

IRELAND AND EMANCIPATION

THE Catholic Truth Society of Ireland has issued a very beautiful book¹ by way of accompaniment to the Centenary celebrations which took place in Dublin from the 19th to the 23rd of June. The lucky person who obtains a copy will hesitate about lending it lest the borrower be tempted to hold it for keeps. It is excellently printed and well illustrated, and we feel that photography is put to the purpose for which surely it was intended when we see these pictures of exquisite works of art such as the Shrine of St. Patrick's Bell, the Ardagh Chalice, the Cross of Cong and manuscript pages of the fine script peculiar to Ireland. The book is worth having for these photographs alone; but that is not to say that the letterpress is not all of a piece with the setting of the book. The articles are of a uniformly high standard, eminently readable and written with the easy grace, dignity and restraint which are the accompaniments of unconscious art. If this is a fruit of the New Ireland, then even our worst foes will not be able to withhold their grateful assent to emancipation as a thing of joy.

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Catholic Emancipation was almost wholly an Irish achievement: the great Emancipator was the Irishman, Daniel O'Connell. O'Connell, whom Gladstone called 'the greatest popular leader the world has ever seen,' was genius enough to discover the political power that lay dormant in the silent masses of his countrymen. A multitude can be trained into a vic-

¹ *Catholic Emancipation Centenary Record*. Edited by the Rev. Myles V. Ronan. (Veritas House, 7 and 8 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin.)

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torious army, carrying all before it by sheer force of numbers; but O'Connell saw that the same multitude could be organised for the winning of political victories by peaceful and constitutional methods and without shedding a drop of blood. It is worth remembering that the great Irish champion of religious and civil liberty, the most successful 'agitator' known to history, fearless and strong as he was, was perhaps strongest in his determination to have nothing to do with the methods of violence and physical force. 'One murder, one robbery will horrify,' he once said, 'and I cannot conceive how robbery and murder are one whit better for being multitudinous—yet that is war.' O'Connell's method has been followed in every country of the world by those who have striven to give voice to the civil and religious rights of the inarticulate masses. Father Ventura, the Italian preacher who delivered the funeral oration on O'Connell in Rome, said: 'The Liberator of Ireland did not confine the benefits of liberty to Ireland; but extended them to all Europe, to all the world. God does not create great men for the use of a single age, or of a single people. He gives them for the advantage of all nations and of all ages. Therefore, it is that O'Connell's genius has radiated throughout the world.' Before O'Connell's time, every attempt at popular political reform was regarded with suspicion, and every 'agitator' was considered a revolutionary threatening the reign of established authority and disturbing the peace of the nation.

The debt that English Catholics owe to O'Connell and his Irish supporters is beyond calculation, yet by a strange irony the Act of 1829 gave to Irish Catholics less liberty than to their brethren in England. The type of Protestantism that prevailed in Ireland was of a much more undiluted brand than English Protestantism. It kept none of the after-glow of the

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Catholic tradition as it did in England. It was Protestant in deed and in name. It protested against the Mass, the Priesthood, and the Pope, and in Ireland it has not undergone the changes that we have seen in England. The Irish gentry and landowners were largely Protestant; those who should by place and power have been the natural leaders of the people were Protestants. The Protestant ascendancy saw that public and state offices in Ireland should be given to Protestants. The masses of the Catholic peasantry and their peasant priests, who became the people's leaders as far as they had leaders at all, were despised and given to understand that they were a subject and conquered race. The high hopes that were aroused as to what Emancipation would mean were not realised; and O'Connell died, as so many Irish champions have died, in tragic disappointment. He received the usual Irish reward of Irish suspicion and distrust.

But looking back over the last hundred years Irishmen can see that O'Connell's stupendous efforts are being justified, and that the fruits of Emancipation are indeed ripening.