

THE OLD HOUSE IN COLLEGE GREEN

A REMINDER OF IRELAND'S PAST.

We have it on the authority of Lecky that when the British Government disposed of the Irish Parliament House to the Bank of Ireland a secret clause was inserted in the lease to the effect, that the House of Commons should be so altered as to retain if possible nothing of its former appearance (says 'Eblana,' in the *Dublin Freeman*). They would have liked to raze the historic building to the ground. Indeed, it is somewhat strange they did not complete their scurvy work with this crowning act of vandalism. Unwise in all their procedure, they were unwise in this, too, that they left standing such a reminder to the generations of Irishmen to come as this glorious masterpiece of the age of Irish freedom—a reminder of the pride and glory that was and of the duty to rededicate the temple at the earliest possible moment.

Consecrated by so Many Memories.

But the Government could not leave the Old House without some marks of their spiteful malice and of their guilty forebodings. 'It was feared,' says Lecky, 'that disquieting ghosts should haunt the scenes that were consecrated by so many memories.' Partitions and divisions and all manner of architectural artifices were therefore invoked to lay the ghosts that would have hovered in the great Chamber which has resounded with the highest flights of human eloquence. Barrington has left us a description of the scene to which that Hall of Liberty was accustomed.

'In the gallery on every important discussion nearly seven hundred auditors heard the sentiments and learned the characters of their Irish representatives. The gallery was never cleared for a division. This rising generation acquired a love of eloquence and of liberty, the principles of a great and proud ambition, the details of public business, and the rudiments of constitutional legislation. The front rows of the gallery were generally occupied by families of the highest rank and fashion whose presence gave an animated and brilliant splendor to the entire scene, and in such a nation as Ireland then was, from which the gallant spirit of chivalry had not been altogether banished, contributed not a little to the preservation of that decorum so inseparable to the dignity of deliberation.'

A Fitting Arena.

The Chamber was a fitting arena for the first intellectual spirits of a Nation. From the description of an English writer, we learn that 'the internal parts have many beauties, and the manner in which the building is lighted has been much admired. The House of Commons is an octagon covered with a dome, which it is to be wished had been raised to a greater height, as it would have added to the magnificence of the building, and at the same time have improved the prospect of the city; but it is so low at present that a person passing can scarcely perceive it. It is supported by columns of the Ionic order, that rise from an amphitheatre gallery elegantly balustraded with iron, where strangers hear the debates. Upon the whole, prejudice itself must acknowledge that the British Empire—one might have added, Europe itself—cannot boast so stately and spacious a senatorial hall.'

The well-known pictures that have come down to us, and particularly that most familiar of them, in which Curran is seen addressing the house, fully confirm these spirited eulogiums. This was the arena in which Grattan pronounced the achievement of Irish legislative independence. On March 14, 1782, the great patriot had announced that he would bring forward the question. Grattan had had three years of exciting political toil. He was in his thirty-sixth year; but his constant and strenuous labors and anxieties had told upon his health. His spirit and resolution were sound and high, his mind at the zenith of its powers, but his body was feeble and debilitated.

A Memorable Day in Irish History.

The sixteenth of April—the most memorable day in Irish history—dawned. Grattan surprised both friend and foe by appearing in the House. It was known how ill he was, and indeed he presented a sublimely pathetic figure. There was suffering in his face. He was thin and careworn. All was excitement. To reach the House the matchless orator of Irish freedom had to pass through streets filled with enthusiasm and expectancy. The Volunteers, in their resplendent uniforms, kept the roadways clear. All the city thronged to the vicinity of the Senate House. Within the Common's Chamber rank, fashion, and genius blended. At 4 o'clock the House sat; the members' benches were filled; the peerage was present in strength; more than four hundred ladies sat in the gallery. Hely-Hutchinson and Ponsonby spoke. There was some danger and anxiety lest the great day should end in nothing.

Suddenly Grattan, wearing the uniform of a Volunteer, rose to his feet. Little did the splendid assembly expect what was to come. They witnessed such a triumph of mind over bodily infirmity as has but seldom been achieved, and it did not seem a bit incongruous when the orator, in clarion tones, proclaimed himself 'the herald and oracle of his armed countrymen.' The speech is one of the masterpieces of eloquence. It was passed into the classrooms to be at once the delight and difficulty of thousands of budding elocutionists. The house was spellbound. 'Fire, sublimity, and immense reach of thought,' says an English critic, 'distinguished the oration.' Lord Charlemont afterward observed: 'If every spirit could be said to act independent of body it was on that occasion.'

Grattan's Memorable Speech.

'I am now to address a free people,' Grattan began. 'Years have passed away, and this is the first moment in which you could be distinguished by that appellation. I have spoken on the subject of your liberty so often, that I have nothing to add, and I have only to admire by what Heaven-directed steps you have proceeded until the whole faculty of the Nation is bound up with the act of her own deliverance. I found Ireland on her knees, I watched over her with paternal solicitude; I have traced her progress from injuries to arms, and from arms to liberty. Spirit of Swift! Spirit of Molyneux! Your genius has prevailed! Ireland is now a Nation! in that new character I hail her; and bowing to her august presence, I say *Esto perpetua!*'

No other orator that ever lived could have begun a speech in such a key, and with hope to sustain the lofty strain for long. But no part of Grattan's oration was unworthy of the sublimity of its beginning, and it remains one of the most complete and perfect products of the human mind. He ended with the historic Declaration of Independence, and while he pronounced its terms and the House voted it unanimously the crowds around the statue of William III. awakened the echoes of Dublin, and the cheers of a delighted populace ran from street to street.

After describing many historic incidents which took place in the old House, the writer goes on to tell of the last days of the Irish Parliament. Other memorable scenes (he says) might be described, that one, for instance, when Grattan rose from his bed of sickness, and, helped by Ponsonby and Moore, for he could not move without assistance, came down to the Old House to speak against the Union. The House, we are told, was hushed to awe as the great patriot, ghastly pale and weak, almost fell into his seat, and with the permission of the assembly, delivered his speech without trying to rise to his feet. But I must pass over this and many another historic incident to dwell for a few moments on the last sad scene of all, in which Grattan's Parliament was forcibly done to death. There is no scene in our history so full of shame, humiliation, and disgrace. It is not my intention to repeat the tale of bribery and corruption. Principals and subordinates all soiled themselves, to all intents and pur-

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