

## THE RISE AND FALL OF IRISH LEGISLATIVE INDEPENDENCE.

(A paper read before the Wellington Irish National League by Mr. J. J. Devine.)

(Continued from last week.)

A GREAT star about this period flashed on the political horizon of Ireland, before whose brilliant light that of all other luminaries there paled and became obscured. It was the politician of untarnished reputation, the patriot of unsullied purity, the statesman whose enthusiastic spirit fired the people, the orator whose burning words are even still quoted as maxims of liberty, the apostle of Irish nationality—the immortal Henry Grattan. The times were favourable to this great juncture in Irish affairs. The eventful year of 1775 had come. Colonial America was in arms against the mother country, arising out of a determined spirit on their part to resist taxation and duty laws. England had dealt with her American colonies as she had so long done with Ireland. She was accustomed to impose taxes on the Irish, lay embargoes on their commerce, and crush their trade laws, and she thought she would do the same with her American colonists. These colonists, however, rose in arms to resist the encroachments of the English Government, and England was obliged to send there every available soldier she had, as well as such foreign mercenaries as she could procure. A call was made on Ireland for 4,000 troops. The Lord Lieutenant told the Irish Parliament that if she would give England the 4,000 soldiers she would give them in return an equal number of Hessians to keep Ireland quiet as a defence against foreign aggression. England well knew the valour of Irish soldiers. She had not very long before a bitter taste of it at Fontenoy, where the Irish Brigade made such havoc with her veteran legions, and drew from the king the memorable remark, "Cursed be the lauds that deprived me of such subjects." England had thus good cause to know that Irish soldiers would not turn their backs on an enemy as the Hessians were wont to do. It was good fighting and not good running men she wanted for her American campaign. The Irish Parliament gave the 4,000 troops and declined with thanks the Hessians. They sent a message that if England would but give them the arms they would raise a sufficient force among themselves for the defence of their own shores. In an unguarded moment, as the context will show, England acceded to their request. This was in 1779. The moment the word was given, volunteer companies were formed in the North. Irishmen, once again, stood shoulder to shoulder for their native land. The movement rapidly spread all over the country, all classes and creeds joining with enthusiasm. Within a year of their obtaining arms, Ireland beheld the glorious spectacle of a native army of 50,000 men well-trained and accoutred. At first they consisted entirely of Protestants. When these, however, saw the patriotic and sympathetic spirit displayed by their Catholic fellow-countrymen, and the practical aid they lent by supplying money and arms, they threw their ranks open to them. The rank spirit of Orangeism had not then darkened the land; it is a foul and evil plant of later growth. The Catholics joined the volunteer organization with such alacrity and in such numbers that shortly after they were admitted to the ranks, and so during the whole time the volunteers were in existence, they formed a decided majority. The volunteers thus became a freely representative army of the people of Ireland recruited from all their ranks and creeds. The war of religions and of castes that had so long divided the people vanished as a dream. The country looked upon them with hope and admiration. They were presented with pieces of artillery by the nation; the highest ladies wore their flags. They were officered by the highest nobles and the finest intellects in the country. The Earl of Charlemont was their general; Grattan, Flood, and other leaders of the people were among their officers. From 50,000 they swelled in the course of two years to over 100,000, as perfectly organised and disciplined an army as any then in Europe. Their bosoms beat as one, for they were pledged to defend their country's freedom, alike against foreign foes without and English tyranny within.

Writing of this period, the historian Lecky says:—"It was a moment of supreme danger to the Empire. The energies of England were taxed to the utmost, and there could be no reasonable doubt that the Volunteers, supported by the people, could have wrested Ireland from her grasp. A nation unaccustomed to freedom, and maddened by centuries of oppression, had suddenly acquired this overwhelming power. Could its leaders restrain it within the limits of moderation? Or, if it was in their power, was it in their will? The voice of the Volunteers soon spoke in no equivocal terms on Irish politics. They resolved that 'citizens, by learning the use of arms, forfeit none of their civil rights'; and they formed themselves into a regular convention, with delegates and organization, for the purpose of discussing the condition of the country. Their denunciations of the commercial and legislative restrictions grew louder and louder, and two cannon were shown labelled with the inscription, 'Freetrade or this!'

"England now became alarmed, and she wanted the Volunteers disbanded. Ireland, however, in that hour was a power; she was united as one man, and besides she was in arms, and exultant. The time was now ripe for action. The immortal Grattan assembled the leaders of the volunteers to devise the best means of utilizing their undoubted power. When they were assembled in convention the question was raised, 'What shall we do with our power.' From the ardent spirit of Grattan did the answer proceed. He said, 'The English Government never will do you justice. Now that you have the Volunteers at your back, you can speak as an united nation! We will not allow them to lay down their arms until we have obtained legislative and religious independence for Ireland; the right to make whatever laws are most conducive for her people.' In pursuance of this programme Grattan brought into the Irish House of Commons, of which he was a prominent member, a bill to abolish Poyning's Act, which, as you will remember, was a law by which the Irish Parliament were prevented from passing any laws

until the permission of the English King and Legislature had been first obtained in each particular instance. When Grattan introduced his Bill into the abject and corrupt Irish Parliament, all the weight of the English Government and all the rottenness of the country was arrayed in hostile opposition. There was, however, a power behind the throne greater than the throne; Grattan effected a flank movement. He lined the streets of Dublin with the Volunteers, he had them drawn up in solid squares with their pieces of artillery before the Parliament House. Their cannons bore labels with the inscription, 'Justice to Ireland, or else this.' What eloquence and earnestness could not effect, a mere show of force instantly did. Poyning's law was repealed.

"In a similar manner Grattan got the restrictions on the Irish woollen trade abolished. He brought in a Bill on the subject, but the degraded house threw it out. He fell back again on his Volunteers, and again was he successful. It was declared that Ireland was again free to trade in her woollens with any country she pleased. It was after this second triumph over the venal Parliament that Grattan addressed the House in these memorable words. He said, 'Gentlemen, your forefathers, sitting in this house, sold and destroyed the trade and liberty of Ireland. I have returned to her her trade, and now I propose to demand of you that you return to her her liberty.'

"Grattan's next step was to convene the famous Dungannon Convention, which was held on the 15th of February, 1782. The idea of the Convention did not originate from himself, but his fiery soul was quick to act upon it. The resolutions to be passed were framed by Grattan, Charlemont, and Flood. The principal were, 'That the claim of any body of men, other than the King, Lords, and Commons of Ireland, is unconstitutional, illegal, and a grievance.' 'That we hold the right of private judgment in matters of religion, to be equally sacred in others, as in ourselves; that we rejoice in the relaxation of the penal laws against our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects, and that we conceive the measure to be fraught with the happiest consequences to the union and prosperity of the inhabitants of Ireland.' Irish Protestants of to-day, bark to the words of tolerance and nationality of your illustrious ancestor! How fallen, alas, are the posterity of the Protestants of 1782! Two hundred and forty-two delegates, representing one hundred and forty-three companies, assembled in the now historic church of Dungannon. Many of them bore emblems of their rank and station in the country. They passed through the ranks and file of the Volunteers who lined the steep and narrow streets of the town, arrayed

'In helm and blade,  
And plumes in the gay wind dancing.'

The conclave was of short duration, it lasted but from noon till evening. The resolutions submitted were unanimously passed, and were received without with the greatest acclamation and rejoicing. They were endorsed at meetings held in various parts of the country, and their spirit was echoed throughout the length and breadth of the land.

A circumstance favourable to the cause which Grattan had so at heart happened at about this time. The Ministry of Lord North, which had brought nothing but disaster to their arms, were forced to relinquish office. The Ministry of Lord Rockingham succeeded. They were supposed to be favourable to Ireland;—perhaps they were constrained to be so. The Duke of Portland, who was much respected in Ireland, and who was known to be favourable to the Irish cause, was as a first step sent over as the new Lord Lieutenant. He had *carte blanche* instructions to concede reforms where desirable. Immediately after his arrival, the Lord Lieutenant, in his speech to the Irish Parliament, advised them to take into consideration the prevailing state of things with a view to reform. This was taken advantage of by Grattan. His cause, if not foiled, would be at least considerably delayed if it was left in the hands of the Parliament. So, on the 16th April, 1782, amid an outburst of the wildest joy on the part of the nation, Grattan moved his glorious Declaration of Independence and nationality—an assertion of Freedom which stands out without comparison in the long scroll of history.

On that 16th of April, the rose-coloured dawn of a new era seemed to break upon long-suffering Ireland. Dublin was filled with the Volunteers. The bright spring sun that warmed the capital with its genial rays, lit up the gay and glittering masses of the national army arrayed along its streets and quays, glanced on their rich banners, and flashed back the brightness of their burnished arms and brilliant uniforms. A large body of them were drawn up in front of the Parliament House in College Green and the approaches thereto. The scroll hanging to the neck of their cannons bore the inscription, "Liberty, or else —." Inside the House everything was excitement, expectation and commotion. The galleries were crowded from early morn with the rank and beauty of the land, while upon the floor below those who were to participate in the grand drama were anxiously awaiting with feelings of joy or concern the raising of the curtain. The regular English soldiers lined the approaches to the House for the the Lord Lieutenant to pass through. The serried and stately ranks of the Volunteers, far outnumbering the regular troops, were drawn up alongside to admit with equal honour and pomp the man who was that day leaving a sick bed to move the emancipation of his country. The hour at length arrived, and Grattan rose. He was ill, but "determination sat on his pale brow." The light of victory illumined his wan cheek; triumph flashed from his brilliant, though sunken eyes. A great writer describes the scene in the following graphic language:—

"Never had a great orator a nobler or a more pleasing task. It was to proclaim that the strife of six centuries had terminated; that the cause for which so much blood had been shed, and so much genius expended in vain, had at last triumphed; and that a new era had dawned upon Ireland. Doubtless on that day many minds reverted to the long night of oppression and crime through which Ireland had straggled towards that conception which had been as the pillar of fire on her path. But now at last the promised land seemed reached. The dream of Swift and of Molyneux was realised. The blessings of independence were reconciled with the blessings of connection; and in an emancipated Parliament the patriot saw the