A. I. R.: Its History and Purposes

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EDITED BY STANDISH O'GRADY.

[ONE PENNY.]

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A. I. R.—ITS HISTORY AND PURPOSES.

DEAR MR. O'GRADY—I enclose my subscription for current year to your delightful paper, which I always read with pleasure and instruction, and to which and yourself I wish every success.—Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM LECKY.

DEAR MR. LECKY—Thank you very much for your continued support and for this welcome recognition of A. I. R.'s efforts to bring Irish men and women, of the thinking and kindly sort, more or less together in a certain neutral ground between these angry Irish camps.

Your letter was addressed to the editor, and not marked private, and for these and other reasons, I don't think you will object to my printing it—the kindly and unsolicited commendation of the admitted chief of the singular modern order, to which, in differing degrees, we have the honour to belong.

You have been one of my supporters since, in January 1900, I started this curious literary enterprise which so many of my good friends, from the commencement, condemned as certain to fail after a few weeks' trial and as certain, in its failure, to bring down a great deal of trouble upon myself.

"Bound to come a cropper in six weeks," wrote one who knows more about the publishing of things at the same time Irish and intellectual, and the sure consequences awaiting all efforts of that nature, than, I think, almost any one else, a distinguished editor and publisher, and a good friend to me, too, from that day to this.

And yet, though every signal showed "danger," though my little pilot engine and myself ran dead against the signals, we are now running on those thin rails well in upon the third year, and not only have the collapse and crash not come, but, frankly, I don't see, at

least within the scope of ordinary eyesight, where and how they can arrive. And I have often thought of writing to you and to other old friends to tell you the history of A. I. R., but have always postponed, perceiving the degree of energy I would have to send out in doing so, knowing well, too, that my writing faculty was as it were, mortgaged to many clamorous and insistent creditors.

Now, it occurs to me that I may at the same time tell you these things, and also my many other good friends and subscribers, and, in a not unwelcome manner perhaps, in doing so fill up a few columns of my paper, which has got to be, to such a large extent, written by myself; literary subscribers of the kind that I want, being so very backward in coming forward.

In the Autumn of 1899 I was in the ownership of an Irish County newspaper and printing establishment. I perceived that this paper being strictly confined, owing to its nature, to that particular locality, did not enable me to appeal for support to my friends scattered over Ireland and Great Britain, and that my connection, which was considerable, and from which I did not like to be quite cut off, could not at all get into touch with me over a purely Provincial-Irish and local organ.

I therefore determined to start an extra page of that paper—to be filled with generally readable matter—and with two or three works published in instalments, which I was anxious to get printed. I thought to print the matter, week by week, keep the types up, and, so, print the books at the smallest expense. You will understand the necessity for thrift in everything that relates to Irish publications.

Then it occurred to me, "why burthen the readers of that extra page with the weight of the reports of the proceedings of our local courts of justice, of our local poor law guardians and lunatic asylums, etc., etc.;" and so I determined to send out to my extern friends one single broad sheet by itself, that extra leaf of the county paper, with literary and other readable matter on one side, and advertisements, if I could get them, on the other. Then it occurred to me, why not fold the broad sheet in two, making out of it four pages, and send it out so, like one of our old-fashioned eighteenth century papers. "Pugh's Occurrences," for example. In which mood I went to Belfast in October, '99, where I have many good friends, one of whom said to me, why not fold the leaf twice? It will make a nice little eight-page weekly, and in that form won't be singular." I agreed with that suggestion, and you will remember that till I brought the printing into Dublin in September last year, A. I. R. was just one leaf of a country Irish paper folded twice.

The next difficulty was the advertisements; for you, perhaps, know quite as well as myself that the subscribers and the general circulation of

a penny paper, be they as considerable as they may, will not maintain, even under such favourable circumstances as were mine then, even the bare cost of production and of the paper merchant's bill. I employed canvassers for advertisements, but they could not get me one! Seeing the absolute necessity that had come upon me for personal action—if the little paper was to start at all—I determined to go to Dublin, take off my coat there and collect those ads. myself. And I did it, by dint of bluff, and brag, and good-humour, and good-nature and old relations with the mercantile classes in Dublin, and returned to the country knowing that A. I. R. was furnished with at least legs upon which to march, or even with wings on which to fly.

Every one of the advertisements which kept A. I. R. on the wing from January 6, 1900, to September 6, 1901, was got by myself, in personal interviews, and not without the expenditure of more of my available vitality and energy than I could well spare. Then I cut down the cost of management to the very lowest point possible, consistently with mere existence, using a Spartan thrift and economy everywhere, and sailing, as it were, under bare poles; and so, contradicted all the prophets of evil and kept A. I. R. doing his weekly stage for near two years, till I sent the docile industrious sprite to endure his weekly re-incarnations in the Capital, in twelve pages instead of eight, on paper double in thickness, and at a cost of production and management concerning which and our other subsequent experiences, I may tell you the curious story—some day.

As to A. I. R.'s policy and general character—apart from the weekly publication of instalments of my books—they consisted, as you know, of little more than a weekly chat with my friends—a characteristic which I have, for, I think, sound reasons, maintained to the present moment, and of which the foregoing letter is a rather bare-faced example.

As to the policy which the paper ought to pursue, I confess I never thought very seriously about that. I only desired to establish a certain medium of communication between myself and my friends, and as to graver purposes beyond the gratification of this desire, and the pleasure arising from self-expression and seeing my poor yarns grow week by week, "Mr. Goodenough," "The Spaniards in Ireland" and others, I had hardly any purpose, rightly so-called, nor indeed have, I think, any to-day, though I knew that people attribute to me many deep and Jesuitical designs.

Politically I have been always a member of your own Party, not through any love for them; for is there a trait or characteristic of our Party calculated to stir the enthusiasm of any rational Irish Conservative? But just because I belonged to a certain camp, and was never given any sufficient reason why I should go out of it, and

separate myself from my friends and join another in which I had none.

Also being innately conservative, I thought it best on the whole to keep things as they are, as long as they will hold together, and not desert an old house, and join in smashing it up, because some one said he was going to build a new one somewhere and some when, and with materials that he hoped to get. And so, thinking a citizen should vote, I cast pretty regularly three votes for our party. I believe I have four at present, and might have five if I liked, being in that respect a bloated pluralist, though I should be just as well satisfied with one as five, and, indeed, with none as with one. However, in the end, finding in myself a great barrenness as to public purposes and designs, I decided just to let myself and my aimlessness, and my good nature and good humour, and whimsies, moods, and fancies, too, play through the little paper, and let its original and editorial columns, for good or ill, be just a sort of reflection of myself. "If I mean anything," I argued, "the paper will mean it; if I mean nothing, things can't be improved, for, while I can stand, A. I. R. shant become the organ of any of these roaring, tyrannical parties, or of these organised, man-devouring, disciplined interests. Good, bad, or indifferent, there will be at least a human being in it."

Also it sometimes occurs to me that in this respect I may possibly be on the right track after all, and be more sensible than I seem. There are things in human nature that would appear to need an organ of expression quite as much as the wolfish factions and the people-devouring interests. That common average kindliness and good nature, with its resulting courtesy and graciousness, which we experience every day and everywhere—in the street, in the train, in town and field, in the cabin and the castle; the poetry and romance, too, the sentiment and fun which are everywhere—do not all these things deserve a medium of expression as much as Mr. Chamberlain's foreign policy, or the wrath of the shouting camps, or the rapacity and sheer wordliness of the Railway Interest, the Liquor Interest, or any other of these allied powers that spring from "the root," we know, and which, in our time, seem to be about to extinguish, not only the Constitution, eating up alike the Crown, the Lords, and the Commons, but threaten to quench the very flame and light of ancient and natural human liberty?

So, in more cheerful moments, I think I may be the pioneer of a new kind of journalism, more natural, simple, human, and sincere than that to which we have grown accustomed, and that, possibly, I may be now led by as true an instinct as that which guided me once when I laughed at the laughers while concerning myself seriously with the mythical and fabulous heroic and romantic ages of our strange history; for, since then, many have followed and are following that trek into the wilds. Possibly now, too, A.I.R. may be a sort of pioneer.

One word more, and I shall have done. Many years ago when in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, I was reading everything I could discover about the Tuatha De Danann and their more human children, the heroes and heroines of the Red Branch, a tall,

scholarly-looking man used to come in every day and surround himself with books and MSS. at a table opposite to my own, and full in view. It was yourself! I knew you and what you were doing; for the less always knows the greater while the greater does not know the less. And I thought it a curious coincidence, which it was, that two Irishmen should be working together there at subjects so far removed in time and in every other respect. I at mine in the starry dim twilight and misty dawn of our History, and you at yours in the wild glare of what looks like its lurid and stormy close. And so farewell, dear Mr. Lecky, and, once more, thanks both for the 6s. 6d. and for the kind words which accompanied it; and I dare say you never before have been asked to read such a long-winded receipt.

Complaints have been made about my not sending receipts, but you will admit that when I do write one, it is with a vengeance!

RE TEINNE CRABHA.

TO THE EDITOR OF ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

DEAR SIR—Your correspondent from Conneimara is perfectly right in his statement that bonefires are called *teinne crába*, or more correctly, I think, *teinne crábac*; but I think if he extends his enquiries among his Irish-speaking acquaintances along the Corrib shore or amid the mountains of his native district he will, I think, find that *crám* (bone) is more usually pronounced *cráb*, the letter *r* very frequently taking the place of *n* in the Irish of North Galway. Thus, *cna* (a nut) is pronounced *cra* in my native district; at least I have never heard it otherwise sounded, nor have I ever heard any other word for bone but *cráb* or *crám*. I think, too, that *teinne crába*, assuming *crába* to mean worship, would not be good Irish for "worship fire." As regards the rest of your correspondent's letter, the old men did almost invariably at the bonefires I have attended take a glowing coal from the fire, but certainly could not have taken it when the fire was nearly burnt out, as they did not stay more than a few hours; nor did they light up the fire on the hearth, for by the time they got home that was generally "raked" or covered up with ashes to keep it alive till morning, as matches for fire lighting purposes were not then in vogue, nor are they now among the peasantry, for with them the fire is indeed perpetual, being carefully covered up every night. The idea associated with bonefire "coals" is not among the peasantry at least that of "vestal" perpetuity, but rather they regard the fire as radiating purificatory, or, more correctly, anti-demoniac, influences. I regret I have not time to enter at greater length on this topic, but would recommend your correspondent to ask his Irish-speaking friends what they mean by *teinne crábac* or by the word *crába* itself. He will, I think, find that the words suggest no idea of worship to their minds. Besides *crába*, in the sense intended by your correspondent, does not mean worship; at best it indicates only a mode of worship. The word *crábaíro* I have heard used hundreds of times as a term of contempt. Of course, it really meant a

hermit, but in its modern applications it is more frequently a term of reproach applied to a man of miserly qualities. No doubt, this sense of the word was suggested by the ascetic economy of the ancient hermits.—Yours truly,

M. M.

TO THE EDITOR OF ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

DEAR O'G.—I hope A.I.R. will prove a success, but I am afraid that an Irish paper which is not distinctively political or sectarian (though yours does not quite avoid these topics) has not the best prospects. The MSS. of the New Testament are matters in which I take—or at least took—a great interest. But very few of your readers will do so. To the Roman Catholic the Vulgate entirely supersedes these manuscripts, and many Protestants will be furious if you imply that the last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel are spurious, though I am sure if we could get hold of the original it would make 120 verses, probably more, instead of twelve. (Paul probably gives us a short abstract of it, and Luke makes an allusion to it in the first chapter of the Acts, indicating how defective his Gospel had been, but I doubt if we shall ever find this Gospel of the Resurrection).—Truly yours,

M.

TO THE EDITOR OF ALL IRELAND REVIEW

DEAR O'G.—Have you read "Australia Old and New," by J. G. Grey? He is much less optimistic and more inclined to be critical than Mr. Lloyd, but on the main point—that New Zealand some ten or fifteen years ago was in a bad way, credit shaky, revenue falling off, and industry languishing, and that all this is now changed very much for the better—there seems to be no difference of opinion, or room for doubt. The points of interest are, How much of this improvement is due to legislation, and how much to other causes? Is the improvement likely to be permanent? And then there is a third question interesting to ourselves, viz., How far are the New Zealand methods likely to be applicable to other countries that might like to see a change for the better in industry credit and revenue? I can send you the book.

M.

[Many thanks, dear M., please do.—ED. A.I.R.]

TO F.

DEAR F.—I dedicate this poem to you, though I think it is too wild, fierce, elemental, and revolutionary to be quite in your style. But it was written by the poet who wrote—

"Life of life thy lips enkindle,"

and other beautiful songs and lyrics which I know you like; and I want to give my poets, girls and boys, something that will make them sit up, and say to themselves: "This is something that I could not write. I must begin again before I can match this."

Observe the description of the sea agitated by tempest, and the silence of the flashing cannon—"dumb in the blast!"

I don't think myself that it is a love story at all. I think it is a vision of the escape of modern Europe with her lover, the genius of freedom, from the