

9. Tom Grady of Castleconnell was a barrister, an accomplished scholar and a satirist who has seldom been equalled in Ireland. Ambitious to win fame and fortune at the bar, his talent for satire and his inability to control it quite ruined him; and he never attained any more profitable reputation than that of a legal wit. All this in spite of his effort to curry favour with a witty speech on behalf of the Union. "The Irish are only the rump of an aristocracy. Shall I visit posterity with a system of war, pestilence and famine? No. Give me a Union. United with that country where all is peace, order and prosperity. Without a Union we shall see embryo chief-justices, attorney-generals in perspective, and animalcula sergeants."

An Unhappy marriage soured his outlook and Tom Grady became "an exile from society in his own house." Here his favourite readings were from Martial and Sterne, Rabelais, Swift and Churchill; and from them he learned how to wound those he hated. His pen was as merciless as a scalping knife, as deadly as a poisoned arrow, and as polished and as elegant as it was powerful and incisive. Be it said however, that he used it always against the corrupt and dishonest; and before he met the hero of "The Nosegay," he had already played his fellow-members of the Bar in "The Barrister," and his neighbour, Lady Clare, in "The Flesh-brush." But in Bruce the Limerick Banker he met such a perfect ~~xxxxxx~~ object for his wit, that he never ventured further.

George Evans Bruce came of a County Cork family (Charleville, I believe), and after a career of vice and dissipation in London, during the course of which however he seems to have amassed a fortune of £90,000 in gambling - he was expelled from a London Club for cheating - he returned to Ireland, became a banker in Limerick and bought a large estate and a sumptuous mansion at Castleconnell Spa. He was incredibly corrupt. At least Grady says so, and he was not the first to attack him. He had already been convicted of usury, and further, in an action against another Limerick man who called him "a rebel, a white-boy, a black-legs, a swindler and a knave," he had been awarded 6d damages. Tom Grady, who acted for defendant handed him a shilling and demanded his change.

Bruce set the ball rolling against Grady by issuing a vicious lampoon accusing him of robbing the Post Office and of murdering his nephew; and, unable to obtain legal satisfaction, Grady issued "The Nosegay." His satirical poem, however, is anything but "a sweet-smelling bunch of posies."

To ensure that his subject could not be mistaken Grady put his own name to it, and had a caricature-portrait of Bruce drawn for it by Brocas. With half-closed eye and hanging tongue, the portrait, said to be an extremely good likeness, has a most repulsive appearance, all the innate ugliness, cunning and sensuality being considerably heightened. Dedicated to Tom Moore, who was himself an adept at the art of virile and vituperative satire, "The Nosegay" is more savage than anything in the whole history of Anglo-Irish literature.

in style it is worthy of Pope, Dryden or Swift, but in venom, ~~violence~~ violence and savage indignation it exceeds them all. Owing, perhaps something to "The Midnight Court," it opens in a Court of Justice before which Bruce is arraigned for his crimes; and in a long series of magnificent rhyming couplets, it runs through the whole catalogue of Bruce's supposed crimes. I say "supposed" for no monster as black as Grady paints Bruce could ever have existed.

His card-cheating, of which the Politician Fox was the victim, in a game then popular, "Quinze" or "Fives," is treated most lightly of all.

"But see aloft and near the Sheriff's box,
The Black-browed spectre of poor Charles Fox.
See, with one hand his angry eyes he rubs
And in the other holds - the five of clubs."

Most of the poem is well-nigh unquotable to modern ears, but the final arraignment is as terrible as anything in the catalogue of Bruce's crimes:-

Is there one evil word you have not spoken?
Is there one human tie you have not broken?
Is there one vice a stain to moral reason?
Is there one crime from swindling up to treason?
Produce the catalogue and let me hear
Even one exception in your black career.
Or take the Decalogue and read it through,
Is there one line inviolate by you?
Is there, through all this wilderness of doom,
One virtue found to glimmer o'er the gloom....

In his dedication to Tom Moore, Grady modestly claimed:- "If I have any merit in the execution of my picture, it is entirely to be attributed to having for a long time minutely considered and deeply studied the original."

A damages action resulted and Bruce claimed £20,000 for loss of character. Grady briefed Dan O'Connell who was known never to spare an opponent in a libel action. He began "I shall follow him from his first ill-omened dawn above the horizon until I show him culminating in his meridian, and emitting thick pestilential flashes through the darkness that envelopes his western career." His second Counsel, Burton, with no more pity, refers to Bruce as "affrighted by his own hideousness, rushing for relief upon society, and by horrified society thrown back upon himself." The Jury returned a verdict for £500 for Bruce and Grady commented "The charges in "The Nosegay," ranged from swindling up to treason, and were number up to forty. Possibly the Jury considered thirty-nine out of the forty were established for they gave the plaintiff precisely one fortieth of the sum he demanded.

Grady's last action in the combat was to issue a report of the trial with a scathing preface, and then he fled to France to avoid paying the damages. Here he died in obscurity, depriving Ireland at once of a scourge and a genius.

Bruce's house in Castleconnell, Hermitage, stands a blackened ruin to this day. symbol of the blackguard who once owned it.