

thought, they are too passionate, too fanciful, yet two of the most subtle thinkers known to philosophical history were Irishmen, namely, Bishop Berkeley, and Johannes Scotus.

The Irish have quickness, brilliancy, but no depth of imagination. They excel the English in diffusive fancy, but are deficient in the power of intense intellect, they have not equalled them in great individuals, creative genius. They have produced no Shakspeare, they have produced no Milton; still there is more idealism among the masses of the Irish, than among those of the English, more poetic association mingles in their daily thoughts, and more enthusiasm in their daily life. And this idealism they rarely lose: it lives with them even amidst filth and famine, it is with them in toil at home, and in exile abroad: it gilds the sailor's watch upon the lonely seas, and it glorifies the soldier's vision in the midnight guard: it throws a rainbow radiance over the hardest lot, and paints the barest spot around the poor man's hut with the colorings of hope. Gay or grave, the Irish peasant escapes constantly from the work-day and walks in fancy amidst things that are not all of the dull and common earth: gay, he revels in drollery and wit, grave, he lives in superstition or reverence. He lives in the midst of wrecks which speak of distant and departed times; he turns with affection to this venerable past, his imagination peoples it with life, and his faith pays it homage. His thoughts are as various as they are vivid, and so are his emotions. Every passion vibrates in the Irish nature, and the Irish heart has chords that answer to every touch, and sound in every tone, from the lowest note to the top of the compass; pity, love, anger, hatred, remorse; every passion but despair, and not *this*, because of every other. An Irishman is rarely for any time given over to the despotism of a *single* passion; thence, the rarity of Irish madness, and the still greater rarity of Irish suicide.

A people thus as the Irish are, of quick perception, of brilliant fancy, and mirthful sensibility; it would be naturally inferred that they abounded in wit and humor, and this inference would be justified by fact. They are a people of both, affluent and glowing. Irish wit—or indeed any national wit, can be but imperfectly illustrated by pointed expressions; many of them, of very doubtful genuineness, and scarcely worth authenticating. Wit is a very subtle essence, very difficult indeed to condense, an ethereal spirit, which dissolves ere you can fix or localize it. So much depends upon the context, upon co-relative ideas, upon contrasted pictures and positions, that in the very attempt to exemplify, you destroy it.

Irish wit is commonly sportive and cheerful; it has of course a sting, but it is not poisoned; it smart, but it does not leave a deadly venom behind it; like all wit, it is somewhat acid, but it does not sour the milk of kindness. It never deals in scornful and abasing irony; but it is full of odd analogies, of insinuated absurdity, and of ludicrous suggestion. But this is uttered with such vivid inflexions of the voice; such querness of manner, such grotesqueness of look and gesture, that without the living person, all description of it is but a faint and empty echo. Without the dramatic posture, the heaven-lit eyes, and the spontaneous inspiration, what of Swift's, of Curran's or of Sheridan's can we have in the prosaic repetitions of their few remembered sayings. The wit of Swift was scathing, and caustic. One day dining with some lawyers before whom he had preached in the forenoon with great severity, a member of the profession intending to retaliate in his own coin, quietly remarked that if the devil were dead, he verily believed, a parson could be found to preach him a funeral sermon. "Yes," said Swift: "I should gladly be that parson, and I would give the devil his due, as I have this day done to his children." Curran's wit was ideal as his eloquence: the one is the ideal of oddity, and the other the ideal of passion.

"I can't tell you, Curran," said an Irish nobleman who had voted for the union, "how frightful our old House of Commons appear to me." "Ah my Lord," replied the other, "it is natural for murderers to be afraid of ghosts." The wit of both Swift and Curran is too familiar to the world, now to be quoted, and I venture to insert these two instances only on account of their individual and characteristic tone and spirit. On Sir Boyle Roche, and Plunket, I must touch as slightly.

This Sir Boyle is amusingly described by Sir Jonah Barrington. He was the very personification of confused speech. He literally talked in bulls, and corrected them by blunders; yet in his utmost incongruity he had meaning and brilliancy. "What, Mr. Speaker," said he, once addressing the House of Commons, "and so we are to beggar ourselves for fear of vexing posterity. Now I would ask honorable gentlemen, and this still more honorable house, why we should put ourselves out of our way to do anything for posterity, for what has posterity done for us." Explaining this, he said, that "by posterity, he did not at all mean our ancestors, but those who were to come immediately after them." Plunket, late Lord Chancellor of Ireland, was once pleading before a judge recently from England, Plunket spoke of a man who raised the wind by flying kites. "What,"