

The nation, oppressed by the various contrivances of the Irish Parliament and its ferocious ally the Orangemen, was not slow to realize the necessity of a combined opposition. Nationalists of all creeds banded together into one great society, that, like a river, swelled as it lived on, but that was destined, when it had run its course, to see its forces dissipated without having accomplished more than a commotion that effected nothing. The Society of United Irishmen sprang into existence in the early part of the year 1791. It soon gained adherents from all parts, and had some of the ablest men of the nation as its directors.

During all these years Parliament was in a most deplorable condition. An election in Ireland meant, in the words of Grattan, "the privilege of returning a few representatives of the people to a Parliament that was already occupied by the nominees of the English Government." Before an assemblage so constituted it was impossible to effect anything beneficial for the country. The most moderate bills for reform were voted down time after time by a great majority until in the end the immortal Grattan and his followers seceded in disgust, and refused to appear again in the House. This took place in May, 1797. From that moment it was plain to be seen that an insurrection was inevitable.

We cannot leave this period without a consideration of the attitude of the English Parliament. The consent of that body to the bill establishing the independence of Ireland had been wrung from them at a time when it would have been impolitic for them to resist. Their subsequent conduct is easily interpreted. They looked listlessly on when the Orange-

men wreaked their brutal outrages on the defenceless Irishmen; they connived at the promiscuous slaughter in the districts where martial law had been proclaimed to squelch a rebellion, whose causes they did not wish to remove; and they refused intervention when Grattan and Fox pressed them to force a change upon the Irish Parliament. It was clear that it was their intention to goad the people on to a rebellion, which they might use as a pretext for the union of England and Ireland.

Ireland had now nothing to hope for. Force was the only means untied by which she might expect an improvement of her condition. Her chances for success were tolerably good. The United Irishmen numbered in their ranks 500,000 men, 300,000 of whom were armed. With a well nigh perfected organization, with great prospect of external aid, with a firm conviction of the justice of their cause, and with the glorious example of the achievements of the valiant rebels of 1641 as incentive, it was far from being a rash estimate that considered success as easily attainable. But a damp was cast over the whole affair by the arrest of the leaders in the rebellion on the very eve of the outbreak. However, preparations had already gone too far to permit even that being a hindrance to the intended action.

The rising, whose general tenor in all that we can here notice, took place on May 23, 1798. Its course was marked by the bitterest animosity on both sides. The rebels fought most courageously, but before many months they were overcome. Still the result is nothing to their discredit. In many engagements they vanquished forces vastly their superiors in numbers, and fully equipped