

THE TRUE WITNESS

AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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NOTICE.

All subscribers who are in arrears for more than one year are hereby notified that if the arrears are not paid up on or before the first of May next their paper will be stopped, because the prompt payment of subscriptions is of vital importance to the financial standing of THE TRUE WITNESS. Montreal, 5th March, 1894.

HOME RULE.

Now that Gladstone has resigned the premiership of Great Britain, it becomes a question of deep interest to know how the important change in the political aspect will affect the Home Rule cause. We are in no way endowed with the prophet's gift, nor are we able to cast the political horoscope of the future with any degree of certainty; but if we are not, as yet, able to foretell the outcome of the movement that has just been made, at least we can predict that, on certain conditions, the advocates of Ireland's claims may be positive that success will eventually crown their efforts. Men come and men go; but the race lives on and the principles of national right and of universal justice are as immutable as the basalt rocks of the Giant's Causeway. In presence of such an important movement and of a crisis like that through which the governing party has passed, the representatives of the Irish cause have an imperative duty to fulfil. They must be more strongly united and more positively determined than ever.

Glance back, for a moment, on the history of the century that is expiring, and the story of the mighty struggle for national autonomy that has been going on during its lengthy years. Leader after leader has arisen, each performing his work with the energy and talents that belonged to him, and each disappearing from the scene after having, by one means or another, accomplished a great deal in the struggle. No sooner did one lay down the sword than another was found to take it up. The memory of the departed one served to stimulate his successor, and the advantages that the former had gained rendered easier the task that fell to the lot of the latter. With each great leader the tide rushed in apace; with his death it apparently receded again; but that constant flow and ebb, while apparent to the superficial observer, and indicative of alternate successes and reverses, still gave evidence of a constant and steady rising of

the great ocean. A wave comes within a yard of your feet, it then rolls back a foot or more; the next comes within twelve inches of your feet, and it rolls back a foot or more; the third touches your feet and plashes upon your ankles. It is evident that irresistibly and steadily the tide is gaining upon the land. So it is with the history of the Irish battle for constitutional rights. O'Connell disappeared, after all his magnificent triumphs and glorious work; the wave rolled seaward. The "spirit of the nation" arose; the wave rolled landward again, and still higher than before. So was it when each of the guiding hands relaxed the grasp on the helm; Butt passed away; Parnell disappeared; to-day Gladstone drops out,—but the tide is ever coming in, and on its bosom it carries the ark of Ireland's hopes, freighted with the assurances of ultimate triumph.

Contemplating the picture from that higher level, and with an eye on the past as well as on the future, we see no reason for discouragement, no cause for hesitation, no excuse for wavering or division. The danger—if danger there be—will not come from Rosebery or any other one who may occupy the high post of Prime Minister; it will come from the uncertain action or the disunited movement of the Irish representatives. In presence of such a momentous juncture it would be the truest and grandest evidence of national sincerity and devoted patriotism, for every member who advocates Home Rule, to sink all differences on matters of detail and to join hands in one grand and united course. No matter who may be the actual leader of the present Liberal party, or who may be the generalissimo of the opposition, neither one nor the other can afford to disregard the wishes of a party that, by a solidification of its phalanx, holds the balance of power. The majority in the Commons to-day is not sufficient to warrant any leader in hazarding a pitched battle without the support of his Irish allies; and the Irish contingent can only retain that strength of position in so far as the aims of its members are the same and their agreement upon the methods to be adopted are identical. Perhaps, more than ever, have the Home Rule men an opportunity of making their power felt, and by calmness, patience, perseverance, and above all, by union, they may be able to wield a still greater influence this year than they have been able to exercise heretofore.

While regretting, beyond expression, the sad circumstances which necessitated the retirement of Gladstone, still we cannot look upon the prospect as necessarily overclouded. He has done well and nobly the work of the last couple of years; he has advanced the cause most materially, and to a stage far beyond the most sanguine anticipations of men who entered the lists ten years ago; he has afforded the Irish people an opportunity of displaying what they could do under other and more favorable circumstances; but it would be wrong for any one to imagine that the fate of a nation, the future of a race, and the ultimate triumph of a just cause depended entirely upon the uncertainty of one human life. We prefer to look higher and to behold a Divine Providence extending His Almighty Hand over the people and guiding them slowly, but surely, along the path of sorrows, that must end in a final crowning of victory.

It seems to us that the great Creator has had always His own wise purposes in view when He carved out such a rough and weary road for the Irish race to travel. It appears to us as if He had ordained that Erin should walk the *Via*

Dolorosa of existence, bearing upon her innocent shoulders the political and national crimes of others, and suffering untold tortures for the preservation of less worthy children of earth. And if it is so, then, she may expect a crown of success some day that will be proportionate to the multiplied miseries of her past. Every time that the cup of prosperity was raised to her parched lips, some invisible and unexpected hand was lifted to dash it to the ground. And amidst her tears of disappointment she even smiled with hopefulness, for she had faith in the One whose pillar of fire had guided Israel through a dreary desert, into a land of promise.

Under these circumstances, and looking upon the situation from that lofty standpoint, we feel even a sense of encouragement and we believe in the ultimate success of the Home Rule cause. But we again repeat that it is absolutely necessary that all petty differences should be forgotten, that no personal or other considerations should be allowed to operate the slightest division, and that the leaders and the people should be inspired with mutual confidence and mutual determination to stand by the flag that now waves to the breeze of future promise. The cause is too grand and too just to be allowed for a moment to become endangered; and the Irish leaders who, at this juncture, combine their forces and present an unbroken front, may legitimately expect the undying gratitude of every child of the Celtic race for generations after they have departed from the field.

NOVEL READING.

When last we referred to this subject we spoke of the different classes of novel readers and indicated that it is a loss of time and a foolish squandering of energy and opportunities to read for the purpose of "whiling away an hour," or for that of picking up names of authors and characters in order to speak about them afterwards. The third class of readers consists of persons who read for improvement and information. This week we intend calling attention to the novels themselves.

Some time ago we gave a short notice of Rev. Father O'Neil's little volume, entitled, "Why, When, How and What We Ought to Read." For this week we could not do better than take a chapter from that admirable work. We will give it *verbatim*, and it will serve as a basis for our future article on this subject. "If it be true," says Father O'Neil, "that the novel is the last stage of prose in its progress towards poetry, perhaps we are coming to a new era, for assuredly the novel seems now to enjoy undisputed sway. It is less than two hundred years since the English novel took its rise. The author of Robinson Crusoe may justly be considered its father. Richardson, Fielding and Smollet worked on the line marked out by Defoe; but if we judge by Fielding, we would conclude that religion no longer held sway over society. However, I am not here concerned with the characteristics of these writers, nor need I analyze their successors,—Scott, who dwelt in a spirit land of chivalry, and whose 'romances' are so upright, so delicate, so true, when he resists the temptation to blacken monks; Dickens, who pictured the poor and lowly, and strove for social reforms; Thackeray, the great searcher of hearts and master of character delineation; Charles Reade, who laid bare the abuses of prisons and asylums; George Eliot, that subtle woman who moralized in a human way, having no God; Bulwer, a brilliant man, who wrote much and often wrote meanly; or many others, whom I do not name. To-day an army of novel-

ists is in the field. Judgment and discrimination must, therefore, hold sway in our dealing with the question of 'light reading.' F. Marion Crawford, whose versatility and ability easily place him in the front rank of living novelists, has recently published a brochure, 'The Novel—What Is It?' I take from him a few suggestive points. He tells us that the novel is an intellectual artistic luxury—a definition which can be made to include a good deal, but which is, in reality, a closer one than it appears to be at first sight. No one, I think, will deny that it covers the three principal essentials of the novel as it should be, of a story or romance, which in itself and in the manner of telling it shall appeal to the intellect, shall satisfy the requirements of art, and shall be a luxury, in that it can be of no use to a man when he is at work, but may conduce to peace of mind and delectation during his hours of idleness."

The reader will remember that these criticisms of particular authors are Father O'Neil's—not ours,—and the general comments are F. Marion Crawford's. In future issues we will take the liberty of differing slightly, on some points, from both one and the other.

But to continue with Father O'Neil's chapter: "No reasonable man will deny that fiction thus understood has a just place in literature, and that it deserves recognition as a factor in our innocent recreation. But the field claimed as its own by the novel has been invaded. 'A man buys what purports to be a book of fiction, a romance, a novel, a story of adventure; pays his money, takes his book home, prepares to enjoy it at his ease, and discovers that he has paid a dollar for somebody's views on socialism, religion, or the divorce laws. . . . In ordinary cases the *purpose* novel is a simple fraud, besides being a failure in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand.'

"The historical novel is another diversion from the true spirit of fiction and imaginative literature, though there need not be injurious effects from such reading unless it is taken as an absolute substitute for genuine history. Any attempt absolutely to displace the novel as an element in our modern literature would be bigoted and unreasonable, and would meet with failure. Our duty is to regulate the reading of fiction, and to check any tendency towards such appetite for it as would render solid study irksome. The novel may, indeed, serve as a recreation, as a teacher of useful, worldly experience; but it must not be adopted for a steady course of reading. Agnes Repplier, the delightful Catholic essayist, touches lightly, yet strongly, on this question, in speaking of the modern girl who at ten or twelve aspires to something partly grown up, to those nondescript tales, which, trembling on the brink of sentiment, seem afraid to risk the plunge; who, with her appetite whetted by a course of unsatisfactory diet, is soon ripe for a little more excitement, and a great deal more love-making; and so she graduates into Rhoda Broughton and the Duchess, at which point her intellectual career is closed. She has no idea of what she has missed in the world of books. She tells you that she 'don't care for Dickens,' and 'can't get interested in Scott,' with a placidity that plainly shows she lays the blame for this state of affairs on the two great masters who have assumed and charmed the world. She has probably never read a single masterpiece of our language; she has never been moved by a noble poem, or stirred to the quick by a well-told page of history; she has never opened the pores of her mind for the reception of vigorous thought, or the