Irish Review (Dublin)

A Cluster of Shamrocks

Review by: Edmund Burke

The Irish Review (Dublin), Vol. 2, No. 19 (Sep., 1912), pp. 391-392

Published by: [Irish Review \(Dublin\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30063256>

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the most sober and the most industrious section of the community, and the one most likely to establish order in commercial and industrial ranks, as they have done in England and America. It would seem that the key to the situation is to be found in the greed and rapacity of the lower ranks of officials. "In one province alone (Bessarabia) the police officials manage annually to extort as 'perquisites' the sum of one million roubles—mostly from Jews." Nor do the Jews get off with paying away huge sums of money. They live in the most abject poverty. The increase of pauperism is appalling. The earning capacity is so small as to keep them hardly above starvation, in the best instances. Ten pounds a year is what a skilled artisan makes, roughly speaking, and out of this microscopic income the police have to be bribed. The net result of all these restrictions is the degradation of the Jew, "both physically and mentally, to the condition of a pariah." "Jewish girls have been banished on the formal ground, that instead of abandoning themselves to vice, they were making a living by teaching, or attending lectures. . . . Modest and virtuous girls have to label themselves officially as prostitutes in order to have peace and quiet . . . and yet have been driven forth."

"Ever fighting poverty and degradation with all the means at its command, the Jewish nation in Russia involuntarily constitutes the strongest protest against serfdom and inequality, but ever and again it has to bow beneath the sledge-hammer of reaction." The eloquent words of Professor Dicey explains the scope of the book and its object much more clearly than anything anyone else could possibly say. "The strange discussion of the horrible question whether baptism in Russia saves a Jew from the disabilities to which he is there subject, tells its own tale. In Russia, as elsewhere, tyranny is producing its most terrible of hateful results; despotic power first degrades its victims, and then defends its own existence by the plea that its victims are unworthy of freedom, or of justice. . . . Every state of the civilised world has authority to guard, by way of denunciation, if not otherwise, against the arrest of civilisation."

A CLUSTER OF SHAMROCKS

By Edmund Burke. London : Lynwood and Co. 6s.

Perhaps the less said about this mis-named collection of short stories the better. Only two or three of the nineteen even pretend to deal with Ireland, and these rather unsympathetically, and very much from the patronising "gentry" angle. The rest range from the Rhine to Norway. There is much abuse of the "pathetic fallacy." It requires a Hans Andersen or a Lewis Carroll to make shrubs and flowers, spring and moonshine, talk convincingly—it seems hardly worth while galvanising hawthorn and gentia into speech in Mr. Burke's style, especially when they have so surprisingly little that is original or even

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characteristic to say. As thus: "Fresh snow fell, and the impatient eldest gentian had the tips of her petals all spoiled; but she was too proud of being the first out to care much about it, though she often eyed them regretfully as a beautiful maiden sometimes looks in the glass at the little spot at the end of her shapely nose. 'I don't mind it in the least,' she said to the others; yet, while she said it, she looked at herself very carefully in a dewdrop"—and so on. This kind of thing is surely played out. The Irish side of the book is meant, we fear, for English middle-class consumption—the brave Irish soldier who gets his 'bunch of shamrocks' from a fair colleen (an Earl's daughter, of course) at a castle ball, and dies from a Boer bullet, wearing them next his heart; the sorrows of a brave and noble Irish landlord against whom, influenced by evil "political agitators," some ruffianly peasants indulge in cattle-driving and moonlighting. Irish readers are rather weary of that sort of thing, but perhaps they still like it in England.