

OUR IRISH LETTER.

The Patriotism and Valor of Irishmen a Century Ago.

Interesting Reminiscences of Another Troublesome Period—The Penalty for Indulging in National Songs in the Capital—Some of Their Effects Related.

WITH a century behind us, men wonder that the old traditions handed down to us from our grandfathers and grandmothers should have taken such a root in our hearts as is impossible of obliteration.

A centenary is a great thing; it is greater even than a jubilee, and grander overall when it marks an epoch of martyrdom for our country's cause.

How the writer first learned what he considers the most typical of Irish national songs may be a digression, but it may not be without interest in the reading. In 1867 he was living in a house, with a beautiful view of a stolid sleepy canal and a strangely miserable looking place over the way which was called Mountjoy.

Oh! those were the days to try men's souls; those were the days when the true gold was precipitated at the trial by fire; those were the days when the honors of martyrdom and patriotism were mingled; those were the days when the hunted hungry peasant rose to the dignity of a hero, and those were the days when a persecuted priesthood seemed like gods.

What wonder is it that we are proud of our ancestors! Some of them met death on the scaffold accounted for as felons. It was a glorious thing to be one of those felons of '98. It needed more bravery to be a man of '98 than it does now to get that much coveted Victoria Cross for conspicuous bravery in the face of the enemy—and many Irishmen wear proudly to-day the latter noble distinction.

The times were different; there was hardly even a forlorn hope. There was the one great chance of freedom that led alluringly the footsteps of brave men to the grave. And they took their chance did those daring heroes. They left mothers, wives and sweethearts. They left everything that a true Irishman holds dear except his innate love of liberty, and for liberty they died.

They died like men for a cause they believed in, and their sons, thank God, have shuddered not at a like fate. But they died fighting and there was not one craven voice to cry for mercy to a tyrannical despoiler whose ears were ever deaf to cries of mercy and whose ideas of justice could only be paralleled by the opportunism of a Cromwellian massacre.

There in the foul shadow of the gallows, with dangling hemp only waiting to be stretched, stood and fought the best men in Ireland—stood and fought with overwhelming odds against them, and the dread symbol of a disgraceful death loomed in the shadow of a noose round the glittering point of a pike.

Unarmed, unnamed, but honored for ever were these heroes. They courted a soldier's death. They bared their breasts to the murderous fire from English muskets; they rushed even into the cannon's mouth for sake of God and country, and happy were those who met death that way. They at least had the satisfaction of dying like soldiers. They were not subjects to the ribald jests of a so-called drumhead court-martial or worse still, to the diabolic refinement of a No. 9.

The ancients in their idea of an emblematic justice blindfolded the goddess and put scales in one hand. The English idea of justice in '98 was the sword and the sword only. Were the idealism of justice vivified she might well thank Fortune that her eyes could not see the infernal work done by men whom the English Government placed on the woolsack to mete out justice. What a horrible thought it is to suppose that an English King and Parliament should prostitute themselves as to let men like Jeffreys and Norbury run riot in wanton bloodshed—at different periods, it is

true, but in all else so much alike that were it a case of triplets, Satan himself must have been the other one.

These men of '98—the martyrs for faith and liberty, the heroes of Irish history—stood up as nobly when they were being dragged into Eternity, or when the fatal noose was around their necks, as they did when the cold steel told the tales at Vinegar Hill. They were noble followers of the brave men who had fought under the standard of the blood-red hand when the forces of the North swept down and carried everything before the invincible battle cry of "O'Donnell Aboo."

They must have been glorious times when "A thousand proud steeds in our vanguard were prancing 'Neath the borderers brave from the banks of the Ban."

How the writer first learned what he considers the most typical of Irish national songs may be a digression, but it may not be without interest in the reading. In 1867 he was living in a house, with a beautiful view of a stolid sleepy canal and a strangely miserable looking place over the way which was called Mountjoy. The man who christened this sombre pile must have been an ironical cynicist of the most developed type. Nobody could see anything but despair, wrecked fortunes, shakely men, shakely infantry. It was a daily round, and we boys had got used to it, much in the same way as people living next door to a fire station are not disturbed by the clanging of the bells. One fine day a lot of us were playing on the canal bank, and one of the boys put his hands in his pockets and, to show his indifference to any political old thing which might be going on at the time, began to whistle "O'Donnell Aboo."

It seems a pity to say it, but we found that piper at a public house. He was a blind piper, too, not like the musician of Hamelin, for he only carried the children in his wake, and rats, thank

goodness, were unknown in that part of Dublin. We led the piper back in triumph till we got to the corner of the cross road, and, as we all lived in that neighborhood, the accumulated coppers eventually persuaded our piper to play "O'Donnell Aboo." None of us knew just what it meant. We knew that a tyrannical, or paternal, or some other kind of a Government said it should not be played, and, of course, the boys demanded it. Felix Birmingham, the butcher, King the inn-keeper, Jordan the grocer, Dunphy, the man who owned the pub, with a choice assortment of neighbors, came out and wondered what was going to happen next. We were within easy distance of the Phoenix Park or Mountjoy, and every mother who saw her boy just grabbed him and took him out of harm's way. The writer's mother, God bless her, said, "John, bring the old gentleman in," and he was led in fear and trembling. It might have been an offence against the law. Whether it was or not I know not, neither do I care now. But what is known is that all that night from Phibsboro and Drumcondra and the Circular road came people to listen to a blind patriotic piper who knew he was in the hands of friends, and who played with every bit of his soul and brought tones out of the pipes in a way that one only regretted he could find no expression in the poor blind eyes.

This was the man who taught me "O'Donnell Aboo," and not a musical lesson, but as a patriotic chant never to be forgotten, as long as I remembered my mother who sheltered him. I have not forgotten it, and I have sung it in strange places and been proud of it. Where others sing the "Marseillaise," "Rule Britannia," or "Die Wacht am Rhein," I have always been Irish enough for "O'Donnell Aboo," whether it pleased the listener or not. To the master first, to the piper second, I am in justice indebted for any patriotic feelings I have. Two days after the episode of the piper in our house, my father was arrested as a suspect while crossing Carleton Place.

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OUR PHILADELPHIA LETTER.

PHILADELPHIA, March 13, 1898.—What a different thing Lent has come to be since it has been made fashionable! Or, rather, since the "fashion items"—those products of the penny liner—have made capital of "Lenten notes" and reel off, with their glib vulgarity, directions for the "little Lenten gown of soft gray," with veil and prayer-book to match, etc. Was there ever such folly and such daring? If there was one least grain of the leaven of the L-nten spirit in the hand that pens such paragraphs—for the hand and the spirit must be one when it comes to writing one's own thoughts, or one's own money-getting ideas—the silliest and most vacant minded among them would blush and tremble at the after thought. The word Lent means such a Catholic, and the Catholic meaning is known in its simplest sense to all civilized people. It means the season set apart for such a review of the past, such an outlook on the future, as shall lead to the penance and the persevering prayer which may soften the wrath of God toward the sin of that past, and lighten the deserved punishment to be adjudged in the future. Of course, we all know that much about it!" says the most impatient and thoughtless of readers and writers. Then, how is it possible that such a subject as the season for which the word Lent stands as the sign for the world, has come to be an object of interest

schemes of benevolence, more expensive to get going than profitable to those for whom the alms are needed. There is never a fear that the Church will be forgotten or that she can go astray (and 'become corrupt,' as did the church of the Anglicans), but when her people become in anything unchurchlike, there is great cause to fear that there will be a chastening for them that shall teach them to long for the old and hallowed practices, in all their fervor of devotion and submission.

Excess of Zeal in Charitable Work.

Another excellent paper last week was the House and Home column in one of our weeklies, which touched lightly on a subject which we have nearly all treated in some vein. I mean the manner of bestowing charity, and the ignorance of the "upper classes" (Heaven forgive me that most unchristian, most un-republican, most un-American phrase!) of the thoughts, feelings, achievements and ambitions of those to whom they blunderingly (for what they are pleased to consider "an elevating influence.") It is a good many years since I learned a lesson that has been many times "rubbed in" since I was on the alert for instances. I had some friends who came from a distant city to live in Philadelphia, where a married brother was already in his own home. They wished to live near him, but there was no house they liked available, nor any prospective vacancy for two or three months to come. But a tiny little place on a small street, new, clean and comfortable, was almost at his back gate, and they very wisely rented it, to await what they really desired to have. "The trials of my friends were district visitors," "Readers," members of this church and that congregation, this organization and that charitable society—not Catholic, of course. There was no sign of want, no slightest hint of want of culture or refinement about house or inmates, but, as the shrewd little seven year old expressed it, "Because we live in a ten-dollar house, they think we are ten-dollar people." The visitors and the others of like errands rang the bell and walked in, uninvited, at their pleasure. They were sometimes

something is wanted, until the acquaintance is made in the most conventional way possible to the circumstances, until the hospitality of the poorest home is offered in some manner, not one of those who had that lesson will ever intrude upon the poor, or offer to elevate "the lower classes." They came to feel that, even had they been of the "class"—whatever it was—to which they

WERE HONORANTLY ASSIGNED, because they lived in a very small house for a short time to suit their own convenience, and opened their door between two other doors that might shelter those of another "class" from their neighbor on the street in front of theirs—they came to feel very strongly, I say, that had they been other than they were, no stranger, however kindly, had the shadow of a right or an excuse for entering their home unasked and thrusting either religion or culture down their throats. "What do you do with the tracts and the temperance lectures, Mary?" laughed her brother, one night. "I put them under the sand in the bird's cage; they are exactly the size and it takes time to cut paper. Perhaps I ought not to feel so hateful about it, but I do!" "Till them you were educated at one of the finest convents in America," he suggested roughly. "They'll never trouble you again—you are past navin!" "That very education taught me far more, it seems, than they have ever learned. I taught me delicacy of feeling for others, and respect for the sacredness of any home," answered his sister. "It even convent-bred girls may forget after many years of 'practical and organized charities.' It is a good thing to take up Dickens' "Bleak House" and study Mrs. Pardiggle's visit to the brick-maker's cottage, as the best possible sketch—and even of 'filling in'—an example of 'how not to do it!'"

SARA FRANCES SMITH.

Mrs. Sadlier on D'Arcy McGee.

HAVING had the honor and privilege of editing the poems of my lamented friend and fellow-worker in the field of Irish and Catholic literature, I gladly avail myself of this St. Patrick's Day number of the Montreal TRUE WITNESS, to drop yet another stone on the cairn of his fame, now that thirty years have already cast their chilling shadow on its magic lustre. His memory must not be allowed to fade from us while even one is left who knew and loved him, and who can value at their true worth his marvellous gifts—his incalculable services to Ireland, his native land, and to Canada, the land of his adoption.

In this centenary year of heroic but unhappy '98, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, as one of the men of '98, ought to find a place of honor with Duffy, Davis, Mangan and D'Alton Williams, in the heart's best love of the scattered children of our own Ireland.

Among the early papers of my son, the late Father Sadlier, S.J., I found quite recently the following apposite remarks on that one of Mr. McGee's poems which I here reproduce with a



pleasure not unmixed with sadness, as the voice of the long dead—mournful, like unto the wind of night among the churchyard trees. My son was little more than a boy when he put these thoughts on paper, years before his entrance into the Society of Jesus. 'A noble spirit,' says Father Sadlier, 'must that have been which guided the pen of McGee when he gave us this "Apology to the Harp." Sad that neglect had coldly fallen on it, consigning it to the kindred desolation of its own land! He essays to throw around it a new light,—yet the thought of the great bards who in times past had waked its sweet minstrelsy fills him with awe, and a reverential feeling of the greatness of his attempt breaks cut into these living strains of "Apology"—little needed it would seem to us to-day. Who can doubt that his wish shall be realized, and while the Irish Harp lives and breathes his will be accounted as a master hand that twined around it a wreath fresh and pure as "The Green Immortal Shamrock" of Moore's deathless song? The following is McGee's poem:

AN APOLOGY TO THE HARP.

I, who have heard these echoes from my soul, A stately boy, onbeheld at my mother's knee: I, who have heard thy dirges, wild as winds, And thy deep tidal tones of prophecy! I, whom you tuned in sorrow, day by day, For friend, adviser, solace, companion: Could I pass by thee prostrate, nor essay To bear thee on a stage, Harp of my loved Eire! Forgive me, oh! forgive me, if too bold— I wince thy chords about my very heart, And make with every pulse of life a vow, Swearing no years, nor death, shall us two part! I have no hope to gather bays on high Beneath the snows of age when they bloom: As many votaries of thine desired. And the greatest favored few have haply done. But if emblem o'er my dust should o'er arise, Let it be this:—Our Harp within a wreath Of Shamrocks twining round it lovingly, That so, O Harp! our love shall know no death!

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