

## BOOKS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

*A Hidden Phase of American History: Ireland's Part in America's Struggle for Liberty.* By MICHAEL J. O'BRIEN, Historiographer, American Irish Historical Society. (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company. 1920. Pp. xv, 533. \$5.00.)

THE racial or linguistic composition of the American nation in 1776, or of the Revolutionary army, is an important and interesting subject. Mr. O'Brien has taken up one section of the problem, the Irish, and, working with great industry and energetic research, has compiled a book of real value and importance, marred by some serious faults. No one could read any five pages of the book without perceiving that the author has undertaken his task in the spirit of an advocate. This has been the custom of almost all who have written about the national or linguistic elements in America to which they have themselves belonged, and there has been so much disposition to minimize the importance and influence of the Irish element that a certain degree of warmth of advocacy on Mr. O'Brien's part is only natural. It does not, however, form the best temper for securing permanent results of the first value in historical writing. Not only does it weary the reader to encounter, over and over again, these phrases about "gross libel", "gross injustice", "damning proofs of the apparently deliberate attempts of these historians to hide the truth"; but it has also had a strong effect upon the author's estimates of the value of evidence. His chief merit lies in having accumulated so great a mass of evidence that no just reader, paying due attention to that portion of the evidence which is solid, will fail to admit that the Irish element in the Revolutionary army, and in the American population of that time, must have been greater than is commonly supposed. But Mr. O'Brien himself is far from being sufficiently critical as to his evidences. All is fish that comes to his net, and he often lays a maximum of emphasis on testimonies that have no value at all.

A striking instance of this defect is his treatment of the well-known remark of Joseph Galloway about Irish troops in his examination before the House of Commons. To this "remarkable utterance", which has no probative value at all, he devotes a dozen pages, and even prints a facsimile of a passage in it, as he finds it in Rivington's *Royal Gazette*. At another place, Mr. O'Brien thinks it worth while to publish a facsimile of an item in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of 1773 regarding the statement of a sea-captain who left Dublin about the first of June, declaring that upward of 18,000 people had left Ireland for America since January. Have we not figures of emigration from Ireland for that year, from one of the best statistical authorities of the time, that show such a statement to be but a sea-captain's yarn?

Mr. O'Brien's accumulation of facts and instances is impressive,

and rightly so, but when it comes to dealing with statistics his method is amateurish and uncritical, though what a careful reader would most desire is a body of well-based percentages. When Mr. O'Brien comes to that point, he contents himself with saying (pp. 134, 135) that after careful calculation he has determined that 35.83 per cent. of the soldiers of the Revolutionary army were Irish. He has reached these results mainly, it appears, by counting Irish names. He shows impressive totals of such numbers, and does not seem always to see that what the reader most wishes is ratios. He finds (p. 222) that "on the Revolutionary muster-rolls of Massachusetts there are approximately three thousand Irish names." That sounds large, but if one observes the composition of the volumes entitled *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, one finds that it is 3000 out of 190,000, so extensive is the duplication, the habit of that compilation being to make separate entries of the same name found in different muster-rolls unless there is certain evidence that they represent the same person. His 2083 names in New York lists, 4000 in those of Maryland, and 3000 in the two Virginia volumes, are taken from books that list, respectively, 44,000 and 20,000 and 44,000 names. If this were all, the Irish element in the Revolutionary army would not have risen above four or five per cent. Now, in the two large lists of Loyalist claimants that give the country of birth, the Ontario list and Mr. Egerton's, out of 1358 claimants, 146, or eleven per cent., say that they were born in Ireland (more than in England). But if a good computation for Pennsylvania could be made, it would raise considerably the percentage of Irish in the Revolutionary army. Of the bravery of that element, and the value of its achievement, there is no question.

In later chapters Mr. O'Brien goes into the further question, how largely this Irish element in the army or nation was "Scotch-Irish", or rather, he scouts the whole notion of a distinct Scotch-Irish element as mythical. He is quite right in saying that the usual habit of the eighteenth century was to give simply the name Irish to all who came from Ireland, and certainly the Scotch-Irish writers in the United States have been as prone to "claim everything" as Mr. O'Brien himself. Certainly, however, there is a broad distinction between Presbyterian and Catholic Irish, though the problem of their relative proportions in the American population of that time is excessively difficult. Arthur Young, a far better authority than most of those whom our author quotes, and one whom he is well content to cite in other connections, says strongly, in various passages of his *Tour*, that nearly all Irish emigration to America was Presbyterian, and Sir Thomas Newenham, a high authority, indicates that nearly all of them came from the North of Ireland ports. On the other hand, Mr. O'Brien says (p. 287) that of the 576 vessels sailing from and to Ireland registered at the New York or Philadelphia custom-houses, as an-

nounced in the newspapers of 1771-1774, when Irish emigration was especially abundant, 329, or 57 per cent., sailed from or to Cork, Dublin, and other southern ports. And he seems to be an honest calculator, if not always critical. By accumulation of instances he indicates the presence of many thousands of Irish in Massachusetts before 1790; and yet the *Boston Directory* of 1789, among its 1300 or 1400 names, contains not forty of those that Mr. O'Brien lists as peculiarly Irish—not an O, and only three Mac's that are not plainly Scottish. All these questions are more difficult than he seems to think, and what is said about them in the Census Bureau volume, *A Century of Population Growth*, though naturally quoted by many as authoritative, is in reality fundamentally erroneous.

An appendix contains a list of 1500 Revolutionary officers of Irish birth or descent that Mr. O'Brien says he has found. The list is not carefully composed and it is subject to a good deal of reduction; 73 of them were in the French-Irish regiments, 80 were "officers" on privateers, 70 or more seem to be pretty certainly duplicates. Mr. O'Brien will hardly maintain that "James Mease, Commissary, Penna. Troops", and "James Mease, Paymaster and Treasurer, Continental Army", are two distinct persons, or that the officers of the Pennsylvania State Regiment of Foot all became new persons when its name is changed to Thirteenth Pennsylvania. As to establishing any ratio, the reviewer knows of no complete list of officers in the Revolutionary army, but of commissioned officers who served in the United States navy and marine corps in the Revolutionary War there are authoritative lists. These officers number 304, and only five of them are in Mr. O'Brien's list of officers. Another long appendix lists all the non-commissioned officers and enlisted men, of the twelve chief Irish names, that Mr. O'Brien has found in the Revolutionary army and navy. He says (p. 218) that no individual name has been repeated; but this, for reasons indicated above, cannot be true.

To sum up: Mr. O'Brien has produced a book of considerable value, but if his object is not simply to edify the Irish-American, but to convince thoughtful persons not Irish, he would have assured a more permanent position to his book by sifting his evidence more carefully and not claiming so much.

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*The Last of the "Mayflower"*. By RENDEL HARRIS. (London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Company. 1920. Pp. 122. 5s.)

*The Finding of the "Mayflower"*. By RENDEL HARRIS. (London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Company. 1920. Pp. v, 58. 4s. 6d.)

THESE two books, written by a distinguished scholar, showing an extraordinary amount of research and study on the interesting problem