

EDWARD MARTYN

GEORGE MOORE said of Edward Martyn : ' There is nobody like him. He is more wonderful than anything in literature.' This inspired thought becomes vivid in Denis Gwynn's story of Edward Martyn's life.* The memoir is compiled from extracts, chaotic in their confusion as they were left, from Edward Martyn's own writings. The result, however, despite the incompleteness of these papers, is the most enlightening story of the state of Ireland in a period when Edward Martyn contributed to its public life by his work of reform. They were the most vital movements of a reform in Ireland, which might never have existed or begun but for him whose courage, perseverance, learning, independence of mind and indifference to criticism, ridicule and hostility made him the most remarkable instance of what one great man of such qualities can do in the public service of his country.

Religion, literature and art always meant much more to him than politics and he had by nature and by grace an aristocracy of mind, a strong mind which estranged him from many literary friends. Religious by a native instinct, he the layman, was truly the 'uncloistered monk,' and he chose to live as a hermit, shunning the world : he lived in a garret, whitewashed and bare, in the tower of his ancestral castle of Tulira. Magnificent in his generosity, he would give all his possessions in the interests of education and the uplifting of his country, and to none was he more bountifully lavish than to him who would be the disciple of his idealism. 'Originality' was the sin of this son of Adam, but fortunately or unfortunately he could not hide it. There

*EDWARD MARTYN (1859-1924) AND THE IRISH REVIVAL. By Denis Gwynn. (Jonathan Cape; 12/6 net.)

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was no deceit in Edward Martyn, and he vigorously denounced and violently disagreed with those who differed with him, especially in politics. This imprudence, or lack of restraint perhaps, may be the secret of the apparent and magnificent failure of a great and humble man. It is said that after he had left Oxford he remarked to a friend, 'I am too unlike other people ever to be a success.' Edward Martyn knew himself to be *sui generis*, yet nevertheless this patriot's zeal, knowledge and work were more fruitful in permanent result than those of almost any other living Irishman.

Denis Gwynn has produced a book worthy of his subject. He first tells us of the Irish landlord, intellectually far beyond his class, who despite his position of Deputy Lieutenant and magistrate, ultimately welcomed the downfall of his own aristocracy and fought the battles of his own people. In the second chapter we learn of his work for the foundation and development of the Irish Literary Theatre. It is interesting to observe the growing interest in Drama since his Oxford days, his discussions with George Moore, his poetic attempt and its destruction, 'because his work was not of a kind to promote the glory of God.' But the result of this decision led him to produce anonymously an elaborate satire under the title 'Morgante the Lesser,' dealing with the materialism of the age. This, produced in 1890, was a fine piece of work and was the forerunner of others, notably the 'Heather Field,' dealing with life in the West of Ireland. Then the first production in the Ancient Concert Rooms in Dublin in collaboration with George Moore, Mr. Yeats and Lady Gregory, and finally after bitter disappointment the opening of his own theatre, assisted by Joseph Plunkett and Thomas MacDonagh of sad memories. Certainly the Irish Theatre owes much, if not all, to Edward Martyn's generosity and strenuous efforts.

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In Chapter Three we read interesting details about his work for Church music and decoration. Here he was fortunate, in his time, to meet with every encouragement. At Loughrea, under Dr. Healy, afterwards Archbishop of Tuam, he was instrumental in decorating and improving the Cathedral, and with the succeeding Bishop O'Dea, Edward Martyn still continued to exercise this artistic influence and friendship. Finally we read of his foundation, under the late Archbishop Walsh, of the Palestrina Choir, in the pro-Cathedral at Dublin. It was Edward Martyn who began the revival of the type of Church-song ordered by Pope Pius X many years after, and subsequently by Pius XI. The whole history of this 'Schola Cantorum,' of which I had the privilege of being a member for six years, is fascinating and interesting beyond words.

In the fourth chapter, the 'Gaelic League and Irish Music' is discussed in connection with the fifth and last, on 'Politics and Later Years,' where one reads of Edward Martyn as the chief connecting link between all the phases of the Irish intellectual revival, in music, dancing and language and drama, with the drama of Irish life interspersed all through, hating with an intense contempt the affectations of West Britonism yet ever conscious of his Irish inheritance and his Norman castle and its aristocratic atmosphere. He abhorred democracy. He ridiculed it and materialism. Meantime the reading of true Irish history influenced him. He became a Nationalist. During the Boer War he ceased to remain Deputy Lieutenant and magistrate and soon, instead, joined Arthur Griffith in founding *Sinn Fein*, becoming, indeed, its first President. But he had no ability for public life as such, and soon resigned, and Edward Martyn became the lonely man and King of his Castle where he retired into a life of loneliness to spend his last days. His satire play,

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'Morgante,' sums up the philosophy of his own life. So it was that, even after death, 'his poor body should serve a useful purpose.' Hence the clause that it should be dissected in a medical school. Everything he could leave was bequeathed to philanthropic and religious purposes, and over his dismembered body in the pauper's grave, his Palestrina Choir sang to their benefactor, kindly soul and friend—*pauper et humilis*.

One cannot leave aside this book without a tinge of sadness and a real sense of loss, and one at once feels inclined to say 'He shone in his day like the morning star in the midst of a cloud'—above all in a country where moral courage and independence of judgment are rarely appreciated, often misunderstood. But we are indebted nevertheless to this great man who left to Ireland an inheritance of an example that is to have an immense influence in the policy of forming and proclaiming *one's own* views with absolute independence, whilst being completely free from pride or fear, respecting every man—fearing none, and doing God's work when one has no great one's frowns to fear or susceptibilities to flatter. Edward Martyn, I knew him well. May his soul rest in peace as his memory remains in benediction.

The reading of Edward Martyn's biography brings to my mind the prayer of another 'magnificent failure' in the person of Cardinal Newman:—

O GOD, I give myself to Thee. I trust Thee wholly. Thou art wiser than I, more loving to me than I myself. Deign to fulfil Thy high purposes in me, whatever they be; work in me and through me. I am born to serve Thee, to be Thine, to be Thy instrument. I ask not to see—I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.'

Perhaps these were Edward Martyn's sentiments too.

JOHN BURKE.