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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

WE do not know that Sir Charles Gavan Duffy's article in the *Contemporary Review* will have the effect that he desires, or will, in fact, persuade the Irish people that Carlyle was a lover of their country. Carlyle, indeed, in his letters writes as mildly as a sucking dove. Some traces, however, of the rugged denouncer of wrongs, as he believed them to be, and of the fierce champion of a "true thing," as he saw it, we still find in these letters. But they fully justified the young gentleman who received them in his belief that Mr Carlyle was a remarkably nice person, and they made it evident—this, perhaps, being the chief point about their publication—that Mr Carlyle looked upon Mr Duffy, and doubtless with complete justice, as a very superior young man. In those portions of the *Nation* for which Mr Duffy was personally responsible, Mr Carlyle was deeply interested—but as for the rest, the less said about it perhaps the better. Mr Mitchell, we must, however, add, was another exception to the general rule, and for him also Mr Carlyle expressed exceptional love. Mr Mitchell, it may be pertinent to recall, had certain inconsistencies in his character. He, for example, at the time of the civil war in America, expressed himself as a strong advocate of slavery. Some bond of sympathy, therefore, more or less latent, may have existed between him and Mr Carlyle. But how was the particular love of Mr Carlyle for Ireland shown? Doubtless he expressed a wish for the amelioration of her condition, not by a system of self-government, not by the success of the movement of 1848, but by her deliverance, in some way not clearly explained, out of the hands of the devil, in which, as opposed to the English Government, he roundly asserted her to be—alluding, perhaps, also to the Popery of her—not that we would dream of attempting to imitate a style possible only to one man, and needing his originality and genius to make it endurable. We cannot say we think these letters have been becomingly published by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy personally. The task might devolve more gracefully on some one who succeeded him. We do not even know that the humility with which Sir Charles quotes Mrs Carlyle's description of his personal appearance completely excuses him, but, indeed, so far as we have any experience of that lady's writings, she appears to us as consciously a very clever woman, always on the tip-toe of an attempt to say something fine or striking—and not quite incapable of "gush." Sir Charles Duffy thinks that the harm of Mr Carlyle's notes on his Irish tour that were published, consisted in their publication. We are not sure that Sir Charles' exhibition of Mr Carlyle in a better humour will neutralise their effect. Doubtless if we know nothing of how our friends back-bite us, we are not annoyed or mortified, but if we do know it, with the annoyance and mortification, there comes to us a better understanding of our friends. We fear our better understanding of Mr Carlyle had preceded that with which Sir Charles Duffy would now inspire us. It is hardly possible for us to return upon our steps. Some of the letters published are trivial and insignificant, or, rather, would be so, if it were not of interest to learn of every stir given by so famous a man—even of the places in which he had laid down his hat or his umbrella. Others of these letters, perhaps, might, with a more refined taste, have been in some respects cut short, or partially suppressed. The passages, for instance, in which allusion is made to members of Sir Charles' family are of such a kind—and yet it would be a pity to lose expressions contained in these passages, which are peculiarly distinctive of Carlyle. A "beautiful lady," in Carlyle's sense of the words was not merely one of outward charms as ordinary people understand her to be. The first Lady Duffy, nevertheless, to whom the expression is applied, was a lady of much elegance and grace. The terms, however, take a more comprehensive and a higher meaning. This is the case very markedly with regard to another lady so described. To the late Mrs Callan, the lady spoken of, Sir Charles Duffy, in a note, pays a well-deserved tribute. The letters to which we more particularly allude are those containing passages relating to O'Connell. Surely Irish patriotism would seem

more respectable in the present and more promising for the future if in the past some of its chief devotees had been less jealous or less distrustful of each other. Coming from Mr Carlyle alone these passages would not be exceptionable; given to the world by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, and following up denunciations made in his "Young Ireland," they seem extremely invidious. But if Carlyle and Duffy have rightly judged O'Connell, their judgment does credit to the discernment of men who made no pretensions to the genius of Carlyle and who had not the opportunities for personally becoming acquainted with O'Connell's character that Sir Charles Duffy possesses. We have written "enjoyed," but we retract the word. The present writer received his early impressions of O'Connell from one who had been a personal friend of D'Esterra, and to whom, therefore, everything connected with O'Connell was naturally repulsive. The person alluded to, further, owned a fragment of a letter written by the victor after the duel and in which that fatal event was lightly spoken of, and this seemed to justify the feeling of repulsion. We believe as a matter of fact that O'Connell was deeply penitent, and the circumstances under which the letter in question had been written were they known, would in all probability have explained its tone. The fragment, we may add, was published some thirty or thirty-five years ago in "Bentley's Magazine," a London periodical which, if we recollect aright, has long since been defunct. The familiar ring of these denunciations made by Sir Charles Duffy and through him by Carlyle is particularly suggestive to us. We cannot think, however, that to throw doubt on the sincerity of one who has been commonly regarded as a prince among Irish patriots, at a time when Irish patriotism is in the throes of a precarious struggle, is an act of wisdom in one desirous of seeing the struggle victorious. Nor, indeed, do we think that the publication of these letters at this particular season is to be commended. What was the reason for this publication? Motives of delicacy might be supposed of themselves to delay it. There was no particular end to be served just now by changing the minds of Irishmen with regard to Carlyle—even if it were possible to do so. The task might well await another day. Carlyle expresses himself as hostile to Home Rule, as believing the very face of nature hostile to it. He protests against the possibility of Ireland's ever being a nation—or ever anything more so than a district or parish of Great Britain. If all this has any effect at all, it must evidently be an adverse effect on the national movement of the day. There is nothing of any very great or pressing interest in these letters. They show us that Mr Carlyle could speak, without stamping and swearing, of Irish affairs—that there actually were moods in which he would not squelch the Irish people "like a rat," even if they did prove themselves a little rebellious. They show us that he had a very high opinion of Mr Duffy, and formed a very pleasant travelling companion for that gentleman on a tour in Ireland. But for all this we could still have waited some years—even a good many—without much privation. The opinions given by Mr Carlyle of some of the British poets and their works are, indeed, well worth reading, although by some of them, particularly that relating to Coleridge, we are reminded of certain unpleasantnesses—also regarded by some people as unpleasant only because of their publication—which somewhat mortified the admirers of the deceased sage when Mr Froude gave them likewise to the world. Was it, by chance, in some degree owing to Mr Duffy's tact in drawing him out and keeping him busy talking about other things than those Irish ones immediately surrounding him, that Mr Carlyle proved himself so amiable and kindly a travelling companion? We fear Mr Carlyle had too much dissembled his love in public to admit of our receiving with any great ardour a demonstration made of it by him in private—more particularly to a select one or two whom he evidently regarded as exceptional people. The article, no doubt is entertaining and curious. Any influence it may exercise seems likely to be in a direction contrary to that desired by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy.

THE following letter explains itself:—
A COURTEOUS LETTER. March 25, 1892.—The editor of the TABLET, Dunedin.—SIR,—I have to acknowledge receipt of the copy of your paper forwarded by you, and have to thank you for the same. I write this note not for the purpose of entering on a controversy with you, but so that it may not be said that

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