

REVIEWS.

THE JOURNAL OF JOHN STEVENS, * CONTAINING A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE WAR IN IRELAND, 1689-1691.

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The taste for reading and its cultivation, has been suggested as the panacea for all the ills the world yields us, but the suggestion has to be so conditioned, so extended, or so applied, that the conclusion of the assertion is but too often lost in the evolution of the premisses. There is a wide-world seeking after fact, but in too many instances by far the *verbum* is received or rejected as an acceptable substitute, while the *factum* ceases to be an entity in the conclusion arrived at. The class of thinkers, after all, of those who read with a set and serious purpose, is a comparatively narrow one, and the great majority of readers, it must be admitted, are but casual and desultory in their literary efforts, where the subject is apart entirely from the personal or material issues in which they are concerned. Bias and prejudice are never far removed from man, be he expert or otherwise, and there are few, if any, who at times have not judgment clouded by their shadowing influences. Especially is this so in cases which deal with historical subjects with periods of history, which time treats lovingly rather than withers, oases in the arid plains, and round which men are moved to warm if not fierce controversy. There are such periods, not all of them or many, which one may look back on, and with regret that their glamour should grow faint, or the inspiration which they give should be entirely lost. In the history of Ireland, as in that of other lands, these periods are not wanting, and they have not been without recorders for the generations that have followed them. Complaint, however, has been made from time to time, and well founded complaint, too, that there is a great lack of readers in

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Ireland, readers of their country's history, and appeals are frequently put forward that the study should be taken up, pursued seriously, and after approved methods. There should be no necessity whatever for any such complaint, any such appeal ; for the subject is one that has an engrossing interest and a fascination, where it treats of an environment within which are all that men hold dear, hearth and home, kith and kin, and the associations which are ever with us, under whatever sky an Irishman's lot may call him. And of all the books with their varying degrees of accuracy on Episodic Irish History, unique of its kind, and in the treatment of its subject, is one that has been quite recently published—"The Journal of John Stevens, containing a Brief Account of the War in Ireland, 1689-91." The volume is printed from the Manuscript in the British Museum, since 1899, when it was purchased at the sale of the Tixall Library, where it lay for one hundred and thirty years. There is another version amongst the Phillipps Manuscript, but the Journal now printed for the first time and very carefully and impartially edited by the Rev. R. H. Murray, Litt. D., to whom too much praise cannot be accorded for his selection of the notes which are largely the views of the men who were directing a struggle, fateful for the future of Ireland, and in which the Irish people were but pawns in a game Louis XIV. was intently playing elsewhere. Stevens's Journal is one of the most important contributions that has been yet made to the material for a faithful history of Ireland. Myth and legend and *coloratura* are entirely absent. The fulness of the writer's knowledge, gained from his personal experience, and himself an actor in the marches, the battles and the sieges which he passes in review, is laid under tribute to the story, and we have accordingly a narrative of the most intense interest, and concerning a war, the effects of which in Ireland have ranged people still in rival camps, and which have still not parted entirely from the bitterness, the fire that war re-kindled and has kept alight so long. In the Journal one has the observations and the comments of a man, an ardent Catholic, an Englishman, and a loyal soldier of "good King James," and, what is so rare in all time, one whose religion, politics, and the liability to err, common to all the race, did not affect his reiterated resolve to write the truth, full as his knowledge, this

feature being naturally the one which gives great weight to the Journal. The narrative is, all through, a human one, of great value to the historical student, and a much-needed corrective to those disposed to take as fact, fancy pictures of the subject treated by Stevens. He gives a life picture of the Battle of the Boyne, which proved so disastrous an action for James' supporters, extols the gallantry of the Irish cavalry, the steady valour of the French Brigade, who saved the affrighted Jacobite infantry from pursuit and annihilation, and is not one whit too severe on the action of the infantry who broke away without firing a shot. Stephens has but little to say of Douglas's Siege of Athlone and its failure, and it is only when the Irish army rallied and fell back on Limerick, that dreary place of banishment, as Macauley terms it, that the reader comes on really serious fighting, and with which the Journal deals as the subject deserves. All through the Jacobite campaign the Irish army was rarely free from a sad plight. Ill-armed, ill-led, ill-disciplined, ill-fed, very indifferently officered in the main, they were at the Boyne, and even at Limerick, when William sat down before it in the worst possible condition for commencing a campaign, much less continuing it.

But the student cannot fail to notice that the material was in the men, and that, however liable to panic, starting and flying from fears of their own creation, they were, even on the showing of the Jacobite campaign, of the stuff of which soldiers are made. Stevens was in Limerick during the siege, as an officer serving in Fitzjames's regiment, and his account simply, accurately, and truthfully told, should prove an abiding one with Irishmen, and more especially with those who are dwellers in the old city, or whose people are of the stock that defended its old walls. Its defence, after the ignominious flight of the Irish Infantry at the Boyne, must have come as a surprise to King William when he saw his army, the bravest and best disciplined one in Europe, beaten back decisively by the Irish after a contest stubbornly fought for four hours of the clock between the combatants.

The Journal deals but in brief with the surprise and capture of Athlone, and it ends abruptly with an introduction to the Battle of Aughrim. Other incidents of the campaign are left untouched by the writer, who, as he takes care to inform us, adheres to the task of setting

down naught of which he had not personal experience. Although here and there he expresses himself pretty strongly on the personnel of the Irish Army, it cannot be said, as stated in a review of his *Journal across the water*, that he accuses the Irish, with whom, and in whose cause he fought through the campaign, of "incapacity and cowardice." His regiment, like too many other Irish Infantry regiments, ran away at the Boyne, but they stood up well and stoutly at William's assault on Limerick, and here is what Stevens, who did not fall in love with the Irish or with Ireland at first sight, writes after he had taken part in, and witnessed the heroic defence of Limerick.

"It is really wonderful, and will, perhaps, to after eyes seem incredible that an army (the Irish) should be kept together above a year without any pay And what is yet more to be admired, the men never mutinied, nor were they guilty of any disorders more than what do often happen in those armies that are best paid. Nor was this all they might have complained of. In Limerick, as has been said, all the garrison lay in empty houses where they had neither beds, nor so much as straw or anything to lie on, or anything to cover them during the whole winter, and even their clothes were worn to rags, in so much that many could scarce hide their nakedness in the daytime, and an abundance of them were barefoot, or at least so near it that their wretched shoes and stockings could scarce be made to hang on their feet and legs. I have been astonished to think how they lived, and much more that they should voluntarily choose to live so, when, if they would have forsaken the service, they might have been received by the enemy (the Williamites) into good pay and want for nothing. But to add to their sufferings the allowance of meat and corn was so small that men rather starved than lived upon it. These extremities endured as they were with courage and resolution are sufficient with any reasonable persons to clear the reputation of the Irish from the malicious imputations of their enemies, and yet this is not all that can be said for them. We have already seen them defend an almost defenceless town against a victorious disciplined army Let not any mistake and think I either speak out of affection, or deliver what I know not; for the first I am no Irishman to be any way biased, and for the other part, I received not what I write by hearsay, but was an eye-witness."

A tribute truly from a gallant Englishman, a brave soldier whose loyalty to the Sovereign for whom he fought in Ireland never flags. One may question the judgment of Stevens, his philosophy, but not his accuracy, and the many important incidents omitted or not referred to but scantily, seem but to enhance the value of the details which he gives us of the Williamite campaign. They will be of absorbing and enduring interest, and the volume ought to find a resting place in every circle where the story of the past needs a stimulus to be called back. The scene of the Battle of the Breach is, sad to say, unknown ground, and of no special interest it would seem for too many Limerick people. The *locus in quo* is hidden away, the breach repaired

after the delivery or the unsuccessful assault, is still daily threatened with destruction. Stevens and his regiment helped to repair it, and perhaps the publication of his Journal may arouse public spirit to chase away the apathy or ignorance ready to suffer such a memorial to perish. The Journal in this respect, as in others, appears most opportunely. In passing, just one reference may be made to the statement of the editor in his introduction, that in the Journal it is abundantly clear that the Irishmen of 1688, and, Dr. Murray adds the Irishmen of 1912, cared for two things only, land and religion. There is the tribute of Stevens, and it is not to be ignored in deduction. Land and religion, and the desire for their possession and retention, are not ignoble or illegitimate spurs to action, moving fairly and justly, and they do not necessarily shut out the possessor, or him ambitious or zealous enough to win one or the other, from being the possessor also of high ideals.

When all was lost for James and his followers, and the Treaty of Limerick agreed to, the Irish Army and their officers had the choice of land and religion, and everything which Stevens tells us, food, clothing, pay, and the material comforts that follow if they went into William's service. They did not do so. They elected to sail for France and serve King Louis. Of course Dr. Murray will tell us why, and twenty answers may be given. But whatever the answer, will anyone who loves truth and justice, and who does not look at them through party glasses, say that nobility of nature, with all their drawbacks, from neglect, by fate and fortune, was absent from the breasts of those gallant countrymen of ours in that last parade of theirs under the old walls of Limerick.

They elected, the great majority of them, for service in France, and their motives are at least deserving of silence or accuracy, certainly not the indulgence of party bias from any side. Looking back, all of us can, more or less, see and realise how well it would have been, in our views, if things had shaped themselves otherwise than they did. But let us not, when looking, or trying to look at the sun, see nothing worth observing or worthy of treatment but the spots on the disc of the luminary.

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