represent such writings as emanate from Dowden, Mahaffay, Brooke, Alexander, Lecky and a numerous coterie who principally reside in the land of fogs—and find their inspiration in all things English. They are after their model Wellington whose only infirmity, ever as a sleuth-hound on his martial track, was, that he had been born in Ireland. Such men may produce a literature, full dear to the scholar's heart, and may be recompensed by closet affection, even if their nation has cast them off as so many Ishmaelites. Of the second class and by far the most noble, a literature to breathe love for the poor and laughter for the lonely, such as we find in the ballads of Burns, and some of the poems of that fellow-loving man Hood, there is no output. Griffin's morbid despondency paralyzed a hand that might have drawn from the lyre the power to cheer the dreary peasant's life. He thought fit to waste his genius on trifles, that were dead before the little graveyard of the Brethren received the ashes of their author. Davis, sole desire was to belong to this class, a class whose aim is to find in their own that inspiration which creates a literature. I am well aware, and under the first class have admitted that there is such a thing as literature drawn from inspiration that has nothing in common with one's country, but the difference is at once apparent. Burns can be read by all Scotchmen, he appeals to them in all climes and times, he is one of them, while Thomson's seasons, are only for a certain brand of Scots, and even then, they require a mood. That odd phrase of Fletcher's of Saltoun "let me make the bulls of a nation and I care not who makes the laws" must be a truth to the creator of the

SECOND CLASS OF LITERATURE.

Since the death of Davis there has arisen in the whole range of Irish literature but three names that one can in any way associate with this literature. Allingham, who touched the national heart in a few of his ballads, notably "Lovely Mary Donnelly." He left his chosen path to sing of roses and nightingales, and was lost in the huge forest of minor warblers, whose songs, bearing no message to man, die with the voice of the singer. T. D. Sullivan, whose spirit is very willing, but whose song is limited to a few notes reminding one of the chaffinch's unvarying strain, though often repeated, ever pleasant; and the youngest and best minstrel, Percival Graves, who has caught those kodax glimpses of the Irish peasant, and in a few graphic dainty touches places before us the real peasant, cheerful in his poverty, faithful in his trusts, confiding in his friends, hating generously his enemies. In the midst of his mirth and melody the harsh discord of sadness. He portrays the nation's life, and in doing so helps in the making of an Irish national literature. With due respect to Sir Charles, this must be done by such men as Graves. It is a grave mistake to

write of it as the outcome of stock capital and lyceums. It was neither Sir Charles nor the Nation that gave us that national literary outbreak of '48, but the struggle that begot these. Of the third class, producers of shoddy, they are found in every Irish town, their lucubrations, if they ornament the rural press, must surely demerit the editors. They consist of poems, sonnets, rondeaux, essays on Round Towers, and bulky volumes of history, mostly issued from rural presses, and often dead on the day of their publication. Some may make a few days noise, on account of the interest of the subject, or

THE SENSELESS FLATTERY

of a few critics, as in the case of a swarm of ill-written volumes called Kenmare Publications. Had these critics known that they were using the tactics of the mythic gods, making a cloistered lady mad in order that she would come out from her holy calm to this troubled and cruel world to destroy herself, I feel that their Celtic chivalry would have warned them to desist. Sad to say this shoddy, that has no excuse for being, is one of the drawbacks to genuine Irish literature. It is foisted on the public with page after page of eminent recommendations, it is lauded by newspapers, and why? Not for its merit; but solely from a pecuniary standpoint. A thousand copies sold will net so many pounds and pence, and pounds and pence are desirable things to have in the Emerald Isle. To those who take the slightest interest in the subject it may be interesting to know these same wearisome Kenmare books had, in ten years, a circulation of more than two hundred thousand copies, while Diveres' volumes of classic verse, attained a circulation of a few hundred copies. I once had the pleasure of staying a few days in Venice with an Irish scholar. To my asking him regarding the absence of a literature, he replied that it was due to agitation. "The people are so busy agitating that they have no time for literature." To this I objected on the ground that former agitations produced a crop of literature. "It is true," he continued, "that former movements gave the nucleus of distinct national literature, but you will note that these movements depended on physical force, and this had to be kept alive by stirring odes and burning addresses, while that of Mr. Parnell is one of moral suasion, and can jog along without these valuable accessories." To my mind there is a truer explanation. Ireland is not a reading country, and Irish writers, bread-earners cannot afford to devote their talents to their country.

THEY GO TO LONDON,

and writing for an English public, they must learn to rid themselves of everything Irish. If some of them now and then sing of their country it is like Prout and Maginn a hurlesque on their countrymen, or a satire on a land that gave them birth, but no bread. Some of the most brilliant of London magazine writers are young Irishmen. These men are not devoid of patriotism. One of them, who has done in spare hours a noble work in collecting,

"And gleaned the gray legend that long had been sleeping
Where oblivion's dull mist o'er its beauty was creeping"

told the present writer that this band of young exiles "were ready to aid in any Irish literary movement, provided that the Irish public would support them. That time has not as yet arrived, though we hope to see it in our time. A few years ago the upper class were the only readers, of late years education has become more widespread among the people, and reading has perceptibly increased. This increase has been noticed by that acute writer Pope Hennessy. In an article in the Nineteenth Century he writes. "Irishmen who return to their country after a few years absence can not fail to see, as one of the most noticeable changes, an extension of popular literature; a great increase in the number of readers, not however, in the upper or middle classes, but in the lower classes—that is lower as far as the possession of pounds, shillings and pence is concerned." It is consoling to know that the reading class increases yet I find that this increase is small compared with England and Scotland. In the city of Dublin there is not a single magazine of any importance. Publishers will tell you that there is no public to support such an undertaking and Mr. Yeats will tell you that these same publishers have told him, "that no book is bought in Dublin unless it be the text-book for

some examination, that alone among the great cities of the United Kingdom,

DUBLIN IS DEAF

to the voice of genius—deafened by the roar of politics on the one hand and lulled into the deadly sleep of scholasticism upon the other." It may be strange news, but I can vouch for its truth when this competent critic writes: "I know poor clerks in London who read the best books with entire delight and devotion, while here in Dublin countless numbers of fairly-leisured and well-to-do men and women hardly know the very names of the great writers of the day." Amid such difficulties the Irish literary man is like a once noted peddler who, finding no purchasers for his wares, carries them to another country where they are eagerly sought after. It is not to be believed that he will care much for the country that condemned him to trudge along the highway with an unopened pack. That there is some reading in Ireland I admit, but I cannot debase literature by putting it under that head. Let Sir Charles, surely a just judge, tell us. "I have made enquiries, and I am assured that the books chiefly read by the young in Ireland are detective and other sensational stories from England and America, and vile translations from the French of vile originals. It is for the moralist and indeed all of us who have loved Ireland, to consider whether the virtues for which our people were distinguished—purity, piety, and simplicity are not seriously endangered by such intellectual diet." If this reading is the increase noted by Sir John Pope Hennessy after years of colonial life, I should pity the prospects of the new movement recently inaugurated to supply the people with wholesome Irish literature. Let us trust that the increase is of a better class, and that that noble land of Young Irishmen led by the gallant old literary warrior Sir Charles, dream no empty dreams in their proposals to give us lives of representative Irishmen, such as Sarsfield, Roger O'More, Luke Wadding, Grattan, Curran, Emmet and O'Connell. With these names

THE OUTLOOK BRIGHTENS.

If they are written, not skeleton like, but flesh and blood as they lived, men with all their Celtic traits prominently drawn, and their environments boldly sketched they will and must command an Irish public, if not in Ireland, in that greater land where the impress of the Celt has been so strongly felt. Stories of a race even in dull books interest, history not dry annals, nor weary puppet drawing but figures that live and breathe, compelling us to be their friends or foes, nor poems not of green-flags and broken harps, nor wild yells and meaningless allusions to the mythic ages of Ireland, but songs that touch the heart, that have their life there, songs that bring hope to the dispirited and sunshine to the gloomy hearted, songs that teach of manliness and duties of man, songs that make one feel proud of the hands that struck them from the lyre.

It may be demanded; where are the writers to supply these captivating books? And here let us avail ourselves of that strange Irish method of solving one question by asking another. Sir Charles is speaking "Let me ask, where in 1840 were the writers who were exciting universal enthusiasm in 1843? Like them the men of the future are consciously or unconsciously, preparing for their task; they are awaiting the occasion—occasion which is the stage where alone great achievements are performed. I could name, if it were needful, a few writers not unworthy to succeed the men of '43." Occasion that is the word, the key to the situation. Ireland has not had the occasion to show us what she can accomplish in

THE DOMAIN OF LETTERS.

Her life has been given to agitation, and the rest necessary to the cultivation of literature denied to her children. That occasion will soon come and Ireland will sadly disappoint her faithful friends in many lands if she will not prove her ability to grasp the occasion, and give us a literature that its intrinsic worth will stand alone and command attention. A little more than a quarter of a century ago Englishmen derisively asked "Who reads American books?" What critic would ask such an absurd question now-a-days? Who reads Irish books they are asking. Shall the do so in a quarter of a century from now? Sir Charles and his band say no; far be it from a henchman, although a foreigner, to say yes. Brander

Matthews says happily that "a man's intellectual development may owe much to the happy accident of a pregnant and stimulating book assimilated at the right moment." I think that a man's intellectual development may owe much to some great far-reaching movement in his own time. The German struggle of '48 produced a crop of literary men, whose impress is still felt. Such a movement hovers over the Irish sky in the shape of Home Rule. May it not be the "occasion" that Sir Charles Gavin Duffy has in mind. If so *cæd mille fallite*.

WALTER LECKY.

Sanctioned Programme.

We have received from the central executive commission for the festival of the Pope's Episcopal Jubilee the following statement of the principal features of the programme sanctioned by the approval of Cardinal Parocchi, their president:

1. *Triduum* of inauguration at the close of December in the Church of the Gesu, with sermon by Father Zocchi, the Jesuit.
2. Audience accorded by the Pope on the Epiphany to the children of Catholic families, accompanied by their parents, for the homage of the gifts of innocence to be made to the Vicar of Christ.
3. Arrival of the Italian pilgrimage on the 19th of February.
4. On the same day, the fiftieth anniversary of the episcopal consecration of the Pope, His Holiness will celebrate Mass in the Vatican Basilica.
5. A solemn academic *seance* will be held in the Church of the Holy Twelve Apostles, with music directed by the Commander Mustafa.
6. During Passion Week spiritual exhortations will be preached to the people in the four churches of Rome.
7. The commission will give a repast to one hundred of the poor who, on the occasion, will be clothed with fresh garments and prepared to approach the Holy Table in the basilica of St. Lorenzo, in Panisperna, where the Pope was consecrated a Bishop.
8. In the same church a *Triduum* of thanksgiving will be celebrated.
9. On the 19th of February the Pope will receive the permanent commission of the Italian Congresses, the central executive commission of the Jubilee *feles*, and the commission of the Roman ladies.
10. The foreign pilgrimages will take place until the end of next year, the Holy Father having decided that the Jubilee will last to the close of 1893.—*London Universe*.

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