

JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.



AEARTH will always exercise its prerogative of snatching from the world, men whose lives and characters have an ennobling influence upon mankind. From its decrees there is no possibility of escape, but time makes some amends for the injury inflicted, by deepening and beautifying the reverence which it is the privilege of posterity to feel for them.

Brought into personal contact with genius, we cannot justly estimate its strength or greatness; we must contemplate it from a distance in order to grasp, unprejudicially, its meaning and power. Through the mist of ages we view the heroes, poets, statesmen and orators of ancient times with a sympathetic eye. Time is a purifying medium, and separates the good from the evil, the real from the dreamy in the deeds and writings of these men. We love to linger over the pages of Shakespeare and Milton, principally because they were literary creators of surpassing and indisputable eminence, but incidentally because they were men with whose careers and personalities we are acquainted through history and tradition, and not through intimate and happy fellowship. Thus it has ever been. The worth of men is not recognized until they are far beyond the possibility of enjoying the delight which acknowledgment of this worth brings with it. The subject of this sketch, John Boyle O'Reilly, did not, during his life, escape the cruel exactions which this arbitrary and nonsensical decree involves. He will have to wait for other generations to weave the wreath of fame which, one day or other, he will wear. He has his admirers, and they are not a few; but his spirit will not rest until the world is pleased to place his name amongst those of its great literary men.

John Boyle O'Reilly was a peculiarly gifted man. Whether we regard him as patriot, orator, journalist or poet we are at

once struck by his intense earnestness, that quality most needed for the achievement of great things. He never did anything in a half-hearted way. He felt so strongly on public questions that he could not speak otherwise than strongly upon them. He as bitterly hated evil as he fervently loved virtue. If his duty were to expose the former, he would bring to the task all the rich resources of his splendid mind; he would fling over his utterances those qualities which he thought would best prepare them to meet the purpose in view. Denunciation, invective, scorn and ridicule were his ready weapons but they were ever directed against the deed, while, for the doer, he felt compassion, as generous as it was sincere. If his duty were to extol the latter he would meet that duty with a smiling face, for he was not of those so selfish as to shrink from bestowing praise, when he felt that this praise was merited. In such cases, indeed, was the man fully displayed. His words, full of singular sweetness, were bubbleings from the rich fountain of a pure and noble heart. It was chiefly in his capacity as editor of a great paper that he was compelled to meet both these duties, and it is but just to say that in no instance did he avoid either of them.

Upon all matters, religious, political or racial his views were broad-minded and liberal. He was not so fettered by party or creed prejudices, as to feel it an obligation upon him to close his eyes to the abuses of the class, with whose general principles he found himself in sympathy. He had a conscience, delicate and sensitive, and its dictates he religiously followed, even when danger of social or pecuniary loss threatened. To say even so much is to say a great deal, when obsequiousness seemed to have entangled the journalists of the day in its meshes.

What shall I say of O'Reilly, the poet? Nothing but what is commendatory. Speculation regarding what would have happened, in certain cases under