

"The Men and Principles of '48"

AND THE BOSTON PILOT.

THE Men and Principles of '48, is the title of a lecture delivered by Rev. Father Sheehy in 1874, and reported in full in the American Celt of October 17th, of the same year. It is an open glorification and approval of the principles of the revolutionary party that opposed O'Connell in the days of the Repeal agitation; it is consequently just as open and formal a condemnation of the life and life-work of him whom the world has been induced to believe a great leader of men, the "Liberator" of Ireland and the author of Catholic Emancipation. Its tone and purpose may best be inferred from a few of the most striking paragraphs in what is certainly a masterpiece of eloquence and literature - if beauty of style, smoothness of diction, energy and fire of thought and expression can ever make a masterpiece where the ideas must be condemned. After sketching rapidly the progress of the whole movement under O'Connell, Father Sheehy arrives at the time of the famous "Munster Meetings," those remarkable evidences of the strong national feeling that inspired the Irish people in those days, that made Ireland's chosen leader the most powerful man in the British Empire, and

"Placed the strength of all the land
Like a falchion in his hand."

Father Sheehy has nothing but condemnation for the leader and reproach for the people. As is well known O'Connell preached everywhere peace and order and constitutional agitation. He declared time and again to the assembled thousands that the man who advocated armed resistance was an enemy of the cause. Father Sheehy thinks differently; "At Tara," he says, "O'Connell had more and braver men than fought in the combined armies at Waterloo. Pity so great a man could be so great a trifle; pity the Irish race had grown so degenerate," and a little further on, speaking of O'Connell's aversion to blood spilling "No drop of blood, was his axiom; no drop of blood, his policy. Even at this distant date it takes one's breath away to recite such pitiable maxims." He condemns "the ethics of moral force and the quackery of bloodless battles" and quotes approvingly some of John Mitchell's fiercest principles; "ideas are most intelligible when they are expressed in action" and "public opinion marches well when it wears a helmet on its head." He would have had O'Connell harangue his hundreds of thousands of hearers on "the pathos of a rifle and the logic of a blow" and inculcate into their minds the divine truth that "sedition is at once the weapon and the shield of liberty." He would have had taught from pulpit, press and platform that "the patriotism fit to achieve liberty and enjoy it after, was to be measured by the polish of the rifle and the temper of the steel." These are the chief ideas that run through Father Sheehy's lecture; in a dozen different ways he puts them before his hearers - in explaining his own position and objecting to those who think otherwise; in defending his friends and attacking his enemies; in lauding the "physical force" men of '48, and condemning the advocates of peaceful agitation, - it is ever the same line of attack and defence.

But Father Sheehy is not satisfied to rest here. However much one might differ with him on principle, no one could deny him the right to a full and free expression of his views so long as he remained in the realm of theory, or did not flagrantly violate historical truth. But Father Sheehy went out of his way to give utterance to as base a slander on the Irish race, and as gross an untruth as could have fallen from the poisoned lips of James Anthony Fraude or Mr. Goldwin Smith. Maddened by the repeated refusals of the Irish people to desert their chosen and successful leader and his lawful agitation in order to follow misguided, hotheaded patriots in an unorganized, hopeless and immoral rebellion, this Irish priest, whose God-given mission and easy task it was to defend his fellow-countrymen against unjust and false accusations, chose rather to grossly insult them and calumniate their character than to acknowledge that while in physical daring

we, (the Irish), surpass most nations, and we are the peers of any, in the higher and divine force of moral courage and moral strength, we are the most abject and crave cowards of all the people who call themselves human beings." To make so sweeping and so untrue a statement Father Sheehy must have wilfully and deliberately shut his eyes to the whole stretch of Irish history reaching from the days of Queen Elizabeth to Catholic Emancipation, and uniting to multiplied instances of "physical daring," such a sustained example of "the higher and divine force of moral courage and moral strength," such a clinging to truth and justice and principle for their own sake and against the heaviest odds, as the world had never before seen and will probably never see again. The annals of human history afford no evidence of a struggle in which so high a degree of the sublimest moral courage was shown as in that of the Irish people against the persistent tyranny, the mean bigotry, and the ceaseless persecution of the English army and government.

So much for Father Sheehy's lecture.

This lecture was delivered more than twenty years ago and had probably faded from the memory of even the most enthusiastic amongst its author's audience on the occasion of its delivery. It certainly did not deserve to live. In our days its doctrine is not only false and dangerous but inopportune. Men are coming to see that the pen is mightier than the sword, and that the sedition and plotting and conspiracy and rebellion are the weapons of fools.

But not so with the Boston Pilot. This newspaper, ordinarily so sure a guide in matters political, and so enthusiastic a defender of the Irish cause and people, has, for some inexplicable reason, gone out of its way to quicken into life the dead lecture, to give tacit approval to principles that could end only in disaster, and to malign, at least implicitly, the Irish people and their greatest leader, Daniel O'Connell. What can possibly be the policy of the Pilot? Has it turned revolutionary? Does it wish Ireland to forsake the path of constitutional agitation for that of secret societies, useless bloodshed and certain defeat? John Boyle O'Reilly would never have sanctioned or advised such a course, and it is hard to believe that it has the approval of Mr. Patrick Donahoe. The men of '48 were true patriots and many of them endowed with literary, political, oratorical or administrative ability of a high order, but in comparison to O'Connell they were altogether commonplace. Strange, then, that the Pilot should publish so false a criticism, so bitter an attack on the great Tribune, more especially at a moment when every true Irishman might do well to drop upon his knees and pray Heaven for just such another leader who might unite by the strength of his genius the warring, jarring factions of Irish politics. Had not the Pilot sources of information that did not exist for Father Sheehy twenty years ago? Sir Charles Gavan Duffy's "Young Ireland," a book having for its avowed object the defence of the men of '48 and written by one of themselves, might have served as a reference, and would have shown that O'Connell always valued his country above himself and his personal reputation, and never more so than in the affair of the Clontarf meeting. The leader had called for a muster of the nation at Clontarf; the meeting was prohibited by the government. Let Mr. Duffy tell us what preparations were made "to preserve the public peace." "The Duke of Wellington had promised to provide for the public peace, and he set about providing for it on a liberal scale. Thirty-five thousand troops of all arms were distributed throughout the Island. The barracks were pierced with loop-holes and became a fortress against insurrection. Forts and Martello Towers were put in a state of defence, garrisons were strengthened, the supply of arms and materials of war largely increased, and war steamers were stationed on the sea-coast and navigable rivers." And against this array of military force what solid grounds had O'Connell for believing that sedition, or rebellion would be successful? Where were his soldiers, where his officers,

where his arms and ammunition? Vague theorizing on the beauties of rebellion may be very picturesque, but the man who leads a nation into war without a reasonable chance of success forfeits all right to our respect and is worse than a criminal. O'Connell clearly saw the folly of holding the Clontarf meeting in the face of the government's prohibition. The proclamation had been issued only a few hours before the time set for the meeting. It was believed that the official document had been purposely kept back until it would be too late for the national leaders to prevent the assembling of the people. Then there would be no difficulty in provoking the multitude to some act of violence necessitating and justifying the interference of the troops and giving hostile rulers an excuse for submitting the whole nation to the horrors of martial law. O'Connell, in all his glorious career never showed himself to greater advantage than at this juncture. A man of less patriotism and more ambition, of less genius and more rashness, of less self-sacrifice and more vanity would have acted quite differently. It would have been so easy to place oneself at the head of the three or four hundred thousand men that were sure to assemble at Clontarf and lead them in a glorious charge for faith, freedom and fatherland. But O'Connell looked beyond the passing hour and saw the inevitable result. Unarmed enthusiasm, swordless bravery, powderless determination are not the most approved weapons of warfare and can lead to nothing but disastrous defeat. And so the great Tribune, who loved his country and his people and had always worked for their best interests, put aside entirely all thought of personal glory or personal reputation, and showed himself ready to sacrifice everything for the general good. In the few hours at his disposal he sent messengers to every part of the surrounding country to prevent the people from assembling and to induce those already on their way to return peaceably to their homes. The Clontarf meeting was not held and O'Connell had prevented what would probably have been the most appalling butchery of modern times.

Yet this is the conduct which Father Sheehy visited with the severest reproach and which the Boston Pilot twenty years after Father Sheehy sees fit to condemn in the same terms, while both approve at least implicitly the sorry rebellion of Smith O'Brien and other men of '48 with their half dozen ridiculous charges and their ignominious capitulation in a cabbage garden. The leaders in this case sacrificed their country to a point of personal honor; they had given their word to fight; fight they would, be the consequences what they might to the vanquished.

The course of the Boston Pilot cannot possibly be due to malice. Is the cause culpable ignorance or wanton carelessness? It is difficult to answer. But one thing is certain - that journal owes its readers an open and unqualified apology for the insult to the Irish race that appeared in its columns and for its unjust treatment of the memory of O'Connell. The history of Ireland from the days of Queen Elizabeth to the granting of Catholic Emancipation gives the lie direct to the assertion that the Irish are wanting in moral force and courage; as to O'Connell, let his vindication come from Thomas D'Arcy M'Gee, himself one of the men of '48. In the preface of his book "O'Connell and his Friends," M'Gee says: "The name of my immortal subject has been familiar to the civilized world for nearly forty years. The free of the earth venerate it, the tyrants and task makers of men hate its utterance. Were those who have been benefitted by the labors of his life to assemble in congress at the call of gratitude, an assembly would be formed without a parallel in all past history. The Asiatic of the Indian Peninsula would leave his rice crops by the banks of the sacred Ganges; Africa would send forth her dusky deputies; the West Indies their emancipated dark men; Canada her grateful reformers, and Europe the noblest of her free and of her fallen races. The voice of Kosciusko, from the tomb, would command some worthy son of Poland to join the great chorus of humanity in singing praises to the common benefactor. It would be a testimonial equal to its cause, if all the world were represented, and not otherwise." The great work of universal emancipation is scarcely completed. One of the first in the field amongst those who labored, and thought,

and suffered contumely and reproach for its sake, was the Liberator of Ireland. Whoever may live to see the day when slavery shall cease, will see also the statue of O'Connell in every free senate, and hear, in every land, the wise and honorable of that age repeat his story with reverence. Alone, or perhaps side by side with Washington, he will be placed in the first rank of those worthies of all the world whose souls were uncribbed by custom and whose benevolent labors were unconfined to any family or nation of the earth. In him the everlasting Church will claim a champion, unexcelled among laymen for the severity of his mission. In him Humanity will claim a priest, entitled to administer at her high altar. In him Liberty will boast a model for all her future reformers." - Chas. J. Fulham in the Ottawa University Magazine, "The Owl."

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