

Ireland A Burlesque

Ireland, as I saw it : the character, condition, and prospects of the people

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My People are destroyed for lack of Knowledge—HOSEA.

1850

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Tarbert

Having to wait a few hours for the boat which was to take us to Limerick, and having given away the breakfast we had provided at Tralee, to the poor children along the road, we found it necessary to look up something to eat. It was too far to go back to the town, and besides, we could not relish a dinner, ever so good, with so many hungry, haggard beggars about us. So we concluded to look for something in the low huts we had passed, near the bridge which crosses the small inlet separating the little island from the main. There might be a dozen or more low, coarse stone huts, with thatched roofs, standing in a row in front of the military coast-station. We inquired at each of these, but could obtain no bread, milk, or meat—nothing at all in the shape of food. In two or three of them there was whiskey, as we judged from the signs usually attendant upon such localities—a few bottles, a glass or two, and several red-faced, weak-jointed, garrulous customers sitting about them. Amongst them we noticed two women who had not signed Father Mathew’s pledge, or else had forgotten to keep it. Our stomachs complained gnawingly at our ill success, and we were induced to renew our search, by inquiring where some milk could be found. We were referred to a low stone house on the side hill, half a mile over the bridge, where they said a cow was kept.

We returned, and incited by curiosity as well as hunger, we resolved to make good use of our opportunity, and so inquired at several hovels scattered along that side of the inlet for bread, taking some pains to look in and see how the people lived. We could not find a morsel to eat till we came to the farthest house in the hamlet. We inquired at the door for milk, and, to our great comfort, were answered favorably. We walked in. It was a rough stone house, laid up in coarse mortar, and unplastered. The floor, as is common, was of clay, which was broken through in several places, so that the loose ground appeared. The roof was formed of small round poles, covered with straw. There were no girders on the walls. The room was open to the roof. Unlike many we have seen, it had a large fire-place and chimney. A bed stood in one corner, and a rude cradle, with a child sleeping in it, near by. There were two old chairs in the room, a wooden bench, a chest, a rough table against the wall, and a dresser with a few dishes on it. A pot was hanging over a peat fire.

The “ lady of the house ” received us, at first, somewhat timidly, but when she learned that we were travelers from America, her manner was at once changed. She apparently felt more at ease, and at once became very social and inquisitive. She offered some apologies for the manner in which she was compelled to entertain the friends of her country, who had been so generous in relieving their distresses, when famine was carrying off thousands all around them, to an untimely grave. We spoke of our acquaintance and experience in the struggles of poverty, and our sympathy for those who are compelled to work hard and suffer much to obtain an honest living. She was more than ordinarily intelligent, and seemed to have a stout

heart to bear up under the difficulties which pressed so heavily upon them. She spoke of their plans to get to America, and manifested a good deal of enthusiasm at the thought that the time was not far distant when it would be executed. It seemed to her like an expected deliverance from captivity, and she spoke of it with all the fervor of one who is hoping to gain his liberty after a long period of false imprisonment. She spoke of her "childers" as doubly dear because they would "goo till America," and never know what it was to suffer poverty and oppression, as their parents had, in the "ould coounthry." She had three children, one an infant, one running about, and one at school. Said she, "We're thrying to kape our boye at school, for I'm tould that in yer coounthry all the childers must be learned."

We assured her it was greatly desired that children should be taught all the useful branches ; that the most favorable opportunities were provided, free for all, and that, as far as we could, we made our free schools equal to any others ; that the children of all classes, the rich and poor, might seek an education in the same school, so that, from the humblest conditions, men might rise, as they often do, to the most eminent positions, as scholars, professors, and statesmen. She seemed perfectly delighted with the thought that her children would, some day, have such opportunities afforded them.

While our conversation was going on, she served us with a basin of "stir-a-bout" from the pot over the fire, and some milk, which she poured from a tin pan into our dishes. One of us sat upon the bench, the other in the old chair. The table was a plain board, loaded, at one end, with various articles, the other, at which we sat, without any covering of cloth. There was as fair an exhibition of neatness as could be expected under such circumstances. The milk was very good, and the "stir-a-bout" passable. It was made of oatmeal, like mush, or Yankee hasty-pudding. There was no bread, butter, cheese, meat, or potatoes in the house. Some times they bought American (Indian) meal, which costs from half a crown to three shillings a stone—fifty to sixty-five cents for fourteen pounds. She said they did not like it so well as oatmeal, and they could not afford to use flour. Their sole dependence is upon oat-meal, now that the potato has failed them. They rarely ever taste meat of any kind. A pound and a half of salt pork would cost more than a day's work. She informed us that herself and children enjoyed pretty good health, but "her man" had to work so hard that he was often attacked with the fever—the fever and ague, which prevails a good deal in these boggy districts.

Just as we had finished our humble meal the husband came in from his work. He was a man of middle size, well-formed, but spare and pale, from hard work, and insufficient food. His countenance was sad, indicating a heavy heart. But he spoke affectionately to his little boy, who met him at the door, and received us with an easy politeness and urbanity we have not been accustomed to attach to the pure Irish character. We, at once, entered in a conversation upon the social condition and prospects of his country, and derived from him much information, concerning the actual condition of those who are what, in our country, we should call *the farmers*. His case was a fair sample of those of the better class of small farmers.

He *owns* his house and one acre of ground, for which, however, he pays to his landlord, Mr. Leslie, the proprietor of the town, £3, (\$15,) for the land, and £2, (\$10,) for his cabin, yearly ! The pasturage of his cow costs him £1, 10s. Add to all this his church rates and taxes, and the sum is not less than \$50. He works for his landlord at 8d. (15cts,) a day, in summer ; in winter, at 6d. and boards himself. [1]

He commences work, at this season, at 5 o'clock, and works till 12, then at 1, and continues till 7. He takes his breakfast before he starts, or goes, as he did this morning, without it. He walks home one, or two miles to his dinner of "stir-a-bout" and milk, and back again, for his *nooning*, and then toils till night. If late, five minutes, he is docked a quarter of a day.

In this instance, he had taken no food since noon on Sunday—the day before—and now sat down to a single plate of oat-meal mush and a half-a-pint of milk.

Now look at the sum of this man's misery. There are at best, but three hundred and thirteen working days in a year. For three or four months in winter he can get no work, and in rainy weather his wages stop, so he does not actually receive pay for over two hundred days. But allowing he works every day, and receives 8d a day, the highest summer wages, abating nothing for rain or sickness, or winter, and he would realize but £10, or less than \$50. From this deduct his rent, taxes, and county cess, and his only support is from his acre of land, and his cow. And he is what would be called a prudent, industrious man, and "well-to-live" as the generality of the middling interest people in this country. Englishmen talk about the indolence of the Irish. The accusation is false. They are as willing to work at any service, as any people on earth ; and those who have a chance do work, under the most discouraging circumstances, with a fortitude which surprises us.

As the poor, tired, famished man sat there, and took his spoonfuls of mush from a tin plate, with an iron spoon, and sipped the milk from a tin cup, I looked upon his thin, pale countenance, which I knew was the index of a sad and crushed heart, and listened to the brief, simple tale of his miseries and wrongs, and marked the fitful glimmerings of a true and noble nature, when he spoke of our own country, and his hope of removing to it ; I could not restrain my feelings of compassion. The whole past rushed up before me. I thought of the days of my boyhood, when I labored as one among the sturdy yeomanry of my native land. I contrasted the prosperity of that noble and independent race—the bone and sinew of our glorious Republic, with the depressed and forlorn condition of these serfs of a proud aristocracy, who are reduced to the last degree of living, wretchedness, and wrong. The farmers of our country sometimes work hard, but they have many days of leisure, and always a garner full, and a broad table well furnished with an abundance of the best provisions, such as an Irish Earl might covet. I watched closely the changes of his features, which betokened a full heart, sadly oppressed by circumstances. When he spoke of his plans of going to America, and we encouraged him to hope it was possible, a smile beamed upon his sad countenance ; but the utterance of a word, or proposal of a question which involved the difficulties with which he was contending, wrought a complete change in his appearance.

His best, and only feasible plan which he explained to us, is to deny himself and family, to the very verge of starvation, in order to save enough to pay his own passage to America, leaving his family behind to subsist upon the income of the cow. Arrived there, he hopes to be able to earn enough, in one or two years, to send for his wife and children. This is the only earthly hope that keeps his heart from sinking into despair. He has no other source of comfort left him. To look upon his wife, and hear the prattle of his children, brings him no joy, but adds to the burden of his sorrows ; while he thinks their affection is to be met with his inability to make them happy. But when he thinks he can provide for them a good and happy home, he presses them warmly to his full heart, as he did, while tears trickled from his eyes, as I laid my hand on the head of his little boy, which he held in his arms, and told him I hoped to see him growing up among the free and honorable young men in our country, with bright prospects of a long, useful and happy life. He was much pleased when we inquired his name, and gave him ours, and promised to befriend him when he came to our country.

Mr.—— may be unlike the rest of his countrymen. I know he is not yet so deeply oppressed as thousands are, and hence he may have retained more of the dignity of human nature, and preserved the feeble action of those tender cords which vibrate in unmistakable tones the true character of an Irish heart. We did not ask his religion. There was no need of it. He showed it to us without. He may be Catholic ; he may be Protestant ; he may be Methodist, or

Independent. That is nothing. Deeper and truer, and more legible than all, he convinced us that he was a *man*, had a heart, and could feel—was a christian, and could love ; and as such I loved him, felt for him, and pitied him as my brother.

We gave them liberally for our meal. When they saw the amount they both, at once, refused it. We insisted, and reluctantly they accepted it, with an expression of sincere thankfulness which was worth infinitely more than the shillings we gave them. But we had detained the man too long, as we may the reader—and he hurried away to labor, apparently with a heart made lighter by our visit, though we found we had robbed him of a part of his dinner.

Ireland has been famed, from time immemorial, for the hospitality of its inhabitants. The pages of every work written upon its history, character, or condition attest it, and we have had ocular demonstration of the fact in many cases. Will any say, even the most hostile Englishman, that these Irishmen are all depravity, all evil—past redemption, ungrateful, vindictive, inhuman ? What nation has suffered so much and yet retains a more excellent quality than the virtue of hospitality ? Shame on the slanders showered indiscriminately upon a whole nation ! It is time to have done with such injustice, to cultivate a better feeling, and bestow a merited eulogy.

Returning over the bridge, we saw several well-dressed, and apparently well-fed, men and women coming from the military station connected with the coast defence. Their condition and manners contrasted strangely with the scenes we had just witnessed. There was a proud and supercilious air about them which jarred the equanimity of our feelings, and, as the phrenologist would say, roused other organs than those which had been so recently in a state of keen excitement. Had there been a wide space between, the change might have afforded relief instead of pain ; but as it was, our organs of benevolence, justice, and sympathy had not been quieted, and we were illy prepared to look, with admiration, upon a display of wealth, and power, and place. So we turned away from looking at the pretty grounds about the Revenue police station, which stands upon a beautifully rounded eminence, and commands a charming prospect of the river and shores. We went towards the long stone pier, from which we were to embark in small boats, to an old hulk moored off in the river six or eight rods. Owing to the great rise and fall of the tides, steamboats can not always land on the end of the elegant stone pier, which extends a dozen rods into the little bay. The steamers come alongside the boat moored off for that purpose, on which the passengers and freight are stationed.

While I sat demurely upon the pier, pondering upon what I had seen, and the various and strange aspects in which humanity must appear to the unveiled eye of Him who “ made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” I was aroused by the approach of a multitude of people, winding round the hill, and issuing from the plantation of young trees, towards the bridge. We started back to see them, as we were curious to know what it could mean. It was a motley group, of all ages, with bags and budgets, boxes and baskets, naked heads and bare feet, ragged clothes and smutty faces, followed by several carts, drawn by asses, and loaded with such goods as are landed on our wharves on the arrival of an emigrant ship. There could not have been less than a hundred, some of whom were tolerably dressed ; but the majority looked very miserable.

We lingered behind for some time after they had passed, engaged in conversation upon what was transpiring. It was not long before we were startled by such a wail of wo as I never heard before. We hastened to the pier, supposing some fatal accident had occurred. The people were crowded together, and weeping and wailing in a most pitiable manner. On inquiring, we found that five or six young persons were about to leave for America. They were going up to

Limerick in the steamer, to take a ship which was to sail the next day. One of them was married, and was going to meet her husband in Pennsylvania ; two or three were young women, and one a young man.

I never witnessed so wild an exhibition of sorrow before. They seemed to give themselves up to mere instinctive passion, without any attempt to control their feelings, or moderate them by judgment. At one time the whole air would ring with exclamations of the bitterest grief, like the rushing of a fierce tempest-wind ; then all would become calm again, and they would talk and laugh, as if the happiest beings on earth. Then some one would hint that the steamer was coming, or some movement would be made to transport the luggage from the pier to the scow, when all would break out in the most furious expressions of grief. Parents would embrace their children, and brothers and sisters weep aloud, as if their hearts were rent with the bitterest agony. One father, who had wept as loud as any other, tried to comfort himself by chiding the others for being so inconsolable.

“ Why,” said he, in a stammering voice, “ we should not wape for them. Och, sure, an’ are they not agoin to lave this poour, wretched counthry, where we all stharve, and goo to that blissid land where the poour folks have mate to ate ivery day, an’ they will ?”

That was like a toast given to our country at a festival. We could keep silence no longer, but at once entered into a description of the advantages and comforts the industrious poor people might have, describing the course they ought to pursue when they emigrated to it ; showing them the folly of living together in our large cities, and living in filth and ignorance, as too many do.

They listened to us with evident satisfaction, and our conversation had the effect to still their horrid yelling, till it was announced that the steamer was winding round the point just below, and would be there in a few minutes. A sudden and terrific scream burst out afresh, as if each was anxious to drown the other, and make his own agonies most conspicuous. Men, women, and children mingled their voices in wild confusion, as if all bedlam was let loose. They embraced, and kissed, and wept, and bade adieu, over and over again. But least affected among them were those who were bidding farewell to their home, their friends and country for ever. There seemed to be a ray of hope and comfort for them ; for the rest, only darkness and despair. And those about to leave, gave it as the richest comfort they could offer, that as soon as they could earn it, they would send them the means of getting away from the oppression and misery under which they were suffering so severely. This was the richest comfort they could offer ; and parents besought their children, with the most earnest entreaties, not to *forget* them when they should have enough to eat, but to remember them, and send for them as soon as they could earn means enough. This was the last, the very last, request that they made, even after they had parted from the shore. “ Don’t forgit yer poor, stharvin’ mither, Mary dear, but be a good child, my darlint, an’ the blissed angels will kape ye.” “ Remimber, Bridget, an’ sind for us, an’ ye can arne feve poound ; we’ll sell the pag and git the rist.”

These requests followed the adieus, as if the anxiety to get to America transcended all other considerations. I stopped behind, till one or two boat loads had passed from the pier ; and remarked that those who had parted from their friends entered at once and cheerfully into conversation upon the plans and prospects of getting to America. Some of them thought they could go next year. Their daughters could earn ten and fifteen pounds a year, and that would pay the passage of father and mother, and one or two sisters. Others expected to be obliged to wait two years. One man said if he could sell his farm he would go next fall. I asked him if he had a farm. He said he had one of ten acres.

“ Do you own it ?” asked I.

“ Och, sure, I have the right of it. I paid a hundred poound for it, and I wish I could sell it for half the amoont.”

“ I thought you had no small farmers here, that the lords and gentry owned all the land, and only leased it to you.”

“ An’ they do ; but sure an’ I own it too, foor I bought the lease of it, an’ pay the rint to the landlord, an’ the county-cess, an’ the tithes, an’ the poor-rates ; till, i’faith, we are all poor ourselves. We are all small farmers, an’ poour ones too, I can assure yer riverence that. An’ ye’re an Englishman—an agent, perhaps, an’ would like to knoo soome thing about our things ?”

“ No, I am not an Englishman, nor an agent, but”—

An’ ye are not an Englishman, ayeh ? The divil a bit can ye decaive me in that, an’ ye would be afther sayin’ so a twelvemonth. Sure, an’ is’nt it as plain as yer hat on yer head, ye are no Irishman. Ye do not spake like a coounthryman of oours.”

“ I am an American, sir.”

“ An’ it’s an Amirican ye are ? Blissed Virgin, an’ it’s a great coounthry ye are coome from, it is. An’ I wish I was there. When did you coome to this counthry ? It’s a poour people we are coome to. The Lord have mercy on us.”

And then followed a tornado of questions and remarks from him and others, about “ Amiriky,” those who had gone there ; whether I knew “ Patrick O’Flaherty, an’ Michael O’Grady, an’ Daniel McSweeny, an’ James McCarthy, an’ Patrick O’Sullivan, who all went from Ballybunnian, Abbeyfeale, Carrinakilly, Ballinruddery, Tallymore, Ardefert Abbey, and all about this region, and soome from county Clare, joost over the river there, who were all cliver min, and shmart.” When I protested I did not know them he was much surprised—though some had gone to Canada, and others to New Orleans.

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The Shannon.

The steamer, a black, rusty-looking craft, came along side of the hull, to which we had been conveyed in small boats, and we were soon all on board. A large company of passengers, from Kilrush and the intermediate landings, were already on the decks, and also a large amount of freight. As this is the first English river steamer I have seen, it may not be out of place to give a brief description of it.

The hulk is constructed much like a sloop, except it is larger, and the bows and keel are sharper. The quarter deck is raised two or three feet above the main. There is no promenade, nor hurricane deck, nor any awning. Fortunately, the sun shines in this country, very little. The guards do not project over the hull, except at the wheel-houses. It is like a sea steamer in every thing except size, and naked as a sloop. The engine and boilers are in the hold, and the pilot, or wheelsman stands in the stern without any shelter from the sun, wind or rain. He has no communication with the engineer. Both are subject to the commander, who directs the former by motions and the latter by words, which are passed down by a man or boy, stationed

over the engine for the purpose, who repeats the captain's orders—" stop her—half speed—back her—let her go."

The regulation and construction of these boats seem to me very awkward and inconvenient. There is no display of taste, and little respect paid to neatness and comfort. Benches are arranged about the after deck, and cushioned seats are in the cabins. But nowhere is seen the taste and luxury found in all our passenger boats. Indeed there is scarcely a " Tow-boat" on the Hudson river, not better found than the best of those belonging to the " Dublin Steam Navigation Company," which controls the navigation of the Shannon.

The dirtiness of the boats is inexcusable, though owing to the burning of turf, which is used instead of coal, it might require more labor to keep it clean. But this is no apology in a country where labor is cheap, and thousands are starving for want of employment. Water is cheap, also, and hogs are plenty, so that brushes can be had to scrub the decks and dust the cabins. Filth is inexcusable, but these people are so used to it that it does not annoy them to travel or dwell in the midst of it. But I wonder those who pretend to more refinement, do not make some attempt to be decent and comfortable.

We passed about the boat to inspect the management and working of it, and finally took our position on a pile of freight, in order to have a better view of the country and scenery along the shores of the Shannon. We happened to be there when the collector came round for our fare, which saved us about fifty per cent., as we were taken for second-class passengers. We had not before suspected but that we were as good as anybody, nor felt any inconvenience on account of *caste*. But pride sometimes begets pride, poverty shame. Many a man would feel himself quite happy, and never dream of dissatisfaction, with himself or the world, but for being over-topped by the vapory show, and strutting brag of others. His equilibrium gets disturbed and envy steals into his soul, and he feels chagrined when others pretend to be greater, or smarter than he. And many are foolish enough to pay their last dollar, and deny themselves peace and the ordinary comforts of life, merely to keep up appearances before others. This is a species of " disinterested benevolence," and *self-sacrifice*, my philosophy could never interpret. I am willing to submit to all rightful exactions, and to bestow honor where it is due ; but I have yet to learn how an imaginary line across the deck of a steamboat can mark the division of honor and shame.

Such distinctions, so far as I have been able to discover, do not prevail here to a greater extent than they do in our country, for we mingled freely with all on board, none neglecting or despising us for being ranked with the " second-class." I do honestly think there is a prouder, and more arrogant feeling in American than in European society, especially in the more common relations of social intercourse ; money, and religious, and political opinions beget as wide divisions, and as bitter asperities at home as here, except in the portions actually arrayed against each other. But the pride of birth, nation, and hereditary caste prevails extensively here, which is not acknowledged in our country.

A portion of the passengers—and the whole deck was crowded—were very well dressed and appeared to be intelligent and refined in their manners. Perhaps one third were of this class. Another third were like the common Irish emigrants who work on our canals and railroads. The remainder were a sort of middle class, who would compare very well with the less educated farmers, and mechanics and laborers, in our country. Several government officers were on board, civil, military, and naval. They ranked, of course, number one—in their own estimation at least. I was sorry to see here, as on most occasions, a degree of hauteur on the part of the English towards the native inhabitants, which was exceedingly unkind and to us

insufferable, because evidently calculated, if not intended, to irritate and exasperate the feelings of this unfortunate people, and keep up and increase the hostility which already prevails too extensively, and is the proximate cause of the difficulties subsisting between the two countries.

It can never be expected the Irish will harmonize, and dwell peaceably with the English, as the members of one nation, so long as their pride is constantly tortured by every officer, resident, or tourist who comes among them. Destroy a man's ambition and he will be sullen and indifferent. Hector his pride and he will grow angry and resentful. Annihilate his hope, and he will become despondent or furious. Oppress him with rents, tithes, and taxes till he can endure no longer, and he will grow angry and rebel, or indolent and starve. Then, to taunt and jeer him in his misery, is a crime and a cruelty too fiendish to be endured without a curse.

I can not blame the poor, oppressed, starved Irish, for their hatred towards the English. I have seen too much to say there is no cause, no wrong in the complaint they make. But I pity them that they are not able to meet the wrong and insult with a stronger fortitude, in a more manly, dignified, and christian manner. It is a poor way to redress one wrong by inflicting another—to punish a landlord they do not like, by assassinating him, stealing behind a wall in a mean and cowardly spirit, and shooting him dead. This is often done, I am told. I have seen reports from various parts of the kingdom, detailing numerous cases of this sort.

I own it is exceedingly provoking to a spirit crushed and broken, to be insulted by one who has produced the misery suffered, and still twists harder the screws which are torturing the very life out of them. If aught on earth could ever justify vengeance, and form an apology for retaliation, the Irishman has it. His starved wife and children, as they turn their glazed eyes, already sunk deep in their sockets, and raise their attenuated hands, imploring him for a morsel of food, when he has none to give—his last farthing having been distrained for rent, and not a potato left for wife and child—do virtually, in the world's sense of it, plead with him to avenge their untimely death, and punish the cruel monster who has caused all their misery. [2] The deep heart of humanity revolts at the thought of such a wrong ; and yet it is well that cool judgment will not excuse the rashness of vengeance. One wrong does not justify another.

It is better, doubtless, the poor peasant should, after he has covered the famished bodies of wife and children with the few sods his remaining strength will enable him to spread over them, lie down by their side on the cold ground and die, [3] than to seek retaliation on the christian (?) landlord, who caused his misery, and now takes his life by inches. The world would call that *murder*, and hang him, while his is but a *misfortune*. Besides, to kill him would do no good. It would not bring back the life of those he loved, but would pierce a new and poisoned dart into his own soul. The poor individual has not the *right* of the multitude of individuals called Government, or the conventicle called Inquisition, to remove the evils which disturb him.

The lives of his wife and children, and his own, are of little worth compared with the glory of royalty, or the preservation of respect for an article in the creed. The poor man's family has no right to live, if the absentee landlord's darling daughters are to be denied a yard of ribbon, a bouquet of flowers, a plate of ice-cream, or a Roman punch, when they want them ; nor Victoria's babies refused a single bauble they may covet. Oh, no ! that would be very wrong ; a grievous offence against the moral and religious sense of nobility. But it is all right to train whole armies, feed, and clothe, and pay them well, and march them forth to shoot their fellow-men, sack towns, ravish women, and perform every hellish act ! That is all perfectly right, very cool ! greatly glorious ! and the brow of him who succeeds best in such noble acts,

shall be wreathed with the greenest laurels. The whole nation shall do him reverence, and be taxed to rear equestrian statues, and triumphal arches, or columns of brass or marble, to perpetuate, through all time, the memory of his gallant deeds ! And he who solves a problem in theological mysteries to the satisfaction of all who pretended to understand and believe it before ; or brandishes about an old argument to sustain the creed, shall be honored — perhaps sainted, though he may never have given a crumb from his table to feed a famished widow, or breathed a christian prayer in the cell of a dying captive !

Oh, Ireland, thou art a burlesque in the eyes of fat, absent landlords, an aspiring government, and a proud church ! Thy *misfortunes* are great, but no *wrong* has been done thee ! There is no help for thy sons and daughters. Thy taxes, thy rents, thy tithes, thy ignorance must remain, though thy children starve ; and any attempt, on thy part, to relieve thyself, to change thy position, shall be promptly met. and the screw crush thy limbs, already mangled, still more ! Thou must not wince, nor utter a word ; but bear, in silence, the sneers of those who come among you, to look carelessly upon thy miseries, or impose new hardships!

The case stands thus. The principal—almost the entire, support of the common Irish population, is derived from the cultivation of the land. If a man can get a few roods, at any thing like a fair rent, he is satisfied, and counts himself happy ; he goes to work with a good heart, according to his best knowledge, secures a livelihood, and pays his rent promptly, if he is fortunate enough to have good land, favorable seasons, and a high market. But here are the *contingencies* which produce Ireland's miseries and ceaseless agitation, and lead to the unlawful and inhuman acts of violence before alluded to.

In the first place, few Irishmen have good landlords, or get their lands at fair rents. I do not mean to say that the landlords—be they English, Irish, or Scotch, are necessarily bad men, or inhuman. I speak of them as *landlords* ; in which capacity, I understand them to be morally under solemn obligations to do right by themselves, their families, their tenants, the neighborhood, and the nation. For what has God, (?) or the government, entrusted them with the *exclusive* right to the soil, from which man and beast are fed, if it is not to make it a source of productive increase to the means of life and comfort ? [4]

Very well ; they are too rich, or proud, or lazy, to till the land themselves, and so entrust the management of it to others, retaining to themselves the right to an income sufficient to supply their necessities and luxuries, and enable them to maintain a degree of ease and splendor suited to their tastes or the circles in which they move. Now all this I will not object to, for so is the practice of the world. But I *might* go back and question their titles, asking in whose name they got possession of those fifty, or one hundred, or two hundred thousand acres of God's earth, made for human homes—for “ the earth is the Lord's and the fulness there-of,” and he “ has made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” so that each man has a *right to life*, and the means of it which come out of the ground, provided he uses proper diligence to obtain it. At least, society has no right to throw about restrictions to exclude him from such opportunity.

I may be told it was William, or Henry, or James, or Cromwell, or Charles II, or Elizabeth, or, if preferred, the O'Neils, the Desmonds, the McCarthys, the O'Briens, or even Brian Boroihme, or Saint Patrick, whose gracious benignity secured to their noble progenitors the exclusive right to the soil in perpetuity forever. But how came they by such power over God's heritage, to slice up His earth, which was made for all His children as much as air and water, and parcel it out with such discriminating partiality ? If they assume to rule in His name, and by divine right, as His appointed emissaries, they should be careful to obey His revealed will, lest they awake His displeasure ! But this is not the point. I go not backwards now to inquire

into titles, because the aristocratic will not hear me, or will feign not to understand me ; and it would do the rest no immediate good if they did.

I return, then, to the position which the landlord takes, that, *being* in possession of the fee to a certain tract of God's earth, he has a right to *a support* from it ; nay, to all the income he can make it yield him. Very well ! So much we yield him, not because it is *right*, but because it is *law* and custom. He can ask no more. Now, what does he do with his vast heritage of land ? Does he come to it, and, like a prudent and wise man, provide for its best management, so as to yield him a rich income ? Does he overlook it, and inquire into the best means of recovering what is waste and unproductive ? Does he look after his tenantry, and see that they are, first of all, made comfortable, and qualified to work to advantage for the best good of the property ? [5] It would seem that mere self-interest, the narrowest (but perhaps strongest) motive to action, would prompt him to do so, to say nothing about the broader principles of justice, humanity, and religion.

But no ; he does no such thing ; probably not in one case in a hundred. He stays away, and knows virtually nothing of the condition of his estates, or of his ten, or twenty, or a hundred thousand tenants—has never seen either, and never wants to, so long as he gets rent enough to support him some where else. He was born out of the country, is alien to all upon or about his property, and though an Irishman, he has learned to hate his country, and despise his countrymen. He has heard, through his venal agent, a most horrid account of the savageness of the inhabitants, made so by his own abusive conduct, or cruel neglect, and does not care to visit them. [6]

Every where we hear censures heaped upon absentee landlords. [7] Now, if they were at home, where they belong, looking after their interests, they would not be for ever draining the country of all its income, to squander it at foreign courts, and thus leave it impoverished, but would spend it where it would do some good, enrich the country, and increase the value of the properties and the comforts of the people. [8]

The second evil I mention, as a prolific cause of the present misery of Ireland, is the conduct of the agents who stand between the owner and cultivator of the soil. In some cases, these agents are appointed by the landlord and act directly for him, which is, perhaps, the least objectionable method, taken as a whole, by the absentee proprietor. But cases are not wanting of their faithlessness, both to their employers and the tenants. I have had the most undoubted proofs of the most wicked and inhuman treatment of these task-masters, in numberless instances ; and there are not wanting evidences of their treachery and dishonesty to the landlords themselves. On large estates, numerous sub-agents are employed, who increase the miseries, and feel less compunction, inasmuch as they feel less responsibility.[9]

The dishonesty and knavery of the agents are bad enough, heaven knows ; but it is not half equal to the oppressions of the “ middle-men,” as they are called. This is a class of petty landlords, a kind of stock-jobbers, who hire large tracts of land at cheap rents, and then underlet them in small portions, at enormous prices. [10] This is done in various ways. They some times, and the more honorable ones, or less knavish, simply stand in the character of an agent responsible for the rent, and are careful to put an additional price, abundantly sufficient to secure themselves from the possibility of any loss. Many get long and cheap leases from bankrupt landlords, and go to work and build towns, mills, and factories, drain lands, and make other permanent improvements, as if the property was actually their own.

It is not unfrequent that such men amass large fortunes, and, in turn, lease their rights to an other class, who become more greedy of gain, and vastly worse oppressors than the land

owners. [11] Some times this subletting is carried down, by these speculators in human rights and miseries, to the fourth and fifth degree. The poor cottier, underlaying all, is doomed to support the monstrous burden that oppresses him, or be crushed to death. [12] From the pores of his skin oozes out the sweat which circulates life and fashion up to the nobleman who sits in the House of Lords, figures at the exchequer, bears the trail of Mrs. Victoria Guelph, or loiters, with his family, about the cities and watering places of the continent. He supports the petty aristocracy, so abundant in all Irish towns, in addition, and then is called *lazy*, *indolent*, and *worthless*, and sneered at as unfit to live in such a bountiful and beautiful country. His very birth-place is begrudged him, and, in cold charity, he is helped off to America or Australia ! Merciful heaven ! Is there no justice left in human hearts ? No compassion for the wrongs and ills of a poor and distressed people ?

And then the larger farmers, learning the method, and imbibing the spirit from their superiors, will split up their farms and let them out by the year in “ con-acres,” at exorbitant prices, sometimes as high as £5, £7, and even £10. [13] A “ con-acre” is a piece of land plowed and manured. Every system is resorted to, from the highest to the lowest, to sponge out something from the next below, and set at ease upon their necks. It is no wonder that the Irish are proverbially suspicious, and jealous of every body. Their whole training tends to induce such a condition of mind. They are oppressed, cheated, and neglected by the “ noble,” and nobody seems to show the least regard for them. Their own neighbors are as overbearing and ungenerous as any body else, and so they are taught to be suspicious and hateful of one another.

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Scenery Along The Shannon.

The scenery along the Lower Shannon is varied, and, in some places, romantic. It would be beautiful, actually charming, if one could banish the sight of destitution and misery which every where meet the eye.

The mouth, from Kerry-head to Loop-head, is ten or twelve miles wide, and the shores about the bay are bordered with caverned cliffs, and swelling hills, sundered by deep glens, narrow inlets, or boggy vallies, with tiers of mountains rising in the distance. The caves of Ballybunnian, worn out by the interminable fretting and dashing of the restless ocean, are objects of curiosity to the geologist and traveler, and the views about the Doon bay are remarkably beautiful. As we ascended the river the jutting cliffs, in some places rugged and precipitous, the rounded headlands, which divide the succession of small bays, the soft, green islets, the ruined castles and small villages dotted along the shores, which look respectable in the distance, with here and there the aristocratic seat of some lord or gentleman, with fine fields, smooth lawns, and extensive plantations, added much to the variety and beauty of the scenery. But the small turf-boats, with dirty, brown sails, managed by ragged and wretched boatmen, and every where the traces of poverty and neglect, so mar the beauties of creation that one can not contemplate them without pain.

For several miles along the shores of the river, before reaching Limerick, the land is level, and the hills recede to a considerable distance. Close on the banks the ground is low, a portion of it having been recovered from the domain of the water, by artificial dikes, which preserve it from being overflowed by high tides and unusual freshets. These alluvial bottoms are rich, and very productive. Back of these, a broad, undulating plain stretches off in all directions, bounded by distant hills on the east, south, and north-west, leaving the beautiful valley on the north and west, through which winds the majestic Shannon, the noblest river in the

United Kingdom. In the centre of this vale, and directly on a bend in the river where it suddenly spreads into the estuary, called the Lower Shannon, is situated the city of Limerick. Several villages, private seats and villas, with old ruined castles towering up, here and there, from isolated rocks or projecting spurs of a range of hills, add much to the grandeur and beauty of this lovely region.

The city itself, as we approached it last evening, made a far more imposing appearance than I had expected to see in this part of Ireland. The size and beautiful situation of the city, the character of its buildings, the large quantity of vessels lying along its well built stone quays, as well as the business-like stir and bustle, and apparent good taste every where displayed, greatly surprised and pleased me.

[1] “ With large tracts of land lying uncultivated, a few miserable men are employed on the roads—at what wages think you ? One pound of yellow meal—i. e. less than Id. per diem !!! Great God, how is this to cure famine !

“ If this process of depopulation goes on a few months more, YOU MAY SEEK AN ABLE-BODIED MAN IN VAIN FOR TWENTY OR THIRTY MILES OF COUNTRY.”

Such is the testimony of an intelligent Conservative witness, after having visited four counties.

[2] “ Disease is cutting away the population at a rate not easily estimated ; and the people, under the pressure of their wretchedness, are fast degenerating into brutality. The poor are buried by stealth, uncoffined, and at night. Parents bury their children in gardens and by-places, to hide the fact of their death, ‘ in order that their miserable pittance of meal might not be stopped.’ The dogs are turning into beasts of prey ; and we have heard a few days since of a dog horrifying a parcel of men assembled at a smith’s forge, by rushing among them with the head of a child in its mouth, which, no doubt, it had scraped out of its shallow, hasty grave.”—KERRY POST.

“ Matthew Fleming, of Sharavogue, found, in one of his out-houses, the head of a poor man, and, on making search, he found the body in the wood of said place, with the hands eaten off. The head was brought by his dog during the night. It appears the poor man, who, it is supposed was from Marble Hill, county Galway, was heard to say that he would have died with want on the previous day, were it not that he got relief from a farmer named Dooly, of Clonaheen. The poor man died with want in the wood. The dogs, as carrion, fed on his corpse. Good God, how long will our rulers be deaf to these scenes, the like of which were never witnessed in a Christian country ! There was an inquest held—a verdict rendered accordingly.”—TIPPERARY VINDICATOR.

[3] WE HAVE DEAD BODIES EVERY WHERE. I am obliged myself to handle them, coffin them, and put them in the earth. We can not procure a sufficiency of men to bury the dead, or of coffins to contain them. EVERY VILLAGE has dead bodies lying unburied for many days ; almost EVERY HOVEL in the suburbs of the town has its corpse. We can not, I repeat, get coffins, boards, or men for the necessity of the moment. May God forgive our rulers for their cruel conduct towards God’s creatures here !”—REV. MR. CONWAY, P. P.

“ The humane Protestant rector of Ballinrobe addresses Lord John Russell to-day, through our columns, and every line of his eloquent, expressive, and philanthropic letter is a voice from the dead—a voice telling of over ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SIX REGISTERED DEATHS occurring in one week in the poor-house of Ballinrobe ! !”—DUBLIN JOURNAL.

[4] “ The SMALL GENTRY, or ‘ squirecns,’ as they are called—men of £300 or £400, (\$1,500 or \$2,000) a year strengthen these failings by the most ridiculous pride. Such men are too proud to send their son’s into counting-houses of merchants, to learn some business and fight their own way as good citizens, and they are too poor to bring them up to professions ; but they will raise heaven and earth in patronage-hunting to get a son into the Post Office, at £80 or £100 a year. Their pride is sufficient to prevent their seeking

independence by praiseworthy and honest industry and enterprise, but is not sufficient to prevent their becoming slaves and sycophants of every ‘ great man,’ for the most paltry advantages.”—IBID, p. 166. A two edged sword, in unskilful hands : Why did not the “ Times Commissioner” propose a way they might work—yes—work “ with their own hands,” and till the waste lands and make them productive ? And why do not the GREAT GENTRY or Squir-MAGNATES, and noblemen, show an example to humble men] We Americans look upon the assumptions of British nobility as a very small—but exceedingly wicked thing.

- [5] “ The law of entail and settlement charges on property often so cripple the landowners that they are frequently, as compared with their nominal property, poor men ; extravagant habits, family pride to live befitting the nominal income, load the estates of such men with incumbrances, until, at length, the DERNIER RESORT of an Irish landlord is taken : he flies to Florence and lives at an hotel, where at the TABLE D’HOTE he can boast of his Irish acres— or he resides in London, in lodgings, and in obscurity. In either case, there is no capital for the benefit of Ireland. In the one place capital can never be created, in the other ease it is sunk and wasted. The land is left to the management of agents, or it gets into the hands of the receivers in Chancery—in either of which cases there is but one object—to extract as much rent as possible. With such a state of things, the want of employment, the distress and misery, and the disturbances of Ireland, under whatever name, are not difficult to be accounted for.”—FOSTER’S LETTERS ON IRELAND, 67.
- [6] “ We are under agents and bailiffs, who have no feeling for the people, our landlord being an absentee nobleman. He never comes near us to see if we are oppressed or tyrannized over. We should have some hope if our landlord would visit us once a year, that we should have some redress.”—FOSTER’S LETTERS ON IRELAND, p. 153.
- [7] “ To speak plainly : to hear a nation bawling out misery and beggary, and to see such numbers of her wise and good children fluttering about the world in splendor and magnificence, seems, at first sight, an irreconcilable contradiction. People that have common sense, humanity, and honesty themselves, will be apt to suppose them in others, and can hardly believe that so many noblemen and gentlemen of Ireland can riot and blaze abroad, while so many thousands of their fellow-citizens are starving for want of their help at home, and their native country is reduced to beggary and a deadly consumption. ‘ Even dogs,’ they say, ‘ when sick, know their own physic, and take it effectually ;’ and I therefore heartily wish many of our people, at home and abroad, may, for the future, give us some proofs of their having some share in this natural instinct as may make us full amends for the want of all rational management of themselves and their substance, to prevent our ruin.”—PREFACE TO DR. MADDEN’S WORK, “ REFLECTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS FOR THE GENTLEMEN OF IRELAND.” p. 67.
- [8] “ In the words of another, ‘ it (absenteeism) is the ruin of the country. We have not a resident landlord within ten miles of us. Though there is between £50,000 and £60,000 a year taken out of the neighborhood, we do not get £100 of it returned.’ ”—IBID, p. 100.
- [9] “ The landlord and agent are both absentees, and it is a great loss to the tenantry upon a large estate, when it happens so. I think it would be better if one or both of them were living upon the estate.”—LAND COM., p. 159.
“ You may say NINETEEN-TWENTIETHS of this barony are owned by absentees.” — p. 144.
- [10] “ The majority of the landlords are non-residents, and very much of the land is let to middlemen on leases. The land is thus taken out of the management of the landlord, and the middle-man, having no permanent interest in it, covers it with a pauper tenantry, from which he exacts a competition rent, and at the end of his term renders it up to the landlord to deal with as he can. The land being generally hilly and rocky, is let by the cow’s grass and not by the acre. A tenant can live pretty comfortably on about ten cows’ grass. ‘ Land ranges from £2 to £4 rent, by a cow’s grass, according to the quality and quantity of the pasture.’ (Evidence of Mr. Eugene O’Sullivan, of Westcove, four miles from Derrynane,

O'Connel's residence.) The sub-division, however, amongst the tenants, especially near the sea-shore, has gone on to such an extent, that most of them have not more than a cow's grass a-piece to live upon. This will give a clue to their poverty. A cow, on fair good land, in this part of Kerry, will yield a firkin and a half of butter a year. A firkin of butter is worth £2 15s. ; a firkin and a-half will therefore leave about £4 a year, and the rent is from £2 to £4 for this cow's grass. A patch of land is manured with sea-weed and shell sand, which the poor, barefooted women carry in hampers on their backs great distances, and on this they raise their potatoes for a year's consumption. The value of their butter hardly pays their rent, and the buttermilk and potatoes are the only food or means of subsistence which the small tenants have. The laborers are worse off ; they have not the buttermilk."—FOSTER'S LETTERS ON IRELAND, p. 389.

- [11] "The middle classes live by subletting, and subletting, and again subletting the land, at increased rentals. This is the extent of their enterprise."—Ibid, p. 145.
- [12] "In filthiness and squalid poverty, starving on a rood of land, with miles of waste land around him, which the application of knowledge and industry would make teem with plenty, the poor Kerry farmer exists, in contented wretchedness. Neglected by his landlord, he knows nothing beyond the growing of potatoes ; oppressed by the hard fisted middle-man, who lives by squeezing another rent out of his industry, he is steeped in hopeless poverty ; cheated and robbed by the bailiffs and drivers, who extort from him his last sixpence for rent, and their fees ; and pounced upon by the middle-man for an increased rent, if he improves an acre of land, he learns cheating and extortion from his betters, and practices both on the wretched being who labors on his farm. In a hovel like a pigsty, in which it is impossible to stand upright, without chimney and without window, with but one room, an iron pot, and a rude bedstead, with some straw litter, as the only furniture, bed, or bed-clothes, the laborer, in the midst of half a dozen nearly naked children, with his bare-footed wife, sits squatted on the mud floor, round the peat fire. A garden-plot of potatoes is their whole subsistence, and for this patch of land, and the hovel which shelters him and his family, his labor is sold to some farmer, who lets him his land and hovel for a year."—FOSTER'S LETTERS ON IRELAND, p. 388.
- [13] A CASE.- "The proprietor in fee, is Mr. Alderman Harty, who purchased from an individual in whose favor it had been confiscated after the battle of Aughrim, in the revolution of 1688. Mr. Harty receives 9d. per acre from Major Warburton, the first lessee ; Mr. Handy pays under an old lease, 2s, 6d. an acre to Major. W. John North holds under Mr. Handy, and pays 6d. an acre ; John North has sublet to several small tenants, and receives from them on an average of £1, 7s. an acre."—POOR INQUIRY, IRELAND, Ap. F. p. 142.
- "And sometimes the farmers, in such cases, to enable them to pay these high rents, let out fragments of land manured to cottiers, in what is termed ' Con-acre,' for which the general price is £8 to £10, the acre."—FOSTER'S LETTERS, p. 70.

Ireland, as I saw it : the character, condition, and prospects of the people (1850)

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