

IRELAND'S INFLUENCE ON THOUGHT.

THE following extracts from Justin McCarthy's recent article in the London magazine, *Time*, on "Ireland's Present Influence on Thought and Literature," will interest our readers:—

The intelligence of Ireland is not asserting itself in English literature just now to anything like the extent which it did in the days of Burke, and Sheridan, and Goldsmith. Against these three names it would be hardly possible to set the names of any three Englishmen of the same time who could be considered the equals of the Irishmen. Nor, to come to a later day, is there any Irish poet with anything like the popularity in England which Thomas Moore had, or any Irish novelist who is read in English homes as Miss Edgeworth was. The Irish novel, I should say, is almost absolutely unknown in England now—I mean the Irish novel of the present. Indeed, even in Ireland itself, the distinctively Irish novel would seem to have all but disappeared. I know that there are two or three writers, and perhaps more, who still make a good stand-up for the life of the distinctively Irish novel; but their stories are not read in Great Britain as the stories of Carlton and Banim once were. Gerald Griffin, who wrote, according to my judgment, the best Irish novel ever produced, did not make his proper mark in this country, but he was much more widely read than any Irish novelist of our time. Poor Gerald Griffin! his literary fate was strange. His marvellous romance, "The Collegians," with its racking pathos, its passion, its humor, its mirth, its tragedy, its absolutely true picture of Irish life in "Big House" and the cabin, its renderings of the peasant's brogue in all its varying tones of the different provinces, never, of course, was read in England by anything like so wide a circle of readers as that which gathered round "Charles O'Malley" and "Jack Hinton." But it came up again transmogrified, translated!—"Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee, thou art translated!" It was set upon the melodramatic stage as "The Colleen Bawn," and on the lyric stage as "The Lily of Killarney"—all the pathos and the poetry and the reality were knocked out of it; the familiar old stage Irishman was made to dance and caper in it; the stage parish priest was substituted for the exquisitely truthful and tenderly humorous figure in the original—and it swept the country, and, indeed, all the English speaking world. It was an Irishman who wrought the stroke of genuine and exalted art—it was an Irishman, too, who did the trick which caught the public.

I am inclined to think that the still lingering forms of purely Irish life out of which a novel could be made have exhausted their artistic effect. The relations between the landlord and the tenant, between the agent and the peasant, formed, and necessarily formed, the greater part of the Irish novelist's stock-in-trade. The pathos and humor, the comedy and tragedy, arose like the mists from the land. Even already the state of things has changed.

Still greater change is undoubtedly to be looked for. Ireland will one day be, to a great extent, a country of peasant proprietors. The new Irish novel will have to grow out of the new conditions of life. Therefore the new Irish novel will have to wait for this new life and to be born of it. A work of fiction, if it is worth anything, does not die with the conditions which gave it life. There are readers for "Uncle Tom's Cabin" still, though the slavery system is gone. But there could not be a new "Uncle Tom's Cabin" written now. So of the old-fashioned Irish novel. It will have its readers still. But there would be little chance, indeed, now for a new novel constructed on the old lines. Some distant, free, and happy Russia will still, no doubt, read the novel of Tourguenief; but it is not likely that in that far-off and happy Russia there will be a new tale of "Virgin Soil."

I do not know whether there are now any great Irish advocates at the Irish Bar. Ireland may be proud of having given to the English Bar its greatest living advocate, in the person of Sir Charles Russell. But I do not hear of any advocates with a fame at all like that of the Currans and Sheils and O'Connells, of a past time. I do not hear even of any men who are compared with Whiteside and Butt. Yet I think I could point to men—young men some of them—who, if they had nothing else to do but to practice at the Bar, might be as eloquent and as powerful as any of their predecessors. There are some Irishmen in the House of Commons whose

eloquence and whose debating power maintain adequately the traditions of Irish political oratory. In eloquence alone does the Ireland of our day hold her own with the Ireland of the past. The Irish eloquence of to-day is above all things else Parliamentary eloquence. It goes to the front—where it is needed—where it has its battle to fight.

Ireland has some very eminent names in the departments of graver literature. Mr. Tyndall is an Irishman; Mr. Lecky is an Irishman. I do not know whether I can call Mr. Bryce an Irishman, although he was certainly born in Ireland. If we are to regard him as an Irishman, then we must say that Ireland has given to literature one of the completest of living historians. I am not quite certain, however, whether I am entitled to claim Mr. Bryce as a fellow-countryman. Mr. Lecky has a position which no man will dispute. He ranks among the very first historians of his day, and his history is philosophic and likewise practical. It is a pride to Ireland to have sent such a man to take such a place in the literature of England. But, of course, there is nothing distinctively Irish in the influence of these men on literature and thought. Their nationality does not shine through them. When we say Irish, we really mean Celtic. There is no great Irish author in this sense at the present hour. There is no great poet, no great Irish novelist, no great Irish dramatist. There is no great Irish musician—although I believe that, contrary to general opinion, Ireland may claim Sir Arthur Sullivan as a son of her soil. Sir Arthur Sullivan, however, would hardly be called a great composer. There is no great Irish wit or humorist. Wit and humor seem to be imported now, like millionaires and heiresses, from the great American Republic. I confess that I for myself am not sorry that Irishmen have ceased, for the present at all events, to be the buffoons and merry-makers of England. I think we did that work long enough, and ought to give a turn to someone else now.

The stage Irishmen and the Irishmen of the music halls are gentlemen who, while probably Cockney in the fact that they were born within the sound of Bow Bells (London), belong to a far more descended race than my countrymen can claim. But we have no great humorist of any order now. We have no Charles Lever; we have no Samuel Lover; we have no Father Prout. Yet no one at all acquainted with the subject or the people will say that the intellect of Ireland has diminished of late years in the least. There never probably was a time when so great a number of highly-gifted young Irishmen were conspicuous before the world. Then we must not forget the unseen work that Irish literary intellect is doing in the journalism of many countries. Irishmen seem to be born journalists. Here in England—especially London—there across the ocean in the United States and Canada—there across the other ocean in Australia, the Irish journalist is everywhere—writing, editing, contributing—he is dramatic critic, literary critic, war correspondent, descriptive writer, writer of political leading articles. In the United States and Canada and Australia it has long been his way to rise into public life and high political place through the ascent of journalism, and of late we are beginning to see something of the same kind happen in England. All this proves that the intellectual power of the Irish race is not diminishing or languishing, and even while we may regret to see it shredding itself away too much in leading articles and descriptive columns and paragraphs, it is something to know that its influence is more widely spread, more broadly felt, than it ever was before. Again, we have some Irishmen almost everywhere over the world now going in for an entirely new trade and taking to becoming millionaires. . . . We may expect to see what is left of the landlord class living in reconciliation with the class who cultivate the soil. We may expect to see all orders and classes and parties co-operate in the work of national re-organization. There is the sort of healthy rivalry which makes a commonwealth great. I hope to see Ireland a great commonwealth yet in that exalted sense. No matter about her size. I was once much interested by a remark of Cobden to the effect that in his opinion the best efforts of human intellect had been brought out in little States which one could almost traverse in a day's journey. Ireland would be a State in that sense—not a little isolated republic or kingdom, but a commonwealth, governing its own domestic affairs to the best of its capacity—a State as Massachusetts is a State—as Victoria and New South Wales are States,