

CHAS. J. KICKHAM.

Patriot, Poet and Novelist. A sketch By J. F. Meagher.

"He is dead!" and the heart of the nation
Pulses with passionate pain,
Because of the harp he will waken
Never again.

It is more than "twenty golden years ago" since I first stood upon the crest of Shab-na-Bhan—a bright, sunshiny day in early autumn, with the yellow corn waving its heavy ears that dropped under the weight of their rich yield, ready for the sickle. Below at my feet nestled the little village of Kilsash, and the "golden veil" stretched away from east to west as far as the eye could scan.

The scene was one worthy of the pencil of Corregio.

And, as I gazed, the historic memories of the old hill flashed back upon my mind. A few centuries past, Cromwell, standing upon its slopes, declared the country to be "worth fighting for," and accordingly Oliver did fight for it, and finally wrested it from the old Celtic race that had their homes beneath its shadow. Its '98 associations came blended with nearer memories of '48—the "time of the hill"—when Thomas Francis Meagher declared himself willing to hold it against all the mercenary hirelings of England.

This bright August day, two thousand men are on its summit in public meeting assembled, all good men and true, educating themselves for the onward march of Irish freedom. As Dr. Campion sang—

Two thousand men for Ireland on splendid
Slievenamon,
Two thousand voices asking Heaven how
Ireland may be won—
Won from the sickening thralldom, from the
serpent's thickening coil
The lying of each slavering tongue its trait
upon the soil.

Ah, me! where are these fine young men to-day? Charles Kickham, Ned Coyne, of Callan, John O'Cavanagh, of Carrick-on-Suir; these, and many more, are in their graves. Captain Finnerty is editing the Chicago Irish Tipperary Advocate, and Michael Heffernan is "doing" the Irish editorials for a New York paper.

With the Clonmel contingent there appeared, for the first time, a very distinguished recruit, and one who, in after times, figured with notorious *éclat* on the swearing-table in Green-street Court-house. The chair was taken by Charles J. Kickham, and Pierce Nagle was elected secretary thereto. Both men met for the first time, (as I believe), certainly no auspicious destiny for either of them. This was my first introduction to the poet of Anner. When we next met our political education was completed, Charles Kickham undergoing a four years "stretch in Dartmoor," and the present writer a more limited course of thirteen months in Kilmalham. This, be it known, is your true British mode of "spreading the light."

And now a word or two to the young reader of the present time as to Charles J. Kickham's antecedents.

In the little village of Mullinahone, about the era of Catholic Emancipation, Kickham first saw the light. Educated in the homely schools of the period, Charles from his boyhood had evinced an eager desire for knowledge and a thorough love of native literature. With gun in hand and some interesting volume in his pocket, as he describes so faithfully in "Sally Cavanagh," young Kickham traversed the surrounding country, from "wild Glenavalla to lonely Glenbower." A serious accident, however, brought this pleasant mode of recreation to an end, and with sight and hearing much impaired, he retired more into himself and became entirely devoted to reading and composition. Into the old Tenant Right movement he flung himself with the ardor of a devoted nature, and knowing the condition of the struggling peasantry, more from personal contact than Government statistics, his contributions attracted considerable attention. But Kickham, though a sterling patriot to the heart's core, had nothing of the professional politician in his composition. He saw too clearly that our taskmasters meant to hold Ireland by the sword, and that the nest of governing officials at the Castle were the mere creatures of English statemanship, and utterly devoid of anything like real legislative power. Without for once turning his back on the cause of the people, Kickham held aloof from the beaten track of stormy agitation, to write pathetic ballads of brown-haired daughters of the Anner, wasting their pure young lives far away from green Tipperary glens in the emigrant-thronged cities of the West. He soon gave evidence that

he was not deficient in the poetical faculty, and even in his earliest productions showed that he had not wooed the muse in vain.

The literary halo that enshrined the youthful enthusiasts of '48, and gave to their revolutionary theories no uncertain stamp of genuine creative power, flashed upon the thoughtful boy-poet by the Anner as a revelation from on high; and, though repressive measures, brutally enacted, dispersed that brilliant group of *litterateurs* into what was for many of them a life-long exile, their teachings had at least found a responsive thrill in that young heart, from thence offered up on the shrine of country. From the departure of the last of the Confederate leaders in chains, to the faithful hour a quarter of a century later on, when he stood calmly in the same dock, confronting his foes with a smile of benign good-humor, Kickham, by voice, and pen, and deed, "aided, abetted" the manly doctrine of Irish resistance *à la mort*.

At this time the "old marble town of Kilkenny" was the centre of great literary attraction. Dr. Case had just commenced the *Coll*, a little weekly magazine possessing merits of the highest order, and for years Kickham's pen enriched its pages with ballad, song, story, and essay. Such fine literary work as "Rory of the Hill," "Poor Mary Maher," a touching biography of Edward Walsh, the ill-fated author of *Mo Craobhu Cno*, and many other beautiful lyrics, brought the subject of this memoir into deserved prominence as poet and novelist. The *Irish People* newspaper, which appeared in the early winter of 1864, had much in it of the old fire that had but smouldered under the surface for many a weary year. Gavan Duffy left Ireland a "corpse" on the "dissecting table." The writers of the *Irish People*, of whom none worked with more persistent energy than Kickham, electrified the "remains," and, lo! once again half a million of the blood and bone of Ireland sprang into *armed life* against their ancient foe. It is not at all intended to enter largely into the details of his connection with the Irish revolutionary movement of '64. Able pens will delineate that period of our history, and draw from its failure a lesson of hope and earnest resolve. In this cursory glance at Charles J. Kickham's political career, I can find no apter measure of the man and his mode of dealing with many-sided Irish questions than what he quoted from Davis, a moment preceding his sentence of fifteen years' penal servitude—

"God of Justice!" I sighed, "send your spirit
down
On these lords, so cruel and proud;
And soften their wrath and relax their frown
Or else," I cried aloud—
"Vouchsafe thy strength to the peasant's hand
To hunt them at length from off the land."

With the spirit of this noble utterance on his lips and in his heart, one of the purest, noblest, and worthiest of the Irishmen of our own day passed from the dock into a convict's cell.

To the broad stream of brilliant verse, evoked by the political whirlwind of '48, Kickham contributed nothing of note. Indeed, he may be said, with perhaps one exception, not to have tuned his lyre until later days, when gloom and desolation overspread the fair face of his beloved Eire. "Corrig-na-clear" may be classed as one of the happiest efforts of Kickham's earlier style, and, as in all his efforts, he confines himself to the well-known scenery of the Anner side, by the foot of Slievenamon.

Oh sweet Slievenamon, you're my darling and
pride,
With your soft-swelling bosom and mien like
a bride!

And he presages the din of freedom's
battle with the hope that

The Saxon might hear
The first shout of the onset from Corrig-na-
Clear.

It is also from this dashing little piece we catch a glimpse of a certain "Mary," the poet's first conception of "love's young dream."

In "Sally Cavanagh" we have a gem of the clearest water, and had Kickham, never penned another line of poetry, his memory as a sweet singer would not die. Alone, all alone, by the wind-swept strand,
My weary spirit sighs;
Oh! my love, oh! my love, shall I see you more?
Oh! my land shall you ever uprise?
And day by day I ever, ever pray,
As wearily the years glide on,
To see your flag unrolled and my true love to
enfold

In that valley near Slievenamon.
Is there not music in each line and heart
in every stave of it?—the wailing of a
strong heart for his country and his love.
The vigorous word-painting in "Rory of
the Hill" needs scant criticism to stamp
it as one of the finest "seditious" ballads

in the language. Davis' "Sack of Baltimore" evinces both power and passion, and his "Fontenoy" as a battle-piece is not inferior to Macaulay's best work in the same line! Savage in "Shane's Head" is fierce and denunciatory over the treachery of the Scots, and curses, as Kehama cursed, the sept of M'Donald root and branch; yet withal, for its masterly power of descriptive narration, the poem of the rebel Rory has never been approached. The mid-night moon is flinging its radiance over the heather-clad slopes of the Fenian-haunted mountain of "fair women," the bold Croppy startles the timorous hare in its "form," as he seeks the rendezvous of his brother-conspirators. Coolly and dispassionately they discuss the desperate chances of an armed struggle, and one war-worn exile brings them happy tidings of succour from beyond the sea. "By my soul! I never doubted them," cried Rory, and he hastened homeward to fling the toothed rake scornfully aside and mount in its stead the gleaming steel.

"Oh, for a hundred thousand of such weapons and such men!" exclaimed the poet, carried along by the power of his own verses; and who amongst us, even now, but will re-echo his prayer?

The "Peasant Girl of the Anner" met with general favor on its appearance, such capable *litterateurs* as Col. Michael Doheny growing warm in its praise; and few will be found to deny it the merit of being the finest rural lyric since Burns' "To Mary in Heaven."

THE IRISH PEASANT GIRL.

She lived beside the Anner,
At the foot of Slievenamon,
A gentle peasant girl,
With mild eyes like the dawn;
Her lips were dewy rosebuds;
Her teeth of pearls rare;
And a snow-drift 'neath a beechen bough
Her neck and nut-brown hair.

How pleasant 'twas to meet her
On Sunday, when the bell
Was ringing with its mellow tones
Lone wood and grassy dell!
And when at eve young maidens
Strayed the river-bank along,
The widow's brown-haired daughter
Was loveliest of the throng.

O brave, brave Irish girls—
We well may call you brave—
Sure the least of all your perils
Is the stormy ocean wave.
When ye leave your quiet valleys,
And cross the Atlantic's foam,
To board your hard-won earnings
For the helpless ones at home.

"Write word to my dear mother—
Say we'll meet with God above;
And tell my little brothers
I send them all my love;
May the angels ever guard them
Is their dying sister's prayer"—
And folded in the letter
Was a braid of nut-brown hair.

Ah, cold and well-nigh callous,
This weary heart has grown,
For thy hapless fate, dear Ireland,
And for sorrows of my own;
Yet a tear my eye will moisten
When by Anner side I stray,
For the lily of "the Mountain-foot"
That withered far away.

It will be at once evident that the same low undertone of sadness runs through all Kickham's work, both in prose and verse; a heart-stilled moan for his country's lost nationhood and the dark fate of her exiled children. And is it any wonder that it should be so, when, in the brief span of fifty years, he saw all the golden valley of his childhood, marked like a graveyard, with the roofless cabins of as fine a race as the hand of God had ever planted in any land under the broad dome of heaven.

But it is as the Irish novelist that Kickham excels. His descriptions of Irish life and character, as portrayed in "Sally Cavanagh," "Knocknagow," and "For the Old Land," the three novels which he has left us in completed form, are as true as anything in print. His simple, pathetic way of depicting the Irish peasant at home, is in marked contrast with the mean specimens of humanity drawn by Lever, Lover, and even Carleton in their caricatures for the English market, and place him first among the story writers who have the spirit of Irish nationality and the true character of the Irish people in their hearts and minds.

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THE POPE'S FAMILY.

DESCENDED FROM RIENZI, THE LAST ROMAN
TRIBUNES.

The Roman papers have recently been recalling some interesting facts as to the family and birthplace of the Holy Father. The Pecci family were originally of Cortona, in Tuscany, whence they moved in the 13th century to Siena. Thence, having taken part with the Medici in the troubles of the period, they were obliged to fly; and under Clement VII. (1378-94) they established themselves at Carpineto, a stronghold in the Volscian Mountains, and in the diocese of Anagni. Leo XIII.'s mother, Anna Properi, was a descendant of Cola di Rienzi, the last Roman tribune, his son Angelo having escaped to Cori, in the Volscian country, and there founded a family, changing the name from Rienzi to Properi, as appears in a chronicle of Cori, dedicated to the preservers of Rome in 1631 by F. Sante Lauriente: Properi antiquitus vocabantur Rientii ex Nicolas Rientio Rom. pop. Tribune." Before the birth of the expected infant, destined to rule the Holy Church as Leo XIII., his father, Colonel Ludovico Pecci, wrote to Mgr. Tosi, Bishop of Anagni, asking him to stand sponsor, and at the same time requesting permission for the baptism to take place in the family chapel of the Pecci at Carpineto, "because the mountains were still covered with snow." The Bishop of Magni "willingly complied with this most reasonable request;" and for the same cause—the inclement season, which rendered the mountain journey difficult between Anagni and Carpineto—he deputed the Canonico Don Giacinto Caporossi to represent him at the baptismal font, and he himself dictated the names; Vincent, Joachim, Raphael and Aloysius, which were given to the new-born boy on March 4, 1810. The register of baptism is thus drawn up: "Anno Domini 1810, die 4 martii hora 16. Ritus Michael Gatoni can. theologus sacrosanctae basilicæ cathedralis Anagninæ, de mei infra licentia, baptizavit infantem natum nudius tertius hora prima noctis ex illis dms Ludovico Pecci et Anna Properi conjugibus hujus parocchie S. Nicolai, cui imposita fuere nomina Vincentius, Joachimus, Raphael, Aloysius. Compadres fuerunt illms et rms dms Joachimus Tosi episcopus Anagninus, ejus nomine de fonte levavit adm. rms dms, Hyacintus cancus Caporossi, ut ex mandato Candida Pecci Caidarozzi, in fidem ecc. Zephyrinus Cima, vicar. cur." The old palace of the Pecci family is situated on a hill and has nothing newer than the 16th century about it. The entrance is from a dark portico at the end of which is the massive door opening upon a broad staircase of stone. On the first floor are the series of spacious rooms on the plan of all Italian palaces; the large ante-room with the pontifical canopy and coat of arms; the crimson room with ancestral portraits; the long rectangular salon hung with tapestries, and furnished with ancient settees and arm-chairs, and inlaid tables. Rococo mirrors adorn the walls and the Pope's bust in marble stands upon a console at the end. To the left of this salon is the little chapel where the Pope was baptized and where he has several times celebrated mass. The State bedrooms are also on this first floor and one of them is called the "Camera di Monsignore," as it was occupied by his Holiness when a prelate. Returning to the great ante-room there is on the other side another spacious room called the hall of the fireplace, from the fact of its being provided with one. Here there is more ancient furniture, and the portrait of the Pope when Nuncio in Belgium. Next comes the dining-room, from which a flight of stairs leads up to another set of rooms in one of which Leo XIII. was born. A long Latin inscription commemorates the fact. (From "Hacks.")

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