

AN ELOQUENT ORATION,

O'CONNELL, THE GREAT CHRISTIAN
AGITATOR.Delivered at St. Laurent College, March
22, 1893, by John J. O'Donnell.

In every country and in every clime, where a nation or a people has been downtrodden and oppressed, God has raised up some man to deliver that nation, to deliver that people from the grinding power of despotism. History chronicles the glorious name of Demosthenes who delivered his people from the tyrant, Philip of Macedon; of Cicero, who saved the Roman people from the conspiracy of Catiline; of William Tell, who, rising against the Austrian tyrant, battled for the rights of heroic Switzerland; and, finally, the name of Washington, who, with a handful of ragged soldiers, delivered his country from the iron rule of the oppressor, gained freedom for his countrymen, and laid the corner stone of the nation's happiness and prosperity, so that, to-day, she stands pre-eminent among the nations of the world—"the land of the free and the home of the brave." Yes, those heroes delivered their countrymen from the hand of oppression, and gained for them political and civil liberty, but liberty of conscience was left to the hero of my theme, to Ireland's hero, the great Daniel O'Connell. Great was the work to be accomplished; small were the means with which to accomplish it, and colossal was the power opposing. For seven hundred years a chivalrous and most christian nation lay crushed at the feet of despotism, crushed but unconquered; right lay crushed at the feet of might; but right, like truth, is omnipotent, and must prevail, for "the eternal years of God are hers."

"For each single wreck in the warpath of
might,
Shall yet be a rock in the temple of right."

The nobility of the nation were robbed of their rights and titles; the people and the nobles were robbed of their lands; the whole nation was robbed of its political rights; the citizens were robbed of their civil rights, of their natural and human rights—the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience, according to the teachings of that Church founded by Christ through His apostles,—that Church in testimony of the truths of whose doctrines over 17,000,000 martyrs bled and died. From the Conquest till 1782, Ireland had a parliament that was not a parliament, but a mock parliament, which, in the words of the immortal Grattan, "sold and destroyed the trade and liberty of Ireland."

THE GENIUS OF HENRY GRATTAN

wrung from George III. and his parliament the right for Ireland to wear her imperial national crown, the right to make her own laws, the right to govern her own commerce, the right to make her own treaties, the right to impose her own taxes. This Grattan did not ask as a boon, but demanded as a right in the name of the nation. This was often, in the past, declared to be the right, pure and simple, of the Irish people by this same giant genius, Henry Grattan; but, then, he stood alone. Now 80,000 armed volunteers stand at his back, and Grattan speaks through the mouth of their cannon, thundering for justice for his oppressed country. He gave an English parliament and an English king one month to decide; and the leaden arguments of 80,000 volunteers prevailed, and brought a British king and British parliament to their knees; made them subscribe to a condemnation of their past conduct, and forced them to right the wrongs of centuries towards Ireland.

"When Grattan arose, none dared oppose
The claims he made for freedom;
They knew our swords, to back his words,
Were ready, did he need them."

Can I say that Grattan's parliament, as it is called, righted the wrongs of Ireland? I am compelled to say no. The ban of political, civil and religious ostracism stood out in all its grim reality against four-fifths of the people; for, notwithstanding the pleadings of Grattan for Catholic Emancipation, the Irish Protestant parliament (there was not a single Catholic in it) and the volunteers refused to petition for or grant constitutional freedom to their fellow Catholic subjects. O, Prejudice, where is thy reason! O, Bigotry, where is thy blush!

A Catholic could not rise in the army; a Catholic could not rise in the navy; a Catholic could not plead at the bar; a Catholic could not sit on the bench; a Catholic could not practise his religion—could not worship his God in security. Men that demanded liberty in the name of humanity, in the name of the principles of eternal justice, now denied this same liberty to their followers. But the scourge of God swept away this parliament by the base, venal bribery of its members. Like the golden statue of the tyrant of old, it had but feet of clay; but as formerly God raised up Moses to deliver the Israelites from the heavy hand of Egyptian oppression, so now did He raise up a Moses for Ireland, who, with the magic wand of his matchless eloquence, smote, again and again, the citadel of British tyranny, and compelled the English lords to throw open the doors of justice to the Irish people. And this Moses of Erin was the great christian agitator, the immortal Irish Liberator, Daniel O'Connell.

In 1813 he took charge of the Catholic Association, and pledged himself to Catholic Emancipation. Consider, if you will, the difficulties that must be overcome in order to reach this desired goal. The Catholics of England were against him; the titled Catholics of his own country were against him; the Church of England was against him; even the Catholic hierarchy of Ireland were against him, for the holy bishops had seen their innocent flocks

LED UP TO THE BLOCK

a hundred times to be slaughtered, and they had no heart for another trial. Unjust laws ever hung over O'Connell's head, and an assassin was on his track; but God was watching over the great Liberator, and the Liberator said: "I will raise up this people; I will mould their hearts into a thunderbolt, and hurl it against the omnipotence of Great Britain."

O'Connell became a leader of the people when, in company with nine others whom he had assembled at the Dublin Hotel, he began an agitation for the repeal of Irish disabilities; and, in the words of Wendell Phillips, "Before those ten men who met in an upper chamber, the proudest government in all Europe, and the most selfish,—with the Duke of Wellington at its head—surrendered within twenty years. Notwithstanding the resistance of the government, the Catholic Association increased in strength and influence as time rolled on. Soon, however, the Catholic Association was suppressed, and all political meetings proscribed. Then O'Connell invited all his political friends to a breakfast at the Dublin Hotel, where they, seated around the table, each with a muffin in one hand and a cup of tea in the other, discussed politics. This was not a political meeting, but an Irish breakfast.

Wellington became prime minister of England, and the Catholic Association, full of the courage and determination of O'Connell, its leader, declared that no man who accepted office under Wellington should be returned to Parliament. In one county alone was the Government candidate unopposed; that was the County Clare; but when the minister of the Crown came back for re-election, like the thunder-clap that breaks the tranquillity of the mid-summer's afternoon, the voice of O'Connell was heard crying out: "I am going to stand for Clare: no more landlord intimidation." England stood aghast, literally stunned at the audacity of such a declaration. The whole world stood aghast and turned to Ireland in astonishment. O'Connell was elected to Parliament by a sweeping majority,—a majority that did honor to the integrity and loyalty of the Irish people. Consider the courage of the man to place himself in this position, defying the laws of England to obtain justice for his country, yet holding England's constitution in his hand. Whilst Parliament was discussing on what terms it could grant Emancipation, O'Connell, with all the majesty of a king, walked into the House of Commons, and advanced to the clerk's desk to take the oath, and the oath put into his hands was to the effect that "The sacrifice of the Mass, the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, is damnable idolatry." O'Connell replied: "In the name of 200,000,000, in the name of 8,000,000 of the Irish race, in the name of antiquity, in the name of history, in the name of the God of heaven, the high God of truth, I reject this oath, and say that it is a damnable oath. I will swear

loyalty to my king and to all just laws made by Parliament; but I will never swear to heresy. I demand to be admitted to Parliament to prove my right." This bold demand was granted more through curiosity, however, than through a sense of justice. The great man enters without a right to enter, stands on the floor without a right to stand, raises his voice without a right to raise it, and has the law repealed. O Angel, to whom is committed the guardianship of Ireland, come to the aid of her generous advocate! Never was a grander cause deliberated upon by an assembly of men; never did greater interests hang on the words of one man; the liberty or the servitude, political, civil and religious, of a great people depended upon the issue. Already these thoughts have lifted O'Connell above himself; already they have inspired him with the grandeur of his mission. The Parliament becomes grave and serious; all eyes are turned upon him; all hearts beat, some in sympathy and some in antipathy with the man and his cause. Hope rises in the breasts of some, fear in the breasts of others. O'Connell spoke with majestic firmness; his sentiments were noble; his reasoning forcible. The fiery emotions of his genius flashed forth with such

MAGNIFICENT GRANDEUR

that he convinced the most prejudiced; subdued the most rebellious; moved the most insensible, and stupified the whole assembly. There he stood with the British constitution in his hand, and, in virtue of this great charter of freedom, demanded, for himself and the humblest of his countrymen, the rights, and only the rights, of British subjects, and the lintels of the doors of tyranny were smitten by the eloquence of O'Connell. An unwilling parliament and an unwilling king gave, reluctantly and with ill grace, political, civil and religious freedom to Christian Ireland; and Erin, at the voice of her Constantine, came forth from her catacombs: her priests could stand upon a free altar, and her people could kneel before a free altar. The Catholic Association, under the leadership of O'Connell, was as a little mountain stream, small and insignificant at first, but gradually increasing until now it had swelled into a mighty torrent—headlong, irresistible in its course,—sweeping before it all things, even England's omnipotence.

O'Connell now turned his attention to the Repeal of the Union, and for this he labored with untiring zeal. He kept the spirit of resistance and obedience alive in the souls of the people. Thousands hung upon his lips as upon those of a prophet. First, he was heard within the walls of Dundalk; next, his mighty genius displayed itself on the famous hill of Tara; then, he addressed two hundred and fifty thousand people beside the Croppy's grave; wherever he went, the people followed, in goodly numbers, that they might drink in, in limpid draughts, those words of freedom that flowed from the fountains of his eloquence. But a dark cloud dimmed the shining splendor of her prosperity; and, after the meeting of Clontarf was dispersed, the sweet dream of Repeal floated away on the dismal wings



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of adversity. O'Connell, by an unjust sentence, was cast into prison, the House of Lords, though his bitterest enemies, declared the sentence to be unjust, and, although he was liberated in a few months, he came forth a mere wreck of the once magnificent form of him who towered over the whole world by his eloquence. Then came the awful year of 1846. Oh! would that I had the power of the burning soul of Thomas Davis, that I might picture to you the dreadful scenes of hardship and privation that the Irish people endured! The gaunt form of Famine stalked over the land; and Pestilence, her attendant, followed in her wake. O'Connell saw the wings of death settling on the defenseless heads of the people, and made one last, grand effort—the effort of a broken heart to protect them.

HE APPEALED TO PARLIAMENT;

but England was deaf to his voice. The father of his people saw them perishing, heard their appeals for help; but, alas! he was unable to assist them. When he could no longer relieve that country that he loved so well, and that loved him so well, he turned his heart's eyes from earth to Heaven, and his footsteps to the heaven of this earth,—the seat of the Vicar of Christ,—to Rome, that there, on the tombs of the Apostles, he might breathe forth his soul to God. But as Moses of old was not permitted to enter the promised Land—the paradise of his hopes, neither was the Moses of Erin permitted to enter the paradise of this earth; for at Genoa, his soul passed into the hands of its Maker: His last words were, "My soul to my God, my heart to Rome, and my body to my country."

Thus ended the closing scene in the life of Ireland's greatest, grandest and noblest son—a son of whom Lacordaire says: "He was not only the Liberator of Ireland, but also the Liberator of the whole world." He not only wished his own people to be free; but also those of every clime, of every condition, and from every oppression. When he had but two votes in Parliament, and being offered twenty-seven more if he did not oppose slave-trade, he replied: "Gentlemen, God knows that I am here in the cause of the saddest people that the sun sees; but may my right hand forget its cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, when, to help Ireland—even Ireland,—I forget the negro for a single hour."

And, now, let us come to the condition of that country for which this great man lived and died. For seven hundred years, the Anglo-Saxons had striven, with all the force of its power, to grind the Irish race into dust. As well might they try to pluck the stars from their ethereal dome in the heavens; for after those seven hundred years, Ireland still stands glorious and triumphant, with the flag of Erin in one hand, and the crucifix of her faith in the other.

To-day, her prospects are brighter than ever before. To-day, isolated though she is from the rest of the continent, she commands the attention of the whole world. To-day, in England's Parliament, stands England's greatest son and statesman, William E. Gladstone, demanding for Ireland, the right to govern herself, demanding, with words of burning eloquence, Irish Home Rule. God grant he may obtain it, God grant that St. Patrick's Day, 1894, may see, once more, what O'Connell lived for, strove for and died for,—an Irish Parliament in College Green.

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Girls who do not dance at all are called wall flowers, while those who waltz to excess are often a little dazy.