

The Author's Presents
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THE
LOST ESCUTCHEON;

OR,

A PAGE RESTORED

TO

The Memoirs of Dublin.

BY

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Ætas incuriosa suorum.

TACITUS.



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TO
THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY

THIS TRACT IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

EXAMEN CRITICUM : or, Original Views of Passages in the Works of
the Poet-Philosophers of Venusia and Aquinum. By JOHN MURRAY,
A.M., Ex-S. T. C. D., Royal Gold Medallist "in Science and Arts,"
by special Award of the King of Prussia; and Resident Master of
Trinity College, Dublin. *[In the Press.]*

THE LOST ESCUTCHEON.

AT a period when national reminiscences in Ireland are fast-fading as the evanescent forms of a dissolving view, and when family records in particular are becoming daily less demonstrable, from unwonted complications of social transition, and rapid removal of ancient landmarks, the present little essay, I trust, shall not appear to be wholly unseasonable or uninteresting. Its purpose is simply to vindicate the authenticity of a fact properly belonging to the interesting archives of Dublin, though heretofore really unascertained. As the subject, however, has been already canvassed by others, so repeatedly that it has become trite, and so inconclusively that it is accounted vague, I prefer rather to involve my conclusion wholly in a plain narrative demonstration than to state it independently, lest I may repel when I would fain attract.

But first let me gently deprecate the animadversion of the 'light reader,' in whose eyes the promised result appears prospectively 'frivolous,' and the

threatened process of *involution* inevitably 'vexatious;' as also of the political enthusiast, who either, on the one hand, views all our locally national memorials merely as tints of classic shade, best available for imparting artistic effect to the more brilliant phases of the imperial panorama; or who, on the other, regarding them chiefly as convenient beacon-points whereon to hoist the standards of primitive and independent clanship, would beckon us back to an age of wild romance, when feudal chiefs and provincial monarchs held a sort of oscillating position midway between the demigods of legendary Greece and the more absolute among the dynasts of modern principalities.

As this tract does not affect to interest, so it cannot reasonably displease, those comprehensive and fastidious classes; and therefore their reprehension should not, at the most, exceed a smile at what they may please to designate 'the oddity of laborious trifling.' Its end shall be fully answered should it assist the annalist or biographer who believes that even one small fiction in historic details may be advantageously superseded by a cognate fact; and should it requite the attention of the citizen-reader who rejoices to see even one additional particle of mildew brushed from the once bright page of our chief city's legitimate heraldry. Requiring, then, merely that the reader who may feel interested in them shall either assume the truth of the facts, or accept my invitation to investigate them, I proceed with details, nothing

discouraged by the critic's ill-omened murmur of impatience :

“ Quid dignum tanto feret hic promissor hiatu ?”

In the year 1846 I discovered accidentally, in the files of a Dublin newspaper of the year 1769, entitled *The Public Register, or Freeman's Journal*, the following brief announcement : “ *Birth :—In Merrion-street, the Right Hon. the Countess of Mornington, of a son.*” The particular paper containing it purports to have been published on Saturday, May 6th, 1769 ; but no specific date marks the event recorded on its page. Few readers shall need to be advised that the above simple sentence must refer to him whom the world now honours as the most celebrated of British Generals, the illustrious Duke of Wellington ; to him whose destinies Fame would seem to have so habitually identified with the world's wide range, that she has not heretofore *cared* to indicate the precise spot where a frail cradle first pilowed the future hero. In plain fact, the maximum value of our *knowledge*, regarding this point of homely interest in the history of the first of our living celebrities, has been hitherto fairly comprised within the terms of the apologetic phrase in which “ legendary lore” is wont to garnish its ignorance respecting the mythic Hercules or the mystic Homer, viz., that “ several places contend for the honour of his birth.” Thus Burke and Maxwell record his Grace's birth to have occurred at “ Dangan Castle, County Meath,

on the 1st of May, 1769 ;" Gurwood and Lodge assent expressly to the time, and tacitly to the place ; the *Irish Ecclesiastical Journal* of March 28, 1843, supports, in a published letter, the claims of Dublin, specifying conjecturally a *non est inventus* locality, once known as "Spring Gardens ;" many competent, nay eminent, antiquarians would look unequivocal dispraise at any who should gainsay a traditional, and in Dublin a generally received opinion, in favour of the Royal Irish Academy House, in Grafton-street : while the simple villagers of the sequestered hamlet of Mornington, in the county of Meath, aver that the event occurred *there*, unexpectedly ; and that the present name of the village is thence derived. The sequel will be found singularly adverse to each and all of these previous statements, whether as regards *place* or *time*.

The above discovery naturally suggested a diligent search for confirmatory evidence ; for, however a formal (it may be said official) record published by a local journal, contemporary with the event, would, if not competently contradicted, be held to be good evidence of a received or recent fact, especially if such related to conspicuous parties, yet, in matter disputed or remote, it would be likely to take rank merely as one of several mutually repugnant assertions. The results were curious, and as follow :

First, a monthly periodical published in Dublin, of high repute in those days, styled *Exshaw's Gentleman's Magazine*, exhibits the following entry in its

May number, 1769: "*April 29th, the Countess of Mornington of a son.*" It may be observed that the apparent tardiness of the notice published in the *Register* of the 6th of May is not perceptibly less favourable to the 29th of April than to the 1st of May, as a date, when it is considered that the newspaper was half-weekly, and therefore one publication only could have intervened between Saturday, April 29th, and Saturday, May 6th; nor can *such* records be held to be disparaged, much less disproved, by modern assertions which, professing no knowledge of their existence, are merely irreconcilable with them. Secondly, at this stage of the inquiry I was supplied with a material fact by the Rev. Dr. Todd, Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, viz., that *the parish-books of St. Peter's Church, Dublin, contain the registry of his Grace's baptism*; a circumstance first brought to light in the year 1843, by the Rev. Dr. Porter, late curate of St. Peter's. On search made in the registry, I found the subjoined entry at foot of a page headed "Christenings, 1769:" "*April 30, Arthur, son of the Right Hon. Earl and Countess of Mornington;*" and signed, "*Isaac Mann, Archdeacon.*" It is here to be noted that the east side of Upper Merion-street was then, as it is now, included in the parish of St. Peter.

The objection that the registries of that period were often supplied from memory, and were in every sense *tabulæ negligentius asservatæ*, as applied to secondary evidence, is itself very secondary. The *last*

day of a month is one of the *least likely* to be mistaken for, or confounded with another ; and Dublin was, in those times, a long day's journey from the *best vouched* of the other places assigned. Thirdly, comparison of the present aspect of the locality with the bearings of a map of Dublin, delineated in the year 1768, shows with much exactness that a house of noble dimensions, though of ordinary style, which now occupies the centre of the east side of the street (No. 24), must then have abutted as a corner house upon an extensive area or common, called by anticipation *Merrion-square*, but not occupied by buildings, save partially at a remote side (the northern), which was not included in St. Peter's parish. This is material. For, fourthly, Watson's Almanac, from the year in which *it first begins to publish* the city abodes of the Irish nobility, namely, 1783 (a relatively late date, we must admit, and posterior to the decease of his Grace's father by nearly two years), up to that in which the Mornington family finally removed to London, gives "*Merrion-square*" as the seat of their town residence.

Now, what can be more likely than that the Countess of Mornington should have repaired to the city, from an isolated country 'castle,' in anticipation of the coming event, even though no permanent residence were there established ? Or what more natural than that the family, having such, should be found at their town house in the middle of the then fashionable *season* in Dublin ?

The supposition, therefore, that the before-mentioned mansion, stately in its homeliness, *conterminous then with Merrion-square and Merrion-street*, and situate in St. Peter's parish, satisfies our inquiry by more than the ordinary conditions of a morally certain proof, would appear to be well sustained *a priori*. Still, in the absence of all direct documentary evidence respecting the actual tenancy of the house, the argument might appear to be rather persuasive than conclusive; and as its end was not to court notoriety for an individual's theory (for which material sufficiently supplied), but to secure credence for an historical fact, it has, partly under the above default and partly through neglect, lain in abeyance since the year 1846. Recently, however, the misty veil which hung around the place has been withdrawn. The publication of Lord Cloncurry's "Personal Recollections" has supplied incidentally the only link defective in a chain of evidence which now, to ordinary apprehension, would appear strong enough to bear up a whole bar of lawyers, had they occasion to try their weight against its strength, in a case, suppose, of title. In pages 8 and 9 of his work, Lord Cloncurry writes: "I graduated in Arts in the year 1791; as it happened, upon the day on which my father entertained the Lord Lieutenant (the Earl of Westmorland), for the first time, at *Mornington House, a residence in Merrion-street*, which he had purchased from the late Marquis Wellesley.

* * * * *

It is at present occupied by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners." His Lordship further states that this house, during the period of its being rented from his father by the late Lord Castlereagh, was the scene of the discussion and arrangement of all the diplomatic negotiations for the enactment of the Legislative Union. It may be added, that the large amount of purchase-money paid by the late Lord Cloncurry (£8000) would appear to be in itself indicative of a long-existing vested interest in this property on the part of the Mornington family. From all the premises the conclusion seems valid that this imposingly unpretending edifice really marks the spot where Erin presented to Britain a hero who was destined, eventually, to overrule the aspirations of Him whom Corsica's more sunny isle was just then about to bring forth,* to impersonate, for a time, the most dazzling glories of France. Accountants' files now strew its wide saloons. Armorial devices yield to Arithmetical. The Monumental is lost in the Mercantile.

An ordinary deduction being supposed in this case to have legitimately worked out a perfectly novel result, surely the circumstance that such a fact, respecting such a man,—a fact overt in its nature, palpable in its evidence,—should have remained so long and so universally unnoticed, merits a passing glance of contemplation.

The antecedents of great men appear, on reflec-

* Napoleon was born on the 15th of August, 1769.

tion, to be generally little cared for, save where they present points which seem to bear strongly upon the circumstances of subsequent exaltation, whether in the way of prognostic or of contrast. "*Plerique mortales postrema meminere*" was the terse observation of Julius Cæsar. But whether the feeling of comparative disregard towards early rise and progress be assignable to the absence in most cases of those collateral associations which signalize the more prominent incidents of an eventful life, or whether it be an involuntary development of that yearning after results and final issues, which ever and anon reminds man, even in the most trivial concerns, that his proper aspiration is towards *perfectibility*, that his spirit's magnet points to the *future*, and to "the consummation of all things,"—still the exact spot in this scene of probation, where a master-spirit first struggled in incipient trial, would appear to present a not less interesting study to the contemplative mind than the "storied urn" which eventually chronicles its earthly triumphs.

These mementoes seem kindred in impressing, with a force seldom incidental to ordinary instances, a kind of objectivity upon *the two periods* of man's closest proximity in time to the confines of that eternal world whence he comes and whither he returns *Hinc ortus—huc repetit*. Both similarly attest that the essence of his being is properly foreign from the things of earth. In the one, we imagine with a peculiar interest the helpless infant bringing nothing

with him into this world save a living soul, which bears no discoverable affinity to any of the terrestrial existences by which it is surrounded ; dealing with these indeed instinctively, as instruments with which it is designed to be conversant, but speedily asserting lordship over them : in the other we scan the solemn lesson that this being, however he may have influenced the course of earthly events, however he may have enshrined his name in Fame's earthly temple, yet after all has "no abiding city here." In the former view he appears indiscriminately as an alien "stranger," in the latter affectingly as a temporary "sojourner." In the one, we picture to ourselves the recently-created mind newly fettered in constrained attachment to an uneasy tenement, which it shall yet, by its energies, exalt and glorify : in the other, we read that, even at man's "best estate," the silver cord must be finally loosed, and the spirit must "return to God, who gave it."

And, as immortality is a revealed and reasonable condition of 'the future life,' so oblivion haunts as a spectre each and all of the relations of time.

In forcible illustration of this latter truth, the poet-philosopher of Aquinum happily observes (if a free translation of his remarkable apophthegm be allowable)

"E'en gorgeous sepulchres themselves must die!"

And, in a like way of reflection, it may be remarked that the birth-places of illustrious men are often themselves not born into notice. If, in the present

instance, I have fenced in for a season one such mentally picturesque spot from the chill encroachments of Lethe's silent stream, I trust it shall be accorded me to adopt somewhat of the *converse* of the unpretending reflection in which the contemplative Roman moralist indulged in reference to his discovery of the brier-clad tomb of the great experimental philosopher of Syracuse: "Ita nobilissima Græciæ civitas, quondam vero etiam doctissima, sui civis unius acutissimi monumentum ignorâset, nisi ab homine Arpinate didicisset."*

At all events, it is a pleasing task for the British civilian to rectify even the least circumstantial error in the early history of one whose martial achievements cannot be over-estimated relatively to their civil effects: and for the Dublin citizen at length to identify, for the satisfaction of residents, or the information of passing tourists, the precise birth-place of Him who must ever occupy a position so prominent in general history, as the eventual conqueror of by far the most remarkable of the renowned strategists in aggressive warfare whom the world has yet produced.

* Cic. Tusc. Disput. lib. v. cap. 23.

THE END.

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In 8vo, Sewed,

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A PAGE RESTORED TO THE ANNALS OF DUBLIN.

BY

JOHN MURRAY, A. M., Ex-Scholar, T. C. D., &c. &c.

PRICE SIX-PENCE.

From the DUBLIN EVENING POST, April 23, 1850.

"We invite attention to a little pamphlet from the pen of Mr. Murray, Resident Master of Trinity College, which is one of the most interesting and original papers that have issued from the University Press. Its framework fixes, for the first time with certainty, the place and date of the birth of our 'Hero of a Hundred Fights;' and its composition belongs to a very high order, both for acuteness of reasoning and philosophy of sentiment.

"But what is particularly to our taste is the pleasing harmony of true British feeling with sound Irish nationality, which is a leading feature of its *morale*. Its compass is small, but it is the smallness of the microscope exhibiting an enlarged and lucid view of the field upon which it is brought to bear. On the whole, it will form an interesting supplement to the existing biography of the great 'Duke.'"

From the DUBLIN EVENING PACKET, 2nd May, 1850.

"The object of the author of this brief but well-written *brochure* is to set at rest the *vexata questio* concerning the birth-place of the Duke of Wellington.

"The research of Mr. Murray brings conclusive evidence to controvert fancies upon this subject, which, in a national point of view, is matter of interest. He makes no assertions without substantial proofs, and we do not think the disputants on the point, now finally settled, can attempt to controvert his 'plain narrative demonstration.'

"Thus is a page of interest, which had been torn from Dublin's history, restored to us; and we thank Mr. Murray for the very interesting facts which he has so agreeably conveyed."

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Houses of the Oireachtas

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