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Notes and Comments

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All Ireland Review.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 1902.

VOL III.—No. 7.]

EDITED BY STANDISH O'GRADY.

[ONE PENNY.]

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Notes and Comments.

At the conclusion of a most scholarly, well reasoned, and eloquent address upon Irish influences upon English literature delivered recently before the Literary Society, Professor Yorke Powell, Professor of History in the University of Oxford, said, very deliberately, that the first literary study of an Irishman ought to be the study of the Irish language. Mr. Yorke Powell has been a subscriber to this paper from the start, and we are very glad to be able to publish his justification of our Gaelic column which, we confess, we started without any serious intention. He is now paying his first visit to Ireland, and intends going to see Tara, Teltown and other Irish places that have a significance in the native literature.

Mr. WYNDHAM's Bill will almost certainly not become law this Session. At the same time its introduction has compelled us, once again, to think about the land question, which is, I believe, an infinitely greater question than we, as a rule, imagine it to be. For the land question is the Ireland question, and the battle which is being now fought out, these current years, *re* the land, is, for us Irish, the question of questions—who owns Ireland? The Irish land question has been fought out a good many times. In 1172 there was a fight inaugurated by Dermot MacMurrough, De Clare (Strongbow), FitzStephen and their Dutch-Norman followers. There is a great deal of the blood of that stubborn Dutch breed in the country, which I regard, to use one of the phrases of the late Cecil Rhodes, as one of our "assets." Mr. Wyndham's Bill won't pass, but, in the meantime, it is making us think about the land question, and in spite of all the talk that has been going on round the question, for as long as I can remember, there has been, in my opinion, no honest, sincere, Irish thinking about the subject at all; up to date landlords and tenants, and landlords and tenants only, have had the field all to themselves hitherto, as if the land question were an exclusively landlord and tenant question; which it is not. It is a question which concerns all of us. We have, all of us, some right, claim, and title to this our native land. In the coming years these rights will be defined, or denied, or ignored.

I WRITE these lines at Freshford, on the borders of the Queen's County and the County of Kilkenny, accomplishing so, part of a purpose which I have long entertained, that of travelling round Ireland and studying the country and the people, for I think that a man who undertakes to write about ALL IRELAND ought at least to do his best to understand the subject about which he writes, and collect and consider all the information that he can concerning

it. This is one of the few Irish Counties in which agriculture survives. It is still, strange to say, an agricultural County, on the whole, though the bullock is very invasive, and if things go on as they are going, he will probably master the County in twenty years. Here, too, unless we can stop him, Bos will rule the country, and Homo will be in England or America. Things are tending, and steadily, in that direction; towards the absolute dominion of Bos—Bos and his masters. The rent of agricultural land here, very good land as I believe it to be, is about 11s. an acre, first term rents, which certainly looks like a poor agricultural result when compared with the rent paid cheerfully and joyfully by an English farmer settled in Guernsey, whose acquaintance I made during my visit to the Island. He was a certain Mr. Cobbe, and he paid six hundred pounds per acre for the fee-simple of the plot of Guernsey ground that he bought. Now, the current rate of interest in the island is 5 per cent. Consequently, Mr. Cobbe was paying £30 a year per acre as rent for the use of his land. Farmers here in the north of the County of Kilkenny are paying 9s. or 11s. per acre, and think that their landlords are destroying them with rent.

THE fact is that the great wave of scientific and intensive agriculture which has rolled over so many European countries, notably Belgium, France, and the Channel Islands, is only beginning to make its presence and its power felt in Ireland. Within the next ten years it will be here in full force, and land worth 10s. an acre per annum to-day will be worth £10 an acre to-morrow. And so the Irish land question, about which no one is thinking at all seriously, assumes, in the eyes of one who contemplates it, huge national proportions. While this great wave of agriculture and horticulture is coming in we are being invited to buy Ireland, and, having bought, give it over to the graziers at a rent of about 7s. 6d. or 5s. an acre, land that, in the near future, may be worth £10 an acre, and near the great cities, worth £15 an acre, and in the South-West and West may be worth what understanding Englishmen are paying for land to-day in the Channel Islands, £30 an acre, £600 for the fee-simple of an acre. Irish land is going to be of immense value from a pecuniary point of view, and, at such a moment, we—we, the Irish nation—are invited to buy it from its owners and give it over, for a song, to the occupiers, who have no more claim to its ownership than those of us who neither own nor occupy. This is a great question, and one which we are determined shall not be settled over our heads by the owners and the occupiers.

Bos is important, no doubt. I think his importance is over-estimated. I travelled yesterday between Dublin and Kildare, and counted all the specimens of that genus observable on the right hand side of the railway and as far as the eye could reach. In all that noble and fertile land I only counted forty-two, to which number I add ten on account of the railway cuttings which, now and then, obstructed my view. Add another fifty for the other side of the railway and consider the result. Between Dublin and Kildare, an utterly depopulated country, there are observable from the train about one hundred bullocks. And to make room for these few vile quadrupeds we have expelled the people. The remains of their little agricultural holdings are still quite visible; everywhere the bushes and hawthorns, sad memorials and remnants of the fences of old time, when a people, a quiet, innocent, docile, rather child-like people, filled this vast unoccupied prairie. And, is it not a shame and a scandal, and will no young Irish hero with sense in his head, and strength in his hand, and courage in his heart, come out before us all and have a fight about it? If he wants something to have a fight about can he have a greater than this?

HERE in the North Kilkenny I find farm labourers' wages about 9s. a week without "diet," 5s. or 6s. with. Those who are the fortunate occupiers of plots and houses under the Acts pay 8d. a week. Those who rent cottages pay 8d. a week for the cottage without any land. There

is, of course, here a ready-made grievance which agitators might lay hold of to kindle a flame. Why should one agricultural labourer have a good house and a plot at a rent of 8d. a week, and another agricultural labourer pay 8d. a week for a very wretched cottage without any land at all. But the labourers in this part of Ireland, so far as I can understand them, seem to be a great deal too meek and humble to ask for their share in the general land settlement. Like the artisans in the great towns they think it a question between landlords and tenants with which they are not concerned.

* *

THERE is no reason that I can understand why the occupier of Irish ground should be converted into a proprietor, while there are a great many good reasons why he should not be converted into a proprietor. Take the case of a tenant paying £100 a year rent, and let us suppose that his landlord is bought out at 17 years' purchase, or £1,700, which the State can raise at 2½, or at the outside 3 per cent., and so reduce his rent to £40 or £50 a year. If he is not satisfied with such a reduction he will never be satisfied at all. But why compel him to pay up the principal? The land is there always, always a good security for the money; for, whoever comes and goes, the land remains, and Irish land, in my humble opinion, is going to be of far greater value than it has been up to date. In fine, is there any good reason at all of any kind, any reason which can show itself why we, the Irish Nation, having bought out the owners of the soil should proceed to give it away to the occupiers. They are just occupiers, nothing more and have no more right to be made the owners than any one else in the country. If any one capable of thought will think about land and its relation to man, he will see that land by its very nature ought not to be made private property. But we, having actually bought Ireland are invited to parcel it out, divide it up amongst a lot of people who have no claim whatsoever, beyond the fact that at the moment they happen to be the occupiers. If we buy Ireland I would suggest that we should, keep at least, some of it for ourselves and future generations. Peasant proprietorship just now really means Ireland for the graziers. Ireland for the least admirable and desirable class in the country.

* *

WHAT here follows is an independent opinion concerning Deirdre from one for whose judgment and right feeling I have a great respect:—

DEAR A.I.R.,—It is precisely because I did rely on the report of others, on whom I thought I could rely, that I now stand disenchanted and disillusioned with regard to the Heroic History of Ireland. I pictured Conchobar as a model of all that was heroic. And now, I learn that in the original story he is a "very bad man, even worse than he is in the play." Besides, this is evidently not the only story that places him in an unheroic light.

Now that I know more about the original legends, I can understand you, and sympathise with you in your wish, that they should not be given to the people as they are, and especially that they should not come down through the Drama and the Stage. Viewed in their outer form the characters in Deirdre appear precisely as Icha-bod has described them. They are not lovely or heroic at all. Illaun was the only one of them who appealed to me.

Still the nation should have its legends in some form. They would supply some of that very power which you say lies behind them, which this people lack, and for which they are instinctively groping. In what form would you propose to give them to us? And why is it that the Danes and the Germans are able to add the study of their legends to their national educational system? and with such apparently good results too. I know that the legend of Deirdre has various inner meanings; but will you give us the possible historical basis of it.

pionnscoč.

[DEAR F.—I think the story of Deirdre has a historical basis; but, mind, I am only guessing. I think it represents an actual conflict, religious and military, between the famous military religious centre of Meath, the Hill of Uisnech, and the more famous centre of the North, Emain Macha, in which conflict Emain Macha was victorious. The story, then, if so much is conceded, was first told, then popularised, and perpetuated by the defeated nation or religion, which would account for the appearance in it of Conchobar, in the character of chief

villain. The Hill of Uisnech was certainly identified with the worship of fire. Do you remember the story I told you last year about the Druid, Midhe, who established his fire religion here, and put all Ireland under a great tax to support it? Emain Macha represented the worship of those of the Tuatha De Dannan who were connected with war, Macha the Red-maned, and her father, Aodh Ruadh, Aodh, the Red, especially. All this is a guess, and, like our friend, M. M., I don't attach importance to my guesses; though I do think this one somewhere near the truth.—Ed.]

* *

DEAR A. E.,—How could you, or any one, imagine that I could have charged you above all men with writing a play that was not pure and refined? Why, purity and refinement are the key-notes of all your work that I have seen, and I don't think a line you ever wrote has escaped me. My quarrel is really with those who made the story of *Deirdre*. You dramatized the story very well and very beautifully, but the story itself which you in your rendering followed pretty closely—the story itself is an offence to me. Unfortunately the original is clever, highly dramatic, succinct and readable, and so has been read widely, and few people can read the story and afterwards quite believe in Conchobar as the hero-king.

* *

Now, if we lose Conchobar we lose the Red Branch, for we cannot continue to believe in those who were the knights and followers of such a captain as the scoundrel of the *Deirdre* story. So, we lose the heroic period altogether, unless we can remake it, building it up anew out of the centres of honour, faithfulness, courage, and affection, which we know are in that literature, and along with them, that strange sense of masterfulness and power of which I wrote last week. The power of it was what so affected me. Then—if I may talk a little about myself—I took those centres to which I have referred and retold the stories around them, forgetting all that was vile, remembering only the noble. For example, I found these lines concerning Sualtam's son, the god-like Cuculain:—

"He spake not a boasting word,
Nor vaunted he at all,
Though marvellous were his deeds."

* *

So I determined to make humility the grand feature of his character, and dismissed from my mind all the stories and traditions that conflicted with the note, which I determined to make dominant in the poor music that I raised around his name. Then I found Cuculain fond of his uncle Conchobar, and faithful to him, and I found Conchobar in other stories figure grandly and conspicuously as the hero-king, and so determined to have nothing to do with such stories as *Deirdre*, or any other (for there are some) in which Conchobar Mac Nessa has been vilified. I think we must all re-consider our relations with the heroic literature and think seriously on the question how we are to deal with it, if we are to deal with it at all. I confess I would not like myself to hand it all over to Dryasdust. When I get that house and plot at the foot of Dunamase you must come to see me there, and we shall reconsider the matter sitting in that clear-aired castled and classic height, and looking out over the glorious champaign of Mid-Erin, Hugo de Lacy's great domain. It is a droll thought in my mind that I might study the land question more effectually on the Rock of Dunamase than elsewhere. We may there, too, together reconsider the heroic literature, and how it can best be dealt with—if to be dealt with at all—as a means of educating our young people.

* *

NEAR Freshford there is a great rath, locally known as Rath Beothach, the Rath of the Living Creature. Beothach is one of the very first names in Irish History. Some time before the Flood—we shall not mind the date—the lady Ceasair came into Ireland, accompanied by three men and their followers. The men were Beothach, Ladra, and Finntann. I have been to-day inspecting the huge tumulus in which Beothach was interred. It covers about two acres of ground, and is all overgrown with fir trees. There are the remains of a fosse and rampart near the top. Rathes of the kind, with or without circumvallations are common enough in Ireland; the peculiarity of the great moate at Freshford is that it is associated with the very first line of the Chronicles of this country.

Our friend, M. M., who came out so gallantly when the "distinguished scholars" refused to write me a line, has promised to send us an essay dealing with these characters. Of Beothach, I suspect there is nothing known at all. The name seems to imply mere existence, an adjectival form of the verb "to be." Violets and primroses were flourishing on the grave of the "Living Creature."

THE IRISH PLAYS.

The production of A. E.'s "Deirdre," and W. B. Yeats' "Kathleen Ni Houlihan," by Mr. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company, at St. Teresa's Hall, Clarendon-street, has roused considerable interest. "Deirdre" has been published in A. I. R. It is founded on the well-known Irish legend, which forms, with "The Children of Lir," and the "Sons of Turinn," the three sorrowful stories of Ireland. "Deirdre" is the Gaelic Helen, and, in dramatizing her story, A. E. has endeavoured to embody, as far as it is possible, the strange, sorrowful, beauty which finds no home in any heart, or in the world, but shines for a moment in a life time, and the hopes and plans of years go down before it, as Troy fell before Helen and the Red Branch flamed to ruin at the coming of Deirdre. By the rhythmic beauty of his sentences; by the rise and fall of emotions which never break into discordant violence; by careful grouping of the actors, and the choice of a colour scheme, A. E. tries to create in the mind of the spectators the mood through which ideas of beauty flash like radiant figures in a dream. His play is not realistic; it is not a study of character; it does not enforce a moral idea; it scarcely even tells a story; it is rather like a strain of music carrying a sweet and subtle enchantment. Like a strain of music, if it does not fascinate, it fails completely, and as a jarring note breaks the harmony, so a gesture or the tone of a voice is enough to spoil a scene. "Deirdre," as a play, makes the utmost demand on those who act it, since it is by suggesting, rather than by expressing emotion, that they must succeed. All the actors in the Fay Company worked at their parts most enthusiastically, and it is difficult to imagine anything more satisfactory than Mr. Diggs' presentation of "Naisi." Two remarks overheard on the first night give an idea of the effect of the play on the audience. At the end of the first act a man turned to his neighbour, and said wearily, "How am I to sit through three acts of this sing-song thing!" At the end of the third act, a bright-eyed old man, who had been listening intently all the time, bent forward to say to a friend enthusiastically, "That's something like a play; that's the play for me!"

Kathleen Ni Houlihan shows us the inside of a peasant's cottage in the west. An old man, Peter, is talking to his wife about their son Michael who is to be married in the morning. The old man is proud of the bargain he has made with the girl's father and the wife is looking over the wedding clothes. There is a sound of distant cheering, and they pause in their talk and wonder what it means. The son enters and there is more talk of Delia and the wedding, broken again by cheering, which seems to have come now to the very door of the cottage. The latch is lifted and an old woman enters, with the "God save all here!" of the country folk. She sits by the fire crooning a strange old song to herself. Michael goes and sits beside her; he would fain know who she is and whence she comes. The old couple are disquieted; they offer food and money but their gifts are refused. "Who would help me must give me all—he must give me himself." When the stranger rises to go they ask her name—she replies, "Some call me 'the poor old woman' and some call me 'Kathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.'" While they are wondering, she passes through the door chanting a song that had come to her on the wind. There is a burst of cheering, and Michael's brother enters with the news, "The French have landed in Killala!" Michael stands as if dazed; Delia, who has come in with Michael's brother, goes up to him, and Bridget tries to coax him to the fire, but the voice of the stranger chanting her song of Death and Victory comes through the open door, and Michael breaks from his mother and sweetheart to follow the Shan Van Vocht.

It is an exquisite little play, and the simplicity of the dialogue and its quaint peasant humour form a most effective setting for the wild, strange songs Kathleen chants to herself. Short as the play is, Mr. Yeats has contrived by a few masterly touches to make the characters live. The shrewd old peasant with his love of bargaining;

the kindly, practical wife; Michael with his latest enthusiasm; the strange woman for whom so many lovers had died; all are real; and after one night one seems to have known them a long time. The acting was very good. Mr. Fay, as the peasant father, brought down the house; Miss Quinn, as Bridget, was splendid; so was Mr. Diggs as Michael, while Miss Walker's Delia, and Mr. Caulfield's Patrick were most excellent. Kathleen was played by Miss Gonne, but she could scarcely be said to act the part—she lived it. She was the veritable Shan Van Vocht, and when she entered the little fire-lit room there came with her a sense of tragedy and the passion of deathless endeavour. When she drew herself proudly to her full height as Kathleen Ni Houlihan, old age fell away from her, and for one short moment she was Kathleen of the poets, "star-crowned, victory-compelling, girt, with a beauty immortal." E.Y.

Correspondence.

INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE.

TO THE EDITOR OF ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

DEAR MR. O'GRADY.—I am glad to see you are maintaining your keen interest in intensive cultivation. I thought, perhaps, these old evidences of sincere faith, now nearly twelve years old, and I think, before Kropotkin's days too, which then were not, but now are to be met with on all sides, might give you evidence and proofs of facts which you would find useful. Make any use you like of them, but do, pray, keep me, at any rate, in the background—behind the scenes altogether, I hope, in A.I.R.

You are terrible for bringing your contributors into the very midst of the company with the most sudden, disquieting, and informal of introductions.

[Yes, I want good reading, and when it comes my way in it goes.—ED.]

Try and return me the cuttings some day, though I suppose I must forgive you if you lose them.

That valued cutting from "Fainne an Lae," that got on your traces up Mount Leinster has, I suppose, "gone down the wind," so I have but poor hopes of ever seeing it again.

Farewell, *asur beannacht leat.*

Mire.

[Yes, but a most pure, noble, and gracious wind, the wind that blows over Blackstairs and Mount Leinster. Dear C., I go about with all my pockets stuffed with letters, bills, receipts, cheques, poetry, friendly letters, hostile letters, poetry, prose, &c., &c., and can't help losing things now and then.—ED. A.I.R.]

—:o:—

Gaelic Poetry.

TO THE EDITOR OF ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

DEAR S.—Your "second daughter" spoils the poem, but she is not genuine—an obvious gloss.

The phonetic rendering vocalizes the verse as near as letters can; and what is language but sound?

I shall not learn Gaelic, but the revival of the spoken tongue has all my good wishes. Why, I ask again, encumber learners with the most archaic and complicated orthography in literature, or dazzle with an unnecessary alphabet eyes that can but imperfectly follow the sufficient Roman print? Your scholars are the ploughboy dining under the hedge, the maid at leisure for a minute after the morning milking, or the weary cook falling asleep on the kitchen table over her O'Growney.

Is it not common sense, as it is sound scholarship, to make a difficult task as easy as may be for people like me? I believe you think so. Go and say it "very loud and clear." R.

[DEAR R.—I don't think that you are such a philosopher as you used to be. Don't you know that difficulty, of a limited kind, adds a charm to everything? I found it so in billiards, I found it so in golf. When I became a good billiard player and a good golf player I ceased to take an interest.

You are quite wrong about the letters and the orthography of the Gaelic. The letters are a great charm and incentive; and the orthography, once you understand the trick of it, makes the pronunciation quite easy.

I suppose you know at least that "roo" is Irish for "red." Is it not a pleasure to know that the true Gaelic for red has a "d" in it, and that the word is "ruadh?"

We the Irish love vowel sounds, and so we have abolished the final "d" in this word.

Can you conclude anything from our national and racial modern hatred of consonants?

(Continued on page 105).