

Irish Convention In English Novels.

We Irish have suffered much at the hands of England, as every well-informed and fair-minded Englishman will admit. But we are a generous and forgiving race, as we ourselves acknowledge. We are willing to let bygones be bygones, ~~if~~ and even to love our English neighbours if they will allow us. We are ready to forgive and forget everything else, if only they will abstain from writing about us. Fifty Coercion Acts can be less deadly than one well-meaning novelist.

Most English novelists have the fixed idea that Ireland is inhabited by a race of Peter Pans — naive and irresponsible children who refuse to grow up. These charming creatures have had a dialect specially manufactured for them — a kind of topsy-turvy broken English, which is spoken alike by peasant and aristocrat. This type of "Irish" character and this variety of "Irish" speech afford great delight to English readers, a delight not lessened by the fact that both are equally unknown to Ireland. When an Irish reader comes across one of these "Irish characters" he feels that there are, for the moment, only two things in life worth doing — first to murder the character, and then to slay the author.

A few days ago I borrowed from the local library a new novel by Frank Danby - "Let Mr. Roof Fall In." On page five an Irish peer says - "Let me present my cousin to you, lady Carrie, it's the broth of a boy he is, and he only speaks Irish." I found, as I expected, that the Irish spoken by the "broth of a boy" was not the Irish language, but the strange dialect I have mentioned.

I must admit that I am not personally acquainted with any members of the Irish nobility. Possibly they use this extraordinary speech, but I doubt it. Lloyd George - whatever may be his ~~fall~~ designs for the future - has not yet deposed the upper classes, either in England or in Ireland, of the advantages of education. Many Irish aristocrats enjoy even the supreme blessing of an English University training.

Towards the beginning of Harold Genders' novel, "The Call of the Siren," an Irishwoman is speaking. She is the widow of Major O'Sorman, P.C. and it is not mentioned that the late Major contracted a mesalliance, or that he rose from the ranks. This is the sample given of Mrs. O'Sorman's conversation - "Well, an' even

if we do meet the poor man in the other world,
 and are we forced to know him because we
 knew his wife? " ~~But~~ ^{progressed,} ~~As~~ the book, an Irish Baronet
 (worthily) maintains the good old tradition.
 Ellice Pemberton is a frequent and
~~horrible~~ offender in this respect. Many a time
 have I opened a novel of his with pleasurable
 anticipation — only to be stabbed by a Pembertonian
 Irishman ere the first chapter had been safely
 passed. When this catastrophe occurs there is
 nothing for the Irish reader but flight.

One of these "novel" Irishmen spoils the
 first half of ~~A~~ De Vere Stacpoole's "Blue Lagoon";
 but fortunately he dies at page and leaves
 us free to enjoy the latter part of an
 otherwise charming book.

Once upon a time I read and tremendously
 enjoyed some stirring romances from the pen of
 Stanley Weyman. The scenes were laid in
 France — a country of which I know next to
 nothing. But unfortunately the writer turned
 his attention to Ireland, and produced a book
 called "The Wild Geese." It dealt with Irish
 people, and the events — of the beginning, at any
 rate — took place in Ireland. I struggled

through some pages, and then succumbed. Now, if I meet a book by Stanley Weyman, I run away and hide.

Not long ago I came across a novel entitled "Herself," by Ethel Sedgwick. I had read in some English reviews that it presented a remarkably faithful ~~and~~ picture of Irish character. This made me feel rather suspicious, but still I hoped for the best. The heroine of the book ~~is an~~ Irish ~~and~~ girl, and her father and cousin also play prominent parts in the story. They are well meaning and their speech is even more peculiar weird creatures, ~~and the like of their speech is not than their behaviour.~~ ~~to be found within the four seas of Ireland.~~ The title of the book may have some reference to the fact that amongst Irish people the wife, or woman of the house, and the husband, or man of the house, are sometimes spoken of as ~~Herself~~ and ~~Himself~~. If so, the connection is not very obvious.

xxx Neither in speech nor behaviour do they resemble anything to be found within the four seas of Ireland — outside of a lunatic asylum.

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of quite a different type is "The Hate Flame," by
Phay Barron. Most of this production is taken
up with detailing the perfections of its hero — a cool,
silent Englishman, with damp curls, a half-sly
laugh, and an unconquerable modesty. These attributes
are joined to a quite extraordinary ability and an
unrestrained philanthropy. The rest of the book is
occupied in vilifying the ranting, malevolent, good-for-
nothing, priest-ridden Irish, ~~seen~~ who are seen in
black relief against the English background of
radiant perfection.

~~It might have been very~~
~~offensive, but it only succeeds in being funny.~~
~~It is all very absurd, though, that it has been less~~
~~sober, it might have been very offensive.~~ This
Fitzpatrick production is ~~unusual~~ and quite departs from
the ^{usual} convention of English novelists with regards to their
Irish ^{puppets} ~~characters~~ — the tradition of amiable irresponsibility.

It is difficult to see whence arose the legend
of Irish character at present so popular in this
Country. Scores of well-known Irish names
rise to one's mind to make the illusion seem
still more strange. — Names of keen and
successful men of business, brilliant litterateurs,
clever lawyers, daring and distinguished soldiers,
intrepid explorers, able administrators — names

which are household words throughout the British Empire.

But, although Irishmen like these find their doings recorded in the English press, the great heart of the English novelist has not yet opened to them.

Perhaps this is because when an Irishman achieves distinction he ceases to be merely Irish and becomes "British." It is a form of canonisation which success invariably thrusts upon him.

It is equally difficult to account for the strange obsession regarding our speech. Possibly it contains a delicate compliment to our nationality.

English people are, as we know, too patriotic to speak a foreign language perfectly, and it may be that they credit us with a like fine sensitiveness. However this hyper-sensitive patriotism does not obtain in Ireland

— we like to do the best we can for any language that comes our way. Consequently, the only difference between the English spoken by educated people in Ireland and in England is that better English is heard in Ireland.

Many present-day vulgarisms in the speech of Irish country people ~~are~~ are simply a survival

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of the Elizabethan pronunciation of English.
What is commonly known as the "brogue" is a
literal translation from the Irish language into
~~Ireland~~ English, and a giving of the Irish
pronunciation to the corresponding English letters.
To reproduce it faithfully requires either a
knowledge of Irish, or a long and intimate
acquaintance with the people. Writers without
one of these necessary qualifications will be
well-advised to leave the "brogue" alone.
