Irish Review (Dublin)

The Intellectuals. An Experiment in Irish Club Life. by Canon Sheehan

The Irish Review (Dublin), Vol. 1, No. 4 (Jun., 1911), pp. 207-208

Published by: [Irish Review \(Dublin\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30062704>

Accessed: 16/06/2014 02:57

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NEW BOOKS

The case *against* Ireland having power over Customs and Excise is, in short, that she is as likely to obtain a brand new republic from England as to obtain the right of setting up Customs barriers within the United Kingdom. At a time when the United States and Canada are actually knocking down, to a great extent, their tariff walls, it would be the merest clap-trap to pretend that we have the slightest chance of getting the power to set up such walls in Ireland. There is no use, in sane politics, in leading the people to believe that they can have the moon if they shout loud enough ; this moon, anyhow, they cannot get. Are we, then, in an *impasse*? Mr. Kettle throws out a suggestion of a middle course—namely, that we revert to the condition of affairs previous to 1853, when the Excise duties were assimilated between Ireland and England. Before that date, even under a unitary administration, there were different duties. Customs duties, such as those on tea, cocoa, sugar, tobacco, &c., present a slightly more troublesome problem, but with good-will they might, perhaps, also be differentiated, if necessary—the Irish Parliament having, of course, control over such adjustments.

For any one who desires a brightly written and informing conspectus of the whole financial question, which will, no doubt, become a burning one in a few months' time, this *brochure* of 96 pages may be confidently recommended. Its value is enhanced by appendices which contain the financial provisions of the previous Home Rule Bills, as well as the amendments, carried in Committee, to the financial clauses of the 1893 Bill.

FREDERICK RYAN.

“THE INTELLECTUALS.” An Experiment in Irish Club Life. By CANON SHEEHAN, D.D. London: LONGMANS, GREEN & CO. 6s.

ONE has to read well into this book to realise that Canon Sheehan is not indulging in a prolonged and rather tedious satire—a satire on the manners of the petty bourgeois society of a little Cork town. It is apparently to be taken, *à la* Balzac, as one of Canon Sheehan's *scènes de la vie de province*. As such it is deadly. A certain Father Dillon gets the idea of starting a sort of private literary and debating society, very limited and “select,” the members of which are to meet in each other's houses in regular rotation. There is Mr. Skelton, the bank manager, and Mrs. Skelton ; Dr. Holden, the local practitioner, and Mrs. Holden ; Prof. Sedgwick, of the Queen's College ; Miss Hester Hope, B.A. ; Miss Fraser, and a Mr. Reginald Hunt, a young Englishman who has come over as assistant engineer in the navy yard. The name of the society is the “Sunetoi,” a characteristic touch of affectation at the very start ; and affectation is the note of this little hot-house coterie from beginning to end. The number of times Mrs. Holden whispers to Mrs. Skelton, and that Miss Hope “sweetly smiles” at Mr. Hunt, or that Father Dillon “gently turns” the conversation, are uncountable, but Canon Sheehan dutifully records them all for the edification

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of the reader. At the beginning they do meet in each other's places, according to rule, but after a brief experiment it gets to meeting alternately in Mrs. Skelton's and Mrs. Holden's. Canon Sheehan, with an industry that is remarkable, gives us a full account of the proceedings of this group through thirty-seven solid "sessions." They pose delightfully before each other; they throw Greek and Latin and French and Italian quotations freely at each other; they mention casually that they take their holidays often up the Rhine; they refer familiarly to Euripides and Tolstoy, Goethe and Tourgenieff. And yet, for all their super-culture, for which we take Canon Sheehan's word, they are an astonishing lot. They cannot bear to come within remote range of any serious issue, or Father Dillon goes through a nervous crisis lest there should be an explosion. As the reviewers generally put it, "the story is coloured with a delicate love interest." Mr. Reginald Hunt, who is a Protestant, is attracted by the charms of Miss Hope, who is prepared to faintly blush on the slightest provocation. Miss Hope is a Catholic, and so Mr. Hunt begins to take a quite serious and sincere interest in the theological arguments for Catholicism, and to be duly impressed thereby.

What is one to say of such a book? As a work of fiction, it is frankly wearisome. Not that, here and there, some of the talks are not in their way interesting, but Canon Sheehan plainly has not the faculty of making the whole thing live, and, in addition, it is far too long. As a picture of the society dealt with it may be valuable, though extremely depressing. One may take leave to doubt whether the temperature of the hot-house is not too high and the atmosphere a little too oppressive. Canon Sheehan, however, in his preface gravely puts the thing forward as "a possibility which the author hopes lies latent in the future that is before his country, when, under the influences of wider and more rational systems of education, the barriers of racial and sectarian prejudices may be broken down, and the higher humanities accepted as an integral portion of social and domestic life." Canon Sheehan's aspirations for the breaking down of sectarian and race barriers are obviously honourable and sincere. It is, of course, a common-place to-day that Ireland has suffered grievously in the past, and suffers to some extent still, from the existence of such barriers. But it is surely an extravagance to imagine that the problem will be seriously affected by little hole and corner meetings of provincial prigs such as Canon Sheehan draws in his pages, and who, judging by their conversations, have as much serious relationship to the life of their town or their nation as the brass handle on Mr. Skelton's bank door.