

MEMOIRS OF DANIEL O'CONNELL.*

No man's character was ever more slandered, blackened, vilified, than that of Daniel O'Connell. No man was ever, in his day, more remorselessly assailed by enmity and bigotry, ridiculed, execrated, foully bespattered by those who could not ignore him as a great force in the world (the little world of these three islands), who were not able to deny the weight of his counsels, the power of his influence, the truth of his judgments, the magnetism of his wit. Nowadays it is a fashion among certain of our enemies to give him a kind of praise, and yet these persons will scarcely be pleased to see what a really great figure O'Connell makes through the medium of his own letters—a medium which has of late years discovered the hypocrisy, treachery, or at least the regrettable folly and weakness of many famous individuals. It has been said that the real greatness of a man cannot be truly estimated till he has been long dead, and certainly the large and manly figure of O'Connell grows more heroic with the passing of the years, and his words and acts tell in the story of Ireland with a vigour and meaning which increase as often as the story is told. It is useless to compare one patriotic worker with another, and to quarrel over which is the greater, to be dissatisfied if star differeth from star in glory. A man is raised up for his own time, and it is idle to speculate as to how the exigencies of another time would have moulded him. Where a new country is to be inhabited there is needed a pioneer of ways, a clearer of woods, and blaster of rocks. O'Connell was the pioneer of Irish liberty, the champion of mere slaves, the man who had to fight single-handed a whole army of seeming impossibilities. Until Catholic Emancipation was won no right could be striven for, no wrong attacked, except by the ways of despairing and fruitless bloodshed. The voice of the Irish nation could only be heard in moans of anguish or cries of execration until O'Connor secured for it a hearing among the nations; and let us never forget this when we hear the voice of Erin, our mother, speaking no longer with passionate wailing, but in clear, calm, articulate tones that convey the words of reason, persuading by their reasonableness, to the ear of the civilized world.

The writer of this book was occupied twenty years in gathering together the letters which reveal Daniel O'Connell's heart and soul to the reader. Not less admirable than the warmest admirer of the great Tribune of the people believed him to be in his own day does Dan stand forth at this moment, as confessed under his own hand by the fugitive expressions of his thoughts, his faith, his affections, his loves and hatreds which he scattered about to friend, foe, acquaintance, wife, and child, during the fifty years or so of his political and domestic career. The slanders that followed such a man, in spite of his virtues, prove how he was hated by unscrupulous enemies; while the love and tenderness with which he inspired those who were most intimately connected with him throw a charm around the strong and rugged personality which sneers cannot dispel. We get even a new picture of him as he appeared personally at the outset of his career, full of hope, strength, and good-will, as sketched by an Irish Protestant, Mr. W. H. Curran. The editor says:

After describing his tall expanded frame, such as befits a man of the people, Curran adds:—"In his face he has been equally fortunate; it is extremely comely. The features are at once soft and manly; the florid glow of health and a sanguine temperament is diffused over the whole countenance, which is national in outline and beaming with national emotion. The expression is open and confiding and inviting confidence; there is not a trace of malignity or wile—if there were the bright and sweet blue eyes, the most kindly and honest looking that can be conceived, would repel the imputation." "Dr. R. R. Madden," adds the editor, "described W. H. Curran as 'a man who would freeze you.' The impression which

O'Connell left on this keen student of character is therefore to be prized.

O'Connell began life by marrying his Mary, whom he so faithfully and truly loved, in preference to an heiress recommended to him by a rich uncle who was deeply and lastingly offended by such wilfulness. The editor rather unkindly records of the rejected lady that she had a strangely and unpleasantly long nose, and we cannot but remember this fact every time we read O'Connell's playful reiterated raptures over his wife, in his letters to her, as the dearest, sweetest, sauciest little *cock-nosed* woman in the whole world. To her a very large proportion of the letters are addressed, containing pleasant news of his active life abroad, interspersed with tender thoughts and jests and playful messages for the dear fireside group at home. I know of no other man who appears in so amiable a light through his correspondence with his wife and children except Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Everyone knows that the darkest shadow on O'Connell's life was cast by the fatal termination of his duel with D'Esterre. Forced in a manner against his conscience to fight the duel, he was overwhelmed with horror when the unscrupulous aggressor and practised duellist fell by his hand to die a few days later of the wound. Many have never learned that O'Connell offered to share his income with the widow of the man he had so unwillingly sent to the grave, an offer which was refused. Neither has it everywhere been recorded of him that he found and seized an opportunity for seriously benefiting the family of the man whose death had been to his slayer a lasting agony. Learning that a lawsuit of great importance to Mrs. D'Esterre and her children was about to be tried at Cork Assizes, he threw up weighty briefs which he held at the moment in Dublin, returned the fees, and, posting down to Cork, pleaded the cause and won the verdict.

A good sketch of O'Connell in the prime of his working power is taken from the *New Monthly Magazine* of the period. A reveller returning home between five and six on a winter's morning, observes him through the window of his house in Merrion Square. A tall able-bodied man is seen through the half-opened parlour shutter, behind which a light is burning. He stands at a desk immersed in solitary occupation. A crucifix hangs on the wall in front of him. From this, and from the calm attitude of the person within, and from a certain "monastic rotundity" about his neck and shoulders, your first impression will be that he must be some pious dignitary of the Church of Rome absorbed in his Matin devotions. However, the bookcases stocked with tomes in plain calf-skin binding, the blue-covered octavos strewn tables and floor, the reams of manuscript in oblong folds and begirt with crimson tape, show this person to be thinking far more of the law than of the prophets. Later in the day, the severe recluse of the morning is transformed into one of the most busy and bustling personages in the Four Courts; and later still you might find the counsellor the presiding spirit at some of the public meetings then held daily in Dublin, riding the whirlwind and directing the storm of popular debate as if he had that moment started fresh for the labours of the day. There he remains till he has carried every point, after which he makes several speeches at a public dinner, before snatching a little hard-earned repose—to be found again in his study in advance of the dawn.

(To be continued.)

Rev. J. G. Wood, M.A., in a paper in *Little Snow Flakes*, says that in his young days a clergyman always wore a swallow-tailed black coat with a rolling collar reaching to the back of the head, and a voluminous white cravat got twice around the neck, furnished with a three-inch wide "stiffener" made of horse-hair and tied in a flat bow about four inches in length. The collars were so wide that the points reached the cheek bones, and in the summer the clergyman always wore white trousers. Mr. Wood is afraid that if a clergyman were now to appear publicly in the costume of 1830, he would be followed and derided by the small boys, and would cause much merriment among the elders.

* Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator. Edited, with notes of his life and times, by D. T. Fitzpatrick, F.S.A., author of "The Life, Times, and Correspondence of Dr. Doyle," etc. (John Murray).