

Old and New Ireland.

*Beaten paths : and those who trod them*

Thomas Colley Grattan

1862

“ Hoo ! Hoo ! I am almost giddy with roving about. I could have ranged farther yet, but am not well able to dive into profundities. I leave those things to stronger wits.”  
— Burton’s ‘ *Anatomy of Melancholy*.’

The writer of an autobiography is, in short, always in a false position, and the reader most frequently in an unfair one. The first can never be expected to speak “ nothing but the truth.” The latter draws many inferences on imperfect grounds, estimates character from insufficient data, and sees facts through a hazy atmosphere and a distorted medium.

Abounding instances exist in illustration of these strictures.

Rousseau’s ‘ Confessions,’ Ireland’s Avowals of Literary Fraud, Heinrich Heine’s ‘ Geständnisse,’ and all such voluntary self-exposures, are revolting proofs of the author’s want of delicate reserve, and an insolent appraisalment of his self-importance. No man, under the boast of making a clean breast, should sell his secret vileness to the public, like a deformed pauper anticipating death, and disposing of his body to the surgeons. This is trafficking the infirmities of nature for base lucre. Decency commands the concealment of physical disease, and that which is mental should remain a mystery. God gave us our virtues for mankind, our vices for ourselves, either as a penalty for being born in original sin, or to temper the pride which would aim at perfection. Consciousness of crime is a tax upon knowledge. But it should be paid to the source from which knowledge is derived, in repentance and reformation.

What has the public to do with our undiscovered errors ? What right have we to raise the veil, and inflict the painful truth on others ? Why even intrude our small griefs upon the world, drops of sorrow in an ocean of woe ? A decorous hypocrisy forbids a man turning informer and peaching against himself. Let others find him out if they can, and denounce him if they will. But they don't require his debasement to make them better. If they want an example, let them scrutinize themselves. Depend on it, every individual has a rich fund of faults, if not exactly of rascality, within him, and conscience will be sure to indorse the bill drawn on it by inquiry. But our fellow-creatures have no claim on any man's frankness for his own condemnation, when it would most probably find clamorous echoes in nine-tenths of their hearts. Self-immolated victims do little good by the sacrifice. They gibbet themselves to amuse, not to improve, the lookers-on. They plunge into the gulf, but the city is not saved.

It is, therefore, far better that every one whose life is worthy of being written, should find a biographer in some one else. The truth has then a better chance of coming out. The work, if less piquant, may be less prejudiced. It will be probably authentic, neither an accusation nor a defence. Each man who writes of other men will form his own standard of propriety as to what he ought to say or leave unsaid. The merit of his memoir will be in proportion to the measure of his discretion. Not bound to tell all he may know, he should not distort or discolour his facts ; and repudiating the axiom of speaking nothing but eulogy of the dead, he should refrain from stating anything they could refute if still alive.

I have not been a great traveller, though almost all my life travelling. I have not penetrated into the extremes of the globe, the distant East, the far West, the frigid North, or frozen South. I have not approached the Pole nor crossed the Equator. But I have mixed much with men and things in scenes less remote but more populous ; and shaken the dust from my shoes on many a well-worn track, from the crater of Vesuvius to the cataract of Niagara. A great deal of what I saw and knew has been long before the public in various forms of composition. Portions of the matter I am now about to print, have been written long, long ago.

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If the proper place to begin a thing is at the beginning, the starting-post (in the race of life) is the point to start from. Therefore it is that Ireland takes precedence here, for my eyes first opened on the world in that, one of its greenest spots.

Nations, or “ peoples,” as the phrase goes, unintentionally give themselves *sobriquets* at times. The “ Emerald Isle” has passed into a gibing byword, from the epithet being rather boastingly assumed by the natives ; as “ the finest peasantry” is applied to them in scorn, because repeated to satiety by a great Irish orator, and echoed *ad nauseam* by his followers, until it became laughed at. So with “ les braves Beiges ;” and I might give other instances, but it is with Ireland I have to do at present. Now, the verdure of that island is really remarkable ; so much so, that when Barry the painter first showed his landscapes in London, the excessive greenness of his grass, copied from nature in his own country, was derisively sneered at as being unnatural. So some American representations of forest scenery are not believed in in Europe, from the exceeding brilliancy of the autumnal foliage. But those who have trod an Irish meadow, or wandered in a Virginian wood, can testify to the truth of those apparent exaggerations, in comparison with the tamer colours of a soil less moist, or of a colder climate. Let us then good-naturedly concede its title to Old Ireland, and at least let me consider it

“ The greenest spot on memory’s waste.”

English tourists have of late years seen much of Irish scenery, and purchasers of property under the recent Parliamentary titles have become acquainted with such of the peasantry as have not been removed by famine or emigration. But neither tourist nor settler of these degenerate days can know anything practical of the national character, as it was exemplified in the host of remarkable public men who flourished before the consummation of the legislative Union with Great Britain in 1800, and some of whom still lingered in faded celebrity in my youthful days. Some were distinguished in the British Parliament, others were prominent in the struggle for Catholic Emancipation. Curiosity was alive to their peculiarities, and their reputation for eloquence and wit was European. Plunkett yet flourished in senatorial honours. O’Connell had worked his way to fame. Edmund Burke, Henry Grattan, Flood, and Curran, though their bodies were in the grave, still lived in lustrous renown. And several others, among them Charles Kendal Bushe, enjoyed a local consideration in the land of their birth, sufficient to give them a high reputation in England. But that reputation expired in most cases with them, and few of their names, except those mentioned, have survived the stirring events contemporaneous with their career. The interest which was then centred in domestic topics, has shifted to foreign affairs, leaving no chance of resurrection to the buried excitement of those troubled times. Without disparaging the generation to which I myself belong, fast making way for another and another, I may say that strangers have small notion nowadays of what Irish intellect produced of yore. And if they know little of what Ireland was in times so comparatively recent, how indifferent must they be to the far-back records of that always

*emerald* isle, its Celtic name of Ierna or Juverna, softened into Erin, giving warrant for the etymology !

We need not revert to the opinion of “ the ancients,” ignorant and superstitious as they were on most points of geographical science, and unenlightened as to the inhabitants of a distant island, the existence of which was considered apocryphal. The Phœnician navigators and merchants, who had pushed their enterprise as far as the Atlantic, secured their monopolies of trade by concealing the real nature of the islands of the West, which were in consequence made the scene of vague imaginings by the Greek poets, who there placed their Elysian fields and their Hesperides,—creations of fancy, foreshadowing a reality long afterwards established. It was not till the second or third centuries before the Christian era that the Greeks made voyages to the British islands, though the Phœnicians had traded to them long before. From probable, though not thoroughly authentic, testimonials there can be little doubt that though the earliest population consisted of Celts, the Phœnicians had established colonies in Ireland, and introduced their religious rites and ceremonies into the country long antecedent to the Christian era.

Had Ireland had the advantage of being subjected by Rome as Britain was, she would have been earlier known to the rest of the world in her true colours. To be conquered, but not crushed, by an enlightened nation is the greatest blessing that can befall a savage one. But Ireland unfortunately found no Cæsar to subdue, no Agricola to colonize, no Tacitus to describe her. No Roman ever planted a hostile foot on her shores ; and she went on from century to century in isolated obscurity, with the poor consolation of certain after-claims for learning and virtue, that are at best doubtful, and too often denied if not disproved.

When Englishmen began to know something of the people who had been so long their neighbours, and of whom they at length so easily made a prey, an astonishing unanimity was expressed concerning them. Giraldus Cambrensis, in the twelfth century, bore striking and pithy testimony, in a sentence as terse and comprehensive as one of Tacitus himself, to the energy and sincerity of the Irish of his times, two of the noblest qualities in a half-savage people, “ If an Irishman be a good man, there is no better ; if he be a bad man, there is no worse.”

Improvement was rapid and great. J. Good, an ecclesiastic in 1566, gives his descriptive evidence as follows :—

“ In general this people are robust, and remarkably nimble ; of bold and haughty spirit ; sharp-witted, lively, prodigal of life ; patient of want, heat, and cold ; of amorous complexion ; hospitable to strangers, constant in their attachments, implacable in their enmities ; credulous, greedy of glory, impatient of reproach and injury ; they think it the highest wealth to live without work, and the greatest happiness to enjoy liberty.”

The lapse of nearly three centuries has made small change in the leading traits of this admirable analysis.

Lord Bacon, in one of his powerful and sententious paragraphs, says :—

“ This island is endowed with many dowries of nature, considering the fruitfulness of the soil, and especially the race and generation of men, as it is not easy to find such a confluence of commodities, *if the hand of man did but join with the hand of nature*”(Works, vol iii. p. 321).

Edmund Spenser, the great poet, whose long residence in Ireland gave him good opportunities for knowing the country, but whose severity of feeling towards the natives, as indicated in his 'View of Ireland,' removes all suspicion of his being a too partial witness to the merits of their birth-place, writes of it in the following strain ;—

“ And sure Ireland is yet a most sweete and beautiful ! countrie as any under heaven, being stored throughout with many goodlie rivers, replenished with all sorts of fish most abundantlie, sprinkled with many verie sweete islands, and goodlie lakes, little inland seas that will carry even shippes upon their waters ; adorned with goodlie woods, even fit for building of shippes and houses, as that if some princes in the world had them they would soon hope to be lords of all the seas, and ere long of all the world. Also full of verie good ports and havens open upon England, as inviting us to come into them to see what excellent commodities the countrie can afford, besides the soyle itself most fertile, fit to yeeld all kind of fruit that shall be committed thereunto. And lastly the heavens, most milde and temperate, though somewhat more moist than the parts towards the east.”

And Malthus, in our own days, who could scarcely have looked with a favourable eye on a population so dissentient to his peculiarly un Irish theories, still conscientiously bears witness that “ Ireland might be made a more rich and prosperous country than England is, in pro-portion, in consequence of its greater natural capabilities.”

After having stated so much of undoubted fact, and I might multiply my English authorities, I do not think it wise to dwell on points which may not bear the same authentic stamp. But the absence of all venomous reptiles from this island, for which God has done so much and man so little until very lately, is a feature so remarkable that it must not be silently passed by. Without contesting the claim of St. Patrick of having driven out those plagues (there being no evidence that they ever existed there), it is enough to know that English writers centuries back recorded the peculiarity. “ Nullus ibi serpens vivere valeat,” was the expression of the Venerable Bede ; while Camden says, “ Nullus hie anguis nec venenatum quicquam.”

Thus hurried back for awhile by the reflux tide of thought, I must come quickly down the stream again, through historical margins to be glanced at in passing, until I reach the recollection of the small space I myself occupied in the scene.

The history of Ireland, chequered with eventful periods, and full to overflowing with stirring interest, gives the lie direct to the assertion of a grotesque and bigoted writer that she “ has been in a chronic atrophy for five centuries back ;” an assertion which although perpetrated in plain English—a rare accident on the part of the author—is anything but plain sense, in the teeth of the desperate activity displayed by Ireland from the invasion of Strongbow to the rebellion of 1798, of the mighty agitation which carried Catholic Emancipation in 1829, and of the marvellous Temperance Movement, at the very period when the author was putting forth his *ex-cathedrà* crudity.

There is a tide in the affairs of nations as well as those of men. The political waters of Ireland have long had their rise and fall, tumultuous at all times, and only turbidly subsiding even now. It is not my purpose to dive into this troubled sea in search of antiquated doubts or undiscovered truths. To trace analogies between the past and present, and from them prophesy what is to be, is a task out of my design. I heard O'Connell shouting “ Justice to Ireland !” I saw Father Mathew pointing out temperance to Irishmen. I knew that the country had been treated unjustly ; that the people had been intemperate, the inevitable consequence of ignorance, which is, in its turn, the heaviest wrong that a government can negatively inflict. But I did not venture to predict the result of the oppression, nor of the outcry for

redress. I thought, spoke, and wrote on the subject [1] where my voice and my pen had a certain small local influence, and met with indulgent attention ; but I waited and watched for the solution of the problem which I felt was to be worked out by Ireland herself. Her unfulfilled destiny, as a portion of European civilization, was to be completed only on her own soil and by her own sons. England had not the virtue nor the wisdom to accomplish it. This incapacity is not, however, peculiar to her. No nation has ever yet done perfect justice to another. No spontaneous spring of magnanimity has ever thrown wide the portals to an imprisoned people. A section of a population may be joined with its victors, under a promise of equal rights and a semblance of amalgamation, as was often effected by ancient Rome and by other conquering states in later times. A class may be enlarged ; a part may be disburdened of local restraints ; but no wholesale manumission has ever taken place from nation to nation ; and England is not likely to be the first to make such a glorious bound on the career of greatness. In saying this I only specify a peculiarity of race, for England and her offshoots across the Atlantic have of all nations most broadly developed the instinct of territorial ambition. The Anglo-Saxon blood will everywhere rise to admit it, with a glow of pride rather than a blush of shame. From the earliest of her wars with France, England has been too narrow for the English. The possession of Gascony, wrenched from her after a fearful struggle ; the invasion of Ireland, where she has from the first kept firm hold ; the seizure of the American continent and islands, where she has still a footing, slippery it may be, but undisputed ; the overrunning of India, the grasp of which strains every nerve, the acquisition of Gibraltar, Malta, the Ionian Isles, the Cape of Good Hope, and the colonization of Australia, New Zealand, and China at last, are points enough on which to rest. This enumeration sufficiently establishes that the pride of colonial conquest is the absorbing appetite of the English mind, a passion without bounds, the sustaining excitement of a whole nation—rather parodied than paralleled by what was till the other day the United States of America.

Was it then to be for a moment imagined that England would voluntarily concede to Ireland the “ Justice” clamoured for by O’Connell, and which meant nothing less than the dismemberment of the British Empire ? The standard of Repeal of the Union which he openly hoisted was really the banner of independence, under the pretext of a compromise. How could it be believed that England would consent to that *premier pas*, which was sure to cost so ruinous a price. But even supposing it to have been but a concession to popular exigence, when did England ever grant so great a boon, of herself, and really *in good time* ? Let her domestic history answer the question. Let American Independence and Catholic Emancipation, and Parliamentary Reform stand forth in evidence. When necessity forces a great measure from British power, it is always yielded greatly. There is no half-opening of the hitherto closed hand, no faltering, no fear of misrepresentation, no care for the opinion of others, no doubt of her own judgment. The Peace of 1783 with the United States, the Pacification of Europe in 1814, the Catholic Belief Bill in 1829, the Reform Bill in 1830, the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, are a few out of many monuments of the largest political sagacity. Whenever other nations or her own subjects act for their own interests with courage and industry, England has always shown in the long run, her appreciation of those two main qualities in her own character. Sympathy with them will obtain fully what justice or policy may fail to obtain at all. England above all nations knows how to yield with dignity, and to give with grandeur. And whenever Ireland puts forward a just and rational claim, in a spirit worthy of British admiration and esteem, it will sooner or later force its concession.

The greatest good that England could grant to Ireland, modifying a mass of misrule, was the advantage of her example. The national union for all national objects, the merging of party feeling in the common cause ; this, the great secret of a people’s power, England has been involuntarily teaching Ireland for centuries ; and it is to be hoped that Ireland has got

the lesson by heart. She has been long reading in the volumes of experience. Her wild struggles for relief were preparatory steps for the quiet course she seems now to have entered on. Her furtive glances at an impracticable freedom have taught her to bear the light of rational liberty.

Casting back our looks upon Ireland as she was in 1782, when Henry Grattan raised the nation, by the impassioned logic of his eloquence, into an attitude of independence ; again at the formation of the Society of United Irishmen, in 1791 ; and finally at the fierce outburst of rebellion in 1798, we can trace step by step, the gradations by which the country, in her own despite, and unknown to herself, was reaching the measure of Legislative Union, by which she was in 1800 entirely engulfed. The patriotic declarations of those various epochs and those of still later days bear a complete similarity of tone. They are in fact but links in the same chain of public wants and wishes ; the utterance of the same hopes, by different generations of men, for the common object of nationality.

But nothing can be more opposed than the circumstances of the times, and the habits of the people. When Grattan aroused an ardent population to arm for a loyal insurrection, more than four-fifths of that population were in a state of political thralldom and national debauchery. When Wolfe Tone founded the Society of United Irishmen, the whole country was disjointed, and all the eloquent appeals of that combination of patriotism and talent were but so many acts of alliance with the policy of England, carried out by its Irish creatures, for that catastrophe of revolt which placed the country bound hand and foot at the mercy of its conqueror. England had thus found means to cajole and disarm the volunteers, and by goading the Catholics into premature rebellion, turned the weapons of the patriot Protestants into instruments for crushing the people, and preparing the Parliament for the corruption under which it voted the Union, the basest of political crimes, as the partition of Poland had been the boldest. Irish independence was trampled in the dust, and England gained a vile triumph, at a purchase far dearer than the proudest victory was worth.

The Union, so effected, and followed up with vindictive energy, was long a total failure for all the purposes of national amalgamation. English ministers bore down the rhetoric of Irish members, by the weight of figures and of calculation, to show that the Union had proved for Ireland the blessing which Pitt in his pamphlet, in 1799, and Clare and Castlereagh, in their speeches at the same epoch, promised that it should become. But it is not by arithmetic that popular sentiment can be smothered. To make the Union a reality, the whole system of government in Ireland required a change. Men are always found to work out the destinies of nations. The necessity of a case is sure to generate the instruments for its completion. The ministers who have governed Ireland of late years have been sensible of the duties of their mission, have laboured to surmount its difficulties, and have taught the country to co-operate in its own salvation. They sagaciously discovered, honestly admitted, and boldly strove to extirpate the evils which previous administrations either saw not, denied, or cherished. Under their protection a noble self-confidence has sprung up among the people, more effective for purposes of good than all the efforts of demagogues and the deceptions of factions were for mischief. Proud in their recovered rights, the millions of Ireland were ripe for regeneration. Peaceful political agitation with social reform led to the decrease of crime, put fighting out of fashion and whiskey out of favour, closed the distilleries for want of custom, and left the gaols open for want of criminals. Those who would hold the Irish people down in ignorance and debauchery were appalled as the good work went on. Those who take pride in the advancement of the human race, who though incredulous of perfection rejoice at improvement, may now turn towards Ireland with admiration, still mixed with solicitude. For fanaticism is still alive—will it ever be extinct ? Prejudice is yet flourishing—can it ever be rooted up ?

Many Utopian plans were frequently put forward by well-intentioned speakers and writers, among the latter M. Gustave de Beaumont, [2] while Ireland was morally besotted, and before the discovery of the great secret of redress. O'Connell had produced, it is true, that extraordinary political organization which carried emancipation. But temperance, the foundation on which everything good is to be built, was not preached or dreamt of as practicable beyond mere local or passing occasion, or as a concomitant branch of a rational but commonplace code of morals. It soon became known, felt, and sworn to by millions, as the master key to the difficult problem of social regeneration. The inspiration fell on those millions through the agency of one man ; and Father Mathew stood alone on the pedestal of his fame, in a holier ordination than that which priested him ;—not as a mere follower of Grattan, or coadjutor of O'Connell ; not as a rival of the dignified patriotism of the former, or the fiery perseverance of the latter ; but as the equal in influence of those great men, and forming with them a triple combination, not unaptly figured out by the verdure, brightness, and equality of the three-leaved shamrock, Ireland's emblem. It is hard to adjudge the palm to either of the members in this national Trinity. Grattan awoke in the hearts of bondmen the love of liberty. O'Connell taught them how to become free. Mathew laboured to make them worthy of freedom. Grattan armed eighty thousand citizens, and won Ireland's commercial and parliamentary independence by physical force. O'Connell enfranchised hundreds of thousands by claims of constitutional right. Mathew disenthralled millions from the tyranny of self-debasement, by the power of moral suasion. Grattan acted on the passions, O'Connell on the judgment, Mathew on the consciences of men ; each being admirably-fitted to the times in which his efforts came into play, and to the state of social feeling on which it was to act. Each laboured well in his vocation. The result of their combined mission must depend on others. To them, however, who planned the design of national creation, from a chaos of political turbulence and social degradation, the highest place must be assigned in the gratitude of those whom they prepared to become a People.

Happily the agitation of twenty or thirty years ago, has totally subsided ; for peaceful as it was, it was yet pernicious. The actors in it are fast disappearing from the scene, by the varied agencies of life and death, and the extinction of the unwholesome heats which warmed them into notoriety. There is now no atmosphere in which such men may thrive. The age of misrule and the causes of turbulence have passed away. England and Ireland are grown wiser than they were, from a better knowledge of their respective characters and mutual interests. The Irish are awakening to a sense of their own mistakes, and the conviction that they were the cause of much of England's misconduct. The national character of Ireland was long obscured, from the effect of its own exaggerated travesties. Brave and generous as Irishmen are admitted to be, they laboured to gain a reputation for reckless pugnacity and unprincipled profuseness. The national songs written by their native bards gave a popular version of their characteristics which naturally superinduced contempt. The sober English could not hold in great respect a people who habitually depicted themselves in an aspect at once grotesque and disreputable. The man—

“ Who spends half-a-crown out of sixpence a day,”

or who

“ Goes into a tent to spend half-a-crown,  
Comes out, meets his friend, and for love knocks  
him down,”

is at best but a loose and dangerous person, whose jocular absurdities raise a laugh, but whose society and whose “ friendship” we would shun.

Yet such was the standard a majority of the Irish established for themselves, not merely in doggerel verse but in absolute fact, and they felt a poor pride in acting down to the degrading level of spendthriftism and bullying. To get into debt and difficulty, and either fight or wriggle their way out of it, was the general rule, and those who formed the exceptions, numerous as they were, were looked on as shabby defaulters. He who abhorred duelling, disliked hard drinking, or avoided prodigal expense, was branded as a poltroon, a pippin-squeezer, a skin-flint, or by some such expressive though inelegant epithets, and it required great firmness to brave the contumely they conveyed.

The result was wide-spread over all society. Extravagance and exaggeration in living and speaking, law-suits, battles with bailiffs, single combats with pistols, faction fighting with shilelaghs, wine, whiskey, gambling ; the gaol for the gentleman and the gallows for the peasant ; such was the combination that gave Ireland its lamentable pre-eminence. It is true that many of the best attributes of the national character flourished amidst this chaos. The wilderness abounded with flowers, though they were choked with weeds. Courage and hospitality were mixed up with the excesses that overlaid them ; and all—virtues, vices, talents, crimes, formed a tangled mass of contradictions which bad government made it impossible to unravel.

The most fatal period of a social system is when there is no strictly defined boundary between right and wrong ; when looseness of principle leads to licence in practice; when faults are slurred over as mere *faux pas* ; errors in conduct as amiable weakness ; profusion as fashionable folly ; and crime itself as misdirected energy.

In condemning this as the prevalent state of Irish society even into the earlier part of the present century, I am not assuming any too rigid code of morals as applicable to the practices of modern civilization. Whoever reads humanity rightly, knows its imperfection, and admits that evil must abound in all large communities, or the system itself would not be human. The “ small vices,” to use Talleyrand’s phrase, are inseparable from man’s organization ; but they become as bad as the large ones when the line of demarcation is not evident. A highly cultivated state of society, under a court and an aristocracy, regulates the conduct of the people at large, on such reasonable grounds of delicacy and reserve, that propriety becomes an instinct of the well-bred, and from them it passes in irresistible gradation to the least refined. If debauchery is held to be immoral, it must be kept out of sight. If ignorance is considered vulgar, men will seek knowledge or assume it. If prodigality is stamped as dishonest, they will live within their means ; and thus the world is saved from the display of evils, the worst danger of which is the infection of their example.

Such is and has long been the social state of England, France, and other European countries, with modifications based on varieties in climate and institutions. But in Ireland the Viceregal Court was too often dissipated and sometimes profligate. The Government was a market of corruption. Men were openly bought and bribed. The aristocracy were spendthrifts and of course harsh landlords. Education was on *principle* withheld from the poor, lest with knowledge they might gain the power with which it is said to be synonymous. Low and mean devices followed in the wake of embarrassed circumstances. Subterfuges and expedients were the characteristics of the gentry. Drunkenness and dishonesty were those of the common people.

I avoid discussing sectarian rivalries and the outrages springing from them. Religious abuses, theological controversy, intolerance, and persecution have formed the compound curse of Ireland for many a generation. But the evils I have traced were irrespective of the



perversions of Christianity from its source. All sects were alike obnoxious to a sweeping reproach damaging to the Irish nation at large.

It was natural that all beyond the pale of such a state of things should look upon such a country and such a people with contempt. The opinions of England took the colour of its prejudices, and Ireland became, in logical sequence, a bye-word of scorn.

The Irish people were shrewd enough to comprehend their ignominious position. They writhed under it, and paid it back by hatred of England, and this dominant feeling was pushed to excess by *soi-disant* patriots. Catholic Emancipation being conceded, not by the magnanimity but by the fears of British statesmen, the unquiet mind of O'Connell not satisfied to rest on that splendid triumph, started anew on a headlong chace after the *ignis fatuus* of REPEAL, unattainable but by the destruction of English power and at the price of Ireland's ruin.

The struggle of years ended in the total failure of O'Connell's giant efforts, and was quickly followed by his broken health, his voluntary exile, and his death in a foreign land. With his fall the fabric of political combination raised by his genius lost all cohesive force, and its incongruous elements came crashing down. From that day all chance of maintaining what was called the Irish party was at an end. Vain efforts have been made by the imitators of O'Connell's system to keep up agitation ; and those former adherents who even before his death denounced this system as too tame, driven in despair to attempted insurrection were shattered by the storm they raised.

Succeeding this catastrophe came the fearful visitation of the potato-disease and its inevitable consequences, famine, and that amazing rush of emigration aptly designated as the Irish *Exodus*, for it required a term of wholesale application to figure the extent of this movement. A decrease within two years of one-third of the population startled the world at large as an unparalleled event in the history of a people ; but it awoke the rest of the Irish nation to the truth of the country's position and prospects. The so-called Irish party, after a few spasmodic struggles, left the field for national redemption free to the efforts of Irish industry and British wisdom.

And everything is propitious for the gathering in of the great harvest. A change almost incredible has taken place in the national character of Ireland. Since John Bull has ceased to play the tyrant, Paddy no longer acts the buffoon. The despot sovereign and the court fool are both extinct. The Irish no more excite laughter by their antics, nor abhorrence by domestic tragedies. The love of liquor has lost its former inordinate force. Duelling is extinct, faction fights are unheard of, assassination is almost unknown. The temperance of the gentry, the comparative sobriety of the lower orders, the decrease of street and highway beggary, complete the picture to those visiting Ireland for pleasure ; and it strikes with delighted surprise the absentees who have known the country long ago, and return to it after a forced or voluntary desertion.

No less astonishing is the alteration in the feelings of the rest of the empire in favour of the integral part in question. England acknowledges the propriety which has replaced the proverbial indiscretion of the sister island. She has given up the paltry jealousy which so long disgraced her and thwarted Ireland. The mockery heretofore applied to the " Emerald Isle," is changed into an acknowledgment of its improvement. Irishmen meet with no obstacles towards advancement in England, which offers manifold resources to their talent. Places under Government are freely given to them in fair proportions. They abound in the learned and military professions. The colonies offer them homes of independence and comfort. No

difference in fact exists but what arises from perverse and factious dispositions. With laws for all alike and advantages in common, the grand desideratum is in rapid progress of realization, the UNION must be soon complete.

But the enduring stability of the work depends on the Imperial Government and Parliament. The immediate causes of Ireland's growing prosperity are too obvious to require discussion. But two of them, which may be called indirect and apparently disastrous, the famine and the vast emigration, have reduced the population to a number far too small in quantity for the productive capabilities of the country, and assuredly not enough in quality for its total regeneration. Yet perhaps a million or more might be still spared with advantage to the self-expatriated and to the land they would leave behind them. As long as the numerical force of an ignorant and inflammable race justifies in the remnant of enthusiastic agitators a hope of physical resistance to England, Ireland will have no chance of repose. It is the bounden duty as well as the best policy of the Government to encourage English, Scotch, and Welsh settlers in those depopulated tracts in which quadrupeds are almost the only "things of life," and to induce the investment of capital in manufacturing and commercial undertakings. Agriculturists, merchants, and fabricants will soon discover the best localities for industrial pursuits, and then let the Government set boldly and heartily to work. Let it stand neutral between religious feuds and party bias. Let elections be untampered with, electors unbribed, and candidates unbought. Let education be extended and if needs be enforced. And above all things let emigration be allowed to run its natural course. There is no fear of its going too fast or too far. Let no heed be given to the objection that "it is the best who go and the bad who remain." It is in truth the dissatisfied who make place for the well-disposed. But in any case the bad will become the better and the better best, when a restricted number has a fair field and an abundance of favour, in the form of increased wages, sufficient food, extended knowledge, friendly intercourse with settlers from Great Britain, and the certain results of an improved civilization. Then it will be seen what Irishmen can do and what Ireland may become. Up to this time it has not been able to prove its capability. When its native princes and aboriginal serfs were vanquished, but the country not totally absorbed, its title as a separate kingdom perpetuated in the person of a foreign monarch, with the mockery of independence and the fact of subjugation, it was but a colony, of too close neighbourhood with the parent State, where oppression and confiscation had full scope, but where man's powers were undeveloped, and the best gifts of nature neglected or altogether overlooked.

The chief danger at this most propitious time for consummating the great good so near at hand, is that the complexity of foreign alliances may cause an apathetic inattention to home interests. The tranquility of Ireland may be suffered to subside into stagnation. The paralyzing proverb of "letting well alone" may become the guiding axiom of men in power, and the country may possibly relapse into its former diseased condition. Having got rid of a swarming and unmanageable population, statesmen may be too timid or too lazy for the task which so many of their predecessors shrank from. If aroused to a sense of their responsibility, they would not perhaps dally with time. They might see that in this age of national reconciliation, while France and England have joined hands, England and Ireland should embrace. They are at least of one family now, for in every province of either country many of the other may find their kith and kin. Saxon and Celt have after all a common interest, the enduring pledge for a solid connection. The one has wrongs to forgive, the other provocations to forget. The most powerful should be the most magnanimous, and the strong should set an example to the weak. A dignified forbearance from all assumption of superiority should be adopted by England, and all the wicked verbiage of Irish rancour cease. An instinct of reason is teaching Ireland the great truth that the saving remedy for her ills is a thorough amalgamation with Great Britain, and that the time has arrived for the removal of "England's difficulty" and the realizing of "Ireland's opportunity."

Reverting to my own personal experience of the subject thus sketched, I think the principal feature of my early days was the marked separation of religious sects in society, that chronic evil which was the source of many an acute mischief. I well remember when, with few exceptions, Roman Catholics were not seen in fashionable company, even in “the midland counties,” removed from the rabid Orangism of the North. The bitterness of private feeling tainting all public affairs may be easily imagined, under a system which limited the intercourse between men, equals in family, fortune, and education, to the hunting-field, the assize balls, or occasional public dinners. In those days anniversaries were kept merely to keep up animosities. Orange emblems or green ribbons were worn in party spite. Toasts were given and songs sung in discordant tones, moral or musical. The milk of human kindness was mixed with vinegar, and turned to curds. All the best national traits were denaturalized, and the worst were paramount. Dissipation was always the order of the day—and night. Hard drinking was the rule, sobriety the exception. I have seen the door of a dining-room locked and the key thrown out of the window, to prevent the escape of any moderate man who did not choose to risk an exit by that same way. I have seen men fined bumpers of salt-and-water—and drinking them—for the offence of mixing water with their claret. How many a time did half, or more, of those “choice spirits,” come staggering up to the drawing-room, scarcely able to stand straight or speak plainly, when the chief measure of fame was the quantity of wine the hero could manage to swallow, and an individual was publicly known as a two-bottle, or a three-bottle, or a six-bottle-man.

Then the duelling ! How regularly was a carouse, an election, a race-course dispute, a ballroom altercation, a tavern broil, followed by a fight ! How many gallant youths and full-grown men have I known who were killed or maimed in single combat ! These are really sad scenes to look back at in cold blood ; but—may I confess it ? — how exciting and contagious when they were actual living facts !

I could tell many stirring and perhaps amusing anecdotes of those times, were I quite sure of my readers’ sympathy. But I do not like to risk the record of obscure provincial *escapades* of actors who merited at best but a second or third rate notoriety. School adventures are hackneyed subjects. A barring-out is scarcely worth describing, when the obnoxious pedagogue’s grandchildren might be among the readers ; and accounts of fox-hunting or other field sports have small chance of interest for a third generation, who only see stray specimens of one’s former comrades, as gouty old gentlemen on crutches, or wrapped up in flannel.

“ Oh, breathe not their names ; let them rest in the shade.”

Yet many of them were gay young fellows in their day—and mine ; and some of them have cut a figure beyond our early restrained locality in the professions and in Parliament. Had I followed up a home career, I might have been able to signalize some who have gained a wider reputation as among my early associates. But causes of no consequence to the world I now write for, doomed me to a less learned course than theirs, and threw me early into one which held great attractions for youths who had more sail than ballast urging their life-boat on its stormy voyage. The whole heart of Europe at that time beat with military ardour. Every lad of any spirit “ who had heard of battles,” like young Norval, and whose “ voice was still for war,” like that of Sempronius (I hope the tragedies of “ Douglas” and “ Cato” are not out of print or of date), took all opportunities of pushing his claim for a commission, by purchasing or volunteering into the Line, or by joining the Militia, from which he might carry sufficient men to entitle him to an ensigncy in a marching regiment. This last was the course I chose, in preference to plodding at a learned profession, or filling some place in a Government office, suited to the younger son of a younger son, with little fortune and small political interest.

My family had furnished members to Law, Physic, and Divinity, and several to the Army. I had a shadowy recollection of an uncle, a captain of foot, who fought in the American war, in a bad cause although it was called “ his country’s.” A relative of my father’s was a colonel in the East Indies. I had cousins in the Line and the Militia. A step-brother and my own brother were also in the service—and I was only anxious to add another of our name to the list. This was soon accomplished, and ere long I was a Lieutenant of Militia. And blithe and joyous was the life of a militia-man in those days. Garrison towns, camps, and country quarters in England, Ireland, and Scotland, taken in turn, or in companionship with Regulars, which being at least half composed of draughts from *us*, left really little difference between the two branches, except the one being liable to be ordered on foreign service and the other going to it voluntarily. The Militia was then, and for many years, a permanent force, admirably disciplined, and well officered ; with only the fault of being somewhat too expensive for men of moderate means (of whom I was one), leading to temptations difficult to avoid, and to debts very hard to be paid. But these were only drawbacks. The advantages overpowered them—the variety, the changes of scene, the good society, the good fellowship, and the knowledge of life.

I was always fond of getting to out-quarters with a subaltern’s detachment, where I was my own master, able to pursue field sports, to avoid drill, courts-martial, and the *tracasseries* of parades and field-days. Many were the delightful acquaintanceships and intimate connections formed in those independent commands. How rich at this moment is the recollection of some of them,—how sad the memory of others !

Let me recall something characteristic of the times, in which mere personal feeling does not overpower or neutralize general facts, and, if possible, some facts out of the dead level of social enjoyments, that may carry a moral with them, while exemplifying the varieties of Home Service.

[1] See ‘ North American Review’ for July, 1840, and January, 1841.

[2] ‘ L’Irlande Sociale, Politique et Religieuse.’ Par Gustave de Beaumont. Paris, 1839 ;  
2 tomes, 8vo.

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