

of wise and elaborate contrivance, and as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people and the debasement in them of human nature itself as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man."

And this horrible machinery of persecution was worked with fit results. It was mitigated in its action by the kindly feelings of those whose supremacy it was invented to sustain; but it brought the country to the deepest depression, and left it spiritless and impotent, at the mercy of its task-masters. I look back from the happier present to the intolerable past in no spirit of bitterness, and with no desire to perpetuate the memory of wrong; but, if we would judge fairly of O'Connell's character and history, we must know what obstacles he had to encounter, what enemies to confront, from what a depth he was called to lift his people, and what faculties he needed to compass his achievement.

IRELAND AN OUTCAST IN HER CHAINS.

Ireland lay, as I have described her, without hope or help—the outcast of the nations! But the hour of her deliverance came—the hour and the man created to deliver her. O'Connell was born into a world which was soon to see convulsions, disturbing its ancient order and shaping its destinies anew; and, in the scheme of providence, these were to give occasion for the use of his singular endowments, which, but for them, might have rusted in inactivity. The year of his birth witnessed the outbreak of the American war of independence; and the battle of Lexington was the herald of events, the memory of which gives our transatlantic brethren occasion for a centenary festival as happy as our own. The spirit of the insurgents passed across the seas and poured new life into the outworn nationalities of Europe. Their success animated the efforts of men struggling for freedom, and compelled attention to claims which had been flouted with contempt. Thus it came to pass that the penal laws were partially relaxed; and when the revolution of France broke forth

TO EMPHASISE THE TEACHING OF AMERICA,

the privileges of the Irish Catholics received great enlargement; the vital right of voting was bestowed: and 1793, when O'Connell was just of an age to take advantage of the boon, he found himself permitted to become a barrister. The preparation was complete. If he had lived earlier he would not have had a chance of developing his genius and marshalling his countrymen for their political deliverance. But the concessions of the Irish Parliament gave him instruments of action. His admission to the Bar enabled him to use them, and, after a moral struggle without precedent in history, he employed the franchise of 1823 to master the Cabinet of Peel and Wellington, and found in the freeholders of Clare the irresistible pioneers of emancipation.

THE YOUTHFUL ADVOCATE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM.

O'Connell came to the Bar in 1798, and almost from the opening of his career he devoted himself to the public service. He had no force to aid him in the gigantic task he undertook; physical or moral help was equally denied him. He led no army. There was no trained and organized opinion to stimulate his efforts or reward them by applause. His lot was cast with an utterly prostrate community—wanting all strength of self assertion, almost without the courage to complain. Indeed, they had fallen so low as to declare, while they grovelled before the throne, that they "respected from the bottom of their hearts" the infamous laws under which they suffered. But, in himself, O'Connell had limitless resources—a buoyant nature, unsleeping vigilance, untiring energy, patience inexhaustible, invention without bounds, faith in his cause which never faltered, and resolution which no reverse could daunt and no discouragement subdue. And, so accoutred, he prepared to play the part of the mighty Jew of old:—

The dread of Israel's foes, who, single combatant,
Duelled their armies ranked in proud array,
Himself an army!

His brain and tongue were at first his only weapons, but the brain was massive and fertile, and the tongue in many ways has never had an equal. He had, perhaps, greater variety and completeness of control over his auditory than any speaker of ancient or modern times. Others have been pre-eminent in special gifts, but he had singular command of the widest range of persuasive eloquence. He had humour and pathos and invective and argument, and he could pass from one to the other, sweeping across the human heartstrings with an astonishing facility and a sure response. He was not an artist in oratory. He regarded his facility of speech as an instrument and not as an end, and had little pride in it, save for the means it gave him of working out his purposes.

HIS GREAT POWER AS AN ADVOCATE AND ORATOR.

He was indifferent to his reputation as a speaker, and took no pains to correct or preserve his addresses, and perhaps the only one really representing what he was is his defence of John Magee, which—he told me during the state trial—he had himself written out while he waited up to start for his circuit on the morning after the delivery of it. He impressed himself upon his hearers, not by nice attention to the form of his sentences or the selection of his words, but by vigorous repetition of the views he desired to inculcate, in such language as was most suited to those whom he addressed. Thus, he dealt habitually with juries; and it was this repetition, in every variety of phrase and with every aid of illustration, which enabled him to fill the popular mind with his own conceptions and mould it according to his will. He had the rare endowments of a stately presence and a voice almost unequalled in melody and compass; and these, with his skill in reasoning and affluence of wit and fancy, commended him to all sorts of people wherever he appeared. Once he came down as special counsel to a northern county, and he was regarded as the very incarnation of evil by jurors who had known him in only their irreconcilable political antagonist. They looked askance at him, and would scarcely hear him; but before he had concluded his speech he had won their admiration and their verdict, and established kindly relations with them which were long maintained. I saw him in Edinburgh speaking to a multitudinous assembly of Scotch-

men, who had small love for the Irish agitator, and no sympathy with his religion or his race, but when his voice rang out like a trumpet round the Calton Hill, he moved them to a passion of enthusiasm such as I have rarely ever witnessed in his Irish meetings.

Listen to

LORD LYTTON'S DESCRIPTION OF O'CONNELL

at a monster meeting:—

"Once to my sight the giant thus was given,
Walled by wide air and roofed by boundless heaven;
Beneath his feet the human ocean lay,
And wave on wave flowed into space away.
Methought no clarion could have sent its sound
E'en to the centre of the hosts around;
And, as I thought, rose the sonorous swell,
As from some church-tower swings the silvery bell.
Aloft and clear from airy tide to tide
It glided easy as a bird may glide—
To the last verge of that vast audience sent;
It played with each wild passion as it went;
Now stirred the uproar—now the humor stilled,
And sob or laughter answered as it willed.
Then did I know what spells of infinite choice
To rouse or lull has the sweet human voice.
Then did I learn to send the sudden clew
To the grand, troublous life antique—to view,
Under the rock-stand of Demosthenes,
Unstable Athens heave her noisy seas."

A QUARTER CENTURY OF IRELAND'S DARKNESS—ALMOST TO DESPAIR.

Pitt unable to fulfil his promises to Ireland, abandoned at the King's bidding the scheme which might have given her a happier future, and ultimately renounced all efforts to remove her religious disabilities. The period which followed was very dreary for her. It gave no prospect of relief. But for five-and-twenty years hoping against hope, she still pressed onward, maintaining her bootless struggle—now in associations, again in committees, often in popular assemblies, sometimes in the law courts—her modes of action always varying, her objects always the same. It was not a time of progress, but a time of preparation. There was continual movement, but little advance. The multitude was made familiar with the story of their wrongs, and encouraged to seek redress by hopes which were often baffled, but always revived. O'Connell had not yet attained that leadership which was unquestioned in after days. But he was mounting towards it. He was building up his legal reputation, and commanding more and more the public confidence. Wherever work was to be done, or counsel to be given, or opposition overborne, in assertion of the Catholic claims, there was he, ready to speak or act, eager to sustain their friends, audacious *a la outrance*, in defiance of their adversaries. Associated with able and trusted men, he was already the animating spirit of the movement. But for him, also, it was only a time of preparation. He was nerving his strength and training his energies for the supreme effort which was to win for him the name of "Liberator."

PLUNKETT AND GRATIAN.

Time went on, but the cause of the Catholics did not prosper much. It had in the Imperial Parliament the advocacy of Plunkett and Gratian—the first astonishing the House by a masculine vigor and a trenchant logic to which it had seen no parallel, and the second displaying in his latest years the unbroken power of that electric eloquence which in his youth had stirred a nation's heart to passionate enthusiasm and high endeavor, and given him a claim to Byron's eulogy:—

With all that Demosthenes wanted ended,
And his rival of victor in all he possessed.

The advocacy of such men was a providential agency, informing the mind of England and dissipating the prejudices on which sectarian ascendancy was based. And they were sustained by a great party, of which I may now say without offence to anyone, that, to its immortal honor, it refused to succumb to the intolerance of royalty or purchase office at the expense of principle. For many a long year the place of the friends of the Catholics was in opposition, and they held that place with self-abnegating faithfulness beyond all praise. In our own island

THE LIBERAL PROTESTANT

was ostracized by the government, and systematically denied emolument of distinction. Yet men like Robert Holmes and Louis Perrin and Maziero Brady—dear friends of mine, whose memory I hold in reverence—were always found mindful of their duty and careless of themselves. They held aloft the banner of religious liberty, round which we all profess to rally now, in evil days, when to be its bearer was to defy authority and court exclusion; and Catholic Ireland will be, indeed, disgraced if the time shall ever come when she shall cease to be deeply grateful for the services and sacrifices of those who did not share her faith or bow before her altars, but stood by her in her weakness, to their own grievous injury, because they believed in the justice of her claims.

THE ROYAL VISIT.

Much had been accomplished by speech in Parliament and writing in the press, and much by the example of steadfastness displayed by honest men in the face of all discouragement. Its opponents were led, at least, to consider the reasonableness of the Catholic demand. But its concession seemed indefinitely postponed; and the people, tantalized and disgusted by the alternation of fair hopes and bitter disappointments, sunk into a miserable apathy. The visit of George IV.—an event of evil memory—galvanised them into feverish expectation for a time. But they soon learned that the King, before whom they had humbled themselves so slavishly, loved them as little as his royal father, and they fell into the abject condition described by one of the best and most accomplished of them all, Sir Thomas Wyse:—"The Catholic spirit had totally passed away.

THE DEAD BODY

only was left behind." But

'Tis always the darkest hour nearest the dawn;