

## A GREAT IRISH SCHOLAR

### THE LAST OF A DISTINGUISHED BAND.

The death of Dr. P. W. Joyce has cut off the last of that giant band of indefatigable literary workers who, bred and grown to manhood in the Gaelic language and traditions before the '47 famine and its resultant extirpations and pestilences had almost obliterated the tongue and music and rich memories of the past, devoted their strong hearts and brains to bridging over the dark chasm and rescuing whatever of ancient Ireland's intellectual wealth and worth could be treasured in imperishable books. The labors of O'Donovan and O'Curry were sketched recently in *America*, and with them was linked the name of Dr. Joyce. Ere the words were printed he had passed. But he left an enduring monument. The Ireland he knew and loved will not wholly pass. Thanks to his toil and talents, much of it will live in his pages, inspiring and energising the newer Ireland with the spirit of the old (writes M. Kenny, S.J., in *America*).

His more important books are prefixed after the ancient Gaelic manner: 'Its place is Lyre-na-Grena, Rathmines, Dublin; its time is . . . ; its author is Patrick Weston Joyce, Doctor of Laws; and the cause of writing the same book is to give glory to God, honor to Ireland, and knowledge to those who desire to learn all about the Old Irish people.' Lyra-na-Grena is the Limerick valley, separating the Galtees from the Ballyhoura mountains, where he was born eighty-seven years ago in the village of Glensheen. To the east is the storied Glen of Aberlow, and the cave in the Galtees where Dr. Geoffrey Keating, hiding from the priest-hunters, wrote the *History of Ireland* and many noble poems and sermons in classic Gaelic; westward stretch the Ballyhouras, whose legends are sung by his brother, Dr. Robert Dwyer Joyce, the author of 'Deirdre,' in *Ballads of Irish Chivalry*; southward lies Glenuanar, celebrated by Canon Sheehan in his novel of that name; and all around are the streams and hills that Spenser saw from his neighboring castle of Killoolman, and enshrined in the *Fairy Queen*. The secluded glen had preserved the language, music, and legends of the past, and as young Joyce grew up he revelled in them. His father had a rich store of songs, and these and all others he had heard in his youth he was able to write out from memory half a century afterwards.

#### He Received His First Lessons

from a 'Poor Scholar' in his home, where such hospitality, he tells us, was 'regarded not as a charity, but a duty, for the instinct ran in the people's blood, derived from ancient times when Ireland was the "Island of Saints and Scholars."' Then he went to the 'Hedge Schools,' that unique institution whereby priests and teachers and people had frustrated the Penal Laws against Catholic education and preserved the continuity of Irish learning. His chapter on 'Memory of Old Customs' in *English as We Speak it in Ireland*, gives a delightful and valuable account of four such schools, where amid rude surroundings he was firmly grounded in the classics and the sciences by teachers who, often rough and unconventional, 'were excellent solid scholars, full of enthusiasm for learning, which enthusiasm they communicated to their pupils.' Joyce was 'the delight and joy' of his school, for he carried a fife on which he could 'roll off jigs, reels, hornpipes, hop-jigs, song tunes, etc., without limit'; and before classes all the pupils danced vigorously to his music under the master's approving eye. They took up their lessons with equal energy, often in a cottage kitchen, 'and the family went on with their household work while the school buzzed about their ears, neither in any way interfering with the other.'

With an equipment thus acquired, young Joyce went up to Dublin, passed a brilliant Civil Service examination, became the Teacher of Method, and later Principal of the National Board's Training School, and as a result of his experiences wrote a book, *The Handbook of School Management*, which was adopted by the

Board as the standard for its teachers, and has run through twenty-five editions. His Dublin training accustomed him to systematize his knowledge and communicate it with order and lucidity, but Lyre-na-Grena had done more for him. The rich old airs he had drunk in at its firesides enabled him to render invaluable service to Dr. Petrie in the early 'fifties in the preparation of *National Music of Ireland*; and though denied the boon he asked in *Garrett Mackenry*, a pathetic story written sixty-five years ago and included in *The Wonders of Ireland*—'Grant me, kind Providence, to spend my declining years in that beloved valley, and to rest at length my aged head in the grave of my fathers on the green hill of Ardpatrick—he continued to revisit it and complete the course it gave him in language, legend, topography, and song. Largely through his wanderings in its neighborhood he was able for the first time to

Identify Spenser's Irish Rivers and Localities, and to contribute some 1200 unpublished airs to Ireland's musical treasure-house—211 in the Petrie collections, and nearly a thousand in his own *Ancient Irish Music*, *Irish Peasant Songs*, and his great final collection of 842 pieces in *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs*. His explanations, annotations, and topical and personal reminiscences, while enhancing their musical value, have an interest for tastes that are non-musical. In his preface to the volume of 1907 he wrote:

'My home in Glensheen, in the heart of the Ballyhoura Mountains, was the home of music and song; you heard them everywhere, sung, played, whistled; and they were mixed up with the people's pastimes, occupations, and daily life. As I loved the graceful music of the people from my childhood, their songs, dance tunes, *keens*, and lullabies remained in my memory almost without an effort of my own, so that ultimately I became the general and, it may be said, the sole legatee of this long accumulating treasury of melody. My knowledge of Irish music, such as it is, did not come to me from the outside in after life, or by a late study, as a foreign language is learned, but grew up from within during childhood and boyhood to form part of my mind, like my native language.'

This mastery of his native language is shown in his *Irish Grammar*—the first that was cheap, simple, and scientific—but he put it to still better use. Associated in his early manhood with O'Curry and O'Donovan, and their successor on the Brehon Law Commission, like them he furnished Gaelic information to high-placed 'ignoramus,' who flourished in borrowed plumes; but later he determined to continue and complete their work, as well as Petrie's, and dispense it to the people in language of their understanding. The permanent result of this resolve is *A Social History of Ancient Ireland*, *The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places*, *A Short History of Ireland to 1688*, and *Old Celtic Romances*. The *Social History* fills 1283 octavo pages, and the three volumes of the *Names of Places* are on a similar scale. The third part was issued a few weeks before his death, making it the most complete and interesting topographical work that exists. The *Short History* has 565 pages, which give a fuller and more reliable story of the period than any longer one we know of, and his *Celtic Romances* remain the most faithful and most readable versions of the thirteen epics he selected. Less eloquent and striking than O'Curry, lacking the depth and the ebullient spirits of O'Donovan, and perhaps the gigantic mental and physical equipment that enabled both to accomplish many a literary *tour de force*, he had a gift that was possessed in like degree by neither, of communicating his wide and varied knowledge to the simplest intelligence. Anyone who reads, can read him! and though eloquence never purples his pages, his simplicity, precision,

#### And the Intrinsic Merits of His Narrative,

will always compel attention. He made use of his predecessors, in as far as they were helpful, always with acknowledgment; but he was no blind copier of any. His *Social History* has exact references to 368 volumes, which he used in its preparation, and his 358 most

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