

Ireland : Croker's Sketch

Sketch of The State of Ireland,

Past and Present.

John Wilson Croker

Imperaturus es hominibus, qui nec totam servitutem pati possunt, nec totam libertatem.
TACIT. Hist. i. 16.

EIGHTH EDITION.

DUBLIN:

M. N. MAHON, 116, GRAFTON-STREET.
1822.

Daniel Graisberry, Printer.

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THE Reader is requested to observe that the following pages were written in 1807, and published in the beginning of 1808. The corrections that have been since made, are *verbal* or *explanatory*. No *substantial alteration* has been thought *necessary*,

Dec, 20th, 1821.

To
The Most Noble
The Marquis Wellesley,
Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland,
&c. &c. &c.

MY LORD,

I REQUEST you to peruse the following pages. Our sentiments probably may not, in every instance, accord ; but I trust I shall convince your Lordship, that the state of Ireland not only deserves your attention, but imperiously calls upon you, as a Statesman and an Irishman, to exert your great and increasing influence in her cause ; hitherto so constantly mismanaged and so often betrayed.

I. AN author ambitious of fame should write the history of transactions that are past, and of men that are no more ; desirous of profit, he should, seek it from the prejudiced liberality of a party : but he whose object is his country, must hope for neither ; and, shrouded in disinterested obscurity, should speak of sects and factions not what they desire, but what they deserve, to hear : to his impartiality, his own times should be as those of Charles or James ; and the ministers, bigots, and demagogues of his day, as Laud or Prynne, as Fitton, Hamilton, or Tyrconnell.

And this style of writing—least popular, least profitable—is at all times the most difficult, and in bad times the most dangerous : power, always quick in revenge, is quickest in reaching its literary opponents ; and the populace is never more slanderous than in arrainging the motives of him who would curb their violence.

II. These disadvantages, great every where, are in Ireland oppressive ; where impartiality seldom thinks, and never writes : party the only distinction, passion the only incitement ; where the faction in and the faction out, *Orangemen* and *Defenders*, coercers and revolutionists, the English administration and the Irish directory, have divided between them the press and the nation.

I am therefore aware that my undertaking is a rash and imprudent *novelty*, attractive neither of the light nor of the grave, of this junto or that. To speak what I feel,—to tell what I see,—to sketch with a true but transient pencil, the state of Ireland, and, in considering the evils and the remedies, to deliver an unbought and unbigoted opinion on the measure of *Catholic emancipation* : to doubt whether I shall be heard ; to be assured that, if heard, I shall offend ; to do my duty, without hope, but not without fear ;—those are my objects, this my situation ;—the inevitable fate of contemporary truth.

III. From the date of the English establishment in Ireland, first effected, afterwards extended, finally secured, by domestic treachery and the foreign sword, there was, till the last century, no civil government. The king's deputies, and the deputies of the deputies, were strangers and soldiers, needy and tyrannical ; their duty, conquest ; their reward, plunder ; their residence, an encampment ; their administration, a campaign ! The Capital and a small neighbourhood, emphatically called the ENGLISH PALE, acknowledged theoretic existence, but enjoyed not the practical benefit of laws. As the superior arms or arts of the settlers changed turbulent neighbours into rebellious subjects, the Pale was enlarged, but they had no laws to dispense, no civilisation to communicate. I will not wade through the blood of a continual rebellion and intermittent massacres, nor through recriminations nearly as odious, and retaliations quite as bloody. Prized should the land be, every foot of which has been, fought ; and fertile the country manured by the indiscriminate slaughter of her sons and her stepsons ! Suffice it to say, the riotous discontent of the half-subdued drew down the suspicious severity of the half-established, and this protracted and barbarous struggle effected by degrees the degradation of both.

IV. I pass over the alternate ravages of Charles and Cromwell, to arrive at the almost Theban contest of James and William—the lawful, but intolerant and intolerable possessor of the throne, and the unamiable, but enlightened and necessary instrument of his expulsion.

Of the Irish, there had been no Religious *Reformation* ; illiterate, they could not find their own way ; and poor, they had little to tempt the missionaries of Henry the VIIIth : all, therefore, in Ireland, that was Irish, was Papist ; almost all that was English, was Protestant. James was a Papist, and William a politician, much more than they were Christians. The blind devotion of the former recommended him to the love and loyalty of the natives, while it exposed him to the fear and enmity of the settlers. Hence a war, perhaps not yet concluded ; and feuds, confessed to be unextinguished.

V. Offended, neglected, and despised by their respective princes, the two parties evinced a generous attachment to their fortunes. But the greater merit is here with the adherents of James. He, to insult and neglect of his followers, added weakness, and meanness, and cruelty, and cowardice, and defeat ; while William—though the friend only of Holland, and the enemy of Ireland—was a conqueror and a hero, had won three kingdoms, and deserved to win them.

Between such men, it was not fortune that decided ; the courage of James fled at the battle of the Boyne, and even his hopes expired in the treaty of Limerick. By conquest and by capitulation, the triumph of William was complete ; as complete, at least, as he desired. Ireland indeed was not tranquillised, but his throne was secured. With war enough at home, she had none to invade the shores of her neighbour. William seized her as an outwork of England, as he took Namur for the safety of Holland.

But though James had abandoned the Irish, the Irish had not abandoned James : against his undisturbed predecessors, they had maintained desultory but implacable war ; to him, expelled and outlawed, they exhibited, as were their character and custom, a perverse loyalty, like their perverse rebellion, blind to its object, and atrocious in its measures.

While James and his power lingered in Ireland, he assembled a pseudo-parliament. He had chosen the members ; he chose the measures—1st the act of repeal, justifying all rebellion, breaking all faith ; 2d the act of attainder, proscribing thousands by name, and millions by inference ; 3d the act for liberty of conscience, licence to the papists, hardship to the reformed. The whole closed with the subversion of established institutions, dilapidation of churches, spoliation of bishoprics, denunciation, plunder, and oppression of the whole Protestant community.

VII. From the Papist, thus lately tyrannical, now subdued, the Protestant thought it justifiable to subtract all power. Obsolete penalties were revived, and new restraint enacted—of their ambition from the senate, their partiality from the magistracy, their force from the field : that influence, often misused, should not be regained, possessions were forfeited, acquisitions forbidden ; that disaffection, as it was natural, should be impotent, weapons of offence were stricken from their hands, and the means of resistance removed, as its causes were multiplied.

The retaliation was complete ; not so its justification. William had ratified the articles of Limerick, and broke them ;—a policy useful to him and his near successors, fatal to us ; ensuring temporary tranquillity, and lasting dissension. Contempt would have extinguished the Popish superstition, proscription has perpetuated it.

The sword had failed, while both had swords ; the law had failed, while it existed but for one ; the alliance of the law and the sword effected something. It has been called a peace, and a truce—it was a pause—‘ to the Catholics,’ said Mr. Grattan eloquently, ‘ a sad servitude, to the Protestants a drunken triumph ;’ but, had James prevailed, it had been to the Protestants neither sad nor servitude, but death ! to the Catholics a triumph, not drunken, but bloody ! This, experience deduces from the ferocious bigotry of that sect at that day ; this, history writes or warrants ; this, Mr. Grattan, in his candour and intelligence, does not doubt.

VIII. Where the warfare of the nations ceased, their *Parliaments* began : the English to assume new, or to assert ancient superiority ; the Irish to deny the latter, and to resist both. Then Molyneux wrote his *Case of Ireland*, valuable for its matter, important in its effect, interesting as the dawn of political discussion. It shook the presumption of one parliament, and fortified the confidence of the other. Hence a more modern policy : the seat and style of the discussion was changed ; the contest was no longer between the senates themselves, but between the adherents of each in the Irish parliament.

A supremacy more complete than she dared to claim as of right, England now established by *influence*—a courteous name for profligacy on one side, and prostitution on the other.

Hence a degraded population, a hireling aristocracy, a corrupt government ; hence the low intrigues, meanness, and misery, of three generations.

From the reign of William to that of George the III^d—a long pause in the annals of our turbulence—during two Jacobite invasions, while half England was hesitating, and Scotland had treasonably decided between the Protestant prince and Popish pretender, Ireland was tranquil ; in allegiance sullen, perhaps, but unbroken. But this is all the historian has to tell ; the rest was the squabble of petty pretenders to power, unimportant even in its day, contemptible in ours ; youth became age, and age sank into the grave in silence and ignorance : for our glory nothing was achieved, for our improvement nothing attempted : almost a century is almost a blank.

IX. With one great exception. On this gloom, one luminary rose ; and Ireland worshipped it with almost Persian idolatry : personal resentment was, perhaps, the first motive of the patriotism of SWIFT, but it assumed in its progress a higher port, and directed itself by nobler considerations. The jealousy of the partisan soon expanded into the generous devotion of a patriot, and the power of his mind and the firmness of his character raised him to an ascendancy which no other individual ever attained or deserved ; above suspicion, he was trusted ; above envy, he was beloved ; above rivalry, he was obeyed. His wisdom was at once practical and prophetic ; remedial for the present, warning for the future : he first taught Ireland that she might become a nation, and England that she might cease to be a despot. But he was a churchman. His gown impeded his course, and entangled his efforts ; guiding a senate, or heading an army, he had perhaps been equal to Cromwell, and Ireland not less than England : as it was, he saved her by his courage, improved her by his authority, adorned her by his talents, and exalted her by his fame. His mission was but of ten years ; and for ten years only did his personal power mitigate the government : but when no longer feared by the great, he was yet not forgotten by the wise ; his influence, like his writings, has survived a century ; and the foundations of whatever prosperity we have since erected, are laid in the disinterested and magnanimous patriotism of Swift.

This is not digression, it is instruction ; justice to the dead, example to the living, it is the debt we owe, and the precept we should inculcate ; when such a man is emulated, his country is redeemed.

X. The accession of George the III^d. was to Ireland the æra, not of her independence, but of the diffusion of those principles, which twenty years after effected, and in twenty years more destroyed it.

Of the injustice of England towards America, the retribution was signal, and the result universal. Ambition was foiled, obstinacy subdued : and oppression on one conferred freedom on both shores of the Atlantic. While her right arm was employed in scourging or curbing America, the reins and rod of Ireland were forced from the other ; and distress resigned what generosity would never have bestowed. Ireland thought that she had attained the maturity at which the pupilage of a people should cease ; and she undertook, in the pride of heart, the management of her own revenues, the regulation of her own family, and the maintenance of her own rank in the society of nations.

XI. Of this revolution, bloodless, or only bought with American blood, Mr. Grattan was the leader. *His* history is now identified with his country's, and even his character may be assimilated to hers. A mind impetuous, and determined ; views not always correct, but always

generous ; an eloquence peculiar and popular ; in a delivery somewhat fantastical, but most impressive ; gentle manners ; a feeling heart ; undaunted spirit ; in private, most of what is amiable ; in public, much of what is great. Flattered and reviled, alternately and intemperately, he has been worshipped and branded, as a saviour and as a traitor—that exaggeration, this falsehood. What he sought for Ireland he did not always obtain ; much of what he obtained has reverted ; much of what has not reverted is injurious : *this* is not *salvation*. Too true to his party to be always just towards his opponents—too fond of liberty to be always on his guard against licence, the public eye, incapable of nice distinctions in perilous times, confounded him with agitators with whom he had nothing in common but some hasty expressions, and some indiscreet and untimely opinions ; when at last the crisis came, he injudiciously retired from the senate, and abandoned for a moment his station in the country. But *this* was not *treason*. Thus, however, living characters are drawn.

XII. The lifetime of our independence was short, its author is still [1] living, his measure already dead : ‘ he sate by its cradle, he followed its hearse.’ Murmurs against this dispensation of Providence have arisen, but unjustly. The being, ‘ *from its mother’s womb untimely ripp’d,*’ was faint and feeble ; the dissolution, though sudden, was natural ; though early, not premature.

Totally separated from England, an independent existence was, perhaps, possible—but while the connexion, however modified, subsisted, it was visionary. The claim of right was extinguished, but the activity of influence was subtilised and invigorated. It was in nature that the greater should rule the less ; it was in nature too, that, intoxicated with fancies of freedom, Ireland should revolt at the reality of dependence ; too powerful for a province, too weak for a rival ; the consequences were inevitable—a Rebellion and the Union.

XIII. In force for nearly a century the popery laws had been lately mitigated. *Elated* at this favour, while independence in progress, the Catholics expected to be *triumphant*, on its establishment—not unreasonably. Of Great Britain and Ireland they were an in considerable sect ; of solitary Ireland an important majority. In its narrow scale of politics, they hoped for weight, perhaps preponderance ! in vain — the independence was nominal ; the connexion real. Disappointment ensued, and dissatisfaction. Nor were these confined to the Catholics. The volunteers, a great body of all religions, heated by popular discussions in military assemblies—confiding in their arms and numbers—bold in their impunity, and infected with licentious politics, had wishes which they dared not speak, and would gladly have taken what it were treason to demand.

XIV. In this tumult the Catholic was again exigent, and the Protestant indifferent, or favourable ; further relaxation ensued, and more general tumult.

Minds became unsettled ; the state feeble, insurrection strong. In the north, an armed parliament discussed constitutional theories and despised the existent laws : but confined itself to speculative treason. In the south there was actual war : midnight insurgents seized whole counties ; at the close of the day the populace rose, and all was confusion and cruelty, flakes of fire and streams of blood, till the dawn ;—evils real or imaginary, the excuses ; evils monstrous and inevitable, the consequences. They evaded the law, they escaped the sword ; at last they defied both. The nights were nights of plunder, the days of punishment, and both of horror.

Then, as now, the disease was referred to the severities of the popery code, and tithe system—and the remedy suggested was the repeal of both. But the alleged grounds of Irish

insurrection are seldom real. The rebellion is raised first, and the grievance found afterwards ; as between individuals of our nation, the quarrel often preceded the ostensible offence.

XV. While further indulgences to the Catholics were granted, and others in progress, the French revolution, having filled its own country brimful with misery, began to overflow upon ours. Much of that event Ireland had already anticipated ; for the rest she was prepared. She had had her *national convention*, her *national guards*, and her *regenerated constitution* ; she too was doomed to have her massacres, her desolation. The course somewhat less bloody, the crisis shorter, and the event more fortunate, but neither totally dissimilar.

Again, the claims of the Catholics—and again, the concession of the government ; the offensive code repealed in more than they desired—almost all that it contained ; nothing reserved, but the command of armies, the dignities of the law, the senate and the throne.

And thus the question now stands !—where will it *rest* ?

XVI. In obtaining these concessions, Mr. Grattan was aided by Gardiner, lord Mountjoy, and O'Neil, lord O'Neil, the earliest friends of the Catholics, the first victims of the rebellion. Against them stood sometimes alone, Fitzgibbon, earl of Clare ; a man not to be omitted in even a *sketch* of Irish history. Of extraordinary endowments, great acquisitions, and transcendent arrogance. Bold and voluble in his speech, daring in his counsels, and fixed in his resolves, the stature of his mind overtopped his associates, and collected upon him the eyes of all, the shafts of many. An humble origin could not moderate his pride ; though success and almost supreme power, seemed to temper it. In wrath, less violent, than sudden ; in revenge, not frequent, but implacable ; he deserved more political friends, fewer enemies ; but there was something in him that would be obeyed, and his opponents fled, and his party fell before his victorious and envied ascendancy. As chancellor, like Shaftesbury, he had no enemy ; and administered justice with undivided applause. In private, he was amiable ; to his family, his friends, and his followers, indulgent, faithful, and generous. In peaceful times, he would have been beloved—and lost. In days of ferment, if a demagogue, he would have shaken, as when minister he supported, the pillars of the state.

The popish religion he thought unfavourable to freedom and knowledge ; its professors, hostile to the government and constitution. Hence his opposition to all indulgences of that sect ; always consistent—often imprudent.

As Mr. Grattan was called traitor—so was Lord Clare—tyrant, with equal exaggeration. When prejudices shall be buried in the graves of these illustrious rivals, we shall probably confess that both were sincere, both fallible ; both honest,—both mistaken ;—human in their errors and passions, immortal by their virtues and patriotism.

XVII. The hordes of petty rebels, that for twenty years, under twenty barbarous names and pretences, had harassed the land, now sank into one great union against all civil and ecclesiastical institutions—it was the legacy of the American contest paid by France. The conflagration was general : war on every side : in Ulster of politics ; elsewhere, of bigotry. The Dissenter fought—the Papist massacred—the Loyalist cut down both. Some provocation there may have been ; much vengeance there was : but where most, if any, provocation, least slaughter, no cruelty ; where no previous oppression, most blood, much torture. The details of this rebellion, realising all we read of 1641, I am willing to omit ; but its *objects* must not be forgotten—that of the Dissenters— a republic that of the Papists —popish ascendancy ; of

both, connexion with France, separation from England. Its results too are important ; Union with England, separation from France, and both, we trust, eternal.

XVIII. From the principles of 1782 sprang inevitably connexion with France, or Union with England, The late and decided atrocities accelerated the choice—not without hesitation. A haughty aristocracy and a proud people did not easily resign their power and their name ; nor an aspiring gentry their hopes ; all about to be lost in British ascendancy. The aversion was almost unanimous, and twice victorious. But Mr. Pitt was undaunted : he saw that this vital measure, once proposed, must be carried, or the country lost ; and fortunately Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, then Minister in Ireland, happened to possess the qualities that were necessary to second so great a design.

Young and inexperienced—unknown in business—little known in the world—unconnected with either of the great political parties which had so long divided the Irish Senate, Lord Castlereagh would not have been selected by an ordinary mind for the conduct of such a measure, which involved every branch of national policy—struck every string of public and private feeling, and awakened all the prejudices and all the passions of individuals, of parties, of sects, and of nations ! But those who knew him judged better ; his inexperience was compensated by an intuitive knowledge of mankind—his youth was moderated by temper and self-possession ; and the highest intrepidity, softened by the gentlest manners, gave him an even more than moral influence which—in a popular assembly, at once, violent and punctilious—neither rank, nor wealth, nor even talents alone could have obtained.

It is the painful lot of a minister that he has to deal with the infirmities of the human mind, and that those who are insensible to higher motives must be urged by the incentives which they are capable of feeling.

The opponents of the Union charged its promoters with deception, intimidation, corruption—and though the extent of these arts was probably exaggerated, no doubt much was done which many would think unjustifiable, and which all would agree to be unavowable.

But those, who denounced these acts of the Ministers, were obliged, by the same necessity, to practise them. The rage of the people was opposed to the allurements of the Court ; popularity bid against favor, hope against fear, and resignation was sometimes consoled by the hopes of a reversion :—both parties addressed themselves to the best passions of mankind, and to the worst ; but with different success ;—the honest preferred England to France ; the base, possession to expectancy; and the act of Union was passed—strange to add, not only without bloodshed, but almost without violence. But the parties had been rather enthusiastic than cordial. Each feared its own success ; the Opposition theirs, as dangerous—the Unionists theirs, as degrading—to the country. The victory was without triumph, and the defeat without dejection.

XIX. The Earl of Hardwicke's succeeded the Union administration. His counsels—by his friends alleged not to be his own—were weak and double. By his public and private gentleness, some ostentatious charity, and the universal purchase of the press, the shadow of popularity was acquired, but this shadow, with which he was contented, deceived England, and darkened Ireland. Inactivity, on the part of the Government, was called mildness and conciliation—sullenness on that of the People, content and gratitude. On this calm of conciliation and content, burst forth another rebellion ; short in its duration, contemptible in its actions, but

serious by its unsounded depth and unknown extent. It was the policy of that day to under-rate the danger ; and the peril of Ireland was forgotten in a squabble between the governor and the general.

XX. In aid of the Union the Ministry had courted the Catholics ; but they found the Sovereign averse to any further concession ; and were reduced to the necessity of vindicating their honor by a resignation of their power. In such affairs a minister should not promise without a previous authority to perform, nor is his resignation any satisfaction to those, whose cause that resignation only renders more desperate.

Mr. Pitt's conduct while out of office had no relation to Irish affairs ; but his return to power ought to have had. This the Catholics felt—they were the holders of his promises, and they now demanded their amount. The minister could not deny the debt, but asked time, to pay. *He* would have temporised : but England is not tolerant of popery, nor Ireland of suspense ; both parties hastened on to discussion, in which the Catholic was successfully opposed by the ministers, who had, a few years before, favoured—and violently supported by the opposition, who, a few years after, sacrificed him. Such are the inconsistencies of faction.

Ireland sank back into her silence ; and all again was mild and grateful and hollow : a halcyon calm, momentary and delusive. The stupendous conquests of the French, the dissolution of the whole European system, astounded the loyal and inspired the disaffected ;—the death of Mr. Pitt—dying, probably, of the general despair—deepened the gloom, and the choice of the new ministry did not alleviate the anxieties of the friends of civil and ecclesiastical establishments in Ireland, in England, or in Europe.

Such was the state of things when the departure of Lord Hardwicke bequeathed to his successor insurrection in five counties, discontent in twenty, and agitation in all.

XXI. That [2] successor was John Duke of Bedford, amiable and honourable, but by party connexions unfitted for the station of Viceroy of Ireland. The brother of Francis—that inconsistent Duke, whose democratical folly Burke has immortalised.—He inherited likewise his influence, his politics and his party. That party, Mr. Fox conducted in England, and the Ponsonby's in Ireland. In opposition at the time of the French Revolution, they naturally but unfortunately connected themselves with the friends of that event. But that event was too strong for them and for itself—Revolution became subversion. Entangled in its anarchy, they could neither restrain their associates, nor disengage themselves ; and Europe saw with wonder a British aristocracy interchanging praises and principles with the democrats of France.

XXII. They repented, no doubt, but in private ; and, until they had given ministerial proofs of their conversion, they possessed the disgraceful confidence of the ill-affected in all countries. At their exaltation, the intemperance of their late associates in Ireland knew no bounds : the advent of the Whig viceroy was hailed by the same voices which had before welcomed the French, To his first levee crowded, in the levelling audacity of their joy, persons of every rank, except the highest ; of every description, but the loyal. From their concealment or exile suddenly emerged the unexecuted patriots of 1798, bearding and insulting the very magistrates before whom they had been convicted. Some indiscreet legal promotions, some ill-advised civil appointments, raised to confidence the hopes of those fanatics ; but raised only to overthrow. The viceroy, awakened to his sense and dignity, and the chancellor—Ponsonby—respectable by his birth and talents, were disgusted at the vulgar

fellowship, and alarmed at the traitorous insolence. They did something, and should have done more, to the repression of both ; but they wished not, or dared not, to exasperate an unforgiving faction ; and by their want of decision lost one party without gaining the other; all were disaffected or dissatisfied.

Though beyond the strict limits of my essay, it is right to say that in *European* politics also, the ministry disappointed the hopes of their former friends, before they had time to conciliate the good will of their late antagonists.

After an ill-judged but consistent effort at peace, they found themselves obliged to adopt the policy they had so long reprobated ; and no doubt they would have pursued it with firmness and zeal.—But the Irish Catholics were again to dissolve a British ministry. The opinion of the Sovereign with regard to them was known to be unchanged, and every intreaty and intrigue were employed by the ministry to dissuade the Catholics from another parliamentary appeal for indulgence. But the Catholics were resolved on the attempt, and I cannot blame their resolution ; I did not think it untimely, I can never think it unjust ; I approved their pressure upon Mr. Pitt—I cannot disapprove their earnestness with Mr. Fox, but I blame, I denounce, as traitorous to the constitution and ruinous to their cause, the speeches then published by their pretended and pernicious friends ;—fatal advocates ! if, indeed, their real object was Catholic emancipation, and not Catholic insurrection.

XXIII. To stifle this appeal, that threatened it with dissolution, the ministry proposed a substitute—an expedient—to quiet the Catholic, to conciliate the king, and thus to keep their places permanently. It had a double face, this measure ; and I scarcely know by which to describe it. It was represented—to the Catholic, as opening to him every rank of military honour ; to the king, as giving nothing new, but merely raising the *English Catholic* to the *Irish* level. In Dublin, it was blazoned as a triumph to Ireland ; at Windsor, it was mitigated into mere justice to England :—but the fraud met its fate; the British king refused to decorate the Roman triumph. Scorned by the Sovereign, by the Catholic, and by the Protestant, the ministry were driven from the cabinet, and at the ensuing elections hardly found their way into the senate.

I regret, not the loss of this bill, but that it, or a more liberal, [3] was not candidly proposed, and honestly carried. I lament, not that those ministers lost their places, but that their deserved failure has disgraced and endangered a good cause, and disappointed and disturbed an unhappy people.

XXIV. Thus far we have walked in the footsteps of time, and heard the voice of history. Events lead us to experience, experience to improvement. There remain then for inquiry the present evil—the future remedy.

Nations have moral as well as physical climates ; and no good is practicable, no institution can be permanent, that is not fitted to the national temperament. The plant of the east withers in the west, the animal of the north degenerates in the south. We have but lately and imperfectly learned, that political modes which exalt one country may debase another.

The self-confidence of England in her system, may be wisdom at home, but it is folly abroad ; she would legislate for Corsica and India, as for Wales or Devon, and hast lost one, and risked the loss of the other. France, by the converse of the same madness, introduced foreign principles into her government, and lost herself. Humanity rejoices that she has arisen

from the grave of democracy ; and those even who think worst of Buonaparte, assent to my reasoning, by attributing his success to the congeniality of his institutions. He has re-established the throne of the Bourbons to seat himself in it.

Ireland—and in a greater degree than other countries—has feelings that must be flattered ; and prejudices and habits, that, to be conquered, must be soothed. She must not be stretched on the Procrustan bed, and lopped or lengthened to an iron scale. Those that legislate for her should know her, and their system should be elastic and accommodating.

Thus impressed, I trace the outline of our manners freely, and, if I can, truly.

XXV. Its popular character and customs distinguish and disincline Ireland from England. Varieties have been sought in the national disposition, referable to the double origin of the Irish people, in vain : however differing in rank, party, or ancestry, they bear the indelible mark of a common nativity. Restless, yet indolent ; shrewd, and indiscreet ; impetuous, impatient, and improvident ; instinctively brave, thoughtlessly generous ; quick to resent and forgive offences, to form and renounce friendships ; they will forgive injury rather than insult ; their country's good they seldom, their own they carelessly, pursue, but the honour of both they eagerly vindicate ; oppression they have long borne, insolence never.

With genius they are profusely gifted, with judgment sparingly ; to acquire knowledge they find more easy than to arrange and employ it : inferior in vanity only to the French, and in wit superior perhaps even to the Italian, they are more able to give, and more ready to receive, amusement than instruction ; in raillery and adulation they freely indulge, but without malignity or baseness. It is the singular temper of this people, that they are prone equally to satirize and to praise, and patient alike of sarcasm and flattery.

Inclining to exaggerate, but not intending to deceive, you will applaud them rather for sincerity than truth. Accuracy is not the merit, nor duplicity the failing, of a lively but neglected and uncultivated people. Their passions lie on the surface, unsheltered from irritation or notice : and cautious England is too fond of recognizing the Irish character only by these inconsistencies and errors, which her own novercal government has contributed to produce or perpetuate.

XXVI. In their domestic life, the gentry and traders differ from the English of equal rank, not in essentials but in modes. Here are less neatness and economy, more enjoyment and society. Emulative profusion is an Irish folly. The gentry would rival the nobility ; the merchant affects to surpass, and the shopkeeper to approach, the splendor of the gentry. Hence patrimonies are dilapidated ; hence capital is diverted from business to pleasure : the profit of one enterprise is not, as in England, embarked in another, but sunk in a villa or an equipage. The English trader bequeaths, the Irish enjoys ; but his enjoyment is not often elegant, and seldom secure.

The nobility and affluent gently spend much or all of their fortunes and time in England ; leaving their places to be filled—in the country, by hired agents—in the city, by a plebeian aristocracy : the former, solely engaged in increasing and collecting rents, can have little conciliatory power with the people ; and the influence of the latter tends rather to increase than diminish the political danger.

A great evil. Not because the country is drained by remittances, but because she is widowed of her natural protectors. The loss is, not of money, but manners ; not of wealth, but of civilization and peace.

XXVII. The condition of the peasant was of late utterly, and is still almost, barbarous. What the Romans found the Britons and Germans, the Britons found the Irish—and left them : the neglect of the conquerors or the degeneracy of the colonists, and the obstinacy of the natives, have preserved, even to our day, living proofs of the veracity of Cæsar and Tacitus : of this, many will affect to be incredulous—of the Irish, lest it diminish the character of their country—of the English, because it arraigns the wisdom and policy of their system. But the experienced know it to be true, and the impartial will own it.

The cultivator of the land seldom holds from the inheritor ; between them stands a series of sub-landlords and tenants, each receiving a profit from his lessee, but having no further interest or connexion with the soil. The last in the series must provide for the profits of all—he therefore parcels out, at rack rents, the land to his miserable tenant. Here is no yeomanry, no agricultural capitalist ; no degree between the landlord and labourer ; and the words ‘ peasantry ’ and ‘ poor ’ are synonymous.

XXVIII. Their dwellings are of primitive and easy construction—the walls and floors of clay, the roof of sod or thatch : within, are two unequal divisions ; in the smaller, filthy and unfurnished, you would hardly suppose the whole family to sleep ; in the larger, on a hearth, without grate or chimney, a scanty fire warms rather by its smoke than its blaze, and discolours whatever it warms. Glazed windows there are none, the open door amply sufficing for light and air, to those who are careless of either. Furniture they neither have, nor want ; their food and its preparation are simple—potatoes or oaten cakes, sour milk, and sometimes salted fish. In drink they are not so temperate : of all spirituous liquors they are immoderately fond, but most of whiskey, the distilled extract of fermented corn. In many districts, by an ingenious and simple process, they prepare this liquor themselves, but clandestinely, and to the great injury of national morals and revenue. Were they allowed, by private distillation, to indulge their taste for inebriety, their own vice would more effectually subdue them than centuries of war.

XXIX. Their dress is mean and squalid ; particularly of the females, whom you would not always distinguish from men by their attire. Of personal cleanliness they have little care. Both sexes wear, in winter and summer, long woollen coats, or cloaks, like the sagum of their ancestors. The children are generally half, and sometimes altogether naked ; living, without distinction of sexes, in dirt and mire, almost with the cattle. Yet from this nakedness and filth, they grow up to that strength and stature for which they are admirable.

XXX. The peasantry of Ireland are generally of the Roman Catholic religion, but utterly and disgracefully ignorant ; few among them can read, fewer write. The Irish language, a barbarous jargon, is generally, and in some districts exclusively, spoken : and with it are retained customs and superstitions as barbarous. Popish legends and pagan tradition are confounded, and revered : for certain holy wells, and sacred places, they have extraordinary respect ; thither crowd, the sick for cure, and the sinful for expiation ; and their priests, deluded or deluding, enjoin those pilgrimages as penance, or applaud them, when voluntary, as piety. The religion of such a people is not to be confounded with one of the same name professed by the enlightened nations of Europe. The University of Paris has some tenets in common, perhaps, with the Irish Papist ; but does *it* believe that spring water can restore the cripple, enlighten the blind, or purify the guilty ?

XXXI. In agricultural pursuits they are neither active nor expert : hereditary indolence would incline them to employ their lands in pasturage ; and it is often more easy to induce them to take arms, for their country, or against it, than to cultivate the earth, and wait upon the seasons. Even at this day, the sons, of the old inheritors are suspected of being more ready to regain their possessions by their blood, than by their labour. Their very amusements are polemical : fighting is a pastime, which they seldom assemble without enjoying ; not, indeed, with iron weapons, but with clubs, which they always carry, and frequently and skilfully use. When not driven by necessity to labour, they willingly consume whole days in sloth, or as willingly employ them in riot ; strange diversity of nature, to love indolence and hate quiet—to be reduced to slavery, but not yet to obedience.

XXXII. Who will call this people civilized, or wonder that they are turbulent ? Who confide in the empiric promising to cure so complicated a disorder by a single specific ? It is but too plain, that there is something to be lamented, and, if possible, changed, in the character of the nation—much in its habits—more in the accidental circumstances in which it languishes ; and it is evident, that no individual remedy can reach and reform evils so heterogeneous. Party is indeed blind, and ignorance adventurous ; but the time, we trust, is past, when party and ignorance alone determined upon the interests of Ireland.

XXXIII. Friendly—on principles and conditions hereafter to be developed—to Catholic emancipation, I cannot believe it panaceatic—alone beneficial—alone necessary. It will be a part—but only a part—of any enlightened system of Irish policy : but it is not itself a system.

Who can be emancipated, and from *what* ? At most six lords, one hundred and fifty commoners, and twenty ecclesiastics ; from four or five disabilities, which reach not, interest not, the mass of their community. Theorists trace from the political exclusion of the peer, the mental debasement of the peasant—truly, perhaps, in a people affluent and enlightened ; truly in small and polished states ; falsely in a great mass of penury and ignorance. Dispel the gloom, enrich the penury, the crowd may then, and cannot till then, become sympathetic to the feelings of honour and ambition : hence, I reason, that to mere emancipation there are previous paramount duties ; that enlightening two millions of Catholics is more important than indulging two hundred.

But the Irish Protestant, has he no grievance—labours he under no difficulty ? has he no cause, or taint of disaffection ? Your Protestant tenants, few in numbers ;—your Protestant artizans and manufacturers, a great and pining population—ask them for a description of their exclusive Paradise. In all that regards happiness and power you will find them to be Catholics, reading the liturgy ; as the Catholics are Protestants, singing the mass. Emancipate *them*, emancipate all ; vivify your country—not in details, but in generals ; not in extremities, but at the heart.

XXXIV. To catalogue and class the diseases and remedies would be a treatise. I only the sketch—happy if what I write hastily, be read at all.

Compendiously, then—the springs of our misfortune are five-fold : — 1. The ignorance— 2. The poverty—3. The political debasement of the inferior orders— 4. The Catholic code— 5. The provinciality of the government.

- [1] These sheets were first published in 1808. Mr. Grattan died in 1820, in the enjoyment of the undivided respect of all parties, and the unanimous admiration of his country.
- [2] The Earl of Powis was named by Mr. Pitt's ministry to succeed Lord Hardwicke, but he never came to Ireland.
- [3] An act of the same purport,—57 Geo. III. c. 92,—passed in 1807 without opposition, almost without observation.

Sketch of the state of Ireland, past and present (1822)

Author : Croker, John Wilson, 1780-1857

Subject : Irish question

Publisher : Dublin : M.N. Mahon

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Boston College Libraries

Book contributor : Boston College Libraries

Collection : Boston_College_Library ; blc ; americana

Source : Internet archive

<http://archive.org/details/sketchofstateofi00crok>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org

October 11 2013