THOMAS MOORE

THE NATIONAL POET OF IRELAND

A REPLY TO THE IMPEACHMENT

The following article from the pen of Mr. J. J. Sullivan, of Auckland, appeared in a recent issue of the *Lyttelton Times*:—

In a recent issue of the *Lyttelton Times*, which has just come to hand to me in Auckland, there appeared an article on Thomas Moore, the National Poet of Ireland, from the pen of Mr. M. Nolan, in which certain specific charges are made against Moore.

Mr. Nolan alleges that Moore 'failed to take advantage of his opportunities'—(a) by the display of his genius in Irish national matters, and (b) by the creation of a national spirit. Moore, as a matter of fact, found himself face to face, when leaving the secondary school, with the doors of Trinity College, Dublin—the only university in Ireland—to use his own phrase, 'a fountain sealed,' and it was the merest accident that in 1793 they were opened to members of his faith for the first time. On entering Trinity College he could not obtain college distinctions, for they were reserved for the professors of the favored creed; but he resolved to show that he deserved them, and entered as a candidate for a scholarship. He succeeded in passing the most difficult examination with credit, but could not, however, as a Catholic, enjoy more than the bare honor of the attempt (*Life of Moore*, by James Burke, 1852 edition, p. 4). The brilliant Irishman, and 'one of the helots of the land,' far from being what Mr. Nolan states he was, became as if by sympathy the intimate friend of those who were so deeply implicated in the insurrection of 1798, and contributed a long letter to the Dublin *Press* in support of the national movement—and side by side with articles written by the chiefs of the United Irish Party. Who could expect otherwise from a young Irish Catholic of ardent temperament, not a cold spectator of the stirring scenes which the last few years of the eighteenth century presented, and who realised, if ever an Irishman did realise, that he had come into the world with 'the slave's yoke around his neck?' It was at this period that a few words dropped by Moore's friend, Edward Hudson, in the hearing of Moore's mother, caused her to implore him to avoid any further connection with the *Press*, and he, who never disobeyed her, gave the required promise. 'Thus it was,' says Moore, 'that by gentle and womanly watchfulness, by the Providence of the little world of Home, I, although placed in the very current of the movement and living most familiarly with the most daring of those who propelled it, was guarded from any participation in their secret oaths, counsels or plans, and thus escaped all share in that wild struggle to which so many better men than myself fell victims.'

If men would only investigate a little, and try to catch the spirit of the times and realise the circumstances, a charge of failing to 'take advantage of his opportunities' would never be levelled by any man against Moore—certainly not by anyone acquainted with his conduct during that 'devilish inquiry' in Trinity College, when the senators hoped to extract some information from the young poet—and failed to make him turn informer against Emmet and other brave Irishmen in 1798 (see works of Moore, by Charles Kent, B.L., 1890 edition, page xxi.).

Mr. Nolan goes on to show that Moore had within his reach material—'a history of a cause which despised the scaffold,' and so on—of which he could write and did not, and this grave charge is not supported by a scintilla of evidence! The very contrary is the case. Moore, although he had before him the words of O'Connell on 'Emmet's rash attempt' at an insurrection in Ireland, not only wrote thrilling melodies on the very subject and the very man—whose attempts were ridiculed by the great O'Connell—but he left a monument to Emmet's worth and character that will go on to posterity, establishing Moore's patriotism, as well as Emmet's devotion to Ireland, for all time. (*Life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald*, by Thomas Moore, Cameron-Ferguson edition, pp. 141 *et seq.*)

Again we hear the same old story, for the thousandth time, when Mr. Nolan tells us of the 'fatuous smiles of the London drawing-rooms' debauching Moore 'from his plain duty and his first love.' Why does not Mr. Nolan give us the whole truth? Was it not mainly through the instrumentality of Lord Moira—one of Ireland's best sons—that Moore received that sympathy in London that was unknown to anybody mentioning Ireland's sorrow and wrongs in those extraordinary years? (See speech of Hon. McMahon Glynn, Federal Parliament, Australia, August 3, 1905).

Read Moore's poems written in 1808 and 1809, and will you find there a vestige of evidence to support the insinuation of his Christchurch critic that Ireland was forgotten by him in the London drawing-rooms? In his poem 'Corruption' he recounts many of Ireland's wrongs and speaks with indignation of

> 'the union thrown
> Into her bitter cup, when that alone
> Of Slavery's draught was wanting.'

In 'Intolerance' he deals with those who, like the irreconcilables in Ulster to-day, disgrace religion by making her the pretext for bigotry—

> 'a canting crew,
> So smooth, so Godly, yet so devilish too;
> Who, armed at once with prayerbooks and with whips,
> Blood on their hands and Scripture on their lips,
> Tyrants by creed and torturers by text,
> Makes this life hell in horror of the next.'

And in the 'Sceptic' we have again conclusive proof that he had not been overcome at this time (1808) 'by the enervating odors of the London drawing-rooms.' He shows England sympathising with patriots abroad while crushing them at Home—

> 'Self-pleased still the same dishonoring chain,
> She binds in Ireland, she would break in Spain;
> While praised at distance, but at home forbid,
> Rebels in Cork are patriots in Madrid.'

Not even in the *Melodies of Ireland* did Moore forget Ireland's wrongs, and who can deny this in an age when to write as he felt would have cut short a splendid career and deprived Ireland and the world of some of the finest contributions to literature?

Moore did not fail in national sentiment in 'She is far from the land,' 'O, breathe not his name,' 'Erin, O Erin,' 'Dear harp of my country,' 'Where is the slave?' and 'Forget not the field,' in which he sang—

> 'Far dearer the grave or prison,
> Illum'd by one patriot name,
> Than the trophies of all who have risen
> On liberty's ruins to fame.'

One of the most ungenerous statements made by Mr. Nolan about Moore is that 'while his country was suffering all the pangs of famine' he had the hardihood to sing—

> 'My dream of life from noon till night
> Was love, still love.'

This poem appeared in 1811 and not, as suggested by Mr. Nolan, in 1847, and wanting indeed is he in 'the higher sensations of the souls which enables one to perceive' that in that poem 'Love's young dream' there is that 'spiritualising influence' which is rarely met with in the works of the great poets of England. At the time this poem was published there were eleven others given to the world by Moore, and to avoid the appearance of selection I take from the first to hand, and in one of them the national sentiment is not wanting—

> 'Yes, Monarch, though sweet are our home recollections,
> Though sweet are the tears that from tenderness fall,
> Though sweet are our friendships, our hopes, our affections,
> Revenge on the tyrant is sweetest of all.'

(*Moore's Poems*, Longmans, 15th edition, 1843, p. 8.)