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AN IRISH SUNRISE

By STANDISH O'GRADY

"AND GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHT, AND THERE WAS LIGHT; AND GOD SAW THE LIGHT THAT IT WAS GOOD."

I WRITE these lines on the side of one of our Wicklow mountains looking eastward over the Irish Sea, beyond which, faintly outlined, the Welsh Hills swim in mist. Beyond those quiet hills, unseen but unforgotten—who can ever forget him?—the great industrial English giant, roused by his hooting sirens, is just now awaking, to renew his endless labour—the mad Titan raging amid his huge industries, and beset by problems huger than his industries. As I look I seem to hear again, this transparent dewy morning, what I have heard so often in the black and dark night, that fierce, insistent, heart-torturing hoot, and hoot, and hoot of his sirens shouting for him to come work; and, afterwards, the thunder of his million-footed armies rushing to battle. To battle? With whom? Or with what? Or why? Or to what end? Why are those mad millions rushing to battle, those wild sirens hooting—all in the dewy morning?

The sun, not a foot above the horizon, lets me gaze my fill with undazzled eyes at his glowing disc. His intolerable meridian brightness is still veiled by the morning: I saw him set last night; saw him set, yet no night succeeded.

Mira cano. Sol occubuit; nox nulla secuta est.

Through the few fragrant twilight hours of the Monarch's absence he let us know that he was not far away. We saw the light banners of his radiant host borne round the northern horizon where he travelled, he and his armies, eastward, ever eastward, to the scene of his new red birth and diurnal glorious avatar.

Sol invictus! The unconquered Sun!

Why should Man choose one day out of the seven and call it his, when every one of them is his already? Is he not the daily creator of the day? Every day is the Sun's day.

Through those few hours of luminous shadow there was silence; and yet not silence; for the grouse were talking in the heather, and the night-jar reeling, for ever reeling, as he wheeled—beautiful singing creature, heard by all, seen by none—and at midnight a reed-warbler sang, and then, always, our little mountain streams kept tinkling, playing with liquid tender fingers upon their stony lyres. I distinguished the separate notes of three of them—the

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sweet innocents! And twice the cheerful cock announced to the world that all was well, and distant dogs barked: "Ware thief! I, the dog, am here. I am on guard." Then the glad lark soared, singing, from his bed in grass or heather, and the early crow intent on breakfast flew croaking past, and the brave blackbird and the cheerful thrush awoke and lifted up their voices.

Then, so heralded, so welcomed by glad singings pouring forth out of millions of innocent throats, the bird peoples of the Earth; Dawn, the silver-skirted, silent swift-runner Sol, advanced without sound out of the Orient, in her beauty stripped the shy earth bare, and unshadowed the world as she flew, sending out before her, her own millions and octillions of avant couriers clad in pearly grey. The beautiful, beautiful Dawn! the ever-pursued but never captured Dawn, for ever bride, but for ever virgin bride of the Morning Sun: type, for ever, of the loveliest thing that the world knows; girlhood, its sweetness, beauty, purity and goodness!

Girls of Ireland, beautiful daughters of the Dawn, will you help me? For I see and know that you can save us, save the world and liberate mankind, if you only will. I shall tell you clearly the why and how in due time. I see the great prophesy fulfilled, the Hero born of Woman with His heel on the Serpent's head. Remember, and do not fail me.

And as the Dawn passed westward, scattering the blanket of the dark, stripping Ireland bare, reaching out beyond Ireland, out westward over the Atlantic, then suddenly the flaming cause of all that vanguard of music and beauty, alike that of the dim, mysterious night and of the silver-skirted fleeting dawn, arose in his glory and looked benignantly over all his world, pouring forth over all his creatures, insect and bird and beast and Man, over all things animate and inanimate, the boundless floods of his light and fire. The warm light falls everywhere: over England's sooty Cities, over this gleaming Channel, over Ireland's vast Savannahs, following the Dawn over the Atlantic, silent everywhere. And, just as quietly and impartially, the lovely warm light falls upon this little sheet of white paper on which I write; on which I try to set down in stammering prose some weak echo of that half-heard, strong hymn of love and praise, which, if I could, I would so gladly utter with a full throat in thy honour, O most mighty, unfathomable fountain of living power. Yet who of men can praise thee rightly, praise thee at all in days like these, when the nations, each in proportion to its imagined greatness, have conspired to despise thee, seeking with dense material curtains of clay and stone to exclude thy blessed light, and hide themselves from thy vital ray? Obsessed, night-

mare driven, insane; who grope for wealth in the dark, and for happiness in obscure dens.

The wild seer of the Apocalypse in his vision of the coming of the great Judge and Avenger, saw the nations fleeing from His presence and heard them calling upon the rocks and mountains to cover them. But we actually and with our eyes see something still more wonderful. We see great nations, not alarmed by the coming of any judge or avenger, not as yet, laboriously concealing themselves from the loveliest and gentlest and most life-giving thing that we know, which is the Light. We see them rushing, as if panic-stricken, into their dens and hiding-places, seeking shelter everywhere, anywhere, provided only that they may so be able to escape from the light of thy glorious face, O Sun! And they call to each other, encouragingly, hoping by their clamour to subdue a little the universal terror.

"Come! hasten! It is day. Let us go down into the earth in our millions, into the holes that we have digged. Let us in our millions go into our smoke-bebannered tall factories, and serve well our iron demons there. Let us go into our dim offices and turn on artificial lights there, and worship well the great god, Mammon. He will save us; a few of us."

Here, out of Ireland, in the light of the great Ascending Sun, I declare that the civilisation which drives men to do such things and which blinds them as to their horror, is impious, unnatural, and accursed, and is doomed to perish, surely. I say that Nature meant Man to live in the Light, that he ought to live in the Light, and that he knows that he ought. He knows when the Sun rises and he himself leaves his couch, refreshed with sleep, and crosses the threshold of his home, Nature never meant him to go indoors again and spend the bright day there.

You know that I am speaking the truth.

Everything that lives loves the Sun, some very few things excepted, which Nature has made nocturnal, such as bats and moles, things of twilight and the dusk. They, in evading the light, follow loyally the law of their being. Man is not one of them. He belongs to the order of things that delight in the day and rejoice in the Sun. Excepting those nocturnal things, all creation delights in the light. The flowers open their hearts to the Sun, and for him pour forth their sweetness. The trees—why they are embodied sunlight, the Sun's fire miraculously transmuted. See the trees hewn, divided, and on the hearth; now the imprisoned flame which through their myriad green leaves, they once drank in at that fountain of fire—now it shoots forth, filling the home with kindly warmth and gay light, like

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a captured and escaping god; which perhaps it is. When the little Greek child heard the kindled timber crackling on the hearth, he used to cry:

“Hark! Hephaistos is laughing.”

Our own children, to whom the romance of life and such nature poetry are forbidden, cannot be prevented from being happy in the morning at the incoming of the light, and happy round the quivering flames of the hearth.

Earth and ocean rejoice in the Sun. The earth like a bride unveils all her beauty for him, her lord and lover. The sea, struck by his rays, shines and lightens—the myriad wavelets laugh and dance before him.

Why does man, only, flee from him, and at his coming bury himself in his dens of brick and stone? Why?

He loves the Sun surely; Nature has so made him that he must. Love of the light is born in him. But something has intervened, some unnatural thought or desire grown passionate, furious, reckless of consequences, has compelled him to expel this great natural and divine love of his heart, and to admit and cherish, in its stead, some other conflicting passion which drives him helpless into his dens, and to mean and joyless labour there till the Sun sets, when he is free to come forth again, he and the bat; Man, and the beetle, and the bat.

He cannot help it; some demon is driving him. Who or what is that demon? Look around and consider.

What is it that Man loves and worships more than the Sun? Is not something which, like the Sun, is round, a disc; and which resembles the Sun somewhat as to its colour? It wears the hue of the crocus and daffodil, while not alive like them, or like them fragrant, and, unlike those transitory fair daughters of the Sun, it is always in bloom. It is deader than the idols of old; but, like the idols of old, it, too, has a certain deadly power. It can drive men by millions into factories, offices, and shops. It whips the little child indoors out of the light, and chains to his desk the powerfully built athletic man in the prime of life, and the grey haired veteran of sixty. See the millions of its slaves, respectable decoy slaves, bowed over their desks the Planet over, chained to their desks as securely as ever were galley slaves to their oars.

And it can make murder respectable too, this all-but Almighty God; respectable and also glorious. See how it feeds, clothes, and trains other millions, the best human material it can get, and young and brave, and intelligent and loyal, and equips them with the costliest and most terrible engines of destruction, and drives them on to

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mutual fratricide, and the creation of widows and orphans and cripples.

It is the God of the earth; literally so. What other God is, or ever was, able to do such things? Then, too, it is an absurd God, the absurdest that men in their madness ever bowed down unto and worshipped. You can take this God and spin him upon the table with your thumb and forefinger! and he will spin! You can put him in your pocket and take him out again, and lay him on a counter, and he will stay there, till he is removed—this God of the whole earth; terrible heir of all the old extinct gods and demons, devils and idols, of old time.

And I want you, young men of Ireland, you before the rest, to begin the inevitable war against this brutal all-but Almighty God of the whole earth. Face him and he will flee before you: nay, face him and he will vanish. For he is at the same time all-but Almighty and nothing! a phantom, a figment of the imagination of Man. Somewhere upon the round earth this inevitable holy war, divine strife, this latest and greatest and last of all crusades will begin: I want it begun in Ireland, my own country, land of the Heroes and the Saints: Inis Fail. For I think that Destiny with its whips and scourges, and inflicted sufferings and punitory and purgatorial preparations, has better equipped us than the rest to take the lead here and begin the great Exodus. You especially, young men and young women of Ireland, boys and girls of Ireland, my appeal is chiefly to you. And I want you who are not young, and who for different reasons cannot share in that war, to arm and equip the young for that strife. I shall tell you how and exactly before I have done.

To return—my young host—he is only nineteen—emerges now from his hut, wearing his nocturnal loose pyjamas, a towel flung over his shoulders, and a big sponge in his hand. With a gay salutation to this scribbler he stalks up the hillside to enjoy his morning bath, where he has deepened, widened and lined with concrete, a little natural pool, made by one of the streamlets which I heard tinkling through the night.

Some one has made him a present of this bit of the Wicklow Highlands, and here he has built himself certain small huts, not indeed astonishing forms of architecture, though I tell you that the Partheum began with something like this; but good enough for youngsters like him, having some hardy Spartan fibre in their composition. I have myself slept soundly and well in one of them.

To my young host his small mountain estate, of some thirty acres, is little more than a toy, a place to spend holidays in, and his

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habitat just a lodge whence he sallies forth to slay speckled trout in lake and river, while the pure air purges the city soot out of his lungs.

I long to expand before him a vision of the great things that he might do—he and his friends; if they only would. But I dare not. He would not understand. The world and the world's God have been before me and preoccupied the ground.

When I was a young barrister, and in daily attendance at the Four Courts in Dublin, I remember how my coevals and myself, not yet broken to that yoke, used to fume and fret, and kick vainly against the pricks. Sometimes when the beautiful sunlight streamed down on us through the glass roof of the Library, one of us would say to the rest :

“Well, boys, is it not a sin to be here on a day like this?”

And some one would reply: “Ay, it is that,” the while he expanded his brief and dipped his quill in the inkpot.

And it was a sin surely; and is: a sin against Nature, and a deadly sin. And we dimly suspected the same, but believed ourselves powerless to resist the great necessity which drove us on, gay delusions out in front of us and fierce whips behind.

My young host, still a student, is aiming towards one of those respectable callings, all of which conduct young men indoors and keep them there.

He would not understand me were I to talk to him as I do here. He would set me down as “cracked,” or having “a bee in my bonnet;” and the parents and the sisters and the cousins and the aunts would never forgive me for attempting to put “such foolish notions into the boy’s mind.”

And you who read, and cannot at first understand, please remember that ever since you were six years old, and even before, the God of the world has been teaching you, and deceiving and compelling you to love and trust him and to despise the Power that made you. Remember that you are reading me through spectacles steeped in a solution of gold! If to-day you could see things as they are it would be a miracle.

From the Lowlands now a rustic procession crosses the field before me on their way up to the mountains; they are a shepherd, his little grandson, Dannie, and a handsome intelligent sheepdog, called Point. The shepherd is seventy-two years of age, but erect and hale, and walks with long, strong steps. The grandson is, I hear, a good scholar, and has, I know, a bright face.

“Good-morrow, Brady. Going to be a grand day.”

“A grand day, thank God,” replies the shepherd.

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Now I know that if it were raining cats and dogs, Brady would say :

“ A fine soft day, thank God.”

And if it were tempestuous, he would say :

“ A fine blowy day, thank God.”

And if the snow were deep on the earth, he would say :

“ Fine seasonable weather, thank God.”

For Brady is a primitive Irish peasant, not yet quite corrupted by civilisation, and his feeling towards Nature is religious. He will not abuse or use bad language about any kind of weather which it may please God to send. Where did he get this pious feeling towards Nature? Partly it is natural and instinctive. Partly it has come to him by descent and tradition from his remote Pagan ancestors; from men to whom all Nature was something divine, spiritual, semi-human. Our philosophers call this state of mind “ Animism.”

Animism or not, it is also the state of mind of the poet. Wordsworth, for example, was a thorough-going Animist. But all the poets are made much in the same way.

Now Brady did not get this religious feeling towards Nature from his professed religion, which is hostile to it. Our ancient literature is steeped in that feeling. The Irish heathen bard could not or would not say, for example : “ And next day ”—but “ Then when the Sun rose flaming, from his red-flaming couch.” Some such language seemed to him only decent when speaking of things so august. In all our prayer-books, liturgies, and hymn-books, you will not find a trace of this spirit. The primitive Israelites had it, indeed; a great deal of it; a great deal of that beautiful instinctive natural piety. Much of their Old Testament is steeped in it; but growing gloomy and fanatical they brought it into their Synagogues and quenched it there.

The real religion of Europe is, of course, the worship of the crocus-coloured Idol. The professed religion came to us out of the Synagogue and out of the cities of the later Greeks, and regards with hatred and fear all the things that God made and blessed, and declared to be “ good.”

“ Dannie grows fast,” I say. “ He is at least two inches taller than when I saw him last.”

“ And he’s good at his books, too,” replies the shepherd proudly.

The God of the world is as potent here as on the Stock Exchanges of the great Cities. Brady already sees his bright little grandson with a starched shirt front, wearing a black coat, and rising in the world. Why not, being so good at his book?

So they pass; and presently I hear Brady’s voice raised, and

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Dannie's : also Point's. At 10 a.m. precisely, Dannie will be indoors for six hours, getting himself filled up and blown out with divers kinds of vanity. The light will soon fade from his face and the bloom from his cheek.

Now, just to finish this sketch of an Irish Sunrise—unearthliness of early morning disappears in the day, pillars of smoke ascend from many a homestead, human voices and sounds multiply. Near by, the fragrance of coffee floats in the air and the odour of something frying; and, true to time, a visitor from the valley comes ambling across the field. The visitor is a superannuated sheep-dog, once, I hear, second to none on this hillside; now a pensioner and enjoying a well-earned leisure. He arrives punctually at meal times, and can be trusted to bolt a bone with any dog in Ireland.