

# Irish News

## OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, June, 1901.

### A PAGE OF IRISH HISTORY.

I wonder has Mr Wyndham, our Irish Chief Secretary, who is said to be a well-read man, ever read Moore's 'Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald' or Dr R. R. Madden's powerful description of the last scenes in that young life? Did he never meet with a letter written by Lord Edward's brother, Lord Henry Fitzgerald, to Lord Camden, in which he passionately arraigns the Government as his brother's murderer:

Nor, my Lord, shall I scruple to declare to the world—I wish I could to the four quarters of the world—that, amongst you, your ill-treatment has murdered my brother as much as if you had put a pistol to his head. . . . In this situation (Newgate prison) no charitable message arrives to his relations; no offer to allow attached servants to attend upon him, who could have been depended upon in keeping dreadful news of all sorts from him. No, no; to his grave in madness you would pursue him; to his grave you persecuted him. . . . On Saturday my poor forsaken brother, who had but that night and the next day to live, was disturbed; he heard the execution of Clinch at the prison door. He asked eagerly, "What noise is that?" And certainly, in some manner or other, he knew it—for, oh God! what am I to write? From that time he lost his senses: most part of the night he was raving mad, a keeper from a madhouse was necessary.

So died for Ireland's freedom a young nobleman, 'the son of the Duke of Leinster, the most honored and beloved of all his race.' And in the middle of the night his body was taken secretly to a vault in an old church close by Dublin Castle, where so neglected was it by his family—the nation that idolised him did not then dare to honor his remains—that long afterwards the celebrated biographer of the men of '98, Dr R. R. Madden, found the coffin rotting away and the remains exposed. Through his exertions, the body was re-coffined.

Some years ago, I visited the vaults under Saint Werburgh's and spent some time near Lord Edward's coffin, which is marked and adorned by the hand of nature in a strange manner. In the centre of the vault, upon trestles, rests the coffin, which is (or was when I saw it) completely covered by a most beautiful snow-white pall that hangs almost to the ground and is fringed with tassels of the same soft, velvety material. But no human hand wove that pall; it is one of the strange secrets of nature that she, with her own loving hand, clothes the neglected Irish churches with a green mantle and has flung her snow-white cloak over the lonely remains of Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

No one can account for this phenomenon; few, indeed, have ever seen it. The vaults beneath St. Werburgh's Church are perfectly dry and a current of air keeps them pure. No sign of fungi of any kind is to be seen throughout the whole labyrinth save this growth of soft, snowy substance, which, as I said, covers over and hangs in folds from Lord Edward's coffin, the only undraped spot being the breastplate bearing name and date, which is kept brushed by the sexton.

We have still in fine preservation the mansion of Frascati, at Blackrock, near Dublin, where Lord Edward's mother lived and where the young patriot spent many joyous hours with the family he so fondly loved, and where he passed at least one hour of awful suspense.

The old mansion is close to the high road from Dublin. It stands embowered in lofty trees and is so large that it is now two beautiful houses. I sometimes visit there, and never look around what is now the dining-room, but was a ball-room when the Fitzgerald family lived there, without thinking of the loved old stepfather, the stately dowager, the bright young enthusiast and the beautiful Pamela, whose descendant our Irish Chief Secretary is. When I look out on the verdant lawn at the back, with its flood of sunshine, its noble old trees, and see a group of happy faces, I think for the bright hopes for Ireland once dreamed, once cherished under the spreading branches of those great elms. Then I turn to a side-alley and glance at an immense hollow tree that brings to my mind a hunted patriot youth—hunted by base spies and cruel yeomanry, taking refuge for a brief while within that hollow trunk—where he had often hidden in boyish frolic—while his home was searched that he might be dragged away, if found, to die a felon's death.

The tree, though so long hollow, is still alive. In a glass-case containing Irish historical mementoes, I have leaves from the ivy covering Frascati, and laid upon the leaves is a tiny casket containing a piece of dried timber; this is a piece of the first coffin in which Lord Edward Fitzgerald's body was laid.

Curiously enough there died last spring, not far from Frascati, a man who also did what he thought was best to aid Ireland—James Stephens, the Fenian Leader, who lived to a ripe old age and whose body was not hustled away secretly at two in the morning, but was borne publicly to the grave, accompanied by bands, public societies, and a vast concourse of people.

Well, of course people differ in their opinions as to the wisdom or unwisdom of all these men, but of a certainty all—United Irishmen, Repealers, '48 men, Fenians, Land-Leaguers—were honest lovers of Ireland, and all helped in their own time and in their own way to keep up Ireland's heart, even though many of their own hearts broke in the effort. I do believe all had at least honest love for the land that bore them.

### PROSELYTISING AGENCIES.

Death has been busy in another field. We have lost Mrs Smylie. 'Mrs Smylie! Who is Mrs Smylie?' you ask, and no wonder. Well, for longer than I can tell, she has been a remarkable woman in this country; for if James Stephens was Head Centre of the anti-English party in this much tried land, Mrs Smylie was, for at least forty years, Head Centre of a system that has worked a million times more harm and has done a million times more to keep up animosity between Irish and English than ever James Stephens did.

There comes to Ireland annually from England a sum of £20,000 for the conversion of Catholics to Protestantism. We are very ostentatiously informed that this money is subscribed every year by zealous English Protestant 'old women' Who are these mighty generous old women and where are they? I have heard it stated by Protestants who hate the system that the money comes in reality from a very different source and is paid over in order to do the work it does most effectively: keep alive religious animosities in the South and West, and especially in and around Dublin, for, argue the donors of this secret service money, were Catholics and Protestants to be allowed to live in brotherly peace and kindness side by side, and were equal justice shown to the two in all walks of life, they would soon join hands and have but one national and political aim amongst them.

Dublin and its outskirts form a network of an extraordinarily active system of proselytism which finds almost all its victims in the city slums. Mrs. Smylie was the clever organiser of this system and her agents are spread throughout city and suburbs, these agents being, for the most part, women of fair social position who add to their income in this manner, for very little, indeed, of the £20,000 per annum finds its way to the wretched creatures who are tempted to believe the promises of relief held out to them. Mrs. Smylie held a very good social position and received five per cent., or £1000 a year of the £20,000 that passed through her hands to her agents, while another of her family drew £300 a year as her secretary in a work that keeps alive the most bitter and miserable religious rancor in our midst, for all the coarsest and most ignorant calumnies against Catholics are sedulously preached and taught by these people to their unfortunate perverts and in the schools full of little children who fall into their hands.

Is there a wretched drunkard, male or female, dead; an agent pounces upon the starving parent left, and only too often is the child's soul bartered in misery and despair. Mixed marriages bring a large harvest, and hatred and disunion are the outcome of a cruel wrong done, for the sake of gain, to these poor people who, instead of being educated in Christian charity, are reared to hate and blaspheme all that their own flesh and blood hold most sacred. Very many honest Protestants detest these things, but the fact remains this large sum of money is spent for the political aim of keeping Catholics and Protestants asunder, and the Head Centre was Mrs. Smylie. But, unfortunately, there is money in the business; not for the wretched beings whose souls are bartered, but for people living in handsome houses in and around Dublin. Thus the disedifying work goes on.

### BARREN RESULTS.

Five years ago I spent some months in Sligo, and anything more painful and ludicrous than the 'Christian work' that was carried on there cannot be imagined.

Sligo was, up to that time, a good, quiet, 'God-fearing' little city: there were Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian clergymen, all quite well able to look after the spiritual wants of their flocks, all doing their work zealously, and the people lived in peace and harmony, without religious bickerings or ill-will, until it was suddenly discovered by Mrs Smylie's agents—who must earn their money somehow—that Sligo is inhabited by Pagans, Pagan and Catholic being synonymous with these enlightened folk. Forthwith to Sligo went an ex-official of Dublin Castle and two or three others althirst for souls (and extra pay), and on three days in the week a mission was preached to the Catholics in the open streets. Close to the Catholic Cathedral these gentlemen (?) stood and poured forth the usual abuse of Catholic doctrine, Catholic priests, and so on. The people arose against this, mobbed the preachers and drove them off. Immediately, instead of intimating that Sligo had hitherto been a most peaceful town, and that this peace was due to the good teaching of the ministers of religion, the Government, at the instance of the disturbers, began sending large bodies of special police two or three times weekly to protect the men whose irreligious intolerance was the whole cause of disturbance. Then the war began.

I was staying near the Railway Station and had a full view of each day's proceedings, for the coming of the evangelists and their 50 policemen always transpired an hour or so before the arrival of the Dublin train, and all the inhabitants of the suburb, rich and poor, Catholic, Protestant and Presbyterian, turned out to watch the fun. When the train steamed in, as if from underground there started forth a crowd of men and women, armed with improvised un-musical instruments; in the centre always stood the town buffoon, with a griddle (old Irish folk, do you recall hot griddle cakes?) for a tom-tom, and well he played it; on the fringe of the crowd hovered urchins and cur dogs and chickens, and what not. Then, the train having arrived, the station gates were unlocked, 50 policemen, some looking highly amused, some indignant, others bored, came forth about 30 paces outside the gates, formed a circle, and into the circle advanced three apostles clad in tweed, who could be seen gesticulating wildly for perhaps 15 minutes, while, outside the cordon of police, the band played, the people chafed, the urchins danced a delighted war dance, and, outside these again, I have seen half a dozen wise-looking fat ducks standing observantly in the centre of the road, quacking their remarks to each other on the queer ways of Christians. The seance at an end, the police once