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IMPRESSIONS OF IRELAND

BY

Very Rev. PROFESSOR ERNESTO BUONAIUTI, D.D., Ph.D.
ROME

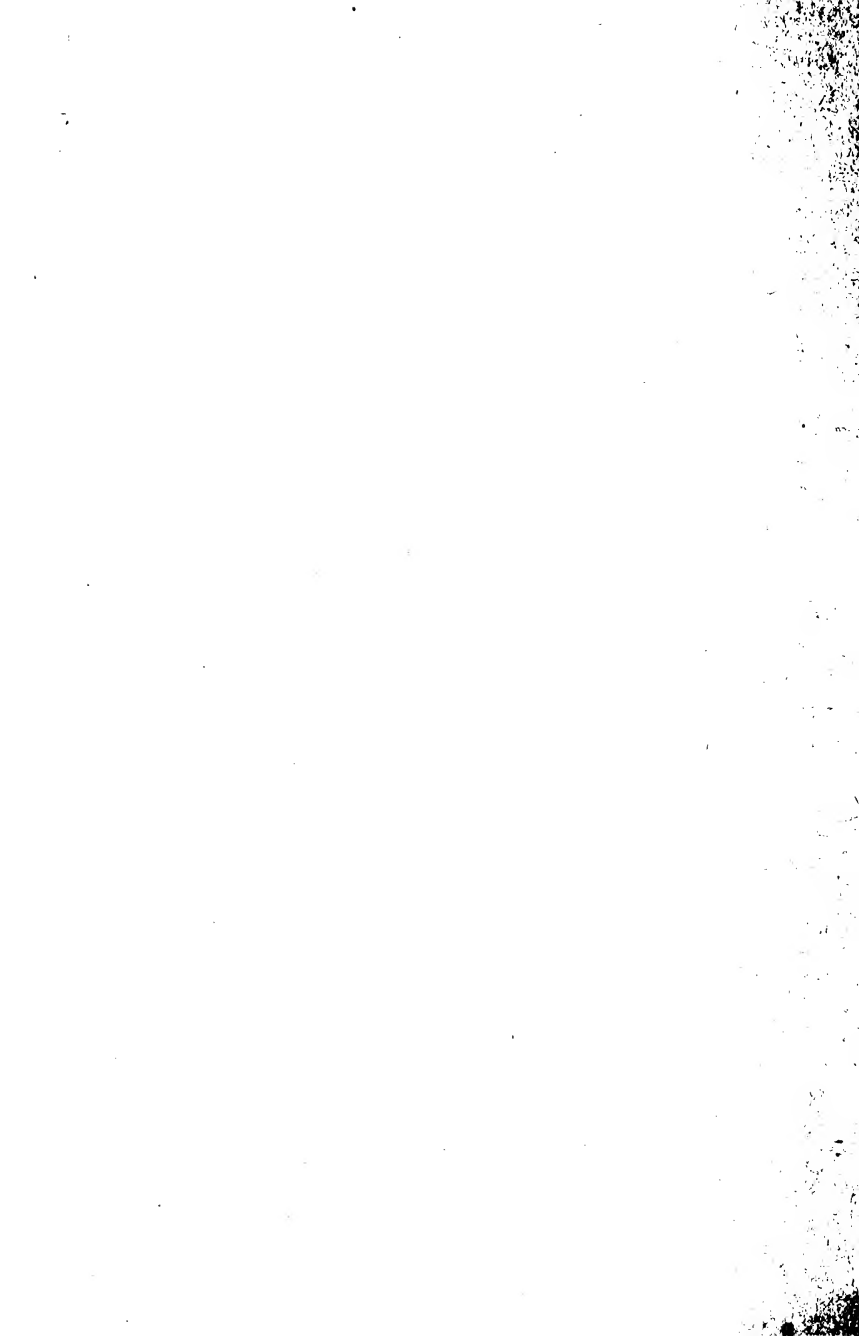
Translated from the Italian by
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Dublin

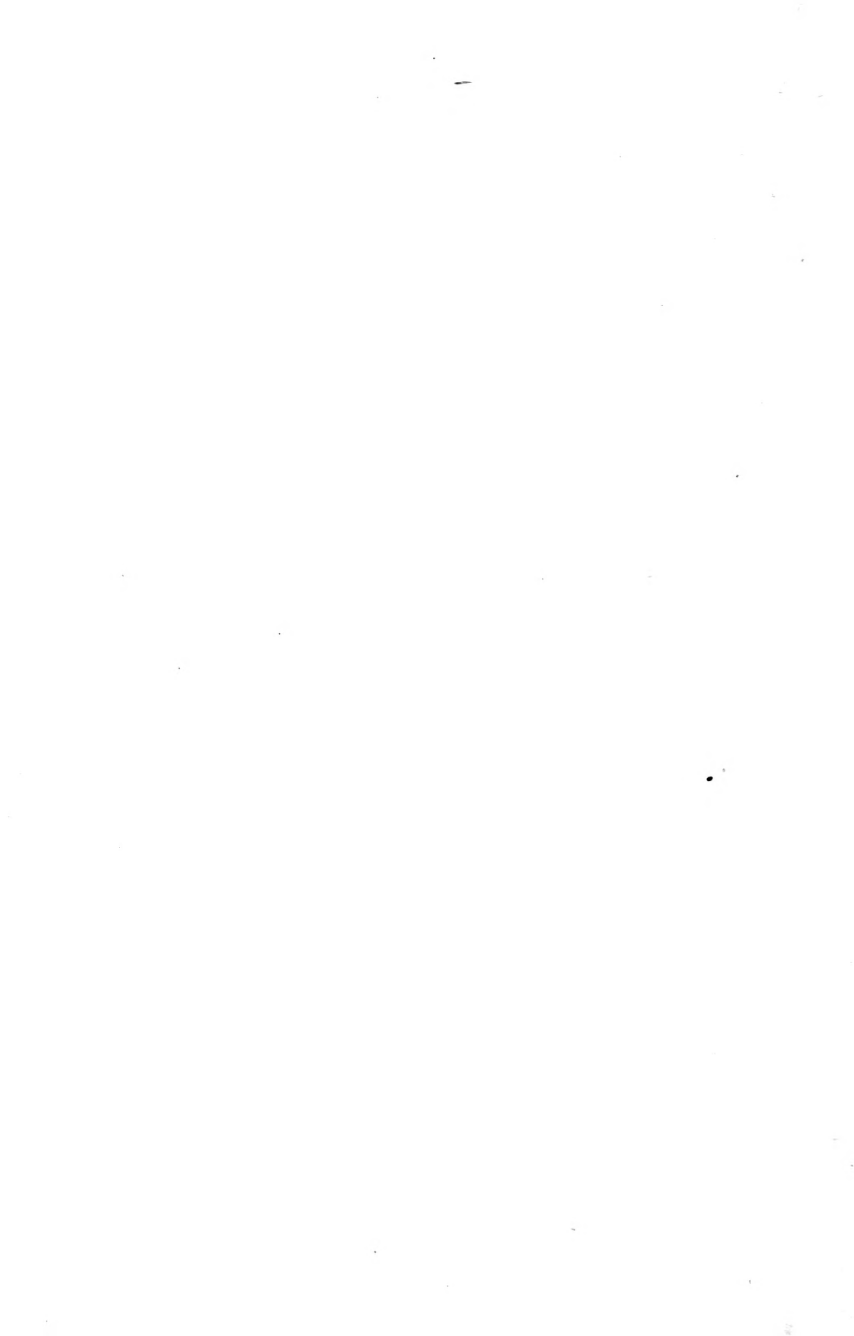
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IMPRESSIONS OF IRELAND

CHAPTER I

THE RESURRECTION OF A PEOPLE

“ The heroes thou weepst are dead ;
Can they live again ? ”

—*S. Patrick to Ossian in the Lays of Ossian*

EVERY year in August when the warm sun gilds the rich cornfields of the Golden Vale, between Cashel and Limerick, and when the groves of Killarney and Glengarriff are in the full splendour of their vegetation, the Gaelic League, founded to promote the Celtic Revival, holds its general assembly—its Solemn Oireachtas—in Dublin. Delegates from the various branches throughout the country report on the progress of the movement. Single and group competitions, in singing, dancing and Irish History are held ; officers are appointed, and an attractive programme of festivities, distinctly Celtic, is gone through, with the object of interesting in the movement an ever-increasing number of Irishmen, especially from among the natives of Dublin—a city, upon which English influence has been longest and most successfully exercised. The congress is a real balancing up of the progress annually achieved by Ireland, in the work of restoring her language and customs, and, very opportunely, is held at a season, when her verdant plains and uplands, rich in pasture and flowers, renew their perennial bloom.

The foreigner who happens to be present at the opening of the festival, carries away a deep impression. What amazes him, beyond all else, is the rapid success which has followed the Gaelic League in its propaganda. Started under very modest auspices in 1893 by a few Celtic enthusiasts (Douglas Hyde, Eoghan O'Growney, John MacNeill, David Comyn, and O'Neill Russeil), and thanks to an apostolate of organizers, men of clear intellect, and iron will (such as Thomas Concannon) it speedily succeeded in firing the entire country with its own ideals, *viz.*, the preservation of the Gaelic tongue, wherever it is still spoken, and its complete restoration in districts where it is already dead or dying. It is the aim of the League that the 600,000 Irishmen who can speak English or Gaelic, with equal ease, as well as the 20,000 inhabitants of the West who are almost completely ignorant of English, should not forget the language of their fathers, nor allow it to yield one inch of ground to the tongue of the invader. It aims, likewise, at restoring to currency the rich native idiom, in those parts where long centuries of slow English penetration—specially active in the last hundred years—have completely driven it out. The results already attained have exceeded all expectation. To-day from Belfast to Cork, from Sligo to Waterford, no Irishman is ashamed of his mother tongue. It is rather those who cannot speak it, that are ashamed of the fact. In the scholastic year 1908-1909 more than 46,000 children passed successfully the Irish examination in the primary schools; 5814—*i.e.* more than fifty per cent. of the total number of pupils—in the secondary. Lastly, as the result of a determined agitation in the country, the national language—medium of the mythological and

epic cycles, from which, on the testimony of G. Paris, are drawn the most exquisite fictions of medieval chivalry, from Tristan to Lohengrin – has been assigned a privileged status in the programme of the new National University. This same Gaelic League, has, with prodigious rapidity, multiplied its offshoots in the country, and counts to-day not less than 800 affiliated branches, some of them amongst the Irish of America and Australia. These, however, are mere figures, and give no adequate idea of the enormous work accomplished by the League in organising popular open-air festivals, establishing schools and fostering colleges, such as that of St. Enda (in which the form of education and general usages, even to the costumes worn by the young students and the system of gymnastics adopted, are distinctly Irish), in founding bursaries and promoting native industries; thus restoring to the gaze of contemporary Irishmen, whom England is making her last efforts to assimilate, the glorious past of the venerated Island of Saints and Scholars, that stretches westwards towards the New World, whither she has sent so many of her sons, after having sent eastwards over the continent the pioneers of Christian civilisation and Christian sanctity in the Middle Ages. For it is to be observed that while the revival of the Irish Language is the principal, it is not the sole, aim of the League. Free from political and religious prejudice alike, its aim is to fuse the rabid Orangemen of Ulster, and the devout Catholics of Connacht, in a united struggle for the intellectual and economic regeneration of their common country, which has been so long and so bitterly tried.

This year during Oireachtas week visitors may have studied a very successful industrial exhibition of native

products (notably Kilkenny furniture, products of the Irish Tobacco Co., native Irish costumes, exquisite jewellery from Dublin) side by side with a promising display of the works of Irish painters. Amongst these, Lavery, a triumphant figure of English pavilions at all International exhibitions, did not appear. But young artists, such as Duffy, Miller and Saunders found an honoured place.

The Gaelic League, however, starts with the principle that the economic revival can only be accomplished by means of a thorough spiritual regeneration; and with this view the foreigner who visits Ireland must signify his hearty concurrence. England has proclaimed to the four winds that it was she who introduced into the sister island the settled forms of civilised life, to which Ireland had been a stranger; and Irishmen have seen themselves regarded for centuries, as belonging to an inferior race, inherently incapable of organising itself into an enduring social structure. How England has vilified the tribal system! And yet, under its shade, Ireland has produced her bards and her lawgivers, her cenobites and her schools. Irish sentiment bitterly felt the rude shock of long, calculating disdain. Timid, suspicious, lacking faith in herself, mistrusting innovation, shy of initiative, sorrowful and resigned, with passive listlessness, or weeping in silence, she allowed the industry, the commerce, the habits of life, and even the language of the country of Cromwell, to sweep over the land, which had witnessed the proud sway of the O'Connors and the wealth and affluence of the Maguires.

Now, if Ireland is to be a nation, if she is ever to walk securely in the paths of agricultural, industrial and commercial progress, she must arouse within herself the

consciousness of her latent capacities, and, drinking deep at the pure fountains of her glorious history, eliminate from her lethargic spirit the habits of pessimism and torpor, which centuries of persecution have impressed upon it. What would it profit her, if to-morrow she succeeded in wresting Home Rule from England, and in opening once more the doors of her parliament in Dublin, whilst she retained not, whole and entire, the abiding consciousness of her ethnical personality, and of her storied destiny? Hence, the Gaelic League, with an exquisite sense of the true meaning of education, aims at restoring everything in the local traditions that may contribute to the elevation of public spirit—from the old Celtic songs with their impassioned modulations, their long melancholy cadences, and faithful rhythm—sonorous murmurs of a soul in love or anguish, down to the characteristic national dances. Hence a pleiad of scholars, led by Mrs. Green, who has undertaken to accomplish for Ireland the historical task accomplished for England by her husband, are devoting themselves to the work of exhuming from the immense treasury of Irish manuscripts lying unpublished in all the principal libraries of Europe—precious heritage left by wandering or exiled monks—the eloquent traces of the past economic and moral grandeur of the country.

This year at the Oireachtas, I witnessed some remarkable test performances of Irish music, executed by Mr. Darley, an accomplished violinist. The sweetness of certain lullabies, and the violence of a malediction on Cromwell, are still humming in my ears. I was present too, at the birth of a new society, formed for the publication of ancient Irish music, in support of which Mr. Hardebeck, a German who has become *hibernior*

hibernicis ipsis, made some very interesting observations, upon the relations that exist between Irish folk-song and Gregorian chant. According to him, the latter is the offspring of the former. This theory appears far from improbable, when one considers the Irish nationality of monks such as St. Gall, who were in their time distinguished exponents of musical culture on the Gregorian model.

But the most attractive item of this year's festival was a reproduction of the National Assembly at Tara—the Sacred Hill of Irish patriotism—according to the description given in the book of Ua-Chonbhail. The festival of Tara, instituted according to tradition by Ollamh Fodla in the eighth century before Christ, brought together, every three years, under the presidency of the Ard-Righ, the sub-kings, local chieftains, distinguished representatives of the cultured classes, historians, jurists, and poets of the country. At one of these festivals, according to the Tripartite Life, St. Patrick was present, and achieved the most signal triumph in the whole course of his preaching.

The Feis of this year reproduced the assembly of King Cormac (grandson of Conn of the Hundred Battles) who lived in the third century of the Christian era. In the Rotunda gardens in Dublin, delegates of the League, and visitors, were present for the first time, at the reproduction of this most characteristic national custom. Two hundred persons all dressed in the costumes of the period, took part. Maidens in white, with their fair, glossy tresses, formed the choir and group of dancers. Troops of boys, as pages, followed the kings of Leinster, Ulster, Munster, and Connacht, who had come to settle questions of public interest, and do homage to

the Ard-Righ—the great Cormac, “under whose rule,” says the old chronicle, “the earth was fertile in corn and fruits, the sea yielded abundance of fish, and peace, opulence, and joy reigned over all the land.’ Next in order to the petty kings, and taking their places at either side of the throne, come the druids, who light the Sacred Fire in the centre of the open space. Then all those present, with the exception of the sovereigns, plunge their torches in this fire, so full of symbolic meaning, lighted by the representatives of art and culture, that they may catch the Sacred Flame. Holding aloft their torches thus lighted, all arrange themselves in a semi-circle; and then when the lights, symmetrically disposed, flash out in the obscurity of the park, a numerous band of young girls trip through the mazes of a complicated dance, full of regularity and suggestiveness, around the druid’s fire, which is now left to smoulder peacefully, after having imparted heat and light to the torches of the assembly. Thus, in the most ancient musters of the culture and chivalry of the nation, on the hill of Tara, did the race commemorate the glories of its intellectual and social life. When the dance is over, the royal cortege retires, singing hymns to the prosperity of the nation. The public still linger in the park, subdued by the eloquence of the scene. The noises of the city, heard faintly in the distance, seem to die away on the railings of the garden, in which is celebrated this strange evocation of the past of a race, now at last after centuries of torpor, apparently rising from its bed of lethargy. I felt the profound significance of this wonderful, this unique, reconstruction—unique because of its singular educative value. We, too, tomorrow, might organise a procession in the Forum, and

pass over the traces of the Via Sacra, a simulacrum of the triumph of Augustus. It might furnish a cinematograph company with material for a film, or please the dilettante student of Roman History. The public would derive no spiritual profit from the spectacle. The historical reproductions of the Gaelic League, on the other hand, are not mere experiments in art. The Ireland of to-day feels acutely that the springs of her greatness lie in the past, and that by restoring ancestral traditions, blending them naturally with existing social forms, and by drawing strength and dignity from the memories of pre-Christian and medieval Ireland, before the Anglo-Norman had deformed and strangled her, she may yet discover her true self, and start life afresh. For the revival of the Gaelic language, in addition to being an exercise spiritually profitable, is awakening social echoes, that, at first sight, one would never dream of. We have here, in fact, a race that through the instrumentality of language and song, is seeking to recover those national characteristics, that have **made** her great in the past. A lady student of Irish, confessed to me that she felt a new personality, racy of the soil, taking possession of her, and supplanting the old; and an amiable young Western priest, member of an intensely patriotic family, confided to me the particulars of similar personal experiences, in regard to the spiritual effect produced on him by the study of Gaelic literature. He likewise drew my attention to the curious fact, that the language revival in Ireland is accompanied with an intensification of missionary zeal—a re-awakening of that ardour for winning converts to the faith, for which Ireland is renowned in the religious history of the old and the new world.

It appears to me the most salient feature of the Gaelic revival is this: Ireland numbers less than five millions of a population in the motherland; but she can reckon close on thirty millions of children dispersed throughout the world—in America, Australia, South Africa, India, in a word wherever the English flag or the English language is found. If to-morrow a re-awakened national consciousness brought together the scattered fragments of this wonderfully prolific race, and infused into them a soul of unity, what singular effects might not be looked for in the world!

Sixty years ago Renan, in a brilliant essay on the poetry of the Celtic races, put himself this question: “Who knows what the Celtic race, which has dreamed with St. Brendan of mystic Atlantides, might not accomplish in the field of intellect, if she once made bold to figure in the world, and subject her rich and profound nature to the exigencies of modern thought!”

The question recurred forcibly to my mind that calm evening in August, as I saw unfolded before me in the suggestive shadows of the park, the reproduction of the Tara assembly; and, foreigner though I was, I had a vague sense that something notable for civilisation and Catholicism was maturing in the soul of this Irish race, so gentle and so pure, so vehement and so dreamy, thus taking up the volume of her noble story, reading therein the glorious pages of her ancient past, and bent on adding other pages no less brilliant.

CHAPTER II

ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY

IN that suggestive "Golden Legend," which was not without its influence on the spiritual elaboration of the Divine Comedy, the holy Giacomo de Voragine relates how St. Patrick, for the purpose of confirming his preaching, asked God to reveal himself by some miraculous sign. And "then by divine command he marked out with his staff a wide circle, and straightway the ground enclosed subsided and a very deep opening appeared. It was thereupon revealed to St. Patrick that this opening led to a purgatory; that all such as went down into it would have atoned for their sins and be dispensed from the pains of purgatory after their death; but that the majority of those who entered would never be able to get out." The good narrator of the legend goes on to tell how sundry persons went down into the opening but never returned, and that one, Niccolo, was privileged to come out unhurt, after having had a fearful vision of the other world.

That clear August morning on which I left Enniskillen, the Irish Lucerne, and, crossing the fertile County of Fermanagh along the shores of blue Lough Erne, made towards Pettigo, thence to pursue my journey to the celebrated Purgatory, I had, in sooth, no intention of trying my luck at the opening; for I had taken a return ticket. Besides, however much I had desired to follow in the footsteps of the lucky explorer of the under world, I could not have satisfied my craving.

Many years ago the grotto which gave access to the mysterious regions of the suffering souls, was, as a precaution against superstition, filled up; and a little mound on which the pilgrims assemble before evening devotions, now stands above it. My intention rather, was, following the suggestion of D'Arcy Magee, to submit to observation, at one of the most venerated centres of Irish piety, whither from June to August of every year thousands of pilgrims congregate, "the power of faith."

The truth is, to have clear evidence of the deep religious feeling of the Irish Celt, one need not traverse the island from east to west, and reach the tiny islet on Lough Derg in rugged Donegal, to which tradition points as evidence of St. Patrick's miracle. You have but to set foot on the Emerald Isle, and after disembarking in the morning at Kingstown, to repair to a Catholic church in Dublin. There you can estimate the abyss that, in a spiritual sense, divides England, which you have left the day before, from Ireland, which you have reached after scarce nine hours journey from London, by Holyhead and across St. George's Channel. You feel at once you are in the true land of faith. On any day in the week, at any hour in the morning, every church, whether it be the aristocratic pro-cathedral, or the Franciscan church along the Liffey, or again that of the Dominicans in one of the poorest quarters of the city is crowded with people, in an attitude of the deepest reverence. The Catholic churches of Dublin are not aesthetically the finest in the country. There are better in small provincial towns, such as Sligo, Omagh, Killarney. In Dublin, it would seem as if the modesty of the Catholic churches were meant to express a more

eloquent protest against the English invasion, which has transformed into Protestant churches those magnificent old monuments of Catholicism in the capital—St. Patrick's and Christchurch. But aesthetic considerations are here out of the question. The most seductive spectacle for the visitor who comes from abroad is not the cupola or the façade, but the praying throng, above which hovers, in sensible form, the vivid and abiding realisation of the divine.

If then leaving Dublin, which after all is Anglicised to a certain degree, you journey through green Erin, and visit the western and southern counties; if you stop at the lesser cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Westport, and everywhere scrutinise the manifestations of religious life—the work accomplished by the Catholic priest, the Christian perfume that breathes from the daily life of the people—you are not long in satisfying yourself that you are in the heart of the most Catholic nation in the world—aye, in these days when the engrossing cares of material life have everywhere so absorbed human energies, as utterly to stifle the energy of the spirit, perhaps the one truly Catholic nation on the earth.

We Latins might easily be induced to believe that so deep a realisation of the Gospel must be accompanied by the most fanatical bigotry. Nothing of the kind. The Irishman, unless by a very rare exception, is no bigot. He abhors the studied ostentation of his faith, feels the most cordial antipathy towards every practice that savours of fetishism or superstition, realises by intuition the superiority of God's law over that of man, and has a heart open to the widest tolerance.

Were I to venture an impression of my own I should

say that Irish faith has within itself a preventive against any pharisaical deformity, because it reposes on a mental attitude sensibly different from that which as a rule inspires the profession of religion in the Latin countries. Our attachment to religion is, if I am not mistaken, in very notable measure determined by the thoughts of the other world, and the desire of divine grace. The Irish Celt's religion on the contrary springs from the actual sense of the divine, which accompanies, nurtures and sustains his daily life ; from a familiar need of the supernatural.

Besides this, after ages of unexampled sufferings, cheerfully borne for the faith of his fathers, the Irishman sees, in Christian practices, the most urgent and at the same time the sweetest duty that devolves on social life. In old Gaelic the church is called " people's house." In fine, the dogmas of revelation, the teaching authority of the church, the actual presence of God, are for the Irishman, not cold intellectual formulæ, but truths incarnated in practice, and tangible in the actions of daily life. In Donegal the poor peasant who speaks Gaelic while he addresses everyone else in the second person singular, addresses the priest in the second person plural, because the priest is not alone ; God is in him. Such a pinnacle of reverence, one may easily understand, constitutes a perilous occasion for Catholic priests, to abuse the piety of the faithful. But anyone who has lived in intimate association with ecclesiastical life in Ireland, must acknowledge that the priest responds conscientiously to the people's trust, and ever prompt to their call for the legitimate assertion of their rights, never turns to his own profit the veneration of which he is the object.

But if the spectacle of deep faith everywhere meets the stranger in Ireland, it is there in the little island in Lough Derg, sacred to the revered memory of St. Patrick, that it presents itself in all its singularity. For my own part I have never regretted the journey. From Pettigo one of the characteristic Irish jaunting cars, with its high wheels and side seats, took us to the lake, which, set in its waving coronal of hills, breaks suddenly on the pilgrim's view, and reveals to him at a glance the island of penance, about two hundred yards from the shore. My travelling companions, evidently ladies and gentlemen of high social rank, were touched with emotion and prayed devoutly.

I have seen other religious pilgrimages. But what a difference from the pilgrimage of Lough Derg! In our countries there is something restless and disorderly in the behaviour of the crowds that wend their way, singing hymns to Loretto or to Pompeii; and the goal of their travel seems not rarely as if summoning to a festive gathering. With the Irishmen who, in June, July and August, from every county in the land, come to visit the little island in Donegal, a spirit of recollectedness and severe penance is the predominant note. They wear on their very countenances the consciousness of an inestimable religious rite, discharged in communion with the entire race, which ever since the days of St. Patrick, has reverently walked in his footsteps, in the pious expectation that, on the last day, he will be their own judge.

Having crossed the little expanse of lake and disembarked on Station Island, the pilgrims take off their boots and forthwith commence the prescribed practices. These are neither few nor easy. They must visit the

two churches of the island, make numerous circuits of the principal one of the two, extend their arms several times on the cross of St. Brigid (a very old Celtic devotional rite), and in due order make prolonged stations in the penitential cells or beds of St. Brigid, St. Brendan, St. Catherine, and St. Columba. Lastly, the exercises, which are to be repeated on three consecutive days, are brought to a close near a rude cross, which bears the name of St. Patrick.

With these pious exercises the pilgrims combine a strict fast, and the plain accommodation* of the common hospice. And here, in the levelling tendency of a régime imposed on all alike, consists perhaps the most beneficial social effect of the pilgrimage. The rich merchant of Cork or Tralee, the well-to-do farmer of Ulster, the Dublin tradesman, the poor fisherman of Galway, are all reduced to a common level in presence of the ritual imposed by the devotion of the place. For my own part I have never seen a Christian practice that exceeds this in instilling a sense of equality among men.

I have not been able to read into the souls of the pilgrims, and I know not whether in the secrets of their hearts this visit to the rude island in Donegal really means to them escape from purgatory after their deaths. The fact remains that as they turn homewards to the four points of the compass, they carry away a deep content of soul, and all contribute to sustain the fame of the place—venerated and loved to-day as it was in the time of the pious Ligurian Dominican Jacobo de Voragine.

Returning in the evening, on foot, towards Pettigo,

* "Discomforts" is the equivalent of the Italian.

over a melancholy series of hills dotted here and there with little cottages, and patches of meadow, in which splendid types of peasants, men and women (descendants perhaps of the royal houses of O'Connor and O'Donnell) I reflected how solidly St. Patrick had fashioned the soul of his people to Christianity. A week before, in the National Museum at Dublin, I had contemplated with emotion that little iron bell, which a very old legend declares was used by St. Patrick to summon the faithful, and that in the eleventh century King Donnell O'Loughlin had it covered with a magnificent chased casing. What national apostle has rung for his converts a bell whose summons has been more widely obeyed? The rude relic which the old book of Cuana alleges to have been buried with St. Patrick, exhumed by Columba and deposited for centuries at Armagh, now rests in the Kildare Street Museum at Dublin, in the glass case where many old Irish bells are brought together. The custodian politely offers you a lens that you may the better see and admire the exquisite gilt tracery of the cover. But you are totally distracted. No, the bell is not silent. Its peal, the voice of St. Patrick, still reverberates in the world, and thirty millions of Irishmen bow devoutly to its chimes.

In what rich measure, too, has our Latin Catholicism been lulled by that chime? How much has not the Christianity of St. Patrick, the faith and piety of the Irish Celt, deposited in the religious experience of the Continent? Catholicism in its exterior organisation is a Mediterranean phenomenon. But the important part played by Celtic Christianity in the formation of Catholic ritual and devotion, has never yet been appreciated.

Only yesterday a very subtle French psychologist declared with justice that the researches of the future will show how the imagination of the Irish race, so intimately modelled on the Gospel, is one of the essential factors in the religious evolution of the West.

CHAPTER III

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF IRISH POLITICS.

Erin, Oh Erin ! Thy winter is passed,
And the hope that lived through it, shall blossom at last.

—*T. Moore.*

NOT many days have passed since the stormy session of last July, in the course of which Mr. Asquith was subjected to violent insult by the Tories, because, as was now evident he had pledged himself to the Irish Party to introduce a Home Rule Bill—that is, a bill to secure for Ireland legislative autonomy, exercised in a national parliament elected by the people, and empowered to regulate the domestic affairs of the country, imperial questions being reserved to the Parliament at Westminster. I may say candidly, I had expected to find greater enthusiasm for the approaching abolition of that Act of Union, which, for a hundred years has been the nightmare of public life in Ireland. I do not say that the parliamentary policy of Mr. Redmond and his numerous party has not a strong following in the country. If you look up, in *The Leader*, the standing list of subscriptions, you will see that from every parish in the country, generous contributions flow in to swell the funds of the party. At all events, it is impossible to discover that attitude of impatient expectation, begotten of mingled joy and fear, which one might look to find in a country on the eve of realising her long-cherished dreams. The friends of the party seek to

explain the fact by pointing out that to-day the desire for autonomy is less keen than it was twenty or thirty years ago, because the trend of English politics has materially changed, and the change has been to the advantage of Ireland. The explanation is not without its basis of fact. Ireland is no longer the Cinderella of the United Kingdom subjected to all the petty annoyances and mortifications of English rule. The singular vicissitudes of parliamentary life, have placed in the hands of her deputies to Westminster, formidable weapons of combat ; and the island beyond St. George's Channel, has, in the course of twenty years, won reforms of vast importance. I may mention the Local Government and Land Purchase Acts. When one reflects that some of the fiercest battles recorded in the modern history of Liberal politics in England have been won thanks to the almost unanimous support of the Irish party, one cannot help pointing to the relentless nemesis, which has assigned to Ireland the task of abolishing the cherished privileges of that House of Lords, from which has ever proceeded the most obstinate opposition to the redress of her political and religious grievances.

Be this as it may, the above explanation is not exhaustive. When, to-day, in the best informed centres of Dublin, and in the small but industrious County towns of the midlands, as well as of the South and West, you may hear harsh criticisms of the Irish Party, and observe on the face of the speaker an expression of ill-concealed doubt on the subject of Home Rule ; and when the bellicose policy of the Young Ireland party, of which the Sinn Feiners appear to be the heirs, has suddenly reappeared, and is making some headway in the country, the cause is not to be sought merely in the improved

condition of the people, and in the likelihood of a permanent understanding with England. True it is that England has recently set in motion very signal measures of reform in Ireland—partial and tardy reparation for centuries of impoverishment. I have already mentioned the Local Government and Land Purchase Acts ; and may here add the measures passed to extend the operations of the Congested Districts Board, and the act establishing the New National University, which has just opened its doors in Dublin, and is looked forward to as destined eventually to rival the hated Trinity. Many reforms, especially those of an economic character, have signally ameliorated the conditions of life in Ireland. But how much in this department still remains to be done !

When I reflect that Ireland possesses the European ports that lie nearest to America—those of Galway, Clifden, Westport—that she has others, like that of Tralee, in which vessels of very large tonnage can enter, dock and unload ; that she has splendid navigable rivers—the Shannon whose waters bathe the Norman castle of Limerick, the Liffey which flows through the capital, the Lee with Cork on its banks, the Foyle which receives the finished products from the smoky factories of Derry ; the Lagan which tells of the marvellous growth of Belfast—that she could develop enormous hydraulic power ; that she possesses vast tracts of peat ; that her immense expanses of pasture land are unequalled in the world—when I reflect on all this, as I stand on the summit of a hill near Clifden looking out over the bay, on which a few fishing-boats may be seen skimming the waves, I realise, with an acute sense of pain, what Ireland is compared with what she might be.

We are, it is true, in the initial stages of a revival ; but this is confined to agriculture and home industries. Horace Plunkett, by his propaganda in favour of rural credit societies, and by the establishment of co-operative creameries, which now display their modest chimneys on the outskirts of every Irish village, has much contributed to this. But if we leave out the favoured regions of Belfast, Derry, Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Wexford, no symptoms can be observed of a promising industrial and commercial activity, which in any case would encounter insurmountable obstacles in the monstrous attitude of the railway companies.

Now, the Liberals with smiles on their faces have come to the Irish Party, and have said to them, with an air of candour : “ Help us in reforming the Lords, and in carrying our budget ; in exchange, we will give you the coveted measure of Home Rule, and you can proceed to set the affairs of your house in order.” Mr. Redmond and his friends have closed with the offer. The country is slow to brand them as simpletons ; but it has its misgivings. There is an old Irish proverb which says : “ A dog's grin, an Englishman's laugh ! ” Is the popular philosophy, crystallised in the above eloquent aphorism, about to be falsified at last ? Meanwhile, along with the mirage of Home Rule, which a schism in the Liberal Party might defeat, there has been accepted by the Irish Party, and safely passed into law, a budget, which imposes a heavy tax on alcoholic drinks, and thus hits Ireland and her producers and consumers of whiskey particularly hard. It is true Irishmen have hit back, by increased earnestness in the temperance crusade, so as not in the net result to pay an increase of taxation. Ireland, be it remarked,

is the only country in the world where every problem, whether economic or administrative, immediately assumes a more or less moral tinge. Is it always lawful to block the inroads of taxation by having recourse to tactics of abstinence ?

Lady Clanricarde once said to an Englishman : “ You have always been as a garden wall interposed between us and the sun ! ” Many Irishmen are now asking themselves, somewhat sceptically : “ Is the wall tottering ? ” They have scant faith in the attractive prospect opened out to them by the Liberal Party. Is this excess of pessimism ? I should be slow to say it is.

Thus, the policy of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and the promised measure of Home Rule, give rise to a dilemma which is very trying to the Irish spirit.

For seven centuries—from the very day, in fact, on which Henry II., armed with a papal bull, (authentic or otherwise), crossed St. George’s Channel, and asserted the sovereignty of England over the lesser island—Ireland has never abandoned the struggle for national independence—a struggle of two civilisations, two souls, rather than of two states. To-day, Mr. J. E. Redmond alone—perhaps not even he—knows what form of Home Rule the Liberal Government is disposed to grant. It is certain, however, that on any hypothesis. Ireland can never have power to control her own political and financial relations with other countries, unless on the condition that she enter unreservedly the mighty current of British political life. And in that case, would not Home Rule stand for a base transaction, a tame acquiescence, which, if sincere, would be equivalent to the final abandonment of the majestic tradition of the Celt, and his utter absorption in the triumphant

life of England? The soul of Erin perceives the dark dilemma, and recoils on itself in painful uncertainty.

Before three years have elapsed, it may be, the old Parliament House in Dublin, that once rang with the powerful eloquence of Grattan, will open its doors once more to the representatives of the Irish nation. What are to be the limitations of their legislative power? For one thing, the Customs will be outside their control. And then, what benefit to industry, which has so much need of protection, to commerce, which demands liberal expansion and generous subsidies, will accrue, from their presence at home? What, then, does all the bitter struggle come to, or what does Ireland gain by accepting the position of a minor planet in the great British system, if, for example, she is powerless to prevent the price of those commodities which she largely exports, such as butter and eggs, from falling suddenly in the markets of Dublin or Cork, merely because a number of men on strike have brought railway traffic to a standstill at Liverpool?

The friends of the Parliamentary Party do not seek to evade the force of these observations, but reply that there is no better course open. An acute professor of science in Dublin wittily remarked that, "to demolish a wall you require a better implement than your own head." True, and Ireland is physically unable to extricate herself from the meshes of the English political and economic system.

The first thing responsible for this complex Irish problem is Nature herself, which has set this little island, of perennial verdure—rich in rivers and inlets, corn and fruits, with a superficies of less than 100,000 square kilometres, and a population of less than

5,000,000—at a distance of but three hours' sail from the larger island,—with a superficies of more than 200,000 square kilometres and a population of close on 40,000,000, and unable to produce the necessaries of life for all her children—and the second thing responsible is History, which has allotted to the twin islands two distinct races of men, so constituted that they cannot understand each other, but pursue aims in irreconcilable conflict. Renan, in this connection points out that a race endowed with a generous allowance of commonsense, cannot get on well with another race less richly endowed. It might, perhaps, have been a little more relevant to point out the economic aspect of this race discord; for there is never a truce between a nation, which has set covetous eyes on the rich possessions of her neighbour, and the weaker nation that has been violently plundered.

In face of this situation, the question arises: if in 1840 when Ireland counted eight million inhabitants, and O'Connell held them in the hollow of his hand, if in those memorable days of great public meetings in which hundreds of thousands of patriots took part—if then, the revolution had been accomplished, the depopulated and downtrodden Ireland of to-day might perhaps hope to find her political freedom in the chances of Home Rule, and, in a conflict between the free-traders of the manufacturing towns and the protectionist graziers of England, her economic security.

To-day, Ireland has to face the exigencies of the moment, and keep ever infusing fresh vitality into the life of the country. We must not be led astray by deceptive statistics, in which Ireland figures with an export trade of sixty-two millions, and an import of

almost equal dimensions. As a matter of fact, Ireland exports too much of those commodities which are required for the decent support of her own population. How far off is the day when Ireland imported every article of luxury, salt and iron excepted, in exchange for her surplus of products, and her people were well fed and well clad!

Are those days ever to return for you, wretched but virtuous fishermen of the Claddagh; for you, dock-labourers of Dublin; and you, lonely peasants of Connemara?

Much progress, certainly, has been made within recent years, and the outlook is hopeful. But, then, in the direction of progress, which is the better path? Viewing the question in the abstract, and having regard to the incurable antagonism that exists between Irish and English interests and ideals, the policy of Sinn Fein would appear preferable. But politics, like history, is not an algebraic problem, and in the Irishman's game of chess, the practical needs of the moment are all-important. Hence it is, that at the present juncture a generous measure of credit must be accorded to the Irish Party; the more so, as Home Rule, given the many psychological factors that come into play in the Irish problem, so far from signalling the end of the great Anglo-Celtic duel, might simply mark the beginning of a new phase, pregnant with incalculable consequences for both combatants.

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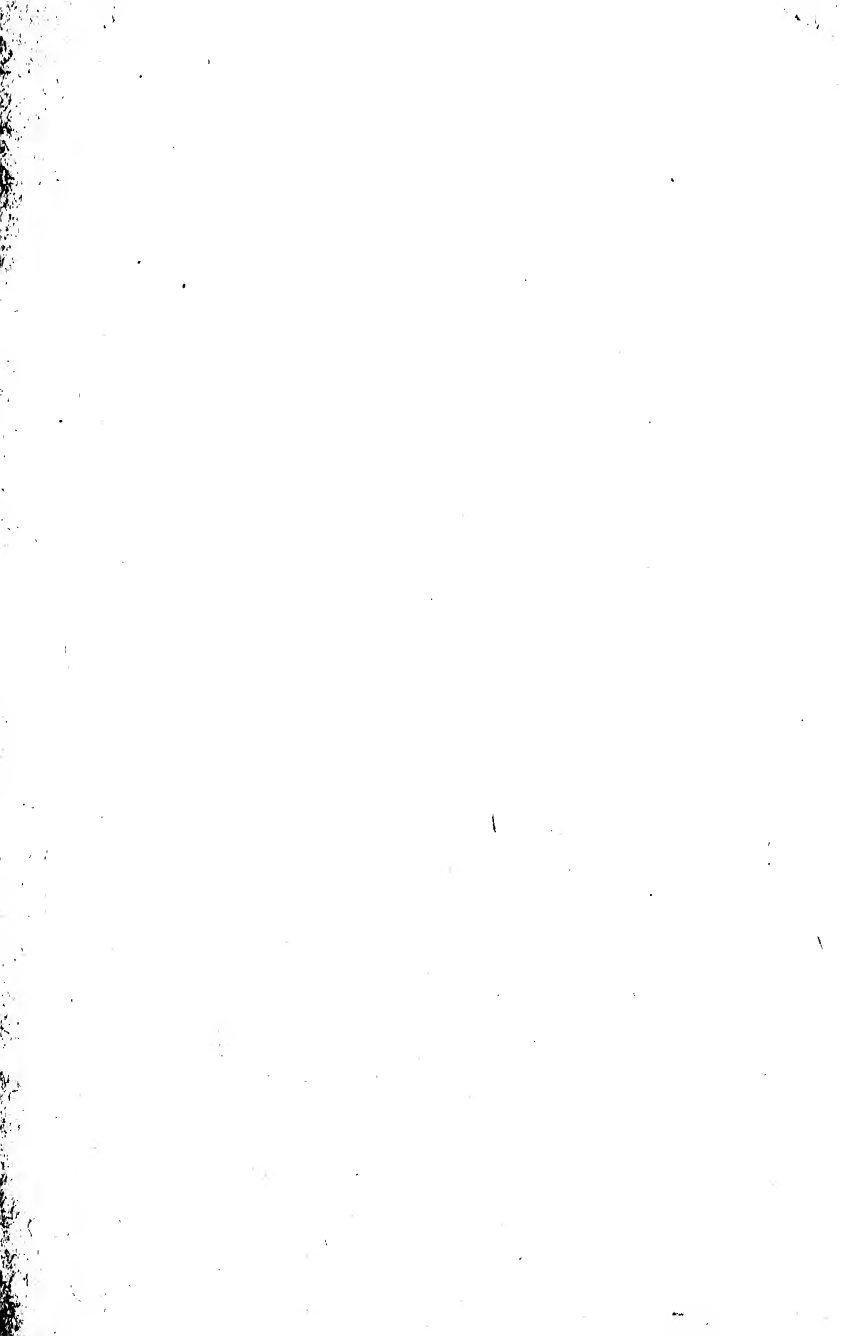
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