

Old and New

The creed of the Anglo-Saxon has always kept conveniently close to earth while it has been said that the centre of gravity of the Celt is not in this world at all. At any rate the things of the spirit are more to the Celt than to the Saxon. It has always been so. And therefore the *vis viva* has been commoner among Irish writers than among their enemies across the sea. What is true of the Sinn Féiners is true of the Fenians; and what is true of them is true of the Forty-Eight men also. A suffering people may not be able to practise in perfection the Gospel that teaches men to eat and drink while they live, but sufferings purify them and give them a spiritual vision that the chaw-bacons never possess. The tradition of Irish writing—using the word tradition in the sense understood of French critics—is not new. One can trace it back across the ages, and though it swells and falls like a strain of music, its continuity is unbroken. Its spirit is saturating the air of the *Coulins*, or the wailing threnodies of old lamentations. It is heard in Burke's passionate panegyric for Marie Antoinette; in Sheridan's awful invective against the tyrannies perpetrated under British rule in India; in Grattan's dying plea for justice and honor in a great country's dealings with a small nation. The same tradition lives in the *Spirit of the Nation*, that little volume which preserves for us the songs which kept the soul of Ireland alive in Forty-Eight at a time when the English Government, encouraged by the *Times*, was bent on killing the bodies of Irish men and women; it is perpetrated in our day by Pearse, Plunkett, MacDonagh, Figgis, Boyle, Dora Sigerson, and—thank God for it—a host of others. When Matthew Arnold sought for a prose writer to compare, even at a distance, with Bossuet, it was to the Irishman, Burke, he turned. If we want beautiful English prose to-day we will go to Wilde, or to Pearse, or to Kettle, or to Dunsany. The passages that began with the words, "It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France," or "Had a stranger in that time come into the province of Oude," still shine with their own brilliancy, after a century of wear. And where will you find lovelier words than in those paragraphs of Pearse's which talk to his boys of the woods and streams on the Dublin hills? Where out of the Bible will you find such ineffably beautiful and simple language as in a story of Dunsany's or a sketch of Wilde's? Yes, the tradition of Irish prose is a grand heritage. It has its ebbs and floods, its systole and diastole, but it has never died, never broken. And one of its greatest wonders to-day is the marvellous things of beauty and fancy our writers can create from the simplest and shortest little words. If you have not found out what a marvel that is go to Pearse and to Seumas O'Kelly and a new world will be born for you.

The Ancient Spirit

Let us go back a little and we shall find in the past the self-same spirit that animated the men of to-day. Hear Hussey Burgh in defence of his country over a hundred and twenty years ago: "The usurped authority of a foreign Parliament has kept up the most wicked laws that a jealous, monopolising, ungrateful spirit could devise to restrain the bounty of Providence, and enslave a nation, whose inhabitants are recorded to be a brave, loyal, and generous people. By the English code of laws they have been treated with a savage cruelty: the words penalty, punishment, and Ireland are synonymous, they are marked in blood on the margin of their statutes; and though time may have softened the calamities of the nation, the baneful and destructive influence of those laws has borne her down to a state of Egyptian bondage. *The English have sown their laws as dragons' teeth, and they have sprung up armed men.*"

Grattan speaking on the Volunteers might well be pleading to-day: "See Ireland's military ardor expressed not only in 40,000 men, conducted by instinct as they were raised by inspiration, but manifested in the zeal and promptitude of every young member of the growing community. Let corruption tremble; let the

enemy, foreign or domestic, tremble; but let the friends of liberty rejoice at these means of safety and this hour of redemption. Yes: there does exist an enlightened sense of rights, a young appetite for freedom, a solid strength, and a rapid fire, which not only put a declaration of right within your power, but put it out of your power to decline one. Eighteen counties are at your bar; they stand there with the compact of Henry, with the charter of John, and with all the passions of the people. 'Our lives are at your service, but our liberties—we received them from God: we will not resign them to man.'"

Here is another passage which in Grattan's words answers to the hypocritical taunts of many a dishonest writer of modern journalese: "I shall hear of ingratitude: I name the argument to despise it and the men who make use of it: I know the men who use it are not grateful, they are insatiate: they are public extortioners, who would stop the tide of public prosperity, and turn it to the chance of their own emolument: I know of no species of ingratitude which should prevent my country from being free, no gratitude which should oblige Ireland to be the slave of England. *In cases of robbery and usurpation, nothing is the object of gratitude except the thing stolen, the charter spoliated.*" And speaking against the Union, that stigma on British honor, rightly described as the most shameful transaction ever perpetrated by civilised men, he said: "The Constitution may for a time be lost: the character of the country cannot be lost. . . I do not give up my country. I see her in a swoon, but she is not dead. Though in her tomb she lies helpless and motionless, still there is on her lips a spirit of life, and on her cheek a glow of beauty."

*"Thou art not conquered; beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson on thy lips, and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there."*

While a plank of the vessel sticks together I will not leave her. Let the courtier present his flimsy sail, and carry the light barque of his faith with every new breath of wind: I will remain anchored here, with fidelity to the fortune of my country, faithful to her freedom, faithful to her fall."

There is the ancient spirit, caught up by the Forty-Eight men, and again by the Fenians, and living imperishably in the men of to-day. "A nation does not die," said Pope Benedict. Ireland is the best proof of that. If a nation could be killed by human means Ireland were dead. But Ireland is neither dead nor conquered. Every word of Grattan's applies to the Lloyd George Government. We have but added the roll of a century of crime and oppression to the account that stood against John Bull in Grattan's day. We will never forget. Restitution of stolen liberty and a spoliated charter is the one basis of forgiveness. And so, we wait and see.

DIocese OF DUNEDIN

Having advanced work for the occasion, to-day (St. Patrick's Day) is being observed as a close holiday in the *Tablet* office.

The Sisters of Mercy, South Dunedin, acknowledge with thanks a gift of £1 for the orphans from an anonymous donor, Oamaru.

On Sunday next (Palm Sunday) the palms will be blessed and distributed prior to the celebration of the various Masses.

The following pupils of St. Patrick's Dominican College, Teschemakers, were successful at the recent examinations:—Intermediate: Mary Ny, Reta Brown. Public Service: Leila Biggins, Alice Annett. Teachers Class D: Winifred Mary Boland. Teachers Class C: English and French, Winifred Mary Boland.

A friendly cricket match was played on Monday afternoon, at the Caledonian Grounds, between teams representing John McGlashan College and the Christian Brothers' School. The college team led off with 40,

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