

## CHARLES STEWART PARNELL.

Reminiscences by T. M. Healy, M.P.

Of the many strenuous comrades who strove with Mr. Parnell in the stirring periods of his career, only one has given to biography since his death the scantiest contribution. From such neglect the memory of the greatest must suffer in succeeding generations, for even genius unportrayed moulders in forgetfulness. The conflict which clouded the last nine months of Mr. Parnell's life explains much reticence. A partisan design might be attributed to the most candid narrative. Indeed, so exacting are the disciples who cherish certain versions of his principles that a wholly laudatory sketch by the competent author of "The Parnell Movement" was ill received in some quarters. Genuine biographical effort has thus for the moment been paralyzed, and a career rich in dramatic interest has apparently left behind it only the slenderest trail of literary remains.

In the case of Daniel O'Connell, though he, too, left a divided party at his death, friend succeeded friend with Lives, Speeches, Letters, Anecdotes, to illustrate his career. Yet the Liberator's life lay mostly upon the surface, and lacked the intensity of that of the Land League Leader. O'Connell's character, "open as the day to melting charity," was wotted of all men, and needed no literary analysis before the people; while the strengths and reserves of Mr. Parnell's nature, the subtle, yet firm touches which showed his powers, were undefinable even to many who felt their influence. Portrayed in the coarse ochres of sectional partizanship, the lumpy pigments make the judicious grieve, and to explain them to a generation removed from the passions of the time special treatment would be essential. The lava of recent eruptions may still glow too fiercely to present a serene examination of the pathway it envelops, but when it has ceased to be molten, much darkness will have set in.

In these difficult conditions, for any actor in the strife to afford a glimpse of the ever-varying frontage of a great yet simple intellect, a facet must be presented, remote from any angle of political controversy. Remoteness in years from recent conflict should also soften the shadows of the incidents treated of, and therefore, in the following pages, scarcely anything which happened less than a decade ago will be referred to.

Like a vein in marble a mystic strain seemed to thread its way through Mr. Parnell's mind. Sometimes this gave a clue to its political workings, but he shrank whenever possible, from revealing the fancies by which at times his thought was influenced. In photographic phrase the "exposures" were short, yet they yielded to the mental retina a clear and permanent impression, contracted sharply with the granite background of will which gave the dominant tone to his character. Thus, like the venerable heel of classic fabie, they involuntarily furnished the explorer with an unexpected inlet to the impregnable mental fortress of that "strong man armed keeping his court."

Many a time in the house of Commons when the gaunt Tory Whip of old days, Mr. Rowland Winn (the late Lord St. Oswald), would bustle in solemnly to the Bar, and stand there gravely craning forward to get an inkling of what was going on, Mr. Parnell (with whom he afterwards cemented the Carnarvon negotiations) would smilingly muse, "Winn always reminds me of an old nurse. I had"—a pause—"she had a very queer name—Mrs. Tuppenny." Then perhaps a question would be asked as to the nature of the resemblance and he would repeat, "She had just that

same bulge in the centre of her forehead."—A pause. "I once threw a candlestick at her, whereupon Mr. Parnell would smile, half in amusement at his own daring, half in respectful atonement to the shade of Mrs. Tuppenny. Then if the debate was dull and his mood was unembarrassed, he would recall in snatches broken sketches of The Tuppenny. From various references to her now and again, the impression remains that it was from this antique serving-woman the Irish leader drew whatever tendency towards the "Aberglaubisch" his childhood received.

Hostile journalists who pursued Mr. Parnell at the outset of his Parliamentary career as a bore, a blunderer, and a petulant, wheeled round later on to invest his successes with unfathomable accompaniments of surprise and mystery. It is true that the conditions under which he came to live after some time lent themselves to such treatment—lurid or mystic—according to the bias of the daily purveyor of spiced condiments for the public palate. It is equally true that in the end it came to suit the harassed politician to don as his permanent raiment the "cloak of darkness" and "shoes of swiftness" which sensationalists cheaply presented him with. Some of the strangeness, however, that tantalised the inquisitive came rather by "suggestion" and "transferrence" from the ready writers of the day, whose colourings the keenly-watched statesman adopted and even intensified to "make up" for the part of the Unaccountable which the critics willed that he must play. Still, there underlay these wrappings a foundation which gave body and substance to the descriptions the public received.

In those strange eyes there lay at times, something of "the light that never shone on land or sea," and then they shot a power that easily affected the susceptible. Occasionally from Mr. Parnell's lips would fall, in some snatchy way, traces in a belief in portents and signs which awed the unexpecting listener. As far as might be, he hid away the contents of this encumbering knapsack. He bore the burden, but treated it as something that should not be unpacked before the scoffs of a workaday world. What garniture it contained we know only from shreds and patches. There be mental hair-shirts as irksome as those of bodily chafing. Mr. Parnell sometimes hinted that his religious leanings were rather towards the Plymouth Brethren—whose tenets he said were held by one of his kinsmen—but his thoughts, as outwardly expressed were not often cast in a speculative direction. Indeed, a relative wrote after his death, in explanation to the family objection to his burial in the Catholic cemetery at Glasnevin instead of in the family vault at Mount Jerome, Dublin, that it had no sectarian foundation, as her brother cared very little for religion, but very much for his ancestors.

The extra subjects, however, in which he believed were many. For instance, he would commence no important business on a Friday. After his return from America in March, 1880, Mr. Parnell worked incessantly during the General Election. Making Dublin his headquarters, he raided through the constituencies, returning occasionally to Morrison's Hotel, where he held council with his supporters until the beginning of May. During these two months he did not return to Avondale, although he constantly said he wanted to get home. But when the elections closed, the preparation of a Land programme, and for the coup which ousted Mr. William Shaw from the leadership, detained him, and time after time he was obliged to put off the return to his estate. At last came the prospect of a free day, and with a sigh of relief the hard-pressed politician declared

he "should certainly get away tomorrow by the mid-day train." Tomorrow came, and, having called to see him before he started, I found there was no sign of preparation for departure. "Are you not going?" said I. He hesitated, smiled in a troubled sort of way, and then austere-ly replied, "I had forgotten it was Friday." "Forgotten what?" said I, unfamiliar in actual affairs with the Friday prejudice. "It would not be lucky, I think, for me to return home on Friday," said Mr. Parnell very simply!

From the man who would go unflinchingly to the cannon's mouth to effect a purpose the answer was almost awe inspiring. It was for me the first inkling that he had notions of the kind, but in the course of years it became evident that he had quite a code of such beliefs. He was guarded, however, against making them the sport of the sacrilegious, but involuntarily at unexpected moments and in the oddest way, the tenets of Mrs. Tuppenny shyly presented themselves.

On the lips of such a man they acquired a setting of their own. When the first amazement passed away that omens about dates, colours, numbers, and observances affected this strong mind, what would otherwise have seemed trivial fancies seemed to become almost dignified beliefs.

Shortly after being imprisoned in Kilmainham in 1881, he was presented with a handsomely-worked green smoking cap, wrought with shamrocks. The colour green, misliked Mr. Parnell sorely, although it is the national hue of Ireland. He had been taught to regard it as "unlucky," and not only would he not wear his smoking-cap, but he would not suffer it even to remain in his cell. "All the national misfortunes of Ireland," he explained, as he bundled it off, "come from the colour green." For one who, during a large portion of his career, had to live in public, amidst the waving of green flags, this extraordinary prejudice must have been a besetting inconvenience. On another occasion, while travelling, he was presented on a railway platform with a green silk handkerchief, duly emblazoned with patriotic mottoes. As soon as the train started he pitched it out of the window, with a comic expression of apprehension lest a collision should occur if he retained it in the carriage.

After his release from prison, some one who knew of this patriotic colour-blindness remarked in the House of Commons, while sitting near him on the benches, that he had taken to wearing a ring with a green stone—a catseye. This was the more peculiar, as that time Mr. Parnell seldom wore ornaments or jewellery of any kind, so the colleague ventured a remark on the novelty. Mr. Parnell took the matter almost tragically. "Yes," said he, "the ring was given to me in a way that I can't refuse to wear it, but it is certain to bring some misfortune on me." He spoke almost with bitterness, as if protesting against a cruel but inevitable fate, and with an impressiveness impossible to forget. Still he wore the ring to the end.

In the height of the Land League agitation of 1880, its leader attended a meeting in county Tipperary, and the speakers in the evening dined with the parish priest. After dinner the materials for "punch" were handed round, as is the custom in some parts of Ireland. When the decanter reached Mr. Parnell, he politely declined it, and his hospitable host, knowing him to be most abstemious, put the statutory question, would he prefer anything else? "Oh," came the reply, with a winning smile, "I shall gladly join you, Father, but the decanter did not reach me the right way." A sudden silence fell on the guests. Most of them were puzzled, but the ever-watchful politician, though en-

gaged in a brisk conversation, had not failed to mark that some occult rubric was neglected in handing round the bowl. More experienced *convives* than himself were sunk in ignorance of the true formula of libations being probably more intent on the matter than the manner. Accordingly, under distinguished guidance, back again to the host at the head of the table went the generous receptacle. Here a pause was made and a helpful taken, and the decanter was solemnly passed round the table anew from right to left, according as the law is, instead of from left to right, until it reached the chief, who, bowing assably, helped himself. So Bacchus and the Goddess Tuppenny were satisfied.

Another table story is told by one of Mr. Parnell's fellow prisoners in Kilmainham. Leave had been got from the Governor for a few of the "suspects" to spend the afternoon together, and they were afterwards an hungored. One of them, therefore, undertook to act as cook, and grilled the steak, while another foraged for *utensils and laid the cloth*. Then the imprisoned politicians sat down to eat, and, as is usual at pic-nics, the salt had been forgotten. After due quest the "host" obtained a supply, and at once proceeded to help his fellow-captives' plates to the harmless necessary condiment. Suddenly Mr. Parnell detected the malign hospitality. "What are you doing?" said he, instantly arresting the hand that welded the salt-spoon. "Why, you could not do a more unlucky thing than help a man to salt." A plea in abatement from the offender was allowed on the score of ignorance, but the rest of the table asked for authority. "Why," said Mr. Parnell, "don't you know? Help you to salt, help you to sorrow." The quotation, delivered with impressive gravity, was conclusive, and, all keeping their countenances, the contents of the bodeful salt-spoon were negotiated some other way!

Incidents arising out of his belief in lucky and unlucky numbers are endless. While the Kilmainham Treaty was in preparation, and the late Mr. W. E. Forster's throne in Dublin Castle was being sapped by his prisoner from the jail hard by, Mr. Parnell skillfully hit on the idea of availing of the introduction of an amending Land Bill, for which the Irish Party had won a Wednesday for a Second Reading debate, as the public basis of his arrangement with Mr. Gladstone. The Bill was afterwards moved by Mr. John Redmond in April, 1882, and one of the clauses became the Government Arrears Act of that year. To frame such a measure in prison, legal help of course was necessary, and Mr. Parnell asked Mr. Maurice Hoaly to visit the prison and discuss the matter, which he did for several days.

Even at so early a date after the passage of the Land Act of 1881, that enactment had been riddled by the Judges in provisions vital to the tenants' interests. There was, therefore, a great outcry for amendments, and various proposals were discussed in turn in the prison. One suggestion, however, which my brother made, Mr. Parnell refused to adopt. He was pressed again and again as to its necessity, but into the Bill he would not allow it to go. The enemies of the alleged agrarian *jacquerie* in Ireland little supposed that at its head was a moderate and almost Conservative leader, averse, except when driven to it by the "stokers" of the movement, to lend his approval to extreme demands. Indeed, later on as his power increased, he grew still more moderate, so that Mr. Biggar once said of him musingly, "I wonder what are Parnell's real politics!" At all events at Easter, 1882, Mr. Parnell having obtained a fortnight's release on parole, had effected an understanding with Mr. Chamberlain, who was