

LIFE AND TIMES OF DANIEL O'CONNELL.

A LECTURE RECENTLY DELIVERED AT AUCKLAND UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE CATHOLIC LITERARY SOCIETY BY THE HON J. A. TOLE.

(Concluded.)

O'Connell, though not generally understood—any more than Curran, perhaps—to have been a profound lawyer, possessed every requisite of a barrister of the highest reputation, and with hardly an exception was the ablest man at the Irish bar. His greatest forensic effort is said to have been his defence of John Magee for libel; but all his speeches should be read by the young men of this Society, and you will derive instruction, pleasure and profit from them. You may not always experience highly-finished and elaborately-perfect oratory, or massive phrases; but you will recognise the ready wit and powerful eloquence of the tongue that responds to the promptings of the true, the tender, and patriotic heart and glowing mind; and you will arise from the perusal of O'Connell's speeches wishing you could speak as well. Try to do so. Though O'Connell was capable of highest oratory whenever the spirit and occasion required, he also possessed a quality of speech in the other extreme to which only those endowed with his extraordinary versatility could, with safety to their method of diction, venture to descend. And in this connection I may, as I suppose a patron ought to do, offer a word of advice to the young men of this Literary Society, and, looking at the political atmosphere, even to the young ladies, and it is this, that if you desire or hope to become good speakers, next to the acquirement of the facility of speaking, you should always in your ordinary conversation and speech talk at your best. I do not mean by this, that you are to talk on every occasion with that precision and style of rhetoric which is employed on more formal occasions, but that you are to avoid falling into the use of slang, and a careless or vulgar choice of words and mode of expression, which though apt enough, perhaps, in a certain sphere, will most assuredly prove a serious and embarrassing

"Two pence, your grandmother!" replied Mrs Biddy; "do you mane to say that it's chating the people I am? Impostor, indeed!"

"Ay, impostor; and it's that I call you to your teeth," rejoined O'Connell.

"Come, out your stick, you cantankerous jacksnaps."

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, you old *diagonal*," cried O'Connell, calmly.

"Stop your jaw, you pug-nosed badger, or by this and that," cried Mrs Moriarty, "I'll make you go quicker nor you came."

"Don't be in a passion, my old *radius*—anger will only wrinkle your beauty."

"By the hokey, if you say another word of impudence, I'd tan your dirty hide, you bastely common scrub; and sorry I'd be to soil my fists upon your carcass."

"Whew! boys, what a passion old Biddy is in; I protest as I am a gentleman—"

"Jintleman! jintleman! the likes of you a jintleman! Wieha, by gor, that bange Banagher. Why, you potato-faced pippin-sneezer, when did a Madagascar monkey like you pick enough of common Christian decency to hide your Kerry brogue?"

"Easy now—easy now," cried O'Connell, with imperturbable good humour, "don't choke yourself with fine language, you old whiskey-drinking *parallelogram*."

"What's that you call me, you murderin' villian?" roared Mrs Moriarty, stung into fury.

"I call you," answered O'Connell, "parallelogram; and a Dublin judge and jury will say that it's no libel to call you so!"

"Oh, tare-an-ouns! holy Biddy! that an honest woman like me should be called a parrybellygrum to her face. I'm none of your parrybellygrums, you rascally gallowa-bird; you cowardly, sneaking, plate-lickin' bliggard!"

"Oh, not you, indeed!" retorted O'Connell; "why, I suppose you'll deny that you keep a *hypothenus* in your house."

"It's a lie for you, you robber; I never had such a thing in my house, you swindling thief."

"Why, sure all your neighbours know very well that you keep not only a hypothenus, but that you have two *diameters* locked up in your garret, and that you go out to walk with them every Sunday, you heartless old *heptagon*."

"Oh, hear that, ye saints in glory! Oh, there's bad language from a fellow that wants to pass for a jintleman. May the devil fly away with you, you micher from Munster."

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impediment to the ready and elegant flow of language from an habitually-choice vocabulary. I give this advice from my own observation. In my experience of speakers, the men and women who spoke best and most charmingly were those who always in conversation or in telling a story, or making a speech, talked at their best in the way I mention. One notable illustration of what I mean is our Sir George Grey—who on all occasions, whether in private or on the platform, speaks with that ease, appropriateness, and elegance which we all so much admire. Lady Wilde says that O'Connell, charming and enchanting as he was, could fight with all weapons, "from a boomerang (I should have thought from a shillelagh) to a jewelled bodkin," and sometimes adopted a coarseness of speech when bold; doubtless, the outcome of the serfdom of his countrymen of the time, and the necessity of accustoming them to fight the dominant oppressing factions with their own weapons. Hence, O'Connell had acquired the great power of invective and vituperation, and was sometimes matchless as a scold. An instance of this, vouched for as historical truth, though possessing features of vulgarity, is so characteristic of his lighter moods of fun, and forms so memorable an incident in his life that I must not omit it. There was a certain Biddy Moriarty in Dublin, who kept a huxter's stall on one of the quays opposite the Four Courts. She had a notoriously "bad tongue," and its slang and abuse were proverbial. Some of O'Connell's friends one day thought he could beat her with her own weapons; O'Connell doubted it himself, having heard her Billingsgate once or twice. But he never liked defeat, and backed himself to encounter the virago, and it was decided that the event should come off at once. An adjournment was accordingly made to the huxter's stall, the owner herself in charge of her small wares, and a few loungers and idlers hanging round the stall—for Biddy was one of the sights of Dublin. O'Connell commenced the attack.

"What's the price of this walking-stick, Mrs What's-your-name?"

"Moriarty, sir, is my name, and a good one it is; and what have you to say agen it? and one-and-sixpence's the price of the stick. Troth, it's chape as dirt—so it is."

"One-and-sixpence for a walking-stick—whew! Why, you are no better than an impostor, to ask eighteen pence for what cost you two pence."

"Ah, you can't deny the charge, you miserable *submultiple* of a *duplicate ratio*."

"Go, rinse your mouth in the Liffey, you nasty tickle-pitcher; after all the bad words you speak."

"Rinse your own mouth, you wicked-minded old *polygon*—to the deuce I pitch you, you blustering intersection of a superficies!"

"You saucy tinker's apprentices, if you don't cease your jaw, I'll —" But here she gasped for breath, unable to hawk up any more words, for the last volley of O'Connell had nearly stifled her.

"While I have a tongue I'll abuse you, you most inimitable *periphery*. Look at her, boys! There she stands—a convicted *perpendicular* in petticoats! There's contamination in her *circumference*, and she trembles with guilt down to the extremes of her *corollaries*. Ah, you're found out, you *rectilineal antecedent* and *equiangular* old hag! 'Tis with you the devil will fly away, you porter-swiping *similitude* of the *bisection* of a *vortex*!"

Overwhelmed with this torrent of language, Mrs Moriarty was silenced. Catching up a saucepan, she was aiming it at O'Connell's head, when he very prudently made a timely retreat. "You have won the wager, O'Connell, here's your bet," cried the gentleman who proposed the contest.

It is doubted if Biddy was fully reported; at any rate it was an unequal match, inasmuch as O'Connell's attack was planned.

I have said O'Connell was bold in speech—he was also physically courageous. This quality in his character was called forth in the dulling days of 1815. At one of the numerous Catholic meetings held at that period, Counsellor O'Connell said, "I am convinced that the Catholic cause has suffered by neglect of discussion. Had the petition been last year the subject of debate we should not now see the beggarly Corporation of Dublin anticipating our efforts by a petition of an opposite direction." A Mr D'Esterre, a member of the Corporation, took offence at the expression, "beggarly corporation," which, now-a-days, would not disturb the equanimity of corporations, and he championed their cause. He requested an explanation from O'Connell, who, in reply, emphasised what he called his "contemptuous feelings for that body in its corporate capacity, although it contains many valuable persons, whose conduct as individuals (I lament) must necessarily be confounded in the acts of the general body." This was the only satisfaction O'Connell vouchsafed to D'Esterre, except that at about 4 o'clock one morning in January,