

less explicit. He writes:—'It would be difficult, in the whole compass of history, to find another instance in which such various and such powerful agencies concurred to degrade the character and to blast the prosperity of a nation.'

The result of the Penal Laws was to cement inseparably into one the national and the religious life of the Irish people. The people were despoiled of everything that the tyranny of man could reach, but nothing could pluck the love of the Catholic Faith from their devoted hearts. Impending suffering brought into bold relief the indomitable courage and heroism of the Catholic priests. Many and many a time was the sacrifice of the priest's life linked with the holocaust of Holy Mass, which he was offering at the altar; many and many a time was the altar-stone, the Corrig-an-Affroin, reddened with his blood. Mr. Lecky gives unstinted praise to the

Heroic Devotedness of the Irish People

and the Irish priests during this dismal period. Of the Irish people he writes:—'They clung to their old faith with a constancy that never has been surpassed, during generations of the most galling persecution, at a time when every earthly motive urged them to abandon it, when all the attractions and influence of property and rank and professional eminence and education were arrayed against it. They had their reward. The legislator, abandoning the hopeless task of crushing a religion that was so cherished, contented himself with providing that those who held it should never rise to influence or wealth, and the Penal Laws were at last applied almost exclusively to this end.'

Of the Irish priests he writes:—'The zeal with which they maintained the religious life of their flocks during the long period of persecution is beyond all praise. In the very dawn of the Reformation in Ireland, Spenser had contrasted the negligence of the "idle ministers"—the creatures of a corrupt patronage—who, "having the livings of a country opened unto them, without pains and without peril, will, neither for any love of God, nor for zeal for religion, nor for all the good they may do by winning souls to God, be drawn forth of their warm nests to look out into God's harvest"—with the zeal of Popish priests, who "spare not to come out of Spain, from Rome, and from Rheims, by long toil, and dangerous travelling hither, where they know that peril of death awaiteth them, and no reward or riches is to be found, only to draw the people unto the Church of Rome"'. The same fervid zeal was displayed by the Catholic priesthood in the days of the Cromwellian persecution, and during all the long period of the Penal Laws.'

The First Great Victory

achieved in the century just closed by the United Irish priests and Irish people was to sling aside for ever the chains and fetters of those Penal Laws. The Irish race was not extirpated, its faith was not overcome. Lord Macaulay attests:—'It is not under one, or even twenty administrations, but for centuries we have employed the sword against the Catholics of Ireland. We have tried famine, we have had recourse to all the artifices of Draconian Laws, we have tried unbridled extermination, not to suppress or conquer a detested race, but to eradicate every trace of this people from the land of its birth. And what has come of it? Have we succeeded? We have not been able to extirpate, nor even to weaken them.' Some features of this great victory achieved by the united priests and people of Ireland merit to be considered. The British Government left nothing undone to separate the priests from the Irish people. Early in the century they made an official proposal to subsidise the Catholic clergy, but the clergy spurned the bribe, and chose to share the poverty and hardships of the faithful, whom they loved. Emancipation was then offered, if only a veto were allowed to Government in the selection of the spiritual pastors. But such a veto would weaken the confidence of the people in their religious guides; and, with genuine national and religious heroism, priests and people resolved that nothing would separate them. They would refuse Emancipation sooner than accept the veto. The King, again and again publicly called God to witness that he never would sign the Act of Emancipation. Despite all this, he had to sign it. The Duke of Wellington, the leader of the party hostile to the Irish claims, was forced to avow that such was the union of the priests and the people, there was no alternative. Sooner than face civil war, it was necessary to give victory to the Catholic cause.

And how far-reaching has been the victory thus achieved! Not only was the Penal Code cancelled from the Irish legislation, but religious freedom was granted to the Catholics of England and Scotland; the same liberty in matters of divine worship, to last throughout all time, was extended to the colonies; and if, in Australia, we enjoy to-day that priceless heritage of re-

ligious freedom, with its manifold, imperishable blessings, we are indebted for it to the happy union of the Priests and People of Ireland.

The Next Great Victory

achieved was on the battlefield of education. Throughout the period of the Penal Laws, the Charter Schools devised by the Protestant Primate, Boulter, were lavishly subsidised by the State, and were forced upon the country with the intent to rob the Irish children of their nationality and their Faith. None but the outcasts and Protestant children could be got to attend them. Parliamentary Commissions reported that they were nothing better than seminaries of irreligion and vice. Nevertheless, far into the late century, they continued to be patronised and richly endowed by Government till at length, with every accompaniment of national execration and ignominy, they were consigned to a dishonoured grave. Throughout all this time, there was a price on the head of the Catholic schoolmaster. It was penal for a Catholic parent to send his child for instruction to a Catholic teacher. The hedge-schools were the only resources of the clergy to bring the blessings of education to their flocks in those perilous times. Hear how Mr. Justin McCarthy writes of these schools:—

'On the highway and on the hillside, in ditches, and behind hedges, in the precarious shelter of the ruined walls of some abbey, or under the roof of a peasant's cabin, the priests set up schools, and taught the children of their race. With death as the penalty of their daring—they gave to the people of their persecuted faith that precious mental food which triumphantly thwarted the efforts of the Government to brutalise and degrade the Irish Catholic off the face of the earth. In those "hedge-schools," as they were called in scorn, the principles of religion, of morality, and of patriotism were kept alive, and those elements of education, which are the very life-blood of national existence, freely dispensed. Eagerly as it was given, it was no less eagerly sought for. The readiness of the priests to teach was only equalled by the readiness of the people to be taught. The proudest place of honor in Irish history belongs to those hedge-schools and their heroic teachers. But for them the national cause and the national existence would have withered away under the blighting curse of the Penal Laws. From those hedge-schools came some of

The Brightest Ornaments of Modern Irish History.'

It is a cheering thing to look back upon the efforts of the clergy to keep alive the spark of learning, among their devoted flocks, amid these horrible scenes of desolation and persecution. We see, for instance, the venerable priest, who was soon destined to be Archbishop of Armagh, the Venerable Primate Cragh, whose cause of Canonisation is at present before the Roman Court, teaching a school for the poor children in Limerick. The illustrious Bishop of Kildare, Dr. Leverous, in a thatched cabin near Naas, gathered the scattered youths around him, to teach them the rudiments of piety and secular instruction. Another priest chose the centre of the bog of Allen, far away from military pursuit, for his literary home, and we are told that many of the Irish youth, even from a distance, hastened thither, and built their cells, enduring heroically every hardship that their minds and hearts might be equipped with the enlightenment which he no less heroically imparted.

The Kildare Street Society Schools, and other similar schemes, were devised early in the century, under pretence to educate the Irish youth, but in reality to undermine their Faith. The National System, introduced in 1831, gave promise of better things, but it was practically entrusted for its working to avowed proselytisers, the Anglican Archbishop, Dr. Whately, and the Presbyterian, Rev. Dr. Carlyle. After a while they were able to boast that they were weaning the Catholic children from their loyalty to the Church, and sapping the foundations of the whole vast Catholic fabric. But the watchmen on the towers of Israel were not asleep. They warned their flocks of the imminent dangers.

(To be concluded.)

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