

GENIUS AND CHARACTER OF THE IRISH PEOPLE.

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT BOSTON BY THE REV. THOS. BURKE.

I AM come to speak of the history of our nation and our honorable race. I am not ashamed of my country. I say, taking all for all, that it is the grandest country and the most glorious race of which the genius of history can ever record. There are two elements that constitute the character and the genius of every people. These two elements are the religion of the people and the Government. I need not tell you that of all the influences that can be brought to bear upon any man, or upon any nation, the most powerful is the influence of their religion. If that religion be from God, it will make a God-like people; if that religion be from Heaven, it will make a heavenly people; if that religion be noble, it will make a noble people. Side by side with their religion comes the form or system of government under which they live. If that government be just and fair, and mild and beneficent, it will make a noble people; if that government be the government of the people, it will make every man in the land a lover of his government, a lover of the land, and a lover of the institutions under which he lives. But if that government be a foreign government—the government of a foreign race—it will make an alienated people. If that government be unjust and tyrannical, it will make a rebellious and revolutionary people. Now, when I come to speak of the genius and character of my fellow countrymen, I am reminded that in the character of every people on the face of the earth there is a light and shade. There is the bright side and the dark side; there is the sunshine and the shadow. There is the side which we eye to contemplate—the side in which the virtues of the people shine out; the side which the better part of their nature governs. And there is also the bad side—the side that we are ashamed to look upon; the side the contemplation of which makes a blush rise to the cheek of every lover of the land. And so there are lights and shades in the character and in the genius of our Irish people. As it is in nature, this world, in all its beauty, is made up of lights and shades. My friends, there is no sunshine without shadow; there is no light perceptible to the eye of man unless that light bring out all that is fair and beautiful, whilst at the same time it casts its shadow over the dark places. I have said that, in the order of nature and in the beauty of God's creation here below, there is light and shade. But there is this distinction to be made—the light comes from Heaven, from the Sun, rolling in its splendor over the clouds above, in us; the shadow comes from the earth, from the clouds that are near the world, from the deep forest glade, from the overhanging mountains—from these come the shadows, but the light comes from Heaven. So, in like manner, in the character and in the genius of our Irish people, there are both light and shade. There is the bright side, the beautiful side, the glorious side to contemplate; and there is also the dark side, but with this difference; that the lightsome, the beautiful side of Irish genius and character is derived from above—from Heaven—from God—from the high source of Irish faith; whilst the black side of our character, the dark and gloomy shade, comes from below, from the treachery, the depravity and wickedness of man. In speaking to you, my friends, on this subject, I am forcibly reminded that the character and genius of every people are formed by their history. In going back to the history of Ireland, I am obliged to travel nearly two thousand years in order to come to the cradle of my race. I am obliged to go back to the day when Patrick, Ireland's Apostle, preached to the Irish race, and in the Irish language, the name and the glory of Jesus Christ and of His Virgin Mother. And coming down through that mournful and chequered history, I find that our people have been formed in their national character and genius, first of all by the faith which Patrick taught them; and secondly the form of government under which they live. What is the first grand feature of the Irish genius and the Irish character? It is this: that having once received the Catholic faith from St. Patrick, Ireland has clung to it with a fidelity surpassing that of all other peoples. She has known how to suffer and how to die; but Ireland's people have never learned to relinquish or to abandon the faith of their fathers. They received their faith from the glorious Apostle whom God and Rome sent to them, early in the fifth century; they struggled for their faith during three hundred years, against all the powers of the north—unconquered and unconquerable—when the Danes endeavored to wrest from Ireland her Christian faith, and force her back into the darkness of Pagan infidelity. They have struggled for that faith during three hundred years of English tyranny and English penal laws. They have suffered for that faith, loss of property, loss of friends, loss of nationality, loss of life. But Ireland, glorious Ireland, has never relinquished the faith which she received—and she is as Catholic to-day as in the day when she bowed her virgin head before St. Patrick to receive from him the regenerating waters of baptism. This, I say, is the first beautiful light in the character and genius of Ireland. Every other nation of whom we read, demanded of their Apostle the seal of his blood to ratify the truth which he taught them. Ireland, alone, amongst all the nations of the earth, received their faith willingly; took it joyfully; put it into the hearts and blood of her children, and never caused her Apostle one tear of sorrow, nor one drop of his blood. More than this, every nation on the face of the earth has, at some time or other, been misled into some form heresy.—Some doctrine was disputed; some discipline denied; some anti-Pope set up his unholy pretensions to be the head of the Catholic Church. I claim for my nation, for my race, that with a divine instinct, they never yielded to any form of heresy; they were never yet deceived in the instinct which drew them to the true head of the Catholic Church—the real Pope of Rome. In the fourteenth century, there was a protracted schism in the Catholic Church. An anti-Pope raised himself up. France was deceived, Germany was deceived, Italy was deceived, England was deceived; but Ireland, glorious Ireland, with true instinct of a divinely-inspired and guided people clung to the true Pontiff, and adhered to the true head of the Catholic Church. Whence came this light? Whence came the fidelity that neither bloodshed nor death could destroy? It came from God; it came from that high heart and high mind in Heaven

that inspired Patrick to preach the Gospel to the people of Ireland, and inspired the Irish people to receive the message of Christian peace and love from his mouth. The next great point in the genius and character of the Irish people is the bravery, and valor, and courage that have been tried upon a thousand fields; and, glory to you, Ireland; Irish courage has never been found wanting! No, never! They fought for a thousand years on our own soil. The cause was a good one; the fortune of the cause was bad. They were defeated, and overpowered upon a hundred, yea a thousand fields; but never from the day that Ireland's sword sprang from its scabbard to meet the first Dane, down to the day that the last Irish soldier perished on Vinegar Hill,—never has Ireland been dishonored or defeated by the cowardice of her children. Why, whence comes this light of our people? I answer, that it comes from this, that Ireland as a nation, and Irishmen as a people, have never drawn the nation's sword in a bad, a treacherous, or a dishonorable cause. We have fought on a thousand fields, at home and abroad; we have been from time to time, obliged to shed our blood in a cause with which we had no sympathy; but Irishmen have never freely drawn the sword except in the Sacred cause of God, of the altar of God, and of sacred liberty—the best inheritance of man. Search the annals of the military history of Ireland. Did we fall back before the Dane, when for three centuries—three hundred years—he poured in army upon army on Irish soil. He endeavored to sweep away the name of Christ from the Irish land. Did we ever give up the contest, or sheath the sword, or say the cause was lost? Never! England yielded, and admitted the Dane as a conqueror, France yielded, and admitted the Dane as a ruler and king amongst her people. But Ireland never—never for an instant yielded; and upon that magnificent Good Friday morning, at Clontarf, she drew the sword with united hand, swept the Dane into his own sea, and rid her soil of him for ever. Ah, my friends, Irishmen for three hundred years were fighting in the cause of their God, of their religion, and of their national liberty. Then came the invasion of the English. For four hundred years our people fought an unsuccessful fight and divided as they were, broken into a thousand factions, how could they succeed when success is only promised to union as a preliminary and a necessary condition. They failed in defending and asserting the nationality of Ireland. At the end of four hundred years, England declared that the war was no longer against Ireland's nationality, but against Ireland's Catholic religion. And England declared that the Irish people must consent not only to be slaves, but to be Protestant slaves. Once more the sword of Ireland was unsheathed and came forth from its scabbard; and this time in the hands of the nation. We have fought for three hundred years: and five years ago the Government and people of England were obliged to acknowledge that the people of Ireland were too strong for them. They were conquerors on the question of religion; and Gladstone declared that the Protestant Church was no longer the Church of Ireland. Whence came this light—this magnificent glory that sheds itself over the character and genius of my people? I see an Irishman to-day in the streets of an American city; I see him an honest labourer; I see him, perhaps, clothed in rags; I see him, perhaps, with a little too much drink in, and forgetful of himself; but wherever I see a true Irishman, I greet him as the representative of a race that never yet knew how to fly from a foe, or to show their backs to the enemy. Why? Because of their Catholic faith, taught them by St. Patrick, which tells them that it is never lawful to draw the sword in an unjust cause; but that when the cause is just—for religion, for God, or for freedom—he is the best Christian who knows how to draw the sword, wave it triumphant over the field, or let it fall in the hand of man who knows how to die without dishonor. The third light that shines upon the bright side of the history, the character, and the genius of my people, is the light of divine purity; the purity that makes the Irish maiden as chaste as the nun in her cloister; the purity which makes the Irish man as faithful to his wife as the priest is to the altar that he serves; the purity that makes Mormonism and defilement of every kind utter strangers to our race and to our people. I say, the Irish woman is the glory of Ireland; she is the glory of her country. How beautiful is she in the integrity of virginal purity. She has been taught it by St. Patrick, who held up the Mother of God—the Virgin Mother—as the very type of Ireland's womanhood, and Ireland's consecrated virgins, as illustrated in the lives and in the characters of our Irish virgin saints. The Irishman knows that, whatever else he may be false to, whatever other obligations he may violate and break, there is one bond, tied by the hands of God Himself before the altar; sealed with the sacramental seal of matrimony; signed by the sign of the Cross—that no power upon earth, or in hell, or in Heaven, can ever break; and that is the sacred bond that binds him to the wife of his bosom. What follows from this? I know that there are men here who do not believe in the Catholic religion; that do not believe in the integrity of our Irish race: yet I ask these men to explain to me this simple fact—How is it, how comes it to pass that whilst the Mormons are recruiting from every nation in Europe, and from every people in America, they have only had five Irish people amongst them? And amongst these five, four arrived in New York last week. A reporter of the 'Herald' newspaper went to them, and he said to them, "In the name of God, are you become Mormons?" They said, "Yes, yes, we are." "Why don't you come from Ireland?" The answer he got was this—"A weel, we cam' fra' the North of Ireland, ye ken; but we're a Scotch bodies." Men and women of Ireland, to the honor and glory of our race, there was only one Irishman among all the Mormons. What brought him across there? I don't know. I would like to meet him, and have half-an-hour's conversation with him.

(To be Continued.)

The general election at the Cape has resulted in a great infusion of new blood. The Parliament consists of sixty-eight members, and of these twenty-eight never served before, and thirty-seven did not sit in the last house.