

FATHER PROUT.

By Eugene Davis in the *Review*

Most of the students of English literature can easily recall to mind the name of Father Prout, but few are familiar with that of the Rev. Francis Mahony. Yet both were one and the same; for Prout was the pseudonym of the Rev. *litterateur*. There are not many, however, cognizant of the fact that there was at one time a real live Father Prout in the diocese of Cork, who had been for years the pastor of Watergrasshill, a parish in which the famous Blarney-stone is located. He was a simple-minded, unsophisticated old man when Mahony knew him, now some six decades ago. The knowledge of moral theology, which the P.P. had acquired, was sufficient to enable him to take spiritual charge of his flock, but he was absolutely ignorant of literature, history, and other mundane subjects. Shortly after the death of the venerable ecclesiastic, Mahony, who was then on the staff of *Fraser's Magazine*, in London, contributed to that periodical a series of interesting and erudite papers entitled "The Reliques of Father Prout." In introducing them to the notice of his readers, Mahony, who concealed himself behind the pen-name of Oliver Yorke, announced that Father Prout had left him all his valuable MSS. which would now appear in successive numbers of *Fraser*. The essays, which astonished the literary world of that day by their scholarly qualities, and stately eloquence of style, were written on such themes as "An Apology for Lent," in which the parish priest of Blarney proved by quotations from the Fathers of the Church and other authorities that fish was more nutritious and palatable than any kind of meat; "A Defense of the Jesuits," the logic of which dumfounded every light in the Protestant camp; a "Visit of Sir Walter Scott to Blarney," on which occasion the aged *cure* proved to have the oriental origin of the stone which the Scotch baronet kissed at great risk to life and limb, the *Rogues of Tom Moore*, in which the author translated some of the Irish poet's melodies into quaint old classic French, and gave them to the public as originals alleged to have been found in the archives of continental libraries—thus showing up the "poet of all circles and the idol of his own" as a plagiarist of a most shame-faced type. These articles, particularly the last, caused the utmost sensation in literary coteries all over the British Isles. Moore became as mad as a March hare over the unfounded accusation brought against him. Oliver Yorke simply replied by congratulating him on his skill as a translator. Other articles which demonstrated Father Prout's intimate knowledge of Cork city and its intellectual and political status caused still a greater sensation on the banks of the Lee, where the worthy mayor and aldermen woke up one fine morning to find themselves famous thanks to the publicity given them in *Fraser*. No one except Dr. Maginn, the then editor, who was, like Mahony himself, a Corkman, had any idea of the identity of the real author of those scathing and talented contributions. In Cork city people nudged each other in the ribs, and laughed their lungs hoarse at the idea that the late Father Prout could have had anything whatsoever to do with such learned lucubrations. Nor was it known for years afterwards that the *deus ex machina* was none other than the Rev. Francis Mahony.

Mahony was born in Cork, in 1804, of a prosperous Kerry family that had settled in that city, and became the originators and owners of the celebrated Blarney tweed industry, which, I believe, is still under their control. At an early age the young lad was sent by the Bishop of Cork to the Irish College of Rome, where he prose-

cut his ecclesiastical studies for several years. The venerable nonagenarian, Dr. Kirby, Archbishop of Ephesus, who is still alive, was a fellow-student of Mahony. I had an interview with the doctor in 1880, at a time when he had been for almost half a century the rector of that establishment. It was from the lips of this veteran ecclesiastic that I learned the circumstances attendant on the composition of the "Bells of Shandon" by Mahony. These remarkable lines were pencilled by their author on the wall of his cell one languid summer afternoon when the college was enjoying its *siesta*. The dean of the house saw them as he was making his daily rounds next morning, and while he complimented the youth on his poetical talent, reminded him that his mission in life just then was not to become a poet, but a priest. Mahony, who was at the time a shy and timid lad, took the mild rebuke in good part, and promised to sin no more. His curriculum at the Propaganda was a success from start to finish, and he was very popular with professors and students alike; but when the time came for his taking Holy Orders, he decided that he was unfit for the work of an Irish county priest. He was too fond of books and study to devote himself with sufficient ardor to the many outdoor cares and responsibilities associated with parochial ministrations on a bleak hill-side, and among a people who probably would never be able to appreciate him. He accordingly applied for and was granted admission into the Jesuit College of Amiens, and a few years subsequently was transferred to a college of the same society in Paris, where he read a profound course of theology, and was in due time elevated to the priesthood. His intimate and extensive knowledge of languages and European literature qualified him for a professional chair in the last-named college—a post which he held, however, only for a very short period.

He had up to this epoch in his life been convinced that the career of a religious was suited to his temperament. He now discovered to his dismay that he had no real vocation for the priesthood. He felt bitterly, I am told, at separating himself from his Jesuit colleagues a step he took once he had resolved on trying his fortune in the literary world of London. "I would have been a zealous priest, and, perhaps, a most effective preacher," he once said to J. P. Leonard of Paris, "were it not for the mania which I had for the pen, and the secular erudition in which I had been steeped." He proceeded to London, where his first struggles for existence were hard and arduous enough. He would have received financial aid from home if he had asked for it, but he was too proud to do so. At length, toward the close of the twenties, he secured an introduction to Dr. Maginn, a fellow-Corkman, who, after having seen and examined some of Mahony's literary wares offered him a position on the staff of *Fraser's Magazine*. It was on this periodical that his "Reliques of Father Prout" were first published, and won for the pseudo Oliver Yorke a prominent place among the leading *litterateurs* of England. The contributors to *Fraser* numbered among them the leading writers of the time, and used to assemble once a month in a London restaurant, where they crossed legs under a table, rich with choice viands and crusted wines, around which wit and repartee flashed in brilliancy as clear as crystal, and quite as effervescent as the *Veuve Clicquot* champagne which they quaffed on such occasions. These were what Prout used to call the "nights and suppers of the gods." Maginn called them "*Noctes Ambrusianae*." Here the young Irishman clinked glasses with another famous Corkman, Sergeant Murphy, with that dyspeptic and dog-

matic ogre Carlyle, with Thackeray the humorist, and Maclean, the rollicking artist who illustrated the Prout Rollique, and who also hailed from the banks of the pleasant Lee. All these writers were the learned luminaries of *Fraser* in those days. The predominance of the Corkonians in the editorial sanctorium of the magazine once drew from Carlyle the admission: "We should transfer our desks and printing press over to the classic purlieus of the Coal quay, my friends; for it is Cork and not London that illumines the pages of our monthly."

Some years after the retirement of Maginn from *Fraser's*, Francis Mahony, tired of London, returned to Paris, and spent almost the remainder of his career in the capacity of correspondent of the London *Globe*. His contributions to that journal were marvels of style, and full of interest—his picturoes of Parisian life being particularly faithful to nature, and winning for his newspaper an immense popularity in London. Prout—this was the name by which he was known in the French capital—used to rent a modest suite of rooms in the Latin quarter close to the Sorbonne. Six times every week he would cross the Seine to the reading-room of *Galignani's Messenger* in the Rue de Rivoli. Here he would write his daily letter, and afterwards stroll out into the Tuileries gardens, opposite where he would spend many of his evenings in reverie. At *Galignani's* he met at times such congenial Bohemian spirits as the late John Mitchel of '48 fame, rebel and refugee, James Stephens, the founder of the old Fenian organization, and the late J. P. Leonard, who enjoyed the unofficial title of Irish Ambassador in Paris. Politically Prout was a rank Tory; but he managed to pull on very well socially with these compatriots of his, two of whom professed very radical ideas on the Irish question. On a certain occasion, however, when an Englishman formed one of the company, Prout's Irish spirit could not restrain itself. It happened thus. The Anglo-Saxon happening to remark that Ireland needed the superior intelligence of Englishmen to control her destinies properly, Prout glared at him through his spectacles, and retorted: "All the same, sir, our forefathers were saints and scholars when yours were savages!"

One summer's day Father Prout and John Mitchel were taking a stroll through the woods of St. Cloud, a Parisian suburb. The weather was oppressively hot. Prout, who wore a cotton shirt, opened his collar to give himself more comfort—a circumstance which revealed the sight of a scapular to the astonished gaze of the Irish Presbyterian. Leonard was of the opinion that—disguise it as he tried to do—Prout was always a Catholic at heart. In England he affected a mild regard for Protestantism which was not sincere. In Paris his Catholicity secretly gained complete mastery over him once more. I was assured on good authority that he used to be often seen going at night to Notre Dame cathedral, and kneeling in prayer before a side chapel dedicated to the Madonna. These inner manifestations of piety had at last their logical result. He abandoned the pen and the world forever, and retired to a monastery, where he passed several years in penitential sorrow and suffering for any scandal he might have caused by his defection from the Church. Here he died in the early portion of 1866. In the May of that year his remains were transported to Cork, Ireland, where they were buried in the churchyard of St. Anne, Shandon, under the shadow of the steeple whose bells he had immortalized in the heyday of his youth and the springtide of his poetical ambition.

Prout, like Renan and other ecclesiastics, dressed very severely, and looked like a clergyman in the

dark austere clothes which he habitually wore. In conversation he had a slight Munster accent which, he was glad to admit, no amount of travel could ever wholly eradicate from his tongue. He had a high intellectual forehead, bald on top, and two piercingly critical eyes, usually *voespataol*-ed, which seemed to analyze the hidden soul of everybody with whom he was thrown in contact. Despite the severe expression of his face, he was nevertheless the wittiest of scholarly wags, and a genial humorist.

Death of a Patriotic Exile.

There lately passed away, in the city of Campinas, Brazil, an Irishman, not widely known to fame, indeed, but still one whose heart, after many years of absence from his native land, beat as warmly with patriotic feelings as if he had borne an active part at home in the many stirring incidents that have taken place in Irish politics during the past half century.

On the 7th of June, 1893, Richard Gumbleton Daunt died at his residence in Campinas, somewhat suddenly. His age was advanced, but there was nothing in the general condition of his health to excite the alarm of his friends. He was the son of the late Captain Richard Gumbleton Daunt, an officer in the 60th Regiment (Rifles), and a near relative of W. J. O'N. Daunt, of Kilcaskan, county Cork. He resigned his position as staff surgeon in the British army, and emigrated, from the Cape of Good Hope, more than fifty years ago, to Brazil, where his personal qualities and the skill he exhibited in the practice of his profession rendered him so popular that, on having become a naturalized citizen of Brazil, he was elected to the Provincial Parliament of San Paulo; and about the same time he married a Brazilian lady Donna Anna Francelina dos Santos de Camargo, a relative of the Regent Fiejo and a descendant of the Portuguese Marquis de Tavora, by whom he had a numerous family, one of whom, Padre Fergo de Segouira, was at one time chaplain to the daughter of the late Emperor Dom Pedro II. Mr. Gumbleton Daunt's eldest son was made a Knight of the Rose of Brazil, by Dom Pedro, who entertained a high esteem for that gentleman's father.

The many years which had elapsed since Mr. Daunt quitted his native land, left his heart unchanged in its fervent love for Ireland. His constant aspiration was for the recovery of Irish Legislative Independence. With intensest interest he followed every varying phase of the movement for Home Rule. His letters to his relatives also included anxious inquiries concerning the success of the efforts to preserve the Irish language, to the funds for promulgating which object he frequently contributed. He felt indignant at the slunkeyism which could regard with indifference or complacency the abandonment of the ancient Gaelic of his country; in which subject as in every other in which Ireland was concerned, his feelings, his sentiments and his principles were enthusiastically National.

His funeral showed the general esteem in which he was held by all ranks in Campinas. A profusion of rich floral offerings covered his last resting place. The Municipal Council of Campinas decreed that a vote of sincere sympathy should be offered to his sorrowing relatives. A public subscription is also in progress for the erection of a mausoleum in which his remains will be deposited.

Mr. Daunt was one of the earliest converts from Puseyism to the Catholic Church. "*Memoria ejus in benedictione.*" We feel sure that from many an Irish heart will arise the prayer, *requiescat in pace.*

Three things to govern—temper, tongue, and conduct.