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The Feis Ceoil and "The Magpie." To the Editor of the All Ireland Review

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THE FEIS CEOIL AND "THE MAGPIE."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

SIR—I read in your issue of 30th ult a pseudonymous attack upon the last Feis Ceoil celebration at Belfast reprinted from "The Magpie." To the timid and commonplace of all classes in this country there seems a weird fascination in pseudonym and anonymity when abuse or threats are to be levelled at individuals or institutions. There is something so satisfying in being able to let off one's spite without the risk—in a strictly metaphorical sense—of having one's fitches striped in return. It induces the feeling of having done something heroic and made a very good bargain in the transaction. Besides, there is this advantage in pseudonym and anonymity. They are vague and mysterious, and lend an air of importance to utterances which, if their real author were known, might not attract the attention due to the possibility of their coming from some really distinguished authority in disguise. Having thus delivered myself on the question of pseudonymous and anonymous communications in general, hoping that from this time forth they may gradually cease to appear in the Press of our country (and I speak feelingly because I have been the recipient of many threatening and anonymous letters from every class of society in Ireland, high and low, as well as of anonymous attacks in the Press, when I have tried to better Church music), I shall now begin contrary to my habit with all such pseudonymous and anonymous productions, to deal with the article at hand.

And, first, as is the manner of my anonymous friends in the Press, before launching censure I will begin by some gentle and candid praise. Federigo and Sebastin, the pseudonymous author or authors, as the case may be, of this article, reprinted from "The Magpie," deserve all praise for what appears to be their very genuine love for the incomparable folk music of Ireland. I agree with a little of what they say as to its not receiving sufficient attention from the Feis. In the vocal solo competitions I would have almost nothing else. I also think it was a grave mistake in performing such a work as "The Hymn of Praise" at one of the evening concerts of the last festival. This was quite outside the scope of the Feis, and was opposed by the Dublin committee. However, they wanted it in Belfast, and so had their way. So much for my commendation. Now for the censure. If our authors had taken the trouble to read the constitution of the Feis Ceoil Association they would have seen that its aims differed materially from those of the Harp Society, which appears to have been established altogether for the cultivation of Irish music. But the Feis has a further object in addition to this (I quote from its printed rules), "to promote the general cultivation of music in Ireland." How this object can be effected by a restriction to the folk music of Ireland I cannot possibly understand. Take, for instance, the unaccompanied choral competitions. How can the Irish airs be set as test pieces when they can only be sung in unison? It would be an act of philistinism to harmonise them in the same way as it is philistine to harmonise the Gregorian chant. What, therefore, should be the works to be set? Obviously the masterpieces of unaccompanied choral writing, which are universally admitted to be the music of Palestrina, Vittoria, Lasso, Marenzio, etc., about whom our authors complain. The same arguments in setting masterpieces in each, apply to the orchestral, quartette, and other competitions where counterpoint comes in. Then at the risk of being called a West German, which is not nearly so repulsive to my national individuality as being called a West Briton (because the Germans are now a civilised literary artistic people and the English are not). I altogether repudiate our authors' criticism of these distinguished German musicians, Bach and Kruse, who did such good service at the recent Feis. I think it would be a bad prospect for the musical future of Ireland if, through narrowness, she deprived herself of instruction and criticism in instrumental music and composition from a nation which has produced the greatest masters of those arts in modern times.

By all means let us cultivate our national music; but let us not accuse the Feis Ceoil of fraud because

it turns out to be an association different from what we imagined it to be in our carelessness and ignorance. The Feis Ceoil is a sincere artistic institution, faithful to its constitutions, and free from all anti-national servility, and should be supported by everyone who has the artistic interests of Ireland at heart.—I remain, yours obediently,

EDWARD MARTYN.

Tillyra Castle, Ardahan, Co. Galway,
5th July, 1900.

AN INDEX.

I became a subscriber to your paper "A. I. R." from first number. I have lost my No. 23 of 9th June. Kindly send me another copy. I do hope you are going to publish a yearly index. The want of one would detract very much from the value of your paper.

FELIX CARBRAY.

Dear F. C., I shall think about your suggestion. But do you think that this somewhat aerial and irresponsible little paper is worth an index?—ED.

CENSURE.

I am very glad to print censorious comments; but of late have received none, with the exception of one too long and too ill-phrased for publication.

Unless I get something of the kind, that I want, stinging, to the point and reasonably well written, I shall have to write and attack myself under a nom-de-plume; for, frankly, I don't like publishing so many compliments unaccompanied by at least a few drops from the vinegar-cruet.

But why print the compliments?

Well; we are all human; and the most angelic of us like a little praise, and can even take in, digest, and absorb a reasonable degree of flattery; and I am, perhaps, a little weaker than other people in this respect. Moreover, on principle, I incline to the printing of correspondence, which brings my readers and myself into a certain vital touch with contemporary Ireland.—ED.

A LITTLE HUMOUR.

Kindly send me No. 25 of the "A. I. R." In my absence from home I have had my letters forwarded. Apparently the delicate constitution of the wrapper was unable to support the second journey. Indeed, after the usual single journey, it generally arrives in the exhausted condition of the Grecian gentleman, whose name you doubtless remember (it is more than I do), who had only strength to deliver his message before expiring from the effects of the journey. Possibly the frail "tenement" of the paper is "o'erformed" by the weighty matter it contains.

C. S. B.

TO E. Y.

So glad you are going to write a history of the men of '82. It has never been done yet; that is to say the greatest event, so far, in Irish history wants its recorder.

Read everything that you can get about the subject, about the times, about the manners, idiosyncrasies, etc., of the men and women of the 18th century before writing a line. Saturate your mind with the subject, and don't write till you are filled with it, and your imagination teeming with scenes and pictures and men and women.

Give us something like Carlyle's French Revolution, only less dark and lurid.

Don't forget that the best of those men drew their inspiration from the Bible. Also don't count on my help; count on no help at all outside of yourself and the unseen powers and forces that will, to your surprise, come into your mind as you go forward.

A tame conventional history would be worse than useless—much worse.

Whether you write in prose or verse—I strongly recommend prose—your book must be a kind of poem.

Wishing you "God-speed,"

I remain, yours faithfully,

Ed. of "A. I. R."