

It has always been cited as the crown of legal and constitutional agitation, and one that no leader less gifted than O'Connell could have gained. It changed the position of the Catholic portion (which was the far greater portion) of the Irish population towards the Protestant portion, but it did not change the position of either with regard to England. It set the Irish Catholic on an equality (theoretically, at any rate) with the Irish Protestant in the eyes of the laws which England had made, but it did not give either power to change or modify any of those same laws. The Irish Catholic could compete with his fellow-countrymen of any creed in trade or profession, but should his competitions in either clash with English interests England had not yielded an iota of her power to trample down such competition. And in after times, whenever it has so clashed, she has used that power.

O'Connell brought constitutional agitation to a degree of perfection which has never been surpassed by this country at any other period, or by any other country at any period. Lecky, an historian with no love for O'Connell, acknowledged that for leading and controlling a political organisation, no leader in the world's history surpassed him. During his gigantic agitation for Repeal it is computed that at Tara and other monster meetings the assembly numbered, not thousands nor tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands; yet so orderly were the proceedings, so well controlled those vast crowds, that there was afforded no pretext for military interference. By such tactics O'Connell had won Catholic Emancipation. Through the constitutional mouthpiece of the ballot box had an awakened Ireland spoken; and her voice had been heard and obeyed, and the penal laws blotted from the pages of her law books. Fifteen years had passed between the decisive election of Clare, in 1828, and the monster meeting called to meet at Clontarf in 1843: 15 years which might reasonably be thought to have made for the progress of freedom and justice even in British minds. The same men—Peel and Wellington—whom O'Connell had conquered before were the men whom he had to confront again. Little wonder that O'Connell believed that the methods by which he had won his glorious fight could not fail him now. He forgot that the victory he had won was the victory of the Irish Catholic over the Irish Protestant: the victory which he had set out to win would have been the victory of the Irish over the English nation; the later organisation, far stronger and more completely organised than that which had won Catholic Emancipation, proved powerless to win national freedom. O'Connell showed no less prudence and restraint than he had done during the previous struggle. Lawyer as well as statesman, acts of violence appealed neither to his character nor his judgment, so he would not permit any course of action which would give the Government a legal justification for interference. To suit her own purpose England defied her own laws: she declared O'Connell's lawful acts illegal. The events of that time do not need to be recalled to Irish readers: the proclaimed meeting at Clontarf, which but for O'Connell's exertions would have been a massacre, his subsequent arrest and release with one foot in the grave—in a word, the ruin of himself and his constitutional agitation by unconstitutional methods.

The Land Acts are the more modern monuments of renewed constitutional agitation. The triumph of the Irish tenant farmer involved the ruin of the Irish landlord. The latter, as a class, did so little good to Ireland that there is no need to drop tears over his grave; but the fact remains that in the Irish land struggles, whichever side lost or gained, England was not called on to suffer; she was the judge, but not the paymaster. In the land question Parnell triumphed—a hard struggle and a great victory;—but it was a struggle between class and class, between the *Irish* oppressed and the *Irish* oppressor: it let the question of nationhood alone.

The agitation for self-government was proceeding when the cloud which had darkened Parnell's life-path deepened and blackened his political sky and burst in thunder over startled Ireland. We have been told,

and told again, that only for that catastrophe and the consequent "split" Ireland's legislative freedom had been achieved. This is, and must ever remain, mere supposition. Had Parnell never loved unwisely Ireland's story would perhaps have been the same. He had come within sight of the goal—so had O'Connell; the might-have-beens of history are a sealed book. If Parnell had not given a weapon against himself we have no assurance but that some other weapon as fatal would have been found or forged for his destruction before he had been allowed to snatch the prize. One, indeed, had been forged previously, and failed, in the *Times* Commission. Had his unscrupulous accusers not then failed ignominiously to attach any degree of guilt to Parnell there can hardly be a doubt that he and probably his lieutenants would have suffered the extreme penalty. The subsequent divorce proceedings which eventuated in his undoing would not have been necessary, and the story through them unfolded would have been heard only in connection with some mysterious Diary such as was whispered about in relation to Roger Casement when he was not in a position to disprove the characteristic concoctions by which it was sought to sully his good name. Slander is a familiar means of discrediting, or attempting to discredit, Irish leaders, living and dead. O'Connell did not escape it. Even in our own day men and women very dear to the Irish heart have been slandered most persistently, and one deploras having to complain that it is not the work of England's agents alone, but that Irish Catholics, and not always lay Catholics, lend themselves to the dissemination of the slander.

Future historians will find it hard to convince their readers that the Ministry which ruled Great Britain at the commencement of the present war ever intended that any form of self-government should come into operation in Ireland. It is sufficient to review mentally the delays at every stage, the connivance of Carson's illegalities, and finally the transparently engineered Curragh strike. To sum up: no permanent concession of Irish freedom, however logically incontestable, however morally undeniable, will be yielded by a British Government in normal times. All the eloquence, reasoning, and moral force of Irish feeling are as waves spending themselves on the rock of English interests. This seems a dispiriting doctrine, but there is no wisdom in ignoring a truth because it is displeasing; and in ignoring this lies a special danger.

As has been already said, when Irish interests are alone concerned the moral force of constitutional agitation has proved strong enough not only to win but to hold: the penal laws have never been renewed; the Land Acts have never been repealed. When British interests are touched we need a surety stronger than our moral strength to guard our rights: the national freedom won by Grattan was shamelessly withdrawn when England was strong enough to break her pledge.

Taihape

At a meeting of the parishioners of the late Father Kinkead, held on Sunday, January 5, it was decided that a suitable memorial be erected to his memory. After a meeting of the committee, to be held on January 23, when the form of the memorial is to be decided upon, a subscription list will be opened in the parish and surrounding district. Friends of the late Father Kinkead in other parts of the Dominion should be in sympathy with this praiseworthy effort. Mr. Bartosh has been elected secretary.

My wife—just listen to her for 10 minutes and you will want to run to the nearest grocer for a packet of the genuine "NO RUBBING" Laundry Help. Economical too.—Irishman.

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