

More Talk & Travel.

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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To Killaloe

May 24. — We rose at an early hour, and, as little more was to be seen, busied ourselves with writing, till the family began to stir, when we called for our bill—and a small one it was not. Several articles were inserted which we had never seen. But there was no use in quarrelling with the handsome daughter of Mr. O’Grady, who managed the domestic and financial affairs of the house, and answered to all the items at which we demurred, after we had sent a demurrer, by boots, to O’Grady himself. The daughter would not disturb his slumbers though the sun was two hours high, but she would assure us that the bill was exactly just, for she had kept it herself, and it was right. It was of no use to tell her that she had inserted several items which must have been ordered by some less temperate than ourselves. She, doubtless, thought we *ought* to have ordered all she had charged us, and that, therefore, it was our loss, and not hers, if we had not had it. So we “paid up” with as good grace as our stifled rage would permit, but neither “boots” nor “chambermaid” received a fraction that time.

It was it vain that the former followed us with his demand. We referred him to his employer, who would, undoubtedly, make it all right with him out of the enormous bill which he had charged us. Poor fellow ! he persisted that he had nothing to do with that, and should not get a cent above his “chances” for which he had to pay £5 a year. A hard *chance* this time, my boy ; for we can not consent to be charged twice the amount we should have paid at Cruise’s, or any other hotel in the kingdom, for no better fare, and then be dunned afterwards, simply because you happen to know we are Americans, and hence suppose, as you say, that we are rich. That is a poor return for the little token of kindness we showed you last year. Make a fair charge, the usual price, and we will not complain ; but our generosity we choose to keep in our own hands, to dispose of to our liking. Twelve shillings, (\$3,00,) for two lodgings, an ordinary breakfast, dinner, and tea, is near double what any decent host in the realm would charge a noblemen. And though we are sovereigns, we are not willing, after such an imposition, to make presents on demand.

Budgets in hand we hastened to the canal landing, from which we departed at 7 o’clock, in an iron packet boat, some six or seven feet wide and fifty long. There were not many passengers on board ; for, since the opening of the railroad, a short time ago, most of the travel to Dublin goes that way. There were, however, enough for comfort, and a few of the “better class.” The morning was beautiful, and we promised ourselves a pleasant ride on lake Derg and the Upper Shannon. We secured our places and paid our fare through to Dublin—fare moderate, and comforts few. No matter, we are here to see how our neighbors live, and would have no alteration on our account. I prefer to see things as they are, that a more correct opinion may be formed of the actual condition of things.

Along the line of the canal, for some distance, women were engaged in washing in it. For this purpose they either kneeled close to the edge, or else stood a foot or two in the water, and there, washed, "battled," rinsed, and wrung their clothes. Old women and young ones were engaged at this work in great numbers, and presented to us an object of novelty worthy of note.

Not far from the city, the canal crosses the main river, which makes a curve towards the east, and keeps up the west side to O'Brien's bridge, near which it enters the Shannon, along the shore of which boats are towed to the lake just above Killaloe. The valley through which the canal and river pass, is rich and beautiful, and tolerably well cultivated. The shores, at a distance, are adorned with handsome mansions and villas, surrounded by pleasant grounds and rich meadows. The hills back, and the mountains in the distance, add much to the beauty of the scenery.

At a distance, on the right, stands the ancient tower of Castle Connel, close on the opposite bank of the Shannon, near the Doonas Falls. This is said to be a place of much resort by the people of Limerick on Sundays and holidays. During the summer months many come here to reside. The principal attractions are the natural beauties of the location, a chalybeate spring, the rapids of the Shannon, and purity of the air. The only attraction it had for us was the gruff ruins of O'Brien's castle, which stands up in solemn defiance of time and change, a monument of the strength and dignity of the kings of Munster. It stands upon a detached rock, close in the town, and looks sullenly-down upon the pigmies who now are content to dwell in mud cabins, indolent, and oppressed, wholly unworthy the great chiefs to whose clan their ancestors belonged.

I here give the description of the rapids, by an Englishman, that my countrymen may know what passes for "sublime grandeur" in "English eyes."

"The Shannon is here, for more than a quarter of a mile, almost a cataract ; and this, to an English eye, must be particularly striking. It is only in the streams and rivulets of England, that rapids are found ; the larger rivers generally, glide smoothly on without impediment from rocks ; the Thames, Trent, Severn, and Mersey, when they loose the character of streams, and become rivers, hold a noiseless course ; but the Shannon, larger than all four, here pours that immense body of water which above the rapids is forty feet deep, and three hundred yards wide, through and above a congregation of huge stones and rocks, which extend nearly half a mile ; and offers not only an unusual scene, but a spectacle approaching much nearer to the sublime, than any moderately sized stream can offer even in its highest cascade. None of the Welsh waterfalls, nor the Giesbach in Switzerland, can compare, for a moment, in grandeur and effect with the rapids of the Shannon."

The rapids are about equal to the falls in the Connecticut at Enfield, or in the Ohio at Louisville, in low stages of water. Yet to those unfamiliar with large rivers, and the noise of foaming cataracts, this is naturally an object of much curiosity. To us it had not half the interest of the old castle, because not half the novelty, The Shannon falls, in the distance of fifteen miles, from Killaloe to Limerick, between ninety and one hundred feet, more than half of which is in the space between Castle Connel and Castle Troy. At O'Brien's bridge there is a small village, and near the hill of Doonas, are the hamlets of Erina and Cloonlard. There are no other places of consequence till we approach Killaloe.

On the east bank, is the county of Tipperary, one of the largest in Ireland, and one of the most wretched and restless. From time immemorial this county, bordered on Connaught and Leinster, has been the battle ground of the feuds and strifes between the opposing provinces.

In this region Cromwell disbanded his army after having subdued the county, and cleared it of the Catholic population, whom he had driven into Connaught, shipped to other countries, or slain by the sword. Many soldiers settled in this region, and English grandees who supported his government were rewarded with liberal grants of the best land. The soldiers mingled with the people, married Irish wives, and produced the race of large, well-formed, and handsome people who are found in this portion of the kingdom. But they did not much elevate the moral or temporal condition of the inhabitants. Crushed by the feudal power, which is ever suspicious of the improvement of dependents, they have struggled in vain for right and liberty, No part of the country has been so ready for revolt as Tipperary and Limerick, and no parts have felt more severely the blighting effects of absentee landlordism. Nenagh, Clonmell, Cashel, and Limerick are names closely allied to the wrongs and struggles of Ireland. Not even Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Clare, or Kent, have suffered so much, for there the people with less information, and less manliness, have submitted to the vilest impositions till no heart of resistance is left them.

As long as they can, they continue to till the soil, and sell all they can produce to pay rent and taxes, except a few potatoes, and when they can do that no longer, they live on “ dillisk and dhoolaman, or seaweed,” which they gather from the rocks. Potatoes and butter-milk they esteem good living, and call those who are able to have it, “ thokey,” that is, *good livers*. Many infuse pepper in water to give taste to their poor potatoes, and eat nothing else for months. When they can get none of these they lay down and die.

The people of Tipperary and Limerick are not willing to submit to such cruelty ; they will not starve without a struggle. They cling to life with greater tenacity, and every now and then, feel twinges of conscience, and start up with fitful glimmerings of hope, and make a futile attempt to subvert the causes of their misery. But all is vain ; and they sink back into a gloomy and sullen despair and, in the bitterness of their souls seek vengeance on the minions of that power which oppresses them.

In conversation with some men, this morning, I learned many things about the outrages and intimidations which so frequently occur in this part of the country. They generally originate in a struggle for land, on which alone they depend for a subsistence, and from which they are evicted by the unfeeling landlords and their heartless agents. [1] The people themselves are wofully ignorant of the arts of husbandry, as well as indolent in their habits, and no inducement is set before them to correct either. Land-owners, agents, and middle-men are alike the enemies of the common people, extracting the last penny, pound of butter, and hamper of potatoes for rents, taxes, and tithes, to sustain, in idleness, the very men who cause their misery. Is it any cause of wonder, that hatred and malice should be engendered, under such circumstances ; or that passion, stirred to the last pitch of desperation, should seek vengeance, and count it sweet ? It would require a degree of forbearance not common in an ignorant, neglected, and abused people like these, to keep cool under such cruel grievances. How could it be otherwise than it is ? If landlords will oppress and abuse their tenants, keep them ignorant and starved, reduce them to brutes what can they expect but brutal returns ?

The gentleman with whom I conversed gave it as his opinion that “ bad farming” is more the cause of poverty and misery, in this country than “ high rents and taxes ;” that if the people could be taught to improve their lands, they could pay all demands, and live comfortably. There is, doubtless, truth in his remark. But how can these poor creatures begin to improve ? Are the proper men, the land-owners, here to instruct and help them ? Are they encouraged to make improvements ? No such thing ; but they have every reason to know that if they make lands more productive, they shall be made to pay a correspondingly higher rent, and perhaps be evicted to give place to some other.

The people are, in all cases, spoken of and treated by the rulers, civil and social, as vassals, as inferior, and dependent upon the will and caprice of the land-owners. Those who would improve the tenure to the land propose no more than a lease of ten or twenty years. And most on the side of power rely mainly on the government lash to whip the people into peace and prosperity. The days have gone by when absolute power over personal liberty is vested in governments. Christian liberty is too well understood by most enlightened nations to consent to forcible measures. Men must be drawn by motives and convictions which do not impinge upon individual freedom ; the masses are coming to have some indistinct notions of natural rights, and social privileges, and justice and equality between man and man. They have heard the scripture, which saith, “ He has made of one blood all nations of men,” and that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God ; that God loved the humblest child of earth, and sent his Son to preach the “ gospel to the poor ;” to deliver the captives, and defend the outcasts. And they have some faith in God, as the Ruler of kings, and Protector of men, and they are not disposed to submit to be wronged and starved, while others revel on the sweat, and blood, and sinews of their fellowmen. It is a pity they do not understand more fully the true spirit and power of Christianity, for then they would be able to work out their salvation more certainly. But it is vain to talk of this to starving men. They have ears, but they can not hear, and eyes but they can not see, further than to seek vengeance on those who torture them. [2]

Let the government adopt the strongest measures, but let the scales be even. Let them go to the root of the matter ; and first settle the rights of certain men, made of the same materials and subject to the laws of the same divine government, whose wisdom and justice is impartial. Let it determine, if it can, why one man is put in possession of one hundred thousand acres of land, while another has not a foot ! That done, let it show why these lands are held in perpetual entailment, in defiance of the just claims of lawful heirs and creditors. When that is done in a satisfactory manner, we will ascend to the branches, and work as busily as any other in cutting out *suckers*, lopping off dead limbs, and “ ejecting” needless branches. I would respectfully refer her majesty’s government, and all friends of Ireland, to the authority of the holy statute, especially to the commentary of St. Paul, found in 1st Cor. 12th chapter, for information on this subject.

We have, in part, illustrated this subject, practically, in our country, and the institutions of our government rest upon a firm basis, because every body has an interest in the government. Our greatest danger lies in our *landless* population, in slaves, and foreigners, who are made citizens on too easy terms, while yet strangers or alien to the principles of our government. We have not, however, tried what must be done in Ireland—the breaking up of feudal tenures, in order to remove wrongs and secure rights to the people. We have estates, the owners of which are already tyrannical, and would be more so but for the power of public opinion, which is little else than the concretion of what leads to “ intimidation” in this country. In our republic, law is but the expression of public sentiment. Here, it is the will of the few, and those few not the common people, but a race or grade, which claims, not *justice*, nor *merit*, but hereditary and exclusive right, as the basis of all legislative and executive power.

Now let these false claims be abolished ; let the estates so long abused by the favorites of the crown, be sold to pay the debts of a profligate nobility and gentry ; let them be bought by the government with the money now squandered on monster armies of soldiers and policemen, needful to keep the people in subjection, and be leased to the inhabitants under certain restrictions, or sold on easy conditions ; then let model farms and practical schools be established, which shall be, *free*, and I will venture, with such advantages, and all their disabilities removed, there would be no longer any cause to complain of Irish outrages, and

Irish ignorance, and Irish recklessness, and Irish indolence, and Irish bigotry, and Irish improvidence, and Irish turbulence, and Irish hatred of good government, and Irish ingratitude, and so on to the end of the long list of English complaints and accusations so constantly reiterated.

I can not see why there is not as much propriety in such a course as there was in the boasted emancipation of West Indian slaves, by purchase and apprenticeship. Irishmen are of as much value to themselves, and to the world, and their life and liberty are as dear to them as they are to Africans. Wherefore, then, are they suffered to be ground to the earth with rents and county-cess, and poor-rates, and tithes, till they can live no longer, and then be ejected from their miserable mud hovels, and left without food or shelter, to beg of other beings as wretched as themselves ? It is easy to complain of such a population, but all severity will be vain, till some steps are taken to awaken their ambition, and rouse their dormant energies, with a prospect of comfort and permanent prosperity before them. They will then toil and suffer as well as any people under heaven.

The English are for ever complaining of the laziness of the Irish. We never hear that complaint in our country. With all the other sins laid to their charge—it is a rare thing to hear an Irish man or woman called *lazy*. They dig our canals, grade our railways, carry our hods, wash our clothes, cook our food, nurse our children, and do half the service of our country, out-doors and in, and no one hears of their laziness. They may be called ignorant, bigoted, dirty, clannish, quarrelsome, drunken, improvident, all sorts of hard names, but never lazy. Nor would they be so at home, if there was any proper motive, any inducement for them to work. They harvest the crops of England, and do much domestic service, and no body complains so far as they know, that they do not work as well as the English. It is only *at home* that they are called lazy. And there they do not work as faithfully as they might. But how can they ? They have been so often cheated, so long oppressed—robbed of their crops for rents, and taxes, and tithes, that they have lost all confidence in land-owners, their agents, and middle-men, and can have no heart to improve the land which they do not own, and can not lease, except from year to year. Who does not know, that even among the most enterprising farmers of America, there is no surer way to “*run out a farm,*”—render it unproductive, than to rent it year after year. And this impoverishment of the soil is rendered more certain if it is sub-let in small tracts to different persons. Each wants to make what he can of it, and at as little outlay as possible.

Such is the way of the world ; and why should it be thought a mark of unheard of stupidity and indolence, when Irish peasants are found in it ? Who blames them for refusing to lay out their strength upon lands to which they can have no claim ? Why should they drain bogs, and recover impoverished and waste lands, which can yield them no reward under two or three years ? It may be said, the landlord, finding them good tenants, would, of course, retain them. Perhaps he would—perhaps he would’nt ! In our country, not even the squatters on our new territories would subdue a patch of ground, if they did not know they should either purchase it by pre-emption right, or sell their “*betterments*” to some other man. Irish land-owners and their agents have become too cunning to give long leases to their tenants, for this very reason : that they would sell out their rights when a good offer was presented. They prefer to have their lands every year in the market, subject to the competition of a starved population, who have no other mode of subsistence. Forced by necessity, they will run up the rent to the highest pitch, hoping, by hard labor, a cheap diet, and kind Providence, to be able to pay it, with the other taxes, and have enough to keep their families alive.

In this precarious way the people have been living for years, and when the potato rot destroyed the crops, and “*free trade*” reduced the price of grain, they had no more than

enough to pay rents and taxes, and so were left to starve. As many as can, flee to America ; but multitudes have no means to get there, for they have no “ lease” nor “ tenant-right” to sell, nor credit to hire lands ; of course they can be ejected at the pleasure of the landlord, who has no motive, as in cases before noticed, to help ship them out of the country. He will not be at such needless expense, and so calls in the bailiff ; with a posse of constables and policemen, and the work of eviction and destruction commences. The family is dragged or driven from the hut, the little amount of miserable furniture thrown into the street, and the building levelled to the ground. Some times the thatched roofs are set on fire, and the naked walls left, as we saw whole streets of them at Kinsale, on the day of our landing. The work is carried on till a whole village is depopulated, fifty or a hundred houses torn down, and four or five hundred persons turned into the world, without house, or home, or food, or friend. [3]

Now, I put it to any one, wrong as it may be, whether it is *very strange* that disorder and outrages should prevail among a people so circumstanced ? . . . Can an American, familiar with the independence of our farmers, who *own* their lands, and pay but nominal taxes for the support of the government they make themselves, wonder at the destitution, misery, crime, and intimidation so common here ? He is never disturbed by the haughty agent of an absentee landlord, nor teased and taunted by a domineering agent, or middle-man. He tills his own land, sleeps in his own cottage, “ none to molest or make him afraid.” He is a sovereign—a prince in his own palace, and, unless he is cursed with the ownership of more land than he needs, or with slaves, sees none around him but those he has engaged on mutual terms, at fair wages, rates which will enable them, in five years, to become farmers themselves. Blessed is the lot of the American farmer! He may be, so far as condition is concerned, the best, the happiest and most independent among men !

How can all the remedies England’s philanthropists and statesmen have proposed, ever effect a radical cure of the enormous evils complained of, so long as the land is kept in the hands of the *few*, and the *masses* are left in a state of dependence and servitude ? Not until human nature is changed can one man, who has a soul to feel, and a *will* to resolve, be *forced* by direct action, or incidental circumstance, into a state of subjection to another *like himself*, and feel at peace ; and, until a man feels happiness, or sees it before him, he will not be satisfied,—he will not rest. Men, reduced to the rank of cattle, or made machines, without *will*, without ambition, without *responsibility*, may do any thing—but good. That they can not do ; for they have no power, no means. And it is no cause of wonder, if they occasionally break loose and, with brute force, take vengeance on the head that oppresses them. The caged lion will growl and snarl, and devour if he can. The more there is of the man, the stronger is the love of liberty and right, the firmer his resolve to resist oppression.

The turbulence of this population, shows that there is life-blood at the heart, struggling to circulate without impediment. The danger is that the circulation has been checked so long, that the fever has affected the brain, and that the English doctors will therefore think further depletion necessary. But that will only reduce the system lower, and render recovery less certain, unless followed with great care and suitable nourishment.

I am glad Ireland is not dead, that the people breathe—some even for freedom, and that all sigh for a better state of things. I believe that day will come, not by rebellion ; for it is a vain method to attempt to overcome one evil by another ; but by a course of gradual amelioration, till rotten estates shall go into complete decay, as they are going at a rapid rate, and rotten lords be found a useless burden to the state, the right of primogeniture be abolished, with which the law of entail must fall ; and an open field and fair play be afforded to all.

Then shall virtue and merit rise to a proper rank, and gilded indolence and vice receive a merited rebuke. Industry, honesty, and frugality shall be duly honored and recompensed, and the arrogance of fortuitous birth, and undeserved distinction be hurled into disgrace. The kingdom of Heaven will then begin, and the church will be untrammelled in its career by needless splendors, and tithes upon poverty. The clergy will cease to be wolves in sheep's clothing, biting and devouring one another, and become what their office indicates, shepherds of the flock, servants of servants, to guide, and help, and bless, and save humanity. Every man will sit down under his *own* vine and fig-tree, and all will become kings and priests unto God.

But I see no hope for Ireland without it. The repeal of the union can not effect it, neither can the actual independence of Ireland from English authority. A moral and social reform is needed. The tenure by which real estates is held must be changed, the curses of rank must be abolished, the last trace of feudalism wiped out, and church and state divorced, before Ireland can become the home of prosperity and peace. Any approximation towards this end is so much gained. But the sore, to be cured permanently, must be healed from the bottom. Under such a course of treatment, your armies and policemen might soon be disbanded, and your barracks, and your jails, and your poor-houses, be turned into homes of industry, plenty, and peace ; and on Ireland might be fulfilled, in a brief half century, the beautiful prophecy, “ Swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks, and the people learn war no more.”

But you say this is very fine in theory, but all imagination ; and you point to past centuries to prove its impossibility. But hast thou no faith but in the past ? none in God and the future? Seest thou no cloud in the west, not even as big as a man's hand, portentous of good ? Thy works, O England, would seem to indicate that thou hast had no faith in Ireland, in times gone by, for one of thine own jurists has said, in words too true, that “ *You may track Ireland through the statute book, as you'd follow a wounded man through a crowd—BY BLOOD !*” Thou must mend thy ways, or Ireland will rebel, if able, or emigrate, or else starve and rot.

Change thy policy towards this noble, beautiful, but unhappy country. Thy philosophers are not afraid of experiments ; neither should thy statesmen be. Try one in the crucible of kindness, and see if Irishmen even, have no hearts, to melt in tears of gratitude—no pure metal, wrapt up in the alloy of a rough exterior. Abused and neglected as they have been, till they have come to hate and devour one another, for which, in part, thou art responsible ; for thou hast encouraged Orangemen, and oppressed Catholics, and done many naughty things. And yet, bad as thou hast helped to make them, we find little difficulty with them in our country, except where they congregate in masses, and retain their old ideas and feelings. They serve us well in our kitchens, and stables, and fields, and mines, and stores, and ships, and farms. They dig our canals, and grade our railroads, through mountains and over vallies. They sit in our legislatures and courts, and they fill our armies and navies, as thou wilt have occasion to know, if any untoward circumstance should ever determine thee to war with us again. A few months' training suffices to make them about equal to Englishmen, in the wants and works of our country ; I mean, if they have had tolerable advantages at home.

Thy cousins of the Emerald Isle are becoming an important item in the constitution of our community. It would be well, then, if thou wouldst not send all thy poorest and most ignorant to us, but be generous, and help in this work of education. We will do what we can, and thou must do what thou canst, what thou so much neglectest ; for we remember whence we sprang, and it will not be good in us to disown the children whom our “ mother” (country) refuses to own and nurse. But, having grown somewhat older since thou didst play the tyrant and disinherit us—in knowledge, power, and wealth—we will take what thy inability and old age

will not allow thee to do, and provide for them. Yea, we will take thy rebels, if thou pleasest—not all thy *mean* men—thy gamblers and burglars, as we are wont ; we have too many of them already—but thy political agitators, and disturbers of thy political peace—thy O'Briens, and Mitchels, and Meaghers. Thou needst not manacle them, and be at the trouble of sending a ship to carry them to Botany Bay. Just put them on board a transit ship and send them to us. In the new, “ we are all one”—alike in Christ.

Thou wilt find no lack for thy humane efforts, if thou wilt lay off the goggles of thy nobility, and look at things as they are. Both priest and statesman, school-master and manufacturer, farmer and mechanic, may be busy in better work than grinding swords, building prisons, forging chains, and writing homilies. These laws may be made just and equal, these souls may be saved, these minds may be educated, these rivers turned upon the wheels, and spindles set a-going, these bogs drained, mountain lands tilled, and worn lands improved. Here is a broad field for thy philanthropy, without troubling thyself about South Carolina and Georgia. The free States will take care of American slavery, and it is better for thee to work humanely nearer at home. We have heard thy advice, and like it, and give thee this in return, with the hope it may do thee some good, and make thee love thy Irish children better, and do them less harm, and more good !

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Killaloe has a poetic name, a romantic and beautiful location, and many legendary reminiscences of Irish valor and magnificence. It was the central residence of Brian Boroihme, the great hero and monarch of Irish patriotism. It has little else to boast of. The quays along the river, and the new pier at which the steamboats land, show some signs of life and business ; but every thing else bears the stamp of time, neglect, and poverty. The buildings, generally, are old and dilapidated. Rows of small, low cabins are strung along the elevated ground, without much respect to order—in true Irish style. A few decent buildings are seen near the business part, and several really elegant mansions in the neighborhood. Among the latter, I noticed particularly the diocesan seat, or “ palace of the Bishop,” called Clarisford House. It is a good mansion, surrounded with elegant and shady grounds, which reach to the bank of the river and line of the canal, for some distance. The Bishop of Killaloe lives here in great splendor, with a large income, and little to do. [4]

On the opposite or Tipperary side, is Brian's fort, once a strong fortification, commanding this important pass between the north and south. It is no longer of any concern, for Connaught, and Leinster, and Munster, are no longer separate kingdoms, with opposing interests, but are alike crushed and suffering beneath the oppressor's power. Neither can the heroes of Munster meet here, to oppose the intrusion of English invaders, as in the days of King William, when Sarsfield intercepted the reinforcement coming to the siege of Limerick.

The long bridge which crosses the Shannon, to the village of Ballina, is an object of some curiosity, on account of its numerous arches. But the cathedral most attracted our attention. It is an ancient building, of massive proportions, and, from its commanding position, becomes a more prominent object than any other, except the mausoleum of the famous Brian Boroihme, which is a pile without symmetry or beauty, designed to mark the last resting-place of Ireland's most honored chieftain. Above the villages, on the west side, is an elegant villa, occupying an elevated and romantic site, on the shores of the lake, back of which rises Slievebernagh, a lofty hill, which looks down upon this charming lake, and commands an extensive view of the counties of Limerick, Clare, Galway, Tipperary, and far up and down the valley of the Shannon. On the opposite side is Derry castle, on a bold projection of the Arra mountains, which border this part of the lake, the elegant mansion of some grandee.

Back of this, to the north, the mountains rise precipitously nearly two thousand feet, and are said to contain valuable quarries of slate, which are extensively and profitably worked. I saw large quantities piled about the quays, indicative of considerable business in that line.

The scenery in this region is very fine. The beautiful valley through which the Shannon hurries its winding way, with broad plains on either side, with here and there a wooded hill, and the far off ranges in the distance, bounded by Slieve Pheling, Devil's Bit, Gottymore, and others of equal grandeur on the north, by the lofty mountains which approach to the very shores of the lake, just at its outlet ; then the calm, clear waters spreading off to the north, with sinuosities penetrating far into the sides of the rugged mountains which border its shores—every thing is pleasing, varied, and romantic. I remarked to my friends that the old Irish must have been a poetic race, for they always chose the most beautiful and romantic spots for their castles and towns. This might have been caused by another motive—the strength of the positions, and the ease with which a castle could be built sufficiently strong to resist opposing clans.

These strong holds are in narrow passes, on projecting cliffs, isolated rocks, or narrow necks or points of land, where the feudal lord could congregate his vassals, and defend himself from the missiles of assailing enemies. The introduction of gunpowder rendered these castles useless defences, and they have gone into ruin. But the villages about them remain, and indicate more, perhaps, the love of life, clannish arrogance, and good engineering, than an innate, poetic admiration of natural beauty.

Two or three steamers were lying at the pier, not far from the landing of the canal boat. A crowd of ragged men and boys were huddled about, in waiting to beg, or get a job, the former being far the most energetic in the prosecution of their business. We conveyed our own baggage to the steamer, in republican style, somewhat to the dissatisfaction of the scores who strove to take it from us. We had here a sample of urgent haste, such as some times characterizes our own countrymen, when about to leave a boat. A woman was anxious to get on shore before the narrow plank was laid on the bows of the boat, by which, with great care, we were barely able to get to the land with dry feet. Either misjudging her strength or the distance, she leaped into the shoal water, and splashed about like a sturgeon just caught, much to the amusement of the company on shore, who laughed heartily at her misfortune.

Some distance up the lake, we passed an elegant demesne, on a beautiful and extensive point of land, which penetrates some distance into the water, and sweeps back, in rich undulations, towards the dark summits of the Arra mountains. It is a lovely spot, and, in appearance, the abode of rural prosperity and comfort. But all the beauties of nature are sadly marred in this unhappy land. There are few spots in this world, I have ever seen, more highly blessed by nature, and none made so miserable by the wrongs and imprudence of man, for whose happiness it was so elegantly fitted up. This lake is a beautiful sheet of water, and this estate a most charming location ; but its very beauty is made odious by the surrounding misery. The extensive park, lined with a variety of elegant trees, with herds of deer grazing on the lawn, the long, shady avenues leading to the mansion, and the rich fields beyond, are all attractive, grand, and tasteful ; but how can a heart, capable of appreciating the loveliness of such a spot, enjoy it, while starvation is staring, with envious eyes, and poverty and hatred lie groaning and grumbling under the walls ?

Mere wealth, and power, and splendor can avail nothing towards genuine happiness, while the very position occupied is the source of misery to others. Pride can not fully blind the heart ; neither can success in the prosecution of selfish ends, silence the claims of our better nature which solicit another's good. Haman was not happy while Mordecai sat at the king's gate Irish nobles and gentry, whether of Celtic or Gothic extraction, are ill at ease amid the

scenes of wretchedness they have themselves helped to produce or perpetuate. I do not wonder that they live abroad, and rarely come here to look upon their estates, if for nothing but to forget, if possible, the wickedness of their own neglect, and the sight of misery their own luxuries have caused.

I feel sad as I pass over this beautiful lake, and look upon the varied and fertile shores, and think of the vast resources of this poverty stricken nation. Every thing wears a sombre appearance, and I can not be cheerful. There is a chord which links humanity together, which, like the telegraphic wire, once touched, communicates its message to the heart. It would not be well to resist this influence if we could. By shutting out the rays of light, we may not see the dust in the room ; but it is there, nevertheless, and, added to its own evil, we deny ourselves the counteracting influences, we might otherwise obtain. I am glad that I am here ; that I have seen what I have ; that I know what I do of the dark phases of human nature, which can never be learned at home.

Lough Derg is some twenty miles long. It is twenty-five miles from Killaloe to Portumna, but these towns are a mile or two from the lake. Its breadth is various, from three or four, to eight or ten miles. A wide bay puts off to the west, at the head of which is Scariff in Clare ; another nearly opposite, towards Nenagh, the chief town in the north riding of Tipperary. These form the widest part of the lake. The shores are deeply indented, and at the south end, abrupt and broken. Farther up the lake the shores are more level, and said to be capable of the highest cultivation. The hills rise more gradually and their summits are less elevated and more distant. Deep and beautiful valleys approach to the lake from the back country, and add greatly to the picturesqueness of the scenery. There are no villages of much consequence immediately on the borders of the lake ; but old dilapidated castles are seen in abundance, in all directions on every jutting headland, and in almost every secure and beautiful spot. The names of several of these, and the legends connected with them, are given me as we pass along, but few of them I care to remember. I have no reverence for feudalism in any shape, but it is well to know something of what *has been*, that we may learn to appreciate what *is*.

We have just landed some passengers at Dromineer, the port of Nenagh, the boats coming off a long distance to effect the exchange. This must be dangerous business in rough weather, and to us appears very unaccommodating. I remember when little boats used to be sent out by a line to land passengers at the villages along the Hudson. We should now call that an awkward and dangerous operation. But here there is little enterprise, and no opposition. Public carriers consult their own interest, and the people must submit to any inconvenience. A stage never takes up nor leaves passengers, except at their own offices—often in a stable-yard, and steamboats *land* their passengers into small boats, and an extra charge is charged for taking them on shore. A company which should practice thus in our country, need never make a second trip.

Such is the working of freedom and monarchy. With us the *people rule*, and companies and statesmen must *serve* the public. Here monopolies rule, and the people must submit. With one all is animation, cheerfulness, readiness to serve, freedom to enjoy, and equality of feeling ; with the other, dullness, sycophancy, haughtiness, moroseness—a sort of “ Do this, or go to the devil,” as one man expressed it. The evils of an aristocratic government may be seen and felt in all ranks of society, but in nothing more than in the social condition of the people. I thank my God that I was born in a free country, and bred up under democratic institutions ; where every man is a unit, and self-dependent for success ; and where the natural, equal and indefeasible rights of all men are tolerably well understood and regarded, and where each man is held responsible for the defence of his own, and the invasion of another’s. Corporations with us can not rise above individual privileges ; and, though soulless, are alike

responsible to the popular will, for their conduct and their existence. They may, for a time, play a blind game, and deceive the community, and bias the government, but a day of retribution always overtakes them. In freedom, the right and good, alone can stand in permanence, as, in the light, truth only can appear with safety.

At some distance on our left, we passed the Holy Islands situated in Scariff bay, not far from the north shore. On one of them is an ancient round tower, and near it a pile of ruins are to be seen. The island appears to be low and level, and of small dimensions. It is called Irish coltra, the Holy Island, or Seven Churches, and was formerly one of the “stations” to which pilgrimages were made by the Catholics to do penance and obtain the forgiveness of their sins. There were seven churches built upon it, besides the round tower. Connected with this was St. Patrick’s Purgatory, where the more wicked and obstinate were put through a severe course of training till *submission* was produced and absolution merited. This “station” was once as much celebrated as that on Lough Derg, in Donnegal.[5] Several passengers assured me that it is still visited by many pilgrims who come here to do penance for their sins. One of them is a gentleman of great respectability, who is familiar with this region, having been often to the island and distributed many comforts among the people. I pity the poor creatures who are so blinded by ignorance, but I do not marvel at their folly. I have seen enough, in the doings even of Protestant ?, in our own country, to admonish me to deal charitably with a weak brother, on whose soul still sits the incubus of misbelief and superstition. “Lord, help thou our unbelief.”

This border of the lake is exceedingly beautiful. The ground ascends gradually from the water’s edge, up Slieve Aughta, till it attains the height of more than one thousand feet, at the distance of three or four miles. The hills trend off westward, in rich, swelling slopes, and are covered with pasture-fields, and their bases dotted over with cottages, the size and character of which, from this distance, are not discernible, but appear remarkably pleasant, as if the abodes of plenty and contentment. I was just now giving vent to my admiration of this grand landscape, when the gentleman before alluded to cooled my enthusiasm, by informing me that there is scarcely a place in all Ireland where the people are so completely destitute and wretched.

[1] “The county of Tipperary has long possessed the notoriety of being the focus of outrage and disorder. . . . From all I hear, the owner of an estate, in former days, kept open house, lived usually in a style beyond his income, aped the expenditure of men of superior fortune, shot, hunted, and got money as he could, to keep going on. Most of the estates are ENTAILED; the owners married, and every means were resorted to, to raise money. Some times long leases were granted to men of property, in order to obtain funds, who commenced letting out land at an increased rent, to middle-men. The sons of the LAND-OWNER grew up, hunted and shot with the father, and would have shot any one who suggested to them that they ought to do some thing to maintain themselves. The sole means of providing for them, was to let to them portions of the estate, which, BEING USUALLY ENTAILED, could only be done at the least improved rent. The younger sons then got a local standing, became ‘Squireens,’ started shooting and hunting lodges, SUB-LET THE LAND, which they never thought of farming themselves, at an INCREASED RENT; and, so long as their father lived, were principally at home. On the death of the father, the ELDER BROTHER came into the estate, and the knives and forks of the YOUNGER brothers were no longer regularly set for them. The stables were not always ready for their horses as long as they pleased, and they found out that they had to support themselves. To do this, an other SCREW WAS PUT UPON THE SUB-TENANTS and all sorts of chicanery were resorted to by these needy men, to obtain money from those under them. As they could barely live, the usual course was to try and get some government-place, as they could turn to neither business nor profession. To

obtain this the member of Parliament for the county was followed and besieged, and they began to find out that their tenants could be made 40s. free-holders, and that this was an available means of influence. The unfortunate UNDER-TENANTS were then compelled to subdivide their land with sons, to make voters, in order that, at the next election, these votes might be bargained for a place. The mischief did not cease here. This FORCED SUBDIVISION rapidly increased the population. As there was nothing but the land to live by, the increased population brought competition for land, and eagerness to get any patch, however small, at INCREASED RENTS. The people, following the teaching, began themselves to subdivide ; and the ‘ Squireens’ or needy middle-men RAISED THEIR RENTS proportionately to the increased competition for the land, which they themselves had brought about. But the increase in population went on ; the absence of any trading or professional knowledge among these SMALL GENTRY, too proud to do or learn any thing, but not too proud to resort to any tricky jobbing to raise money or got a place, brought with it, of course, the absence of any enterprize or any business undertaking, which could afford other EMPLOYMENT FOR THE PEOPLE than the cultivation of a patch of land. The PEOPLE thus got beaten down, and became serfs, crushed down to the worst food, and the most miserable clothing and dwellings ; and, being neglected and without knowledge, they were UTTERLY UNABLE to improve themselves. ... In England, you some times heard of landlords COMPELLING their tenants to vote for them ; but in Ireland, the tenants’ votes were a valuable commodity, not to be given away. They were bargained for places, and I am assured of instances where they have been sold for money, which the landlord himself pocketed. The poor tenants were deprived of even that resource of the vilest in England—they could not even sell their political franchise for a bribe, for their landlords generally sold it for them, and pocketed the amount without consulting them, and *compelled* them to vote as he liked.

Is it to be wondered at that such a system should bear such fruits ? The fruits are now being reaped Estates get into the courts, and receivers are appointed, who exact the highest competition rents ; embarrassed landlords live abroad, or in English towns, and they also exact the highest rents they can. The best tenants, who WILL live in comfort, are compelled to emigrate, and the most ignorant and unenterprising tenants remain, *without knowledge or means* to improve the land, and striving, by endurance and potato diet, *to squeeze out the rent*. They have no means of employment ; land they MUST HAVE, TO LIVE, until the struggle for a patch of land has become so desperate, that it is retained by a system of terror and assassination disgraceful to any country.”—FOSTER’S LETTERS, p. 331-4.

“ Agricultural laborers,” says Mr. J. Loughmane, near Cashel, “ are the most miserable men upon the face of the earth, at the present day. I could not describe the situation of the creatures. They have neither food nor raiment ; they have no bed-clothes ; the clothes they wear in the day, they must clothe themselves with at night.”

[2] “ They are half a year idle for want of employment, and their wives are generally out as paupers in the country,” says Mr. O’Flynn, farmer, of New Birmingham. “ Their huts are miserable. There are seven, or eight, or nine of them upon one heap of straw, and generally the clothing they have in the day is their night-covering. There is no sheet, or blanket, and those who are last in bed must get up, for they have no clothes to keep them warm. I have witnessed that.”

“ Is not this sad story enough to account for the state in which society is here ? The people for the most part here are a fine race. The majority of them are stout, and of an average size, and you see among them many tall and powerful men. They are a mixed race, very many of them descended from Cromwell’s soldiers, who were disbanded in this county, the original debentures and grants of land to whom are still extant. . . Near Nenagh, according to the evidence of Mr. M’Cartin, in the midst of all this distress, and misery, and shootings

about the possession of land, there is ‘ an immense tract of *waste* land—the finest mountain land in the world—from 15,000 to 20,000 acres of wild land.’ And according to the report of Mr. Griffiths, ‘ it is probable that about 300,000 acres of waste land might be reclaimed for cultivation, and 60,000 acres might be drained for pasture,’ in this very county.”—FOSTER’S LETTERS, p. 331-3.

[3] It was a piteous spectacle, on Thursday, in the midst of the pouring rain, to see children led by their parents out from their houses into the street, to see mothers kneel down on the wet ground, and, holding their children up to heaven, beg relief from the Almighty, and strength to endure their afflictions. The cries of bereaved men and women, running half frantic through the streets, or cowering from the rain and wind under the shelter of their poor furniture, piled confusedly about, were affecting in the extreme. To see, amid all this misery, ten or twelve burly ruffians from Nenagh, assailing the houses with crow-bars, and to hear their cries of exultation as a wall yielded to their assaults, or a roof tumbled down with a crash, the spectator should be callous, that could avoid being greatly affected by the scene I should suppose that the entire number turned out of their houses on Thursday would reach one hundred and fifty families, or six hundred individuals. Of this number I could learn that about thirty families, or, on an average of four to each family, about one hundred and twenty persons were to be allowed other dwelling⁴ in the village. So that four hundred and eighty persons, or one hundred and twenty families, would thus appear to be thrown on the ‘ waves of the world,’ as some of the unfortunate people themselves stated. I won’t attempt to describe what was indescribable—the goul-harrowing condition of the poor wretches in the wigwams, at the time I was leaving Toomevara, eight o’clock in the evening.”—TIPPERARY VINDICATOR.

“ The work of extermination is proceeding, with all its concomitant horrors, throughout this unfortunate country. I have just heard that two hundred persons have been cast out from the Dawson property, in the Glen of Aherlow, and a very large number cleared out from no less than seven properties in the neighborhood of Slievenamon.”

The Archbishop of Tuam says : “ On the morning of last Saturday, on setting out from Headsford, the corpse of a young man, who died of hunger on the preceding night, was seen stretched on the road-side. I saw the scenes of eviction and desolation, as I traversed the parish to the shores of Lough Corrib. I could not believe that any one parish could exhibit so many monuments of heartless cruelty. It is no wonder if death, in every form of disease and starvation, followed in the train of this depopulating system. The misery, however, was deepening as we advanced, and the wretchedness of the poor of this remote and much-neglected region is such that I will not occupy the time, nor harrow the feelings of the reader by its description.”

“ In the Kilrush Union, county of Clare, several of the evicted tenantry are living in turf-pits, scooped out of the bogs, and covered in at the top with some branches of trees. From these cavities the smoke, at times, is seen ascending, and the passer-by would hardly have known that the bog was inhabited by a subterranean population. In one locality there are as many as twenty of these bog-dungeons, with families in them. Your correspondent lately heard one of the highest employees of the poor-law staff give a dreadfully graphic picture of the scene he had witnessed in Kilrush. He had got down into one of these bog-dungeons, in which a family were lying in fever, and he succeeded in moving some of them, but the odor of the place was so overpowering that he was compelled to retreat.”

[4] “ An extract from the return of probate-wills, made to the British House of Commons in 1832, shows that Beresford, Abp. of Tuam, left £250,000 ; Fowler, Abp. of Dublin,

£ 400,000 ; Cleaver, Bp. of Ferns, £50,000 ; Porter, Bp. of Clogher, £230,000 ; Knox, Bp. of Killaloe, £100,000 ; Bernard, Bp. of Limerick, £60,000 ; Hawkins, Bp. of Raphoe, £200,000 ; that is an average of £188,750 for each of these Protestant priests, after supporting their families in splendor during their lives, and this from the poorest people in Christendom ; and that, too, the great mass being not of their own communion.”

- [5] “ The lake covers two thousand one hundred and forty acres ; its shores are wild and dreary ; and its principal islets are Inish-goosh—Saint’s Island, and Station Island, or St. Patrick’s Purgatory ; even these are very small ; and the remainder, which seem to break and vary the surface of its dark waters, are, with few exceptions, mere groups of rock. On Saint’s island are the remnants of a priory. This island, in remote ages, was the resort of pilgrims, and contained the original Patrick’s Purgatory. The place of the penance is now, and has been for several centuries, on Station Island, which is half a mile from the shore of the lake. It is less than an acre in extent, and contains, in addition to two small chapels, one of which is appropriated to penitents, a house for the officiating priests, and a few cabins. In spite of the prohibitory edicts of several of the popes and orders of the Irish privy council in former days for its suppression, it has maintained its celebrity ; and the numbers who still annually flock hither to expiate their offences, from the 1st of June to the 15th of August, are variously stated at from ten to fifteen thousand. One thing is certain that the ferry which was long rented at £300 per annum, now pays £160.”
—FRASER’S HAND BOOK, p. 532.

“ On the pilgrims first landing in the island, they pay a toll of sixpence half-penny each to the prior for the right to land. They are then taken to a corner of the island, where a roughly made stone cross, with some almost obliterated figures carved upon it is elevated. Round this is a pathway of small sharp stones, which seemed tracked by being walked over. Round this cross, the pilgrims are made to walk barefoot nine times, repeating a number of prayer. They are then ushered into the largest chapel, which is called the ‘ prison,’ where they must fast and pray through the whole of the first night of their landing. They are warned against falling asleep, as they are taught that to do so will bring on them the displeasure of God, and will be punished with purgatory The morning after the pilgrim’s arrival, he or she has to confess to one of the priests—a shilling fee is charged for the confession, though often more is given. Then comes the performance of penances. The pilgrims, for one penance, are made to walk nine times round the pathway round the cross, barefooted, over sharp stones ; and, according to their penance, they are made to walk or crawl a certain number of times on their BARE KNEES, men and women—round the outside of the circular erection of stones.”—CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND, p. 32.

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

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