Nation Making. Bedsteads

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Travellers should remember this. I once arrived in Waterford, *en route* for England, got my impedimenta on board an outside, and bade the jarvey drive to the Milford Boat. He just walked the horse across the road! and said:—"Here we are, sir." I thought the wharf was far down in the town where I have known the Milford steamers to come in. I shall continue these notes next week.

AN IRISH COSTUME.

THE costume here illustrated was designed last year by a County of Kilkenny gentleman, and is already worn by a great many young men and lads of that City and County. As will be seen there is something in it suggestive of Ireland, without being aggressively so. Any one might wear this costume, and go through Dublin without attracting very particular attention. The Hon. W. Gibson has, as we know, gone straight back to the antique, and wears his petticoat and *brat* in the face of an astonished world, but I don't think he has had imitators. This costume is a derivative from that of the 18th century Ireland, and not being very unlike our customary bicycling or riding attire, is fast becoming quite popular. All the smart young men in Kilkenny are wearing it; and, when last in the County, at crossroads out in the country, I saw a group of five or six rural lads so dressed.

The subject of the illustration is Mr. Maxwell O'Kinealy, a young Kilkenny journalist, who took a great interest in our Sheestown Historical Masque, and is, I believe, forming a local dramatic club. He maintains that there is a great deal of natural histrionic talent there, undeveloped—and has asked me to write a historical play to be acted by his club as soon as he can bring it together. I shall do so with much pleasure. I think it will deal with the volunteer movement, with Dobbs for the hero and Grattan for the orator. One of Grattan's speeches nobly delivered might even by itself redeem an illwritten play. It is an interesting fact, by the way, that Grattan before he emerged in the eye of the world as a statesman, and the mightiest orator, I think, of all time, was one of the leading figures in a Kilkenny dramatic society, which, while it lasted, had a very brilliant career.

The traditions of it remain there, and will certainly be a help to Mr. O'Kinealy in realising his ideas.

In the writing of historical plays I aim at effacing the dramatist, as much as possible, and at letting the story tell itself. In writing the Red Hugh play I acted on this principle, and its great success has convinced me that I

am right. There is almost nothing at all of the author in that play, for what seemed to be the most original part of it, Hugh Roe's installation speech, was taken straight from the pages of the Four Masters!

In the next I purpose introducing Grattan delivering one of his own mighty speeches, and Dobbs with his sword by his side and the word of the living God in his mouth. How could these things be improved upon by any wretched dramatist?

NATION MAKING.

BEDSTEADS.

ONE of the signs of the Irish revival is now (thanks to the enterprise of the eminent firm of Messrs. Millar and Beattie, Grafton-street) the establishment of a factory in Back Lane, Dublin, by Messrs. Siddall, Hilton and Co., Limited, for the manufacture of iron bedsteads. We have, however, more than this to congratulate those go-ahead people on; we refer to their having secured the contract for 1,000 Irish-made beds for the Portrane asylum, and this, be it remembered, against twenty-five other English and Scotch firms. We regard this as being extremely healthy, and a good omen in so far as it relates to the quality of the goods manufactured by this Irish house, and which goes to prove that if we have only sense enough to give the preference to our own made goods, we have every reason to be hopeful of the permanence of our own industries.

WE have seen one of the beds supplied to the institution referred to, and we must certainly say we consider it an excellent article, and reflects the highest credit on the Irish workmen. The bed is strong and superior in every respect, being fitted with a most ingenious chain mattress, made in sections, and each section capable of being unhooked, in the event of anything in the way of repairs being required. This is the first time we have seen a chain mattress made like this, and we regard it as being very much in advance of the old wire-woven mattresses that we all have seen so often. The whole has been subjected to a very trying test, a weight of twenty stone having been attached to it and left for about ten days, so that any flaw, would have to give way before such a trial. The chain mattress is attached to the bed by means of a very strong screw, which requires a special instrument either to tighten up or unscrew, thus making it impossible for the patient (and this is a point of great importance in places like Portrane) to interfere in any way with the chain of which the mattress is made. The feet of the bedstead are finished off with a composition of white metal so made as to do away with castors.

COMING back to the consideration of the importance from a National point of view of this new departure, we find that 2,352 tons of iron bedsteads were imported into Ireland during 1900, and allowing 20 bedsteads to each ton gives us a total of 47,040 bedsteads. We have the opinion of an expert who thinks an average price of £3 per bed would be correct; this would give us a total in terms of money of £141,120 as the value of the bedsteads imported during 1900. What this would mean to our workers may be gathered from the information courteously given by Louis Beattie, Esq., to our representative. Mr. Beattie's firm are paying twenty extra hands, owing to the Portrane contract, £30 weekly, which will have to continue for a period of nine months from the time the work was first put in hands, and, remember, this only refers to a contract for 50 tons of bedsteads, and the imports, as already shown, were 2,352 tons in 1900. We sincerely hope the classes in this country will remember this, they have no excuse as regards quality, as the sample we had the pleasure of seeing was certainly not inferior to anything from England or Scotland in its class, and the fact of having been able to make something in Ireland which beat 25 other samples of the same class of article speaks volumes for what can be done at home if only the support is given such enterprise always deserves, and which is well demonstrated by the entire satisfaction which the 500 beds already delivered to Portrane has given.

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THE PLEASURES OF FINN.

"Tell me," said Conan, "What are the sweetest sounds you ever heard?"

"I shall tell you," replied Fionn. "When the seven standing battalions of the Fenians assemble on our plain, and raise their standards of chivalry above their heads; then, when the howling whistling blast of the dry, cold wind, rushes through them and over them, that is very sweet to me. When the drinking hall is furnished in Alluin, and the cup-bearers hand the bright cup of chaste workmanship to the chiefs of the Fians, the ring of the cups, when drained to the last drop, on the tables of the Bruighin, is very sweet to me. Sweet to me is the screaming of the seagull, and of the heron, the roar of the waves on Traigh-lidhe (Tralee), the song of the three sons of Mara, the whistling of MacLughaidh (Mac Lewy), the Word of Fearsgaradh, the voice of the cuckoo in the first month of summer, the snorting of the wild hogs on Magh Eitne, and the echo of the schools in Derry." And he sang this Lay:—

The Dord of the green-topped woods,
The dashing of the wave against the shore;
Or the force of the waves at Tralee,
Where they meet the Lee of the white trout.
Three (men) who joined the Fians—
One of them was gentle, one was fierce;
Another was contemplating the stars;
They were sweeter than any melody.
The azure wave of the ocean,
When a man cannot distinguish its course,
A swell that sweeps fish upon dry land,
A melody to lull to sleep—sweet its effect.
Feargaill, son of Fionn, a man quick in action,
Long and smooth the career of his glory—
Never composed a melody which did not reveal his mind,
A lulling repose to me were his strains.

This even in English seems to me to be a grand and inspiring bit of imaginative composition, but it is far grander in the Irish, which has a roll and roar in it, like the waves of the sea. Observe, too, how modern is Finn here, how simple, how natural; he is just a man, nothing more; just plain manhood, Irish manhood. Finn, owing to the queer stories told about him, and the bad dramas written about him, has been laughed at—in some degree. But, he can no more be laughed out of Ireland than can Galtee More or the Slieve Bloom mountains where he was educated. While the Irish race stands Finn will live and reign, and when the Irish race fails and goes he will not go; he will just move into a new country, for he is not essentially Irish at all; he is man with an Irish accent in his voice, and an Irish flavour in his talk and ways; but he will be quite at home in Oregon or Iowa, or in the Isles of the Pacific when this absurd Irish race and nation of ours shall have given up the ghost and gone over to join the great majority of the defeated.—Ed.

"Inneorad," ar Fionn. "An tan to bí reacht s-cata na snáit féinne arí don máis, agus cóisbair a s-cann-foit ór a s-céannair; agus gluaipor an saot glórad saibtead, glan-fuar, triota agus cáipra, ir nó-binn liom rin; agus an tan oiplegatí tead n-óla agusinn a n-Altúinn, agus an tan báilro na báileamain corann caom-glana do maicib na féinne, an btorz-béim beipio a n-veipe rin as buain fá bopraib na bpuigne ir nó-binn liom rin. Ir binn liom poşar paot eann agus coisroil na s-cop agus fuaim loinne Traighlídhe, agus abpán trí mic Meapóla, agus fead mic Luşaró, agus dóio fearrsapad, agus, &c."

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NATION SLAYERS.—OUR RAILWAYS.

The Railway Interest is, perhaps, the strongest and best disciplined in the Empire, and it is to be feared that our Irish Companies have fallen, or are falling, quite under the control of the leaders of that Interest in England. We have no power at present to bit, bridle, and govern these Behemoths. For which reason we have always looked coldly upon the efforts of our Railway reformers to stir up public interest on the subject. They, and all our reformers, come up at last against a dead, blank wall, beyond which they cannot advance one step. But, through the National Conference, should it come off, we may be able to do many things that now seem impossible. In any event, we think it good, though with the loss of a few of our scanty pages, to remind our readers of the continued existence of the great public scandal supplied by the fact that the inland carriage of Ireland is controlled mainly by those to whom the National interests are as nothing.

The Railway nuisance will be probably the next great public question which our leaders will take in hand.

"RAILWAYS are, in their origin, public highways." This is the dictum of the Railway and Canal Commission. It expresses a great historical fact. The original conception of the railway company was very different from that which obtains to-day. In the beginning of the railway era, the idea was that the railway company would provide a permanent iron road, along which the old firms of carriers and private traders should be at liberty to haul goods for a payment to the company of so much per ton per mile. In this way, and for some time, an active competition prevailed between the different firms of carriers upon the iron road, just as previously a real competition had subsisted between them on the old cart roads. But then the promoters of each particular road became their own collectors and delivery agents, hauliers, and carriers.

GETTING RID OF COMPETITION.

They squeezed out the firms of carriers and established a complete and rigid monopoly upon each line. Their extortions became scandalous, and Parliament was induced to provide a "remedy"—which was, in the end, probably as bad, if not worse than the disease—at least in its effect on rates. In its peculiar wisdom, Parliament granted to rival promoters rights to promote what they were pleased to call "competing systems." For a few years a keen competition prevailed among the "competing lines," but as Robert Stephenson rightly told Parliament where "combination is practicable, competition is impracticable." Of course, combination between the rival lines was practicable, and it came quickly. Then the farmers and traders found that they had to pay interest on the several capitals of the so-called "competing lines" instead of upon one as before. This they had to do in still more extortionate rates, and so the process has gone on to the present day. Competition has been gradually squeezed out between the different companies by means of amalgamations, pools, subsidies, to other companies and rate conferences, until at the present moment, with a few unimportant exceptions, the railway companies are welded into one vast monopoly. To the ordinary onlooker, who sees many outward and visible signs of competitive machinery, it is a little difficult to realize that there is practically no active competition among the different companies. While admitting that there is no competition among them in the all-vital matter of rates, the companies allege that there is an effective "competition in facilities." This, in fact, is only true to a very limited extent, and chiefly in the matter of passenger trains. In respect of goods traffic, the phrase is a pretty little euphony that has not the merit of being accurate. In the case of goods traffic, at least, competition in facilities means a multiplication of wastes for which the traders and the consumers have to pay. It embraces the zealous regiments of canvassers who wait upon customers, the erection of a large number of handsome warehouses in the same place which can only be partially utilized, the provision of large surplus teams of horses and drays by each company "to meet emergencies," and the running of three or four short half-filled trains from the same place to the same place, at the same time, instead of one heavy and fully loaded train.

(To be continued.)

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