

Mr. Tuke's Fund.

James Hack Tuke : a memoir

Compiled by

The Right Hon. Sir Edward Fry

1899

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On the 23rd of August 1845, Tuke sailed from Liverpool...on board S.S. *Great Western* for a visit to America. Two passages of the diary kept by Tuke during this journey show the interest which the parties of emigrants moving westward excited in him, and are interesting, not only as pictures of a phase which has now, I suppose, entirely passed away, but because they relate to a subject with which he was in after life much concerned. The first occurs when travelling between Fort Wayne and St. Mary's in the course of his journey from Toronto to Richmond (Indiana) ; and the second relates to what he saw in an expedition of some twenty miles from St. Louis.

“ Few sights,” he writes, in the first of these passages, “ can be more picturesque than meeting a family of emigrants moving,—to-day we passed some thirty or forty parties. One scene in particular, just on leaving Monmouth, pleased us much. Three or four waggons with their long, snow-white covers were just emerging from the wood, coming up the hill out of a steep little mountain gorge, whilst crossing the bridge behind and descending the hill were the flocks of kine and sheep, pigs and geese, whilst two or three men with the loose horses were bringing up the rear ; the men in their loose dresses and slouching straw hats, and a girl or two walking hand-in-hand beside the waggons complete the picture. It was a truly pastoral and beautiful scene, and reminded us of the accounts of the removal of the Patriarchs in the Old Testament. We should have been sorry to have missed so simple and picturesque a scene, and often as we passed them that day and afterwards, we could not help admiring them, and, looking back as they wound their way through the forests, wishing them in truth God-speed. We continued our way through the swamps and mire until about 8 o'clock we reached Mercer, a small village with a clean hotel kept by a German of the name of Itukes, forty-two miles from Fort Wayne ; our horses, which had never baited, were no doubt as tired as ourselves. In the bar-room were a number of respectable emigrants leaving Pennsylvania for the northern parts of Indiana or Wisconsin. They complained sadly of the roads, and justly ; we were sorry we could give them no comfort about the road we had just come over. We talked to them a while whilst waiting for supper ;—one man the picture of a strong sunburnt farmer with dark curled hair—was nursing a fair child of three or four years old who laid fast asleep upon his knee. I noticed the child's fair face, and he told me that its mother had died lately, and that he was taking it home to its grandfather. The child would not part with him during the day and sleep in the waggon, and he had therefore carried it all day ! What a picture was this man and his child—*he* made no complaint, ‘ its mother had died and he was carrying the child to its grandfather ’ ; *he* had lost his wife, and though he said nothing, no doubt the man who thus loved and cherished the child had fondly loved its mother. It was to me a secret rebuke. I learnt of this good man and his nice girl a lesson which I hope I may not easily forget, a lesson of patience and contentment.”

When on the journey towards Richmond (Indiana) he writes :—

“ Numbers of emigrants were just camping out for the night, and caused many beautiful and picturesque scenes, which the pencil of the artist can alone do justice to. We often pitied them, however, for the women and children especially had a sad, worn, and haggard expression, and no doubt many of them would be a month or six weeks travelling, exposed to the hot sun by day and the cold frosts at night ; and travelling all the while through districts where fever and ague abounded, it is not to be wondered at if many of them looked miserable and ill. When we reflect also upon the fatigue and labour, the care and difficulties innumerable, which each one must endure who goes into a new country, and there, amidst the endless forests or boundless prairie, erects for himself a home, and the almost unsurmountable disadvantages which his family are exposed to from the want of civilisation, one is inclined to regret for a moment that these persons should be so entirely sacrificed. But very different are the feelings which animate the mind upon reflecting that all the power and cultivation, that all the large cities and villages around us, are but the growth of yesterday. No doubt that party around yon blazing wood-fire imagine that they also are destined to raise a city and leave behind a name—they no doubt remember and have seen that their neighbour went into the west some forty years ago, and, amidst savages and wild animals, built himself a rude hut, and what do they see now ? A city with streets of magnificent houses where flourishes religion and education, where science and the arts, commerce and manufacture give employment to some eighty thousand beings ? Can we then wonder at the sacrifice or really for one moment regret it—or think that these sturdy pioneers are to be pitied, or that the dreams and visions in which they will indulge can be too wonderful or too bright ?”

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The autumn of 1879 foreboded distress to Ireland, and as the season advanced, the distress became more apparent ; the rain was continuous, and Ireland was threatened with a double calamity a potato famine and a peat famine : for the potato crop was a failure, and as there was no sun to dry the peat, a fuel famine seemed imminent. Pauperism had increased, the deposits in the banks had decreased, the exports had shrunk, the consumption of luxuries had fallen off, the railway traffic had lessened, and bankruptcy amongst the farmers had grown more frequent. [1]

Thereupon, two very influential committees for the relief of the distressed districts were formed in Dublin ; one which had the care of the fund raised by the exertions of the Duchess of Marlborough, the wife of the then Lord Lieutenant, and the other which superintended the Mansion House Fund. The Quakers in England were again anxious to do what they could, but without establishing any separate fund. The small committee of that body which had the matter in charge were desirous of better information than they possessed with regard to the actual state of things in the west. This and the deep interest which he felt in the so-called Irish question (a question not easy to answer) induced Tuke to visit Ireland again in her distress. His objects were primarily to enquire into the actual extent of the misery and into the working of the machinery set on foot by the two committees in Dublin, the one of which took the Union and the other the parish, as the unit of relief areas, and also to make further inquiry into the causes of the chronic poverty then existing. He also carried with him some contributions from his friends for the aid of immediate and pressing need. Accordingly he left England in February 1880, and at Dublin placed himself in communication with the two committees, who both warmly accepted the services which he proposed to render to the common cause. They, as well as the Constabulary authorities in Dublin, did all in their power to aid him in his inquiries.

A letter to his daughter Frances, dated Dublin, 21st February 1880, gives an account of how he found things in that city :—

“ Yesterday was spent in seeing the authorities—Poor Law officials, heads of various departments, etc. etc., from whom I have bundles of papers and introductions large enough to enable one to settle the affairs of a nation, but alas ! not of Ireland. Of course I saw both the Mansion House Committee, and the Duchess of Marlborough at the Castle, where I was ushered into a large room where the ladies only were at work. Then Lord Randolph Churchill took me into his room and showed me all that they were doing—the endless reports from the districts, etc. etc. etc. He is working immensely hard, and when I left, as his mother (the Duchess) was not at home, he said she wished me to call again this morning at eleven o’clock to have a little talk with her. . . . This I of course did, and I wish I could give you a little idea of the very interesting interview I had, in which she entered with a depth of feeling into her work, which was really very touching, telling me that for some weeks before she began it, she had ‘ felt as if the Spirit was moving her to it,’ and that she felt it a very deep and solemn responsibility, in which his Grace shared. Whilst we were talking, the Duke came in, and spoke very pleasantly about the work going on, and told me that the authorities had directions to afford any help I might need in the country. Naturally I thought it was time for me to leave, but the Duchess begged me to stay after he went out, and again entered into the question of remedial measures, into which I have not time to enter, except to say that she has most practical ideas on the subject ; as she said, ‘ You know my father was a very practical man’ (the old Marquis of Londonderry), ‘ and I inherit his nature and must carry out thoroughly what I am engaged in.

Leaving Dublin in the company of his nephew, Henry T. Meynell, and his friend, Howard Hodgkin, Tuke spent some six weeks on a visit to Donegal and Connaught in the months of February, March, and April (1880). He from time to time communicated what he saw and learned not only to the English committee with which he was most directly in communication, but to the two committees sitting in Dublin. He also addressed the public through the columns of the *Times*, and subsequently through the pages of a pamphlet which he published under the title of “ Irish Distress and its Remedies : The Land Question. A Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the Spring of 1880.” This pamphlet, as its title implied, was by no means a mere narrative of his journey in the west country, but contained a discussion of many of the points then pressed upon the attention of the public.

In the course of this visit Tuke revisited many of the places at which he had been in 1847, and notwithstanding the pressure of distress, very acute in some places, he marked the great improvement which had taken place in the interval.

“ It would be wrong,” he says in his pamphlet, “ not to notice that, except in the very small farms, there are signs of real and permanent improvement in the country. As we drove back to Ballyshannon, I could not but recall the miserable objects I saw one Sunday morning in 1847, digging over the bare ground for a chance potato, and the corpses of the dead carried, without ceremony or funeral, to the grave. From Ballyshannon, nearly all the way to Donegal (a most beautiful drive along the lovely Bay of Donegal), the improvement was marked. One village looked poor, and no doubt was so. At another a fair was being held, and certainly the farmers were quite as well dressed as any small farmers would have been in England. Trade was bad ; ‘ no one could pay,’ we were told, and cows were difficult to sell at £3 : 10s. to £5 or £7. But the change in the cattle was wonderful ; the long-horned, ragged beasts have disappeared, and neat, tidy little beasts have taken their place.”

Again, speaking of Carrick-on-Shannon, he writes :—

“ Contrast this town with its aspect in 1847. It is market-day, and the streets are filled with well-dressed men and women, who buy and sell their little produce, and give to the passing

visitor no idea of want or misery. In 1847 the streets were haunted by famine-stricken men, women, and children, imploring food in vain. Especially do I recall the children, with their death-like faces and their ' drum-stick' arms, so thin that they looked as if they might snap in two if you took hold of them. In the overcrowded workhouse, dirt, disorder, and death reigned. There were no organised committees for administering relief. Look now at the workhouse, not full, and all its inmates in perfect order and cleanliness, well-fed and well-cared-for. Not that there is no want or destitution now, but well-organised committees in connection with the great Dublin funds, whose monthly grants amount to many hundreds of pounds, are in constant session ministering, as some think with too liberal a hand, to the wants of the suffering population. Some outdoor relief is also given by the Guardians. Ladies' committees, too, are at work, giving employment in knitting and sewing to many poor women who would otherwise be idle.

“ Nor is this all. In addition to the ordinary duties of the Guardians, the very onerous task of carrying out the details of the ' Seed Potato Act,' which has just come into operation, tells very heavily upon the Chairman and other members of the Board. Large placards were posted on the walls giving a short, clear abstract of the Act, and the needful instructions to the small ratepayers who can claim its benefits.”

But whatever improvement there had been, the misery still was great. “ This town-land,” he says, writing of Meenacladdy, “ stretches over a wide extent of wet bog-land, bounded on the west by a wild rocky coast, against which the waves of the Atlantic were dashing half-way up the cliffs in huge masses of foam ; on the other side the bogland extends towards the mountains of Donegal, whose slopes were covered with the snow recently fallen. Imagine, over this wild waste, little dwellings scattered at wide intervals, some of rough stone and some of mere peat sods, scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding surface ; add to this the blinding squalls of sleet or snow which swept over it, and some idea may be gained of the district we explored. A few of the dwellings were, of course, on the roadside, but the access to many was over the wet bog where there is no road. I doubt not we must have presented an amusing picture, as, with the priest at our head as guide, his long coat flying in the wind, we jumped from sod to sod to avoid deep holes of mud, or over ditches filled with water, not without failures in our unwonted attempts. Of the destitution and misery found in these bog - dwellings, I feel, after a lapse of twenty-four hours, that I can hardly bring myself to write. It is not merely the unusual distress of to-day, arising from the causes which I have enumerated, but the everyday life, the normal condition of hundreds, nay thousands, of families on the west coast of Donegal, and of many other parts of the west of Ireland, which oppresses me. But on this normal condition—this everyday contest with existence and hardships I must not dwell here. The question involves considerations and issues too vast for any hasty notes. But let me put down, if I can, the condition of a few of the dwellings we entered.

“ A turf dwelling, near the road, which my friends, who were not acquainted with the west, could not believe was a human habitation. The end of the house towards the road was not more than four or five feet high, but, as the ground sank rapidly on the other side, you were able to find an entrance through a low doorway. Within, at first, all appeared dark, the peat smoke which filled the room blinding us. When a little accustomed to the smoke, we saw, by the light which strayed in through the opening in the roof where the smoke ought to have gone out, but did not, a woman and several children crouched around a small fire. There was neither chair nor table in the place ; probably one small stool was all they possessed in this way. The bedstead was covered with a little ragged coverlid, beneath which some straw was spread on the wooden frame ; the children, or others who could not find room upon it, lay down on the bare rock or earth of the floor, in the thin clothes they wear all day, with a little straw or hay beneath them. The family had no resources left ; had it not been for the ' meal'

they must have starved. The man, who seemed an industrious fellow, was working on the bog, in spite of the weather, seeking to cultivate a little ground for the coming season. He had ‘no baste left, neither cow nor sheep, only three or four fowls.’ He had been to Scotland for the harvest last autumn, but had come back without earnings, and now, in debt for meal and rent, he was beaten.”

Here is a picture of a visit on the Connemara coast :—

“A rough boat was at last manned by five men with three oars, to row us over the inlet to the little village of Camus. I wish I could produce that rocky coast and wild miserable village, or rather introduce it into England for a while, so that English people might realise how, in these remote places, so many thousands of people are living. Half a mile away, and I will venture to say no one would think it possible that any human being could live or even find foothold on this rock-strewn shore ; but, by degrees, you see the little ‘smokes’ arising, and here and there little dark strips of land, which show that the ground is being prepared for the potatoes they *hope* to obtain, for they have none left to plant. Then you see peering above the rocks little dark heads of men, women, and children, who, attracted by the unusual sight, come out of their cabins to reconnoitre. As you walk among them on landing, they watch you with curious eyes ; they do not beg, and cannot answer your enquiries, for most do not understand, and few can talk, English. They are a race of wild people, poorly clad, and living with the cattle in their houses, often lying on the damp ground on hay like them. No distribution of meal had taken place last week, and several families were sitting round small quantities of the smallest (old) potatoes I ever saw, and with nothing else to eat with them. In one house which I entered, three children, under one covering, ill with fever, were lying on the ground ; others also were ill.”

By way of relief from the continued story of distress and misery, I may introduce the following curious bit of narrative addressed to his daughters at home, and dated March 1880 :—

“At Knock, a dirty, small cluster of houses, with a church on a hill with tall tower, an apparition, ‘vision,’ is stated to have appeared last August, when the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph and a figure dressed as a Bishop (called now St. John) were seen with an altar, etc. etc., depicted in the evening upon the east end of the church. Much excitement was caused, and the people near called others to see it, and in some way or other, it seems to have been connected with the cure of a young woman in the town shortly after. This was attributed to the miraculous efficacy of the Blessed Virgin, and the report began to spread far and wide that miracles of healing were performed. Other visions also appeared, and strange lights, brighter than electric were seen in the church. A blind man had his sight given, the lame threw away their crutches or sticks, and boys given over by the doctor were cured by the prayers and intercession of the Virgin. This has now continued for some weeks, and I must describe what we saw. As we approached the village, we saw an unusual number of persons about, and both the road and muddy space around the church had the appearance of a fair going on—numbers of cars—booths where books, images, etc., were sold, in addition to a crowd of pilgrims who were walking round and round saying their prayers, kneeling here and there, and especially towards the east end where the vision appeared. Here probably a hundred persons were in various attitudes of prayer, some prostrate on the ground, calling out loudly, ‘Oh, Mother of God, Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, hear us,’ etc. It had been found needful to cover the wall of the church for about eight feet high at the end with boards, to prevent the people cutting out the mortar from this, as it was feared they would attack the stones also and make a hole in the wall, the object being to take away small crumbs of this holy wall for their friends, or as relics. Spite of this precaution, a man had climbed up and

was cutting out the mortar with a knife, whilst the poor people below held their hands or hats, etc., to catch the sacred portions. Nor was the east end the only place, for others were attacking the mortar in more accessible places and carrying it off in paper, etc. One man said he had come from Scotland to see the place, and was much benefited through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph and St. John, but if he had not been, he should have been satisfied that his prayers would have been heard and he helped in another world. At the east end, on the boarded portion, several crutches were hung up, as we so often have seen them in Italian churches, and a large frame, like a crib in a farmyard, was placed a little distance from the church, in which over fifty or sixty sticks had been thrown by persons who had come lame, and walked away better without them ! One on which the word Liverpool had been cut (as is done on an Alpenstock) was specially noticed to us. In the church more than a hundred persons were devoutly saying their prayers, and as we entered, a low murmuring note resounded throughout the building.

“ Near the church is the girls’ school, and a few girls were at work spite of the crowds around. The mistress and her assistant, very respectable young women, quite believed in the ‘ miracles,’ as they called them ; one of them had seen something, and both as firmly believed in the healing as they would in any ordinary fact. We also spoke to the head constable, Poure, who said he had seen, at any rate, one case (which on enquiring into did not seem to me so miraculous as Aunt Emma’s cure, for instance, at Torquay), but he quite thought it to be attributed to the prayers, etc., of the boy and his father. His men, he said, had seen some strange lights in or on the church, and he had no doubt of the *bonâ fide* nature of this strange apparition. I confess that as I heard it described the day before by another priest, it gave me the feeling that it was like the effect of a dissolving view, especially as he said there were lights running up and down the wall (just like the last scene in a magic lantern). Many of the people were men from England or Scotland, as well as Ireland, all, whether well or ill, most devoutly believing in the vision.

“ It is a strange affair, and I feel it quite impossible to account for, unless in the first place some trick has been played, but now it is clear that some who come (one in a hundred perhaps) think they are the better for it. No priest was with the people, but I was amused with one car-load of people, four nuns with black bonnets and veils, looking so much like four good old Friends’ bonnets.”

To return to Tuke’s pamphlet on Irish Distress : so much has changed in Ireland since 1880, that it would be tedious as well as useless to discuss at length his views of the evils and the remedies. Suffice it to say, that he dwells in detail on the contrast presented by the estates of good resident landlords and of absentees ; that he notices the recognition in the language and customs of the country of the tenant right ; that he describes the evils arising from the want of fixity of tenure, that he rejects with some warmth the theory that the Irish are, when properly treated, a lazy people, and that he discusses the two rival projects of emigration and “ scattering” with a strong leaning in favour of the former. In fact he was, as he subsequently wrote, “ strongly impressed with the necessity of assisting families to emigrate in order to lessen the fearful crowding of those who were attempting to live on small patches of land.” [2]

This pamphlet had a great success. It ran through six editions : it attracted much notice in the press, and it was quoted with great respect in more than one debate in the House of Lords. The thoughts that found body in the Land Act of 1881 were then in the air.

On this and on all occasions of his visits to Ireland, Tuke greatly attached to himself those who worked with him ; and his correspondence contained abundant proofs of the affection for himself and the stimulus for work which he aroused amongst the various persons with whom

he was thus brought into contact.

Some evidences of gratitude for these labours found their way to Tuke. An illiterate scrawl lies before me which, I am sure, touched him much when he received it : “ All Mrs. Carol’s tenents and the children also send their blessings to Mr. Tuke.”

The importance of emigration had impressed itself on Tuke's mind as the result of this tour. In September (1880) he met at the table of his old friend Forster (then Chief Secretary for Ireland), Sir John Macdonald, the Prime Minister of Canada, and Sir Alexander Galt, the Resident Minister in this country for the Colony, and they discussed together the prospects of a scheme for emigration to Manitoba, then an almost unknown country. [3] Accordingly, Tuke determined to investigate for himself the results of the previous emigrations of the Irish, and the fitness of the north-western districts of Canada for Irish settlers ; and in consequence, he sailed in the autumn for America with two of his daughters.

He visited Philadelphia, Ottawa, Toronto (where he felt himself “ almost in the old country”), Baltimore (where he speaks of “ an aristocratic air ... in striking contrast to ... the other American towns”), and Washington (where he was greatly interested in a private interview with President Hayes). He went also to Iowa and Minnesota ; and he visited the North-West of Canada with a view of ascertaining whether a proposal of the Canadian Government to place a large number of families on that part of their territory, could be safely carried into execution. Tuke, whilst at Ottawa, had interviews with Lord Lorne, the Governor-General, and with the Premier and other members of the Dominion Government, and took part in the preparation of a plan for the emigration and settlement of Irish families, which had the approval of both the English and the Dominion Governments. This ultimately fell through, chiefly in consequence of the Canadian Government;s declining to be responsible for the collection of the instalments by which the advances to be made by the home Government were to be repaid. [4]

In his paper entitled “ Irish Emigration,” published in the *Nineteenth Century* for February 1881, [5] Tuke gave an account of his visit to the States of Iowa and Minnesota, and to our own province of Manitoba in the North-Western Territory. In Minnesota he notices that many a poor Irishman had found a home and an honourable future, under the “ Catholic Colonisation Association directed by the splendid energy of Bishop Ireland,” and that in Manitoba the Canadian Governments held out most liberal inducements to any who would come and till the soil. He described the great prairie region of North-Western Canada as a waste of fine agricultural country, nearly ten times as large as all Ireland. He then entered upon a detailed consideration of the probable results of immigration into this country, which evidently led to the conclusion in his mind that a well-devised scheme of Irish emigration might be carried into execution with great benefit to both countries : this he thought should be assisted by the English Government ; and then came the question by what machinery this should be done—a question which he had discussed with the Governor-General, Sir John Macdonald, and other leading members of the Canadian Government. Three schemes had been suggested,—the joint action of the Imperial and Dominion Governments, a colonisation association to be subsidised by the home Government, and an Imperial emigration commission,—but into this discussion it is not necessary now to enter ; for none of the plans ever reached maturity. The way in which, in this essay, he met the difficulty likely to arise from the Roman Catholic Church is too characteristic to be omitted.

“ There remains,” he said, “ one other point to be noticed, and that not an easy one. In my pamphlet on ‘ Irish Distress and its Remedies,’ I mentioned what is well known, that the Irish priesthood of the Church of Rome frequently object to emigration. It is not necessary to

ascribe this, as is often ungenerously done, to their pay depending on the number of their flock, which makes them reluctant to lose any parishioners. The pay is poor enough ; and they earn it, for whatever be their failings, the priests look after their people. What they urge is, that in the great American cities men and women become alike demoralised, and lose their simplicity. Their clerical brethren write to them to send no more out. Better, they say, that they should starve at home than run the risk of ruin there. But Bishop Ireland's Association meets this difficulty. The priests go with the people and enter into their interests. Schools and chapels are opened at once, and strict rules are enforced against the sale of spirits. I am glad that I am again supported by the opinion of Lord Dufferin when I say I am convinced that, if there is to be successful emigration on a large scale from western Ireland, it will be needful for the Government to unite with the priesthood, and to give them every assistance in providing for the religious care and oversight of their people. If priests could be sent with their flocks, it would be money well laid out to afford them a free passage, and a grant of land in their new settlement. In Canada this would be looked on as a perfectly natural arrangement.

“ I fear that some of those whose sympathies I should like best to enlist in favour of organised emigration, may take exception to this recognition of the Roman Catholic Church. I can only ask them fully to consider the question as I believe I have done. Conversions from the Romish Church have not been very frequent in Ireland, and are not in the future likely to be more successful among a half-starved peasantry in Connaught than among prosperous settlers in Manitoba. It must surely be admitted that the people are likely to learn more good than evil from their priests, and that in the prairies it is better that they should have their priests than be altogether without religious teachers. At any rate, I am not now proposing any scheme for conversion, but a scheme for lifting up a very poor and miserable class of people who exist almost at our doors, and making them into prosperous and independent farmers and labourers.” [6]

Relief work in Ireland, sad and wearisome as it was for the most part, was not unrelieved by its touches of humour. Mr. H. A. Robinson, a local Government Inspector, and one of Tuke's zealous coadjutors, had been employed in the distribution of seed potatoes purchased by a fund of about 1000, which was, in the spring of 1881, raised for that purpose by members of the Society of Friends ; and under date of Bellmullet, 4th April 1881, he wrote to Tuke as follows :—

“ I have been daily intending to write and thank you for your very kind letter, but the seed business here has not left me a moment I can call my own for the last month. The number of letters I receive from people asking for seed, averages about six hundred a day. I have forbidden all notes being sent, but it is no use ; the people have the most firm belief that ‘ a writin ’ is infallible ; and, as I will not receive them, they resort to strategy and skilful subterfuge, and pop the ‘ writins ’ through the windows, under the doors, and into every available nook and cranny where there is the remotest possibility of their meeting my eye. Last week they were sent in the shape of parcels, but that cheat was soon discovered ; and this morning, when I took in my boots from outside the hotel door, the toes were crammed with these mysterious missives.

“ Yesterday evening, as I was working in the hotel, the whispering outside the window and the scraping of feet apprised me that an outrage was about to be perpetrated, the window was lowered carefully from the outside and a hen was thrust in ; there was a hope hurriedly expressed from without that my ‘ honour would accept it, ’ and then a stampede of the successful delinquents. It needed only one glance at the graceful gift to see that the hen was the unwilling bearer of about thirty ‘ writins. ’

“ The ‘ writins’ themselves are extraordinary specimens, and any of the people that are unable to write repair to a certain scribe, the efficacy of whose effusions is acknowledged.

“ The epistles vary in style.

“ No. 1, which is the work of Paddy himself, generally is to this effect :—

“ ‘ The Barer, Pat Togher, has a long, wake, and helpless family, and hopes, Mr. Robinson, that your honer will give me a few hundreds of seed potatoes, otherwise he will become an incubus on the Union.’

“ No. 2 is the scribe’s work, the charge for it is one penny, and it launches forth into expressive language about donning the Union garb and being a charge on the rates.

“ No. 3 style costs 2d., and is highly recommended. It commences, ‘ Right Honourable Colonel Robinson,’ and pathetically alludes to the land which is lying waste.

“ No. 4 is warranted, and costs 4d., it is enclosed in an envelope and marked ‘ immediate,’ while for 6d. a memorial may be obtained with a large ‘ humbly showeth’ and a still larger ‘ whereas,’ which is literally smothered in flourishes. (This memorial is of known power, and on several occasions has elicited rejoinders from a gintleman at Dublin Castle, saying that it had been afther recaving the consideration of the Lord Lift-mint !)

“ I think, however, I have managed to put an end to the ‘ fetish’ of the scribe, as all persons with letters I have told to wait till Friday.

“ I never saw any people so overwhelming in their protestations of gratitude as they are to ‘ them that’s sending the potatoes.’ If ever you come to Erris again, or if your co-subscribers come, you will meet with a warm reception.

“ Rivers will be netted for you, mountains will be poached in your honour, poteen will be publicly made for your especial delectation, and God help the unlucky landlord, policeman, or *gauger* that will *dar* to interfere with the grateful acknowledgment of a thankful peasantry, to the grandest gintleman that iver kem amongst them.”

In August 1881 the Irish Land Act of that year received the Royal assent. It contained a clause authorising the application of a sum of £200,000 in assisting emigration ; but it required that this should be done through the medium of contracts with some State colony, public body, or public company, and the loan was to be made on good security : these and other requirements rendered the clause, to Tuke’s great disappointment, entirely inoperative. The sum was never touched, and the section authorising its application was repealed in 1891 (Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1891, sect. 35).

The autumn of 1881 again saw Tuke at work in the west of Ireland—for the purpose of making further enquiries as to the feasibility of sending out families, and as to the wishes of the people on the subject.

One letter to his sister Esther, dated Bellmullet, County Mayo, 8th October 1881, may show how Tuke felt in working over old and familiar ground.

“ Here I am once more in this remote corner of the west of Ireland. It is thirty-four years since I was here before in the dreadful winter of 1847, when I had to come down here to sub-

stantiate the statements made in my 1847 pamphlet about those terrible evictions of the Mullaroghe people ; and this is the little sitting-room in the small inn, into which last spring the people pushed the hen to Mr. Robinson, with forty begging letters under her wings, for the ‘ pitaties’ without which they and their small families ‘ would become an incubus on the parish.’ That £1000 which we raised last spring [7] has been the salvation of these people so far as their bodies are concerned ; would that it was their souls also that could be as easily reached ! In the market under our windows are groups of men and women the country women with bright kerchiefs over their heads, and dark brown or red skirts, and often minus shoes and stockings. Many are selling fish, and we hear them chaffering and counting them out in Gaelic. Others have baskets and donkey-loads of potatoes, the result of the seed sent in spring, which has produced a wonderful crop. To-day there is a great surplus, and they are selling at 3d. per stone—2s. per cwt.—in the market. If thou wast here thy pencil would be busy, or brush rather, taking sketches of the picturesque groups in the grounds. As I walked among them a short time ago, I heard them saying, ‘ That’s the good gentleman that sent us the seed—long life to him,’ etc. And this morning our landlady told me, ‘ The people would have made an illumination if they had known you were here ; it was too late when you came, it was thought, but to-night there is to be a bonfire and I know not what else’—which will be a nuisance.

“ I have had a long talk with ‘ Father——, ‘ the priest of a wild country district, with about 900 parishioners spread over mountain and loch, among whom Irish is the chief language ; he was wanting help for his schools, or rather to establish schools, for many districts are without. The priest is a simple sort of man, with the vice probably of his parishioners, fondness for ‘ potheen,’ which they distil largely. He is the man who, often falling a victim to the glass, became a teetotalter and destroyed all his whisky, and when a few days after some gentlemen called, bewailing his condition that he could not offer them anything ‘ moist,’ he wound up by offering them a Seidlitz-powder. Does dearest Maria recollect my coming down here in 1847, just after I was engaged to darling E——, when the landlords were so angry with me for what I had written that they threatened to horsewhip me, and my letters were directed James Hack, so as to prevent my name being known ? Now the tables are indeed turned, and the people horsewhip, *i.e.* shoot, the landlords. The condition of the country in this respect is most serious, not so much in actual killing, but in the many attempts and combinations for this object, as well as the non-payment of rent, among the people. Yesterday, during our long, weary car-drive of sixty miles across the bogs of Erris, we halted at the end of about thirty-five miles at a gentleman’s house, who most kindly gave us lunch and food for our horses. He was living alone, and always armed, and his words as we left in the drizzly, dull evening for the rest of the journey were, ‘ Good-bye, gentlemen, you’re the only people here who can travel without *fear* of being shot !’ no doubt an exaggeration, but with sufficient truth in it to give food for much thought about the state of a people within thirty hours of London.”

The position of things in the west of Ireland in the winter of 1881-82 was this : the various charitable funds and extra Government assistance given to tide over the two previous disastrous years were exhausted, and the people were left face to face with their poverty. Few rents had been paid, notices of eviction were served in all directions, and scores of families were turned out of their miserable holdings to linger on the roadside in such shelter as they could find or could put together. His visit to Canada during the previous year had convinced Tuke of the enormous demand then existing for labour, and of the prosperity of the greater part of those who had previously left Ireland. To his mind, which, as we have seen, had long been brooding on the subject, it appeared clear that the emigration of suitable families, with arrangements for their voyage, their reception in America, and their transfer to selected

destinations, was at any rate one remedy which might be attempted ; but how was it to be done ?

In July 1882 Tuke was again in Galway making further enquiries into the condition of the west. To his daughters he wrote from Glendalough House on 26th February 1882 :—

“ The mist and rain shut out the lovely view from this little house and give a dismal enough aspect to the ‘ face of Nature,’ perhaps somewhat in unison with the sad scenes I witnessed two days ago a few miles from here, near Carna. Seventy or eighty families have been evicted here by Mr. Berridge. They were turned out of their little houses just after Christmas, and since that have been living by the roadside or crowded together in other huts, and now many have made for themselves little ‘ housheen’—how pretty the diminutive is. These are literally trenches cut out of the soil against some huge stone or boulder, which serves for a wall on one side, and the sods cut out for the other wall or roof. The door is the only means of giving light, and serving also for a chimney in many. In these bog-holes men, women, children, and babies are living—five or eight in a family—lying on the straw generally, though in some the old bed has been built into the hovel, and in one case the dresser formed the end and gable of the dwelling. In one a poor man was ill, in another a child, lying on the bare ground. The ground wet and saturated with filth around, completes the picture—no, nothing but an experience could complete the picture, or rather the reality—and I think the most pitiable part of the scene was that of strong men crouching down with the children over the bit of scant fire, absolutely idle and helpless—week after week, day after day, with no resource but the gloomy reflection and sense of misery and despair as to the future—for what is to become of them ? Into the house they will not go, really I believe they would die in these ‘ housheen’ rather than do so. I tried to persuade one man who was ill and whose wife expected to be confined soon, who had five children, to go in, but all to no use. At present they have a little food, some relief being given by the Union, and some having a little money left. They offered one year’s rent, but owing three, it was refused.

“ I am here with Mr. Robinson, whose kindness and desire to serve these poor people it is delightful to see.”

Glendalough, from whence the last letter was dated, was a place to which Tuke was specially attached : of the Easter Sunday of this year, 1882, spent there, Tuke thus wrote :[8]—

“ And how would such a quiet day as this Easter Sunday on which I write be valued by the thousands who have sought in an infinite variety of places—too crowded alas !—to gain the rest and refreshment for brain and body which the perpetual strain of our great cities increasingly necessitates ! Perhaps a solitude too great for most, but the beauty of the surroundings and the charm of this Connemara scenery prevents its intense solitude, at least for a day or two, from being oppressive. There are, I need hardly say, no tourists in Connemara now, though, as the boatman urges, ‘ any gentleman might lie down and sleep peaceably in the woods.’ One ‘ fishing gentleman’ had been for a few days at the hotel, and gone. Except an official passing now and then, no one had been staying there since my visit a month ago. To-day, basking in the full sunshine, how lovely, in its first touch of spring, is the scenery around ! Look from the window across the little slope of grass with the fringe of trees to the left, just budding into life. How perfect is the stillness of the loch, with the shadow of the big mountain reflected on its bosom ; how beautiful even the wide stretch of bog beyond, to-day illuminated and rejoicing in the sun up to the very foot of the steep slopes of the Connemara Pins ; their gray sides, devoid of herbage, almost glittering in the sunshine, whilst the sharp, clear outlines are thrown forward in bold relief against the pale blue sky.

Not unlike in shape and colour, I have often thought, to the outlines of the lowest range of the Alpine spurs which touch the shores of the Mediterranean at Mentone.

“ But with this sunshine it is impossible to remain indoors, and a few steps take you into the rocky wood which nearly surrounds the hotel, and thence into the wide, open, elevated plateau of bog and moor which stretches for miles to the southern coast of Galway. But as you pass through the strip of wood it is impossible not to be struck with the variety and exquisite beauty of the mosses and ferns (just showing their new fronds) which everywhere abound, luxuriating in this moist, mild climate. There, too, in the rocky crevices the *Saxifraga* (London Pride) and the *Hymenophyllum* abound, with other rare ferns.

“ And beyond this belt of wood, which ceases so suddenly that you are assured you are indebted chiefly for this rarity to the hand of some former possessor of the estate, you are on the bog. It is needful carefully to pick your way, to avoid the swampy holes, in order to reach one of the rocky heights which stand boldly out of the turf around. And when there, what a panorama is spread before you !

“ To the west the chain of little lochs which flow through the valley past Ballynahinch and its old robber castle till they find an outlet among rocks and surge on the Atlantic coast. Northward the chain of the Connemara mountains, commencing at the coast, which almost fills up the more distant horizon, and as the eye sweeps along their bold outline they drop down in the valley in which Lough Inagh—the loveliest of Connemara lakes—is lying ; and, again retreating further inland, the heights of Maamturk fill up the eastern distance. How snug and peaceful the scattered cottages of Lasoghta look—almost the only sign of human life visible with the green patch beside them marking the strata in which the marble quarries of Connemara are *found*, rather than worked.

“ Immediately below you the fringe of green larches dips down to a tiny lake almost embowered in their branches, and then, again, other small lochs, their outline partially hidden by the trees on this side, but ever beyond the miles of brown turf bog, all to-day illuminated by the sun.

“ Except the slight breeze which ever haunts a height in the stillest day, there is perfect calm ; not a cloud to show that we are in Ireland. The magpie, flying high in the air in perfect enjoyment of the day, descending suddenly, as by some unseen ladder, with its tail outspread, utters its sharp cry to its mate on the nest in the larches beneath, and the plaintive ‘ wee-wee ’ of the sandpiper and harsher note of the oyster-catcher are the only sounds which break the stillness of this perfect day, which breathes nothing but peace. There are those to whom, alas ! this sunshine must seem, in some degree, a bitter mockery. But it is with the people, and not with the scenery, of Connemara that I am now concerned, and I can imagine some one asking, Is this one of the congested districts from which it is needful to remove a population too numerous for the land to support ?”

In April 1882 Tuke published, in the *Contemporary Review*, a paper entitled “ Ought Emigration from Ireland to be Assisted ?” and in it he brought to bear his knowledge both of Ireland and of America ; of the Irish as seen in Connemara and of the Irish as seen in Manitoba. It was a powerful argument in favour of assisting emigration from the West Coast. He pointed out that in the five counties washed by the Atlantic Ocean, Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, and Kerry, a population of a little over a million was living upon 158,000 holdings, of which nearly half were rated under £4, and nearly another third of the whole at £10 and under ; and that on such holdings as these human life cannot decently be maintained without some additional source of income, which never was forthcoming. “ It matters not,”

he said, “ whether a tenant has fixity of tenure or being a peasant proprietor has no rent to pay ; he cannot, unless he has some other source of income, live and bring up a family on a small farm of ten or fifteen acres.” [9] He went on to show that, for tenants of such farms, the Land Legislation had in fact done and could do nothing ; that to purchase their holdings was beyond their power, even if the fee simple would have been any blessing to them ; that reclamation was too costly and the land too poor ; and that there remained, in his opinion, as the only remedy, emigration to a more favoured land. He then proceeded to show the inadequacy of existing legislation, whether under the Land Act of 1881, or the Irish Poor Relief Act ; he confuted, with details drawn from his own experience, the assertion that the people had no desire to emigrate ; he showed the success which had attended many cases in which voluntary emigration had been assisted, especially in the Catholic colonies of Minnesota and Iowa under the guidance of Bishop Ireland, and the colonies under the management of Mr. John Sweetman ; and he dwelt upon the labours of Mr. Vere Foster in aiding the emigration to America of young Irish girls.

The plan which he advocated was the use of the Poor Law Boards as the agencies to conduct voluntary emigration, and the passing of an Act empowering the Treasury to make special advances to the Unions, for the sole purpose of aiding voluntary emigration, the amount advanced to be repayable in twenty-five years at a nominal rate of interest.

In the concluding paragraphs of his paper, it is not difficult to see that Tuke was already anticipating opposition from some who posed as Ireland’s greatest friends. “ Surely” he said, “ if any of the so-called ‘ leaders of the people’ of Ireland, had any article to dispose of, at present valueless in Ireland, but priceless in America, they would not hesitate to transfer or take it there. To them ‘ Ireland for the Irish’ would then indeed be deemed a meaningless cry. But is it less meaningless when that article is labour, and the alternatives beggary, or independence and comfort ?

“ Much false and merely sentimental talk has been indulged in by certain parties, to the infinite injury of the impoverished people. Who ever affects to speak of ‘ banishment’ or ‘ expatriation’ in reference to the multitudes of Englishmen who yearly go abroad to ‘ seek their fortunes,’ and who, following in the footsteps of their forefathers, have helped to colonise and civilise the world ? And in the greatness of such enterprises have not Irishmen had their full share ? Who regards with pity the founders of that great Western Commonwealth, whose descendants welcome with open arms all comers from the Old World ?

“ We may justly regret the necessity which the changed conditions of agriculture, or the impoverished soil and climate and small holdings, or any other causes combined, impose upon Irishmen to leave their native land ; but to oppose the departure of thousands, who are unable to obtain a decent livelihood in Ireland, to a country which offers them land at the lowest price, and at the same time gives the highest price for the labour they have to dispose of, seems alike short-sighted and impolitic. Just as well might they oppose the exportation of the thousands of tons of Irish potatoes now leaving for New York, and proclaim that they should be left to rot at home.

“ Unpatriotic do you call it ? It is the law written on the human race ; the law which drew Abraham from his native land ; the law which, written on the minds of the great Aryan family, led them to descend from their eastern homes to people and fertilise the plains of Europe ; the law which led Columbus and Vasco da Gama, and a host of others, to search for and to point out the great New World ; the law which has impelled and is now impelling tens of thousands of people of all nationalities in Europe to surge forth with increasing volume, in that great wave of humanity which breaks upon the shores of the Western World, not to

devastate, but to fertilise and bless. And in that vast gathering of all European races which goes to form the great American nation, Ireland may well be proud to have contributed her full quota ; and, spite of some omens to the contrary, the world may be congratulated that both the sentiment and the vivacity of the Irish race will thus be perpetuated, and will help to mould the character of the great English Republic of the future.”

Tuke’s efforts were at last beginning to tell : several public men gave much thought to the subject, and communicated with him ; and on 31st March 1882, a meeting of several influential persons was held at the Duke of Bedford’s house, and by his invitation, to consider the question of emigration from the west of Ireland. Amongst others, Sir Alexander Galt, the representative in London of Canada, Mr. W. H. Smith, Mr. Samuel Morley, Mr. Whitbread, and Mr. Rathbone, took part in the proceedings. A letter was read from Mr. W. E. Forster, at that time Chief Secretary for Ireland, warmly approving of the object of the meeting, but holding out no expectation of Government aid, at least at first. Tuke at this meeting gave an account of his recent visit to the west of Ireland, and argued for emigration of families as the effective remedy. He pointed out that it was better to assist emigrants to places where work could be obtained for them, than to attempt a system of colonisation ; for the experience of Father Nugent and Mr. Sweetman had shown that emigrants placed on settlements are apt to leave their locations for the big towns and the high wages, and that the cost of colonisation per head was four times as much as that of simple emigration.

Tuke’s plan met with hearty approval ; a considerable sum was subscribed on the spot ; a committee was formed, and Tuke was requested at once to visit Ireland to select emigrants and carry into effect the necessary local work. The fund established at this meeting was subsequently known as “ Mr. Tuke’s Fund.”

[1] Annual Register, 1879, p. 189.

[2] Report on Assisted Emigration, 1891, p. 3.

[3] Reid’s *Life of Forster*, vol. ii. p. 274.

[4] Report upon Assisted Emigration, 1891, p. 4. Tuke’s “ Reminiscences of Forster,” *Friends’ Quarterly Examiner*, 1889, p. 170.

[5] pp. 358 *et seq.*

[6] *Nineteenth Century*, February 1881, p. 370.

[7] This was the fund in the distribution of which Mr. Robinson was employed.—E. F.

[8] “ With the Emigrants,” *Nineteenth Century*, July 1882, pp. 140-142.

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