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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

FULLY
CONFIRMED.

A FEW weeks ago we referred to a review given by the London *Tablet* of a book on the Irish rebellion of 1641, lately published by Miss Hickson, and which review we accused of betraying a discreditable animus, and of being otherwise unfair and injurious. In order to bear out what we asserted in this matter we shall now take some quotations from the review of the same work that we find in the *Athenæum*. The writer, then, takes exception to the men appointed as a commission to examine into the evidence of the enormities alleged to have been committed. "The task of taking the depositions was intrusted," he says, "not to the regular legal functionaries, but to nine clergymen of the Established Church, who avowed in print political and theological opinions which, at the present day, would be deemed scarcely consistent with official impartiality. No Irish Catholic, layman, or ecclesiastic, was associated with them in the commission. Confidence in the proceedings of clergy of the Established Church in Ireland at the period is not augmented by the characters of some of them, as portrayed by members of their own order." And further on he says, "It is to be regretted that the present publication does not supply details in relation to the personal history of the clergymen before whom the depositions were taken. An account of the career of Henry Jones, the chief of those commissioners, would have furnished curious and interesting illustrations of the times. Jones was, for a time, in a disturbed district of Ulster in 1641-2; he acted as envoy from some of the Irish to the Government at Dublin, and was afterwards agent in England for the Protestant clergy of Ireland. He was appointed Bishop of Clogher by Charles I., and carried on correspondence with the Irish then in arms in Ulster. Jones subsequently became Scout-Master to the Parliamentarians, and received a salary of £340 per annum for the compilation of a narrative of the rebellion in Ireland. After the restoration Jones obtained the See of Meath, but did not publish the history which he had undertaken. He died in 1681, and his son and daughter became members of the Roman Catholic Church." A fact, we may remark in passing, that seems to show that nothing very atrocious done by Catholics, as such, had come to the knowledge of the converts in question. But the reviewer had already thus defended the Catholic cause. "The representatives of the Irish Roman Catholics insisted, in their public declarations, that tumultuary and isolated acts of the lower classes should not be regarded as those of the nation. They declared that many of the unoffending Irish had been killed or subjected to inhumane treatment, and urged Charles I. to institute official investigations into alleged massacres and losses. In the publications of Jones and Temple the portions of the depositions which related to murders, cruelties, expressions of enmity to England and to Protestantism were elaborately put forward. The 'History' by Sir John Temple, for a time accepted as an authority, is now regarded as untrustworthy. From the depositions Borlase, in 1680, published 'A collection of murders in several counties of Ireland,' which was reprinted at London in 1720. To such compilations Edmund Burke alluded when he wrote that statesmen 'ought not to rake into the hideous and abominable things which were done in the turbulent fury of an injured, robbed, and persecuted people, and which were afterwards cruelly revenged in the execution, and as outrageously and shamefully exaggerated in the representation.' With regard to reflections on the character of the nation," adds the writer, "it may be observed that the worst acts ascribed to the period of 1641 in Ireland were exceeded in enormity by the populace of the Hague, when thirty-one years subsequently they murdered Cornelius de Witt and his brother." And, for our own part, we do not recollect to have read even in the horrid extracts quoted from Miss Hickson by the London *Tablet*, of any case in which the brutal mob cut the flesh from the bodies of the victims they had butchered in the streets and ate it, as the partisans of our glorious William are said to have done at the Hague. Nothing more atrocious than the murder of the De Witts, in fact, has stained the page of history. Our readers, again, will remember how the London *Tablet*, in applauding the publication of the details given by Miss Hickson, implied that they

had now, for the first time, been published—but that such was not the case will be plain from what the *Athenæum* tells us. "The depositions," he says, "already mentioned, do not appear to have been claimed by the Government as official records. Early in the last century these papers were in the hands of private book-collectors, from whom they passed to Trinity College, Dublin, which has not taken any steps towards printing them. The *Tablet* (Miss Hickson's book) contains a considerable number of depositions, including some of those printed by Jones, Temple, and Borlase, as well as others which have of late years appeared in various books. In addition to the depositions connected with the rebellion of 1641, the present volumes contain documents, some of which have been previously published, concerning 'plantations' in Ireland in 1610-1639, and reports of trials in the High Court of justice in 1652-4. Many points, historic and documentary, and polemical, are editorially referred to in connection with the papers; but it is not our province to enter here upon a discussion of them. The history of the period to which they relate has, it was truly observed in the last century, been rendered 'amazingly intricate by the writings of different parties and interests.'—The *Tablet* further seemed to accept it as proved that the supernatural element that had been supposed to invalidate the evidence touching the rebellion was easily explained by Miss Hickson—the *Athenæum* nevertheless seems of a different mind. "From passages in the depositions and contemporary documents," he says, "we may perhaps estimate the degree to which belief in the supernatural prevailed towards the period of 1641. The Rev. George Creighton, in a statement of the year 1643, printed in the second of the volumes before us, avers that 'divers women constantly witnessed and affirmed to him that a rebel struck three times at the naked body of a young woman 'with his drawn sword, and yet never cut her skin; albeit,' he adds, 'those that know the Irish know that they carry no swords unless they be very sharp.' Nicholas Barnard, Dean of Ardagh, and chaplain to Archbishop Ussher, wrote in 1642 that he was assured by officers, 'upon their own experience,' that some of the Irish had by charms succeeded in making themselves 'thrust-free, as they called it;' and the point of a sword put upon their naked breasts, it could not be made to enter or draw the least blood. 'It is certain,' continued Dean Barnard, 'that at the taking of Newry, a rebel being appointed to be shot upon the bridge, and stripped stark naked, notwithstanding the musketeer stood within two yards of him, and shot him in the middle of the back, yet the bullet entered not, nor did him any more hurt than leave a little black spot behind it.' We read in the depositions that at Dungannon in 1641 a vision was seen of 'a woman compassing about the town with a spear in her hand; when any would approach her, she would go from them, when any would go from her she would draw near unto them.' Another dependent of the same period states that 'Master Montgomery, minister,' and several others 'of good worth,' reported that 'there was seen a sword hanging in the air, with the point downwards, the haft seeming to be red and the point turned round.'—On the whole, then we may safely claim that enough has been written by the reviewer from whom we quote to bear out the charges made by us against the London *Tablet*, and we need say no more.

SCOTCH
WORTHIES.

THE London *Spectator* takes Lord Rosebery to task for the opinion expressed by him a little time ago, in unveiling the statue of Robert Burns, that Burns was the greatest Scotchman who ever lived. "For our own part," says the *Spectator*, "we should not only claim John Knox and Sir Walter Scott—to whom Lord Rosebery referred—as vastly greater men than Burns, but many another in every chapter of the history of Scotland of which we have any thorough knowledge." And a little further on he says—"Exclude the wonderful poetry he wrote, and what sign of greatness, as a man, did Burns give us? He wrote good and vivid letters, but hardly so good as Mrs. Carlyle. He wrote some good prose descriptions, but nothing to compare with the prose descriptions of Carlyle. He had large and kindly sympathies, but not larger or kindlier than Sir Walter Scott, and not half so discriminating. He was not ashamed of his order and loved his country; but how few are the Scotch peasants of whom you could not say the same? For the rest, Burns did not govern himself even so far as to prevent doing gross and cruel wrongs to those whom he pretended to love; and though a careful critic of