

AN ABLE ADDRESS

ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF T. D. MCGEE.

Delivered by Mr. E. J. Duggan, of the Law Firm of Quinn and Duggan, before a Large Audience in the Windsor Hall, at the Annual Concert Given by the St. Patrick's T. A. & B. Society.

Rev. Fathers, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen—When I see the very attractive programme that I am about to interfere with, I feel very reluctant, indeed, to take up any part of your time, more especially after my very flattering introduction to you by the Rev. Father Callaghan. When I was first asked to address your society, I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, I accepted it in fear and trembling. I felt very guilty indeed. I felt I was putting myself in the position of those who have honors thrust upon them without any particular merit of their own; and now that I am facing my audience, sandwiched between such very choice and inviting morceaux of music and song. I tell you what, ladies and gentlemen, I begin to have a pretty good idea of what it is like to be a square peg in a round hole. I have, however, one faint hope left. As an indifferent musician may sometimes succeed in exciting interest by touching the chords of an old melody, so I venture to hope that in selecting a subject, I may have been fortunate enough to choose one which, even under unskillful treatment, will appeal to your sympathies. No doubt many of you, ladies and gentlemen, have known the subject of my sketch this evening,

THOMAS D'ARCY MCGEE,

and have listened to his oratory; but to the greater number, I am sure, although but twenty-five years have elapsed since his voice was heard in our midst, his figure must loom mistily out of the past as that of some mighty shade which once played a fitful part on our political stage and then suddenly and tragically disappeared. Though, in his youth, an agitator ripe for revolt, D'Arcy McGee became in his mature years a staunch supporter of the British Crown. No doubt the softening influence of the working of British institutions in Canada, where we are free from creed or class privileges, and enjoy the rights our countrymen are fighting for at home, was the great factor in this change of feeling on his part, he in fact simply experienced that revolution in sentiment, which a fair and equal treatment under the British constitution, a fair and equal application of its principles to all alike is bound to produce among Irishmen—as it has in this country among French Canadians—no matter how alien to English sentiment and how opposed to everything English in politics we may have been under the old order. And no observer can ignore the fact that of late years, now that the great British democracy shows signs of active sympathy without national aspirations, that change of sentiment is rapidly making itself more and more felt. A very interesting study could be made of the various gradations of Irish public sentiment towards England, from the fierce wild hatred that once prevailed, born of despair, to the no less resolute but confident and hopeful spirit which the genius and stubborn will of Parnell brought into life and which now animates our race in its struggle towards the light.

That story of our race, ladies and gentlemen, is filled with tears. Famine and the sword have left their imprint on every page. Gallant but hopeless struggles against wholesale confiscations, penal laws, and coercion laws make a sad story, rendered more pathetic still, by the genius and faith of the people which ever shone steadily throughout the gloom. Hunted and proscribed in their own land, many of our country's noblest sons had to choose between a felon's fate at home and what laurels they could wrest from fortune abroad; and the Scottish bard Campbell was inspired by their misfortunes to deplore their fate in the most plaintive lines ever written:—

Sad is my fate, said the heart-broken stranger,  
The wild wolf and deer to a covert can flee,  
But I have no refuge from famine and danger,  
A home and a country remain not for me.

To this policy of ostracism on the part of England, France owes the brilliant

services of McMahon; Austria the statesmanship of her first minister, Count Taaffe; Spain her O'Donnell; Mexico and Chili, in the New World, their O'Donoghue and O'Higgins; and to it also are our colonies indebted for Sir Charles Gavin Duffy and our own D'Arcy McGee. Mr. McGee was born in Ireland, in 1825. In his boyhood he emigrated to the United States, and at the early age of seventeen, when the repeal movement was in full strength, we find him addressing an American audience on the 4th of July, and even then evincing that power of oratory which was destined later to make him famous. When O'Connell went broken-hearted to jail, the cause he was forced to abandon fell into the hands of the young Ireland party. McGee was invited by Gavan Duffy to assist him in editing the Nation; and in that body of young men, as brilliant a band as ever pleaded a nation's cause by his essays, articles and poems, he contributed powerfully to the success of the movement they had at heart. No better tribute to his abilities need be required than the words of Gavan Duffy: "Who," he asked, "has served his country's interests with such a fascinating genius. His poetry and his essays touch me like the breath of spring and revive the buoyancy and chivalry of youth."

THE YOUNG IRELAND MOVEMENT

shared the fate of its predecessors. The sturdy John Mitchell, the son of an Ulster Unitarian minister, was condemned to fourteen years' transportation; Smith O'Brien and Thomas Francis Meagher were condemned to death, but their sentence was afterwards commuted to transportation for life: Gavan Duffy was tried three times but could not be convicted: and McGee was arrested and released, and to avoid fresh arrest had to flee from his country in disguise. Meagher escaped to the United States, where he soon rose to prominence and distinguished himself as general of the Irish Brigade during the civil war. Gavan Duffy left Ireland, a corpse on the dissecting table, as he himself described it, for Australia, and as first minister led the destinies of that giant young colony. McGee fled to the States, but soon afterwards, at the invitation of the Irishmen of Montreal, settled in this city. It is with his subsequent career we are more particularly interested, for it was in Canada he made his mark as a public man and met his untimely death. Against great odds, Mr. McGee was returned in 1858, before he had been a year in our midst, as one of the members for Montreal in the Canadian Parliament then sitting at Toronto. No aspirant to Legislative honours in this country was ever more virulently attacked. His connection with the Irish revolutionary party at a time when among the great majority of the more influential classes, any sympathy with Irish national sentiment was a crime and carried with it social as well as political odium, excited the bitterest opposition, personal as well as political, to his candidature. The English, Irish and Scotch Protestant vote was almost solid against him; to the French-Canadians he was but little known; but the Irish Catholic electors sank all political differences to unite in supporting one in whom their instincts recognized a leader, and they returned him by thirty of a majority. From that day onward Mr. McGee was the most interesting figure in Canadian politics. There were some very clever politicians in those days. The stage was small, but the jealousies of race and creed were all the more intense, and adroitness and tact in combining out of the various elements a Government sufficiently strong to command the support of both houses was required rather than broad statesmanship. It was in this school that Sir John Macdonald acquired the suppleness and tact which afterwards contributed so powerfully to his success; and it was here, too, that the nimble-minded Sir George Cartier agitated for the rights of his countrymen with all the shrewdness and pertinacity of the Gaul, and with a dexterity which prompted McGee to describe him, in the early days of opposition, as

THE LITTLE POLITICAL THIMBLE-RIG.

The names of Lafontaine, Morin, Baldwin, Sanfield McDonald, George Brown, Dorion and Hincks, conjure up visions of men strong in purpose, subtle in fence, and keen of wit, who struggled, agitated and intrigued to such effect, that in the course of a few years neither party could

secure a working majority, government became impossible, and the only way out of the difficulty lay in Confederation. It was among these men that our curly-headed Irish youth was thrown; and by the end of the first session he showed that he too and the people he represented would have to be reckoned with. Upper and Lower Canada were then united, each with an equal number of representatives, but like a badly broken in and restive team, they were continually kicking over the traces and pulling different ways. In Upper Canada the reform party became divided into two sections. The more moderate of which was led by Baldwin and Hincks, and the more extreme by George Brown, who rode the Protestant horse and advocated representation by population and down with French domination. The Protestant horse, by the way, proved baulky and threw its rider, and it will be interesting to learn whether the lighter weight of to-day, Mr. Dalton McCarthy, will turn out a better jockey. And it might be well for him to guard against accidents by securing in advance the services of Professor Gleason. A coalition was afterwards formed between the moderate Reformers of Upper Canada and the Conservatives of Lower Canada, which brought into office the first Liberal administration. This was defeated by the extreme or clear grit Reformers and the Lower Canada Rouges, but the new cabinet only held office for the brief period of two days, when it was succeeded by the Cartier-Macdonald administration in 1858, the year Mr. McGee was first elected. Mr. McGee at the outset supported the Reform party then in opposition; and in 1862, on the defeat of the Cartier-McDonald government, was given the portfolio of president of the Council in the Sanfield McDonald administration. It soon became evident, however, that he could not long remain in sympathy with a party inspired by George Brown and the *Globe*, even though that party did not deem it politic to embody its extreme views in any ministerial measure; and on being passed over and the people he presented ignored, in the reconstruction of the cabinet, he consulted his constituents, and with their consent joined the Liberal Conservative opposition; and in 1865 on the defeat of the Sanfield McDonald cabinet, he became minister of agriculture in the Cartier-McDonald administration, and until confederation remained a member of that cabinet. Mr. McGee was admittedly

THE MOST MAGNETIC SPEAKER

of his day. Though by no means an Adonis, his appearance was striking and would attract attention in any assembly. A massive head crowned by thick curling dark locks, and set on a well knit, rather burly frame, slightly under medium height, and a countenance, rather heavy in repose, but mobile and fascinating, when lit up by play of fancy or earnestness of purpose, indicated an abundance of energy and resource. Personal prejudices soon took flight before his natural charm of manner and fund of humor; his ready wit and well stored mind commanded the respect of his most bitter opponents; and in public speaking, by the magic of his eloquence, he charmed his hearers and made them realize

"What spells of infinite choice  
To rouse or lull as the sweet human voice!"

His prolific brain was never idle. While discharging the duties of his office and actively engaging in the strife of political life, he contributed any number of essays and reviews to various periodicals and newspapers, delivered lectures on an infinitude of subjects all over the country, and wrote a history of Ireland. Nor did he ever go back on his early faith and his early love. When taunted in the Canadian legislature for his early connection with the Irish revolutionary party, he replied that if the same state of things existed here he would be a rebel in Canada as he had been a rebel in Ireland in 1848; and his memorable letter to the Earl of Mayo, written a few days before his death, pleading earnestly the cause of his motherland, was quoted by Mr. Gladstone as a "prophetic voice from the dead, coming from beyond the Atlantic."

As in the case of all born leaders of men, there was Mr. McGee's nature a dreamy, poetic strain which lent a charm to his treatment of even the most prosaic and practical subjects; and in the midst of more serious matters, he still found time for an occasional flirtation with

the muses. Time will not allow me to treat at any length this branch of my subject, and I will simply quote one of his charming lyrics which breathe the true spirit of poetry:—

My Irish wife has clear blue eyes,  
My Heaven by day, my stars by night—  
And, twin-like, truth and fondness lie  
Within her swelling bosom white.  
My Irish wife has golden hair—  
Apollo's harp had once such strings—  
Apollo's self might pause to hear  
Her bird-like carol when she sings.

But a dark cloud, pregnant with fate, was gathering on the horizon. The sympathy shown by England to the Southern cause and her recognition of Southern belligerent rights, had excited an intense feeling of bitterness in the North, which showed itself at the close of the war in the indirect encouragement given by the American Government to the Fenian flubusterers, who conceived the criminal project of striking England through her Colony and avenging the wrongs of Ireland by shedding innocent Canadian blood. Mr. McGee had just returned from a visit to the old country and the continent. He had represented Canada at the great Paris exposition, he had gone to Rome with a deputation from the St. Patrick's congregation in this city, he had written a series of charming letters from Paris, Rome and other cities of the continent, he had lectured in Ireland, and, with some of his colleagues in the cabinet had taken a leading part in laying the plan of confederation before the Imperial authorities in London. On his return here he found the Fenian secret societies in full blast and the informer plying a thriving trade. He proceeded at once to denounce vigorously the whole conspiracy. For this a faction among his countrymen called him a renegade and a traitor, and he had to meet an opposition at the polls as bitter as that which he overcame in the first instance, and infinitely more bitter and mortifying to himself because it came from those whose gratitude he deserved the most. But this time found elsewhere a sufficient loyal support to counteract the defections among his own compatriots; and the very element which had sought to defeat him in his first appeal now won for him the closing victory of his political life. The advice of Mr. McGee then gave, and the stand he took, time has since fully justified. No argument is now required to show what silly dupes were those who allowed their honest sympathies for our motherland to be played upon and set their own weak, passionate judgment against the wise, calm counsel of

THEIR TRIED AND GIFTED LEADER.

But frank and fearless in the extreme, Mr. McGee made statements on the platform and in the press—statements his own friends warned him against as rash and injudicious—which set some of the conspirators trembling for their own safety. I shall not attempt to harrow your feelings and spoil a pleasant evening by going into the sad details of the tragedy that followed, but will simply say that on the night of the 6th of April, 1868, at Ottawa, after he had delivered one of the noblest speeches ever heard within the walls of a Canadian parliament, on the cementing of the lately formed union by bonds of mutual kindness and good will, the great orator, to use the words of Mrs. Sadler, "the preacher of peace, the sagacious statesman, the gifted son of song, the loved of many hearts, met his death at the hands of an assassin." Only 43 years of age when struck down. With his magnificent gifts, I think I am warranted in saying that had he lived, he would in all probability, in the fruition of years, have reached the highest position in this country a public man can hope to attain. Setting aside all question of the greatness of the loss and looking simply to its effects on our city alone, I can only compare the murder of McGee, in its folly and malignity, to that other outburst of stupid fanaticism,—the burning of the Parliament buildings, which deprived the city forever of the seat of Government.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, poor McGee has gone to his last rest on that couch of which he himself spoke in his farewell to a friend.

Old friends, the years wear on, and many cares  
And many sorrows both of us have known;  
Time for us both a quiet couch prepares—  
A couch like Jacob's, pillow'd with a stone.

He was but ten years among us; but in all that time he was one of those grand central figures around which events revolved. His last speech was an eloquent