

LECTURE.

THOUGHTS ON THE LITERATURE OF IRELAND.

An interesting and instructive Address, delivered before the C. Y. M. S., on 25th January, 1892, by Professor W. McKay.

(Conclusion.)

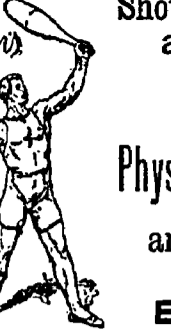
The grandeur and impressiveness of the scene when Burke rose to commence his great task were almost overwhelming. Macaulay, in his brilliant essay on Warren Hastings, has painted it as only that great word-painter can describe such a scene. He has told us how the Lord Chancellor Thurlow sat enthroned under a rich state canopy, the judges of the bench in ermine by his side; how the members of the Church in their law-suits, and the peers in their robes, composed a venerable throng; how the Queen and princesses in their brilliant dresses, and a bright galaxy of English beauties, ranged the long galleries; how the queen of Tragedy, Mrs. Siddons, was conspicuous in the prime of her majestic beauty, looking with emotion on a scene surpassing all the imitations of the stage; how Gibbon the historian of the Roman Empire and Parr the great classical scholar and Reynolds the famous painter, had left their studies to gaze upon the scene. "There, too," he says, "were seated around the queen, the fair-haired beauties of the House of Brunswick, the ambassadors of great kings, and the monarchs of the world, all gazing with admiration on a spectacle which no other country of the world could present." Burke's opening oration occupied the sittings of six days, and at the distance of time, it is admitted to be one of the greatest efforts of genius on record, and one of the grandest triumphs of eloquence. As it drew towards the close, and with the arguments of impeachment in his hands, and as a testimony towards heaven, he recalled the cruelties of the accused, and, in streaming eyes, told how his agents had inflicted unnumbered tortures on innocent women and searaged children, and that in the presence of their parents, of hammered wedges of iron between the crowded fingers of poor Hindu laborers, the agony of the audience could no longer be endured—tears flowed fast—ambassadors of sympathetic indignation lowered the voice of the orator—Mrs. Siddons fainted, and the Queen of Tragedy admitted that all stage-effect sank to nothingness in presence of such a scene. Even the accused was seen to weep, and Thurlow for once shed a tear. "At length," says Macaulay, "the oration concluded." Raising his voice, he called to mind the names of the great Irish orators, and with confidence he ordered, by the Commons of Great Britain, that I impeach Warren Hastings of high crimes and misdemeanors. I impeach him in the name of the Commons House of Parliament, whose trust he has betrayed. I impeach him in the name of the English nation, whose ancient honor he has sold. I impeach him in the name of the people of India, whose rights he has trampled under foot, and whose country has been turned into a desert. Lastly, in the name of human nature itself, in the name of both sexes, in the name of every rank, I impeach the common enemy and oppressor of all. The triumph of the orator's art could go no further. Winding up, he again judged of oratory, promising this generation "the noblest ever uttered by man." Byron has celebrated the scene in lines worthy of the great orator.

contains nothing but pure poetry; and though limited in its range, and covering but a few pages, it has on it the stamp of immortality. One oft-quoted passage I cannot but cite once more,—it never fails. It is a picture of the poet's own longings, amid his sore trials in the din and roar of London,—aspirations, alas! never to be realized, and a potent reproof to England for attempting to rob us of this great genius, as she would fain do his distinguished countryman and friend Edmund Burke:— "In all my wanderings through this world of care, In all my griefs,—and God has given my share,— I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown, Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down; To husband out life's taper to the close, And keep the flame from wasting by repose: I still had hopes, for pride attends us still, Amidst the swains to show my book-learn'd skill; Around my fire an evening group to draw, And tell of Iliad, and of Aeneid's war; And as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue, Pants to the place from whence at first she came, I still had hopes, my long vexations past, Here to return,—and die at home at last."

one of his eloquent countrymen, "kindly Irish of the Irish—all our own." To this period belongs the witty and versatile John Philip Curran, the fearless advocate of liberty, "Whose mind was an essence compounded with art, From the finest and best of all other men's powers. Who ruled like a wizard the world of the heart, And could call up its sunshine, or call down its showers." In one of his magnificent flights of eloquence, during the celebrated state trials, he said of the press: "What then remains? The liberty of the press only—that sacred palladium which no influence, no power, no government, which nothing but the depravity, or folly, or corruption of a jury can destroy." I must pass over Flood, Plunkett, Shiel, and Whiteside, and an array of great names, and come to one that I have no need to mention. Wherever oratory is admired, or freedom cherished, or genius honored, there will the name of Daniel O'Connell thrill the hearts and fire the souls of age after age, down through all future time. He was, perhaps, the greatest representative of the Irish nation that ever lived. As the Liberator and Emancipator he was the true exemplar of his people and the religion of his country. He was the grandest Christian statesman the world has ever seen. "A combination and a form, indeed, Where every god did seem to set his seat To give the world assurance of a man." I have no need to praise him. The Lacordaires of France, the Venturas of Italy, the Burkes of Ireland, the Philipps of America, the patriot orators of the world, will in the future, as they have in the past, honor themselves in honoring the illustrious name of Daniel O'Connell. Such were some of the men of Irish genius, whose fame must survive with increasing splendor the foot-prints of time. As the beautiful manuscript of the Creator is written across the blue canopy of the heavens, to remind us of glory and grandeur of His power, so these names appear in the history of Ireland as illustrative of the great Irish heart and race. I should fear to trust myself to an enumeration of the Irishmen who distinguished themselves in poetry and prose during the reign of the last two Georges. It is enough to say that this is the period of Frost, author of the *Bells of Shandon*, of Maginn Editor of *Frazer*, of Tom Moore, "the poet of all circles," of Aubrey De Vere, the Compeer of Tennyson; the time when Sam Lover commenced to charm with pen and pencil; when the sultans of the Countess of Blessington, the daughter of a Waterford farmer, were rivalling in brilliancy and popularity the assemblies at Holland House; and when Eliza Follen, the young Cork girl, was winning herself the highest laurels on the stage, and rendering herself worthy as well by her accomplishments, beauty and attractions, as by her spole character, the position which she assumed by her marriage with the Earl of Derby. From a poverty-stricken home in a back street of Cork she won her way honorably and fairly to a Ducal mansion, and to the highest social position under the Crown. Balle the composer too falls within this span, and Balle, as the journals of the country repeatedly tell us, holds rank as the first of English musicians, if not the founder of the lyrical drama of England. The popularity of Balle's music renders it almost unnecessary to say anything about it. His songs are known, and his music is loved, wherever the English language is spoken. On the continent of Europe a high opinion was formed of Balle's musical abilities. In Germany he was styled "the king of music," and he was made Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by Napoleon III., on the production of his Bohemian Girl in Paris. Balle wrote in all as many as twenty-nine operas, three in French, and twenty-one in English. What field of mental enterprise is there in which the Irish have not carved their names? The literary ranks are full of them. Amongst the lady authoresses we claim Hon. Mrs. Norton and Lady Dufferin, granddaughters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and noteworthy descendants of the great dramatist; Julia Kavanagh, a Tipperary girl, the author of the charming "Nathalie"; and Mrs. S. C. Hall. Amongst the sterner sex we have Lever and Griffin, Banim and Keat, Anster and Bell, Doran and Knightly, Dufferin and Grattan, the Sullivan brothers, and a host of others. I must close this brief, but imperfect, enumeration. To dwell longer on a dry list of names would but transgress the bounds of propriety. Yet, pardon me, ladies and gentlemen, if in the warmth of my Celtic blood, I be carried away by enthusiasm, when I behold in the literary firmament that brilliant galaxy of geniuses that shone so resplendently in the darkest hour of Ireland's history. Where is the Irishman whose heart is not fired at the bare mention of the men of '88? Where, on the scroll of fame, can there be found such a combination of natural endowments as characterized the more than Spartan band that strove so valiantly to shake off the galling chains of centuries. But all her children have not walked in the footsteps of worthy forefathers. Take those two wretched "of bad eminence," Froide and Fynlady, they are the products of Ireland's rich, luxurious soil. For

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her in the past. Though England has labored for nearly seven centuries to destroy her nationality, yet Ireland is still a nation. She does not, it is true, enjoy political independence; but she still has her national literature, her national poetry, her national eloquence, her national spirit and her national patriotism. Where is the wreath her shamrock does not adorn? Where the muse that has not visited her hills and lakes? Her harp has ever kindled the soul of the warrior and soothed the sorrows of the broken-hearted. Though there is a cloud in her sky at the present moment, still the signs of the times are propitious. Every nation has a mission confided to it by Divine Providence. Who will say that Ireland has yet fulfilled her mission? No! no! Eternal Justice has in store a bright future for poor, bleeding Ireland.

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