

ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS.

In connection with an article in the New Year's number of "Donahoe's Magazine," entitled "A Celtic Chair at Washington," by Edward Gerard, appears a short history of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, as follows:

It is a well known fact that orders of knighthood and chivalry existed in Ireland long before the birth of Christ. History tells us of the Gamhauraid of Iruus Dombann, under Ollihull Finn, Ard Righ of Ireland A.M. 4405. Of the g-Clanna Deaghaidh (Deagaidians) of West Munster under Dairo and his son, Curough MacDaire, who flourished about A.M. 6050. Coexistent with those were Curadhthe Na g-Craobhe Ruaidh, or Knights of the Red Branch of Eamhan Macla (now Navan). To these may be added, the Feinne Eireann (or Fentian Militia), under Fionn Mac Cumball (commonly spelled Finn McCool), who lived in the reign of Cormac Mac Airt, A.D. 294.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians was first organized in Ireland when the infamous penal laws were in operation, and but little documentary evidence of its early history is obtainable. This is due to the danger, at that time, of carrying any papers, the possession of which would entail loss of life, and also to the fact that education among the Irish Catholics was proscribed. When it is remembered that long before 1670 the "Statute of Kilkenny" enacted that the Irish language was a felony, and placed the teaching thereof under a ban, the reason will be apparent for the lack of written history regarding the organization's infancy and show why we have to rely, to a large extent, upon tradition, and the oral evidence of the Bard and Seanchuidhe (shannachie).

It has been alleged that the Ancient Order of Hibernians was established by two women after the siege of Limerick—in that city of the "Violated Treaty"—but the accuracy of the statement may be doubted. We are assured that the order must have been in existence during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, though it may have lapsed to a considerable extent during the reign of James II., and have been revived after Sarafeld's gallant sortie at Ballyneety, and the glorious defense of Limerick.

The purpose which inspired its founders was to keep alive the spirit of Irish nationality, so dear to the heart of the Gael, under the most trying circumstances, to rectify the wrongs of the poor and oppressed, and also to protect the Irish priests in the exercise of their sacred functions. Those were the days when to be a Hibernian was to be ready at a moment's notice to lay down life itself, in defense of the faith, and of its priests; the days when the sacrifice of the mass could be offered only on the mountain top, in some secluded glen, or in some gloomy cavern far from the haunts of men.

Even to the present day the people who still use the vernacular will point out to the tourist in Ireland, Oonoo-an-Aifriinn (the Mass Hill), or Gleann-an-Aifriinn (the Glen of the Mass). These names tell the story of dreary penal days more eloquently than words, and forcibly recall the men whose duty it was to keep watch and ward over the beloved Sagart Aran (Sogart Aroon), and his faithful flock, and to warn them of the approach of the red-coat and priest-hunters. The Hibernians were ever true to faith and motherland in those trying times, when English gold and English rulers—

"Bribed 'a won to rob the sire, And dogs were taught alike to run, Upon the scent of wolf and friar."

It is said, that the Rapparees were also a branch of the old Hibernians, but the truth of the statement I have at present no means of ascertaining. We know that many of the Rapparees were Irish gentlemen, who, through religious and political persecution, were deprived of their ancestral patrimony,

and, having been outlawed, had to fly to the mountains for refuge.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians struggled against fearful odds to be faithful to their avowed purposes, but with all the forces arrayed against them, they kept the enemy in check, and foiled him upon many an occasion, when almost sure of his prey.

Since that period of bigotry and persecution, the scope and work of the Order have changed. Unfortunately, later on, in the hands of ignorant or designing men, its noble objects were, on several occasions, frustrated, and the Catholic clergy were frequently compelled to denounce it, but when it is remembered that the Irish peasant had no redress for injustice, it is not to be wondered at that he tried to induce the brotherhood to aid him in his efforts for retaliation upon his oppressors. Today, and for many years past, both in this country and in the Old Land, the Order's banner bears the motto of "Friendship, Unity and True Christian Charity to Its Members, and Peace and Good Will to All Men."

This is the doctrine taught by the Order the world over, and no true Hibernian fosters any spirit of prescription against his neighbour, no matter what his race or religious belief. In this Republic the principles of the society are fully in accord with American institutions, and its growth and prosperity bear the strongest testimony of its great and noble work.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians was transplanted to the United States about sixty years ago, although it is said to have existed in Maryland and other States previous to that time. It absorbed a great many of the older Irish societies existing here for many years previous to its coming. However, outside a few large centres of Irish population, such as the cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and a few others, very little was known of it for a number of years. When the Irish people settled in the other large cities and towns, the Order took root and flourished among them, until to day it extends to every State and territory on this continent, as well as to Dominion of Canada and Australasia. In the United States there is scarcely a city or town that has not one or more divisions of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

Everywhere it has been established it has carried aid and comfort to the sick and helpless, hope and consolation to the widow and orphan, and social and moral elevation to its adherents.

With such a mission its pathway might be considered easy; yet it has had its struggles. It was misrepresented and maligned—it had to bear the most determined onslaughts from open foes and false friends. Yet to day it stands pre-eminent among Irish societies for its membership, its wealth, and its usefulness, and many of those who stood by it in its darkest hour have lived to witness its vindication and triumph.

It can be said in truth that the growth of the order is due to the wise and able men, who guided its progress with prudence and moderation, neither stopping in their course to hurl invective at their opponents or belittle their cause by wholesale denunciations of those who differed from them.

Their true Christian course had the effect of causing many to stop and inquire into the objects of the order, and every personal research brought a convert to the ranks of organization.

To the lover and believer in the cause of Irish nationality the Order has its attractions, because in every struggle made for Ireland's liberty the Ancient Order of Hibernians took a prominent part. Not only did they connect themselves with the Land League and National League, and later still, the Irish National Federation, and other societies of a stronger mold, to give them moral, material

and financial support, but they also generously voted money out of their treasuries when the exigencies of the occasion required it.

The amount of money contributed by Hibernians for the Irish cause can never be estimated, because it was given without ostentation on many an occasion, and with no other motive than the tribute of love and affection from expatriated hearts to the land of his sires.



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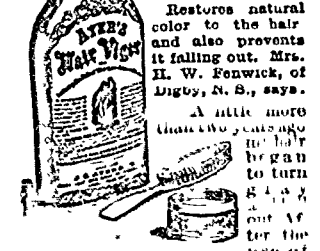
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