

YOUNG IRELAND—THE OLD AND THE NEW.

By John O'Leary.

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Mr. O'Leary, who on rising was again most enthusiastically cheered, the entire audience rising to their feet, expressed his thanks for the address and then proceeded with his lecture, the subject of which was 'Young Ireland—The Old and the New.' He said, after some preliminary remarks, and this brings me back to Young Ireland—the old party and the young society.

I have said before that Young Ireland left much undone, and I may here say that much of what they did was imperfectly done, and some of it even ill done, but it is only fair to add that the imperfection as well as the incompleteness of their work was more their misfortune than their fault. They were entering upon a new country and breaking up new ground, and so naturally had to do some of their work roughly and with imperfect tools. Then they were hampered in mid-career by the famine, and cut short early and suddenly by the French revolution.

But I am not here to criticise, save to such a limited extent—and I desire to make it as limited as I can—as may aid in creation. I am here, if possible, to originate, and as the first step in that direction, I am here to call upon you, young men of the rising and risen generation, and to urge you now, with all the earnestness I can command, and, with the blessing of God, to keep on urging you to imitate and emulate that body whose name you have taken, and I trust not taken in vain. As to what I think you can specifically do, either as a society or as individuals, that I can only more or less foreshadow in a single address; but you will have here often ample opportunity of hearing and discussing plans and details. Shortly speaking, we have as much need as ever for such aid and inspiration as is to be got from ballad and song, from story, essay, or history, and as none of these

things like mushrooms sprang spontaneously from the ground, we must all of us, in the measure of our power, aid, or at most aim at, bringing them into being. Some of us can write, how well or how ill we few of us know till we have tried and tried much. But, after all the number who can write, or at least write effectively, must necessarily be small. We are far too much and too many of us given to talking already, and it would not mend matters if an equal number, or even any great number of us were to take to writing; and most certainly I am the last person in the world to ask any of you to set about writing without adequate training and without some reasonable grounds for supporting in himself some native gift to start with. But you can all read; and this is a side of things that needs to be as much looked after as the other, for without readers on an extensive scale there can be few books of an Irish and national tendency. There seems a sort of vicious circle in this matter. Books create readers, and readers create books; but the Young Irelanders of the past got out of this vicious circle, and so must the Young Irelanders of the present, or, failing to do so, we are little likely to get out of any of our old troubles, and very likely to fall into new ones. But, besides the comparatively passive act of reading yourselves, you can all have the active *role* of urging on others to read.

And here there is not only place for all of you, but ‘ample room and verge enough’ for any amount of activity and any intensity of earnestness on the part of any of you. And here it naturally suggests itself to me to say something to you, and something which many of the younger among you need sadly to hear and to take to heart, on a subject intimately connected with any scheme of literary or political propagandism. I mean the subject of toleration. In no way are we more different from the Young Irelanders than in this; and by the ‘we’ here I mean to include all creeds, classes, and conditions of Irishmen in the present time. The Young Irelanders not only proclaimed the ‘right to differ,’ but, having availed themselves pretty largely of the right themselves, were certainly as willing as any body of men I have veer heard of to concede it fully to others. In the Ireland of to-day, on the contrary, there is no right so steadily denied, and the assertion of which is so severely punished. And here comes in the ugly dilemma

for many of us, but especially for the older among us. We are not only required to have a general agreement with the majority for the time being, but even a minute agreement in minute matters, and, worst of all, it seems practically expected of us to change our opinions occasionally and our conduct constantly. And yet there is nothing more clear to me than that it is not right thinking but right feeling we should look to. I have all my life found some of the worst people holding what I took to be the best opinions, and some of the best people holding what I took to be the worst opinions. Nearly everybody must have had some experiences of the sort, but how few seem to draw the natural inference. If we have good reason for believing that a man means well to Ireland we should take him to our heart of hearts, no matter what his way of thinking may be. As somebody has said, to put the thing in another way, there is no need that a man should be right, but only that he should be upright.

Take as an example of our present intolerance, and a contrast with the conciliatory policy of those from whom you derive your name, the case of Mr. Gray Porter, who was welcomed into the National ranks forty years ago for holding opinions less advanced than those which he has lately striven to act upon, and which have been met on the part of his countrymen either by silent contempt or active opposition. But take a case better fitted to point a moral if not to adorn a tale. I mean the case of The O'Connor Don (hisses).

A Voice—He is no patriot.

Mr. O'Leary—You have no idea of toleration. It is not one but ten thousand lectures you need. Listen to me, and reply if you wish.

The Chairman—I ask you to give Mr. O'Leary an attentive hearing.

Here was a man of the highest rank—and it is idle for us to try and conceal from ourselves, no matter what recent events may say or seem to say to the contrary, that rank counts for much with the Irish people—of undoubted ability, of the best private character, and, as far as I at all know, perfectly straightforward in his public action. He is certainly some sort of a Nationalist, and quite as advanced as I am myself, for instance, on the social question, and yet there seems no

place for him in public life, because he cannot accept all the shibboleths of the day.

Contrast his reception by the present generation with that of Smith O'Brien by the past one. We all know, or at least we all can and ought to know, how similar were the starting points, social and political, of the two men, and we all certainly do know where the current of events, combined with his own innate nobility of character, led O'Brien in the end. I do not pretend, for I cannot know anything about the matter, that The O'Connor Don is, or was, likely even to have developed in the direction of O'Brien, and of course I know that men of the moral stature of the latter are rare in any country or in any time; but how can any of us know how many plants of a similar species growing towards the light may be dwarfed in their growth under the cold shade of neglect and calumny.

And, now, my young friends, having striven, from the nature of the case, imperfectly to show you how you were to imitate generally some of the specific virtues of that brilliant and gallant body of young men whose name you have very fittingly adopted as a badge of honour, but which, as a lesson against rash judgment, you should not forget was originally conferred upon the young men as a term of reproach, or at least of contempt, I shall now proceed to point out to you what I take to be some of your present most pressing needs, and, consequently, some of your clearest duties.

*Fraus latet in generalibus*¹, as the lawyers say, and in the present day people are, properly enough, with certain limitations, held as nothing if not practical. First, then, I think you should spread your societies broadcast, leaving, if possible, no centre of population in the three kingdoms without one. Second, when a sufficient number of societies are in existence, or if a sufficient number be already in existence, they should at once begin to consider how best to unite their separate forces; in what sense they can form one united body; whether there should be a central advising, guiding, and directing council; where should be its seat; and, finally, how far it would be desirable that

¹ Cartlann: 'Fraud lies hid in general expressions.'

the separate bodies should confer with each other, and when and at what place such conference should take place.

Personally, I have not the slightest doubt of not only the advisability but the eventual necessity of union; but while I so think, I am still more strongly of opinion that the amplest latitude of choice should in all these matters be left to the separate branches, and that the last thing that should be thought of for societies, as for individuals, is that they should be forced into any Procrustean bed of uniformity. And now as to the internal working of each society. As far as I can see, from such scant reports as I have hitherto come across, there seemed to be too much not over-wise talk, which sometimes took the shape of actively injurious controversy, and his was nearly always a parade of names and proceedings of no great consequence. These societies are not mainly political bodies, and should rarely turn themselves into debating clubs. You are, as far as I know, brought together mainly for mutual instruction and improvement, but, of course, on the lines of Irish Nationality. Well, with this aim, you would certainly, in my opinion, serve your purpose, or indeed any intelligible purpose, far better listening to the recital of such speeches, songs, or other works of literary art as have stood the test of time, rather than wasting your breath in the ventilation of certain commonplaces, and, possibly, sometimes your tempers in mutual recrimination.

Mr. O'Leary then referred to the class of literature, songs, etc, that should be patronised, and to the course which members should pursue, and concluded—

But in all that I have said to you on education I should have ill fulfilled the task I set be for myself if I had led any of you to think that I set too great store upon knowledge pure and simple. The education I desiderate for you should be an education fully as much of the heart as of the head. If you had all the learning of all the schools, and had not at the same time a strong sense of truth and honour and self-sacrifice, all your knowledge would profit yourselves little in the long run, and Ireland, I think, not at all. In the making of men and nations intellectual causes count for much, but I firmly believe, in opposition to the pseudo philosophy of the late Mr. Burke, that moral causes

count for much more. And now I must close with a sort of confession. What I have been hitherto saying to you was prepared and more or less matured several weeks ago; but last night I tossed about for several hours in bed before I slept, seeking to find some pleasant thing to wind up with, and the outcome of all my effort was simply this:—I cannot promise you freedom in the near or the distant future; but this I can say to you with my whole heart and my whole soul, that I believe firmly still what I first learned to believe some forty years ago, when I first read the poems of Thomas Davis that it is the bounden duty of every born Irishman to live, and if needs die, that Ireland may be free.