

The collapse came when the former law-maker learned that copies of the 'Weekly Irish Times' of the dates mentioned were all along in the possession of his serene and smiling opponent. The game was then up. The most extraordinary part of the whole affair was the confession of the ex-legislator that, all the time that he was spinning his various versions of the 'Clifton' romance and pouring a rain of hot-shot comment on it into the columns of the 'Waimate Times,' he had in his possession the very copy of the 'Weekly Irish Times' that dynamited the soul and substance out of his story of outraged evangelical innocence. Here is a slice from the last word in the controversy—Dean Regnault loquitor:—

'There are (according to Mark Twain) 769 ways of conveying a falsehood. One of the very worst of these is the suppression of the truth that is in one's possession. Till I intimated to your readers that I had the "Weekly Irish Times" of October 13th, 1906, in my possession, and was prepared to lay its version before the public, my opponent held back from your readers the following vital facts, which (he tells us) have been in his possession for the past three months:—(a) The police swore that the preachers in Clifden (not Clifton) were acting illegally (or at least against strict Government regulations) in preaching where they did. (b) It was sworn that one of the preachers assaulted the priest. (c) It was sworn that their "language and other conduct" was "most offensive" and "most insulting" to Catholics. (d) The Bench officially declared that "the street preachers had caused the people great provocation." (This is in full accord with the language used regarding street preachers in various other parts of Ireland by Judge Adams and others). Bear in mind that all this is in the report of the intensely anti-Catholic "Weekly Irish Times." And this is the famous case that is to damn Home Rule for ever and a day! It matters not a jot whether my opponent agrees or does not agree with the police evidence, the evidence of Canon MacAlpine, and the pronouncement of the Clifden Bench. Having (as he admits) this most important side of the question in his possession, it was his duty in justice and honor to place it all from the first fairly and manfully before your readers, instead of misleading them with fantastical romances and with shockingly mutilated and one-sided versions of the "Clifton" affair.'

We dealt briefly some time ago with this 'Clifton' romance. We have pleasure now in giving this further notice of the affair, more especially in view of the mendacious and envenomed versions of the incident that have been circulated by the Protestant 'Defence' Association in the Auckland Province and by over-credulous enthusiasts elsewhere in the Colony. It is a bankrupt cause that cannot stand upon the bed-rock of truth, but must call in falsehood as its ally.

A New Era

'Nitor in adversum' ('I strive against adverse circumstance') might well be taken as the motto of Irish national sentiment. It has had a long, arduous, uphill struggle. But it kept on and ever on. And now, after more than a century, the Irish people find (with Christina G. Rossetti) that the uphill is best escaped 'by never turning back.'

'Between two neighboring States a deadly hate,
Sprung from a sacred grudge of ancient date,'
now bids fair to burn itself speedily out.

'Blind bigotry at first the evil wrought.'

Then followed the evil of governing the weaker wholly in the interests of the stronger nation. Next came the folly of ruling people of one set of traditions and religious and racial sentiments by institutions devised for them at long-range guess-work by people with quite different traditions and racial and religious sentiments. It was assumed that these institutions (including the irresponsible Castle system) must be good enough for Ireland. And the repugnance of the Irish people to them long seemed to numbers of even sincere Englishmen incomprehensible, and evidence that Ireland was at fault, or that the nature of things had somehow gone awry.

Ministries may come and Ministries may go. But neither peace nor progress nor mutual good-will was possible while the principle prevailed that Ireland was on no account to be ruled in accordance with the ideas and aspirations of its people. While tied to that capital blunder, it might be said of each successive Administration:—

Ille sinistrorsum, hic dextrorsum abijt; unus utriusque Error, sed variis illudit partibus.'

Or, as a British poet has freely Englished it:—

'One reels to this, another to that wall;
'Tis the same error that deludes them all.'

There was too long a substratum of truth in the caustic saying of a witty Irishman: that, where the western Isle was concerned, the only chance you had of impressing an English Minister was to come before him with the head of a landlord in one hand, and the tail of a cow in the other. Except during the Melbourne Administration, reasonable popular demands were till now granted (when granted) only under unreasonable popular pressure. Catholic Emancipation—promised as an immediate compensation for the destruction of the Irish Parliament—was delayed till 1828. And even then it was bestowed only when the greater part of the population was strongly disaffected; when (as Peel declared) five-sixths of the infantry force of the United Kingdom were 'occupied in maintaining the peace and in police duties in Ireland'; and when (as he further declared) this locking up of the forces would have had a paralysing effect upon military operations in the event of war with a foreign power. The Tithe Commutation Act of 1838 gave small relief indeed to the Irish peasant. But, such as it was, it was won only by the long struggle known as the Tithe War, which drenched the soil of Ireland with blood. In 1865, while Britons were (says John Stuart Mill) 'basking in a fool's paradise,' the Fenian movement suddenly 'burst like a clap of thunder in a clear sky, unlooked-for and unintelligible.'

'Ah! then and there was hurrying to and fro. . .
And there was mounting in hot haste: the steed,
The mustering squadron, and the clattering car,
Went pouring forth with impetuous speed,
And swiftly forming in the ranks of war.'

The harbors were occupied by the fleet. Swift cruisers patrolled the coasts to prevent the landing of Irish veterans of the American war. Mr. Gladstone and Lords Granville, Dufferin, and Derby bear witness to the fact that the panic into which the Government was thrown by the Fenian scare led to the disestablishment of the Protestant State Church in Ireland in 1869 and to the Land Act of 1870. The (for Ireland) revolutionary Land Act of 1881 represented the Government's surrender to Charles Stewart Parnell and the triumphant Land League. 'I must make one admission,' said Mr. Gladstone, 'and that is, that without the Land League the Land Act of 1881 would not at this moment be on the Statute book.' Fixity of tenure (according to Lord Derby) was won for the Irish farmer by the disconcerting strenuousness of the Land League, and by the industrious and resourceful obstruction tactics of the Home Rule Party in the House of Commons. And (added Lord Derby) 'the Irish know it as well as we.'

Henry Grattan laid down a useful principle both for political and social use when he said: 'What you refuse, refuse decently; what you give, give graciously.' Few of the popular rights that were demanded by the Irish people during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were either decently refused or graciously given. It is this melancholy feature of the relations of the two countries that led Lord John Russell to exclaim to his fellow legislators:—

'Your oppressions have taught the Irish people to hate, your concessions to brave you. You have exhibited to them how scanty was the stream of your bounty, and how full the tribute of your fears.'

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