

RICHARD LALOR SHEIL.

This eminent orator, politician and author was born on the 16th of August, 1791, at the residence of his father, Bellevue House, on the river Suir, a little below Waterford. He received his early education from a French abbe, who had fled from his country during the revolution, and had found refuge in the hospitable home of Sheil's father. After the Peace of Amiens the refugee returned to France, and Sheil was sent to a school at Kensington, London, conducted by the Prince de Broglio, a son of Marshal Broglio. The greater number of the pupils here were sons of French refugees of rank, and Sheil became so proficient in the French language as almost to forget his own. His father's wish was that he should study for the priesthood, and with this end in view he proceeded to the Jesuit College at Stoneyhurst in Lancashire, but his own tastes led him in a different direction. He decided on the bar as a profession, and in November, 1807, entered Trinity College, Dublin. Becoming a member of the College Historical Society, he took a prominent part in its debates, but his speeches at this time were more remarkable for metaphor than argument. His figure was ungainly, his gestures theatrical, and his voice shrill. While perfectly conscious of these defects, he never entirely overcame them, though the practice of public speaking tended in time to strengthen his voice and modify his abruptness of manner. When only eighteen years of age he delivered his first speech in public at a meeting of the Catholic Association. At the outset he was received with marked impatience, but warming with his subject he gained firmness, and at the conclusion was loudly cheered. About this time Sheil's father was completely ruined by the failure of a mercantile firm in Dublin in which he had invested his money, and the family residence of Bellevue had to be sold. This misfortune could not fail to affect the future of young Sheil. He gained his degree of B.A. in 1811, and was enabled to complete his studies for the bar at Lincoln's Inn by the pecuniary help of friends. In 1813 he returned to Ireland and took a leading part in the work of the Catholic Association, siding with the vetoists and against O'Connell.

To aid in defraying the expense connected with his call to the bar, Sheil wrote a tragedy entitled "Adelaide or the Emigrants." This play when brought out in Crow Street Theatre, Dublin, gained a temporary success through the clever acting of the celebrated Miss O'Neil, who undertook the role of the heroine; but it possessed no intrinsic merit, and when afterwards put on the stage at Covent Garden proved almost a failure. He was called to the bar in 1814, but his engagements being as yet inconsiderable, he continued to apply himself to authorship, and produced another tragedy entitled "The Apostate." In this play he seeks to demonstrate that religious intolerance under all circumstances is objectionable. The cast included Miss O'Neil, Mr. Kemble, Mr. Macready, and Mr. Young, and on the night of its first production at Covent Garden the author was called before the curtain to receive an enthusiastic ovation. Mr. Murray paid him £300 for the copyright of this play, and from the manager of the theatre he received £400.

In 1816, the year in which "The Apostate" was written, Sheil married Miss O'Halloran, niece of Sir William Macmahon, master of the rolls. In 1817 he produced "Bellamira, or the Fall of Tunis," a play that met with a favourable reception, although not so successful as "The Apostate." He was now advised by a friend to make an adaptation of Shirley's play, "The Traitor." He began the work, but after a time threw Shirley aside, and out of the new material which he had written he produced the tragedy of "Evadne, or the Statue." This became the most popular of Sheil's pieces, and elicited the praise of many eminent critics. His next play, "Montoni," was a failure. "The fatal Dowry" and "The Huguenots" followed, but also proved failures, owing possibly to the absence through illness of the actors intended for the principal parts. The author, who had expected great things from "The Huguenots," was so disappointed at the failure that he resolved to renounce dramatic literature for ever.

After receiving for his dramatic writings a sum of about £2000, he, in 1822, turned his attention to his profession once more, and set himself to work up the practice so long neglected. Like many lawyers of that period he took an active part in the prevailing political agitation, and wrote a severe criticism on O'Connell, which drew forth a not very flattering retort, but all this was forgiven and forgotten when Sheil gave the laudatory portrait of the Agitator which appeared in the "Sketches of the Irish Bar" he was then contributing to the *New Monthly Magazine*. In the same year (1822) Sheil sustained a great blow in the loss of his wife, shortly after the birth of an only child. For some time after this calamity he continued quietly attending to his profession, and continuing to contribute to the *New Monthly Magazine* papers on the Irish bar, written in conjunction with W. H. Curran. The "Sketches of the Irish Bar" were afterwards published collectively. An accidental meeting of Mr. O'Connell with Mr. Sheil at the house of a mutual friend in 1822 led to the former antagonists becoming fast friends in the work of Catholic emancipation. Shortly afterwards, at a meeting held in Dublin, it was resolved to petition Parliament to institute an inquiry into the unjust manner in which

the laws were administered in Ireland. At O'Connell's request Sheil drew up the petition. When laid before Parliament Mr. Brougham proposed to refer it to the "Committee on Courts of Justice," but Mr. Peel strongly opposed this motion, and would not consent to any reference of a petition which he characterized as "more in the declamatory style of a condemned tragedy than a grave representation to the legislature." In 1825, when Mr. Goulburn brought in a bill for the suppression of political associations, Sheil, O'Connell, and others formed a deputation, proceeded to London, and demanded to be heard at the bar of the House of Commons. The deputation was received most cordially by the leaders of the Whig party, but their mission, notwithstanding, was unsuccessful, the Duke of York declaring in the House of Lords, that in the event of his succeeding to the throne he would never consent to Catholic emancipation. This raised a storm of indignation against the Duke, in which Sheil took an active part.

Sheil's business at the Nisi Prius bar was now considerable, yet he found time to go heart and soul with O'Connell into the struggle for emancipation. He hurried about from county to county, and in the number and variety of his speeches almost equalled the great Agitator himself. To escape for a short time from the constant pressure and turmoil of public life he visited France in 1826. Here his friend the Abbe Genoude was so much struck with his description of the state of Ireland, that he induced him to contribute to *L'Etoile*, a paper of which he was editor, a series of anonymous articles on the subject written in the French language.

On the death of the Duke of York Sheil, made, in a speech at a public meeting, a kind of apology for the severity of his former attacks, but it seems to have had little effect in allaying the resentment felt towards him in high quarters. At length proceedings were instituted against him, founded on a speech which he had delivered on Theobald Wolfe Tone, in which he appeared to approve of the sentiments and doings of that patriot. Plunket was Attorney-General at the time, and most reluctantly took up the case, well aware that this act would destroy forever his influence in Ireland. Canning said afterwards of Sheil's speech that it might have been delivered in the House of Commons without even drawing forth a call to order. Sheil, "to cut down," as he said, "Goliath with his own sword," asked Plunket to conduct the prosecution in person, intending to cite passages from his (Plunket's) earlier speeches, which were, at least, equally as violent and unconstitutional as his own. Matters had assumed a somewhat serious aspect for Sheil, who, by rashly acknowledging the authorship of the letters in *L'Etoile*, gave his enemies fresh weapons wherewith to wreak their vengeance. He was desirous to let the case take its course, but O'Connell, his counsel, wisely put in a claim for the defendant's delaying his answer to the indictment. This delay was a great relief to Plunket, who was only too glad to grant it. The dissolution of government, on the death of Lord Liverpool, still further postponed the trial, and on Mr. Canning's accession to office it was entirely abandoned.

In 1827 a serious accident withdrew Sheil for a time from public life; when able to return to it once more, Canning, on whose aid the emancipation party had reckoned, was dead, and the Duke of Wellington was at the head of the government. With these changes came the Clare election, and the passing of a resolution by the Catholic Association to oppose any member who should accept office under government. When the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed, Lord John Russell advised the withdrawal of this resolution, with which advice O'Connell would have been willing to comply had not his opinion been overruled. The point was speedily brought to issue by Mr. Fitzgerald, the candidate for Clare, accepting office as president of the Board of Trade. By the advice of Sheil and others O'Connell was induced to stand for the county. Sheil was indefatigable in canvassing for his friend. He went from place to place, delivering in out-of-the-way country towns speeches eloquent enough to move a House of Commons. The result is well known—O'Connell's triumph was secured.

Sheil, at the request of the viceroy, advised O'Connell to put a stop for the time to the mass meetings, and on the 25th September, 1828, O'Connell indicated his desire, which was law to the people. At this time the question of emancipation was under discussion, and the people of Kent, apprehending danger, held a great meeting at Penenden Heath for the purpose of according the opposition of the Protestants of England to any concessions the government might be disposed to make. On hearing of their intention he determined to be present, and in order that he might be entitled to speak he proceeded to London, purchased a freehold, and on the 21st of October, 1828, presented himself to the meeting. Upwards of 20,000 men were present, and after appealing to their generosity for a hearing he made a speech, which, in consequence of frequent interruptions, was scarcely heard, but nevertheless his object was gained, as it appeared in the *Times* with others delivered on the same occasion. Filled with admiration of his courage as a man and brilliancy as an orator, the people received him on his return to Ireland with a great ovation.

To be Continued.