

LETTERS FROM BERMUDA.

LETTER XXXIV.

HAMILTON, 18 --

DEAR — As this is my last letter on the Irish question I shall point out the effect which these wars and persecutions have had on that country.

Some persons say that as all these iniquities and crimes are past so long ago, we should "let the dead Past bury its Dead," and forgive and forget, &c., &c. True, but history repeats itself. They are not all past. Injustice still exists and should be remedied. Yet the persons who give expression to these sentiments are always ready to blame the Irish, and always wondering how it is that Ireland, with such great natural resources and native vigour, is constantly poor and *always discontented*. The answer is that the history of the Past is the master key to whatever problems are puzzling to us in the state of things at the present day. Sir John Davies relates that, "During four centuries the Irish had no protection for their property nor even for their lives; to beat or wound a native was not punishable, or even to kill one was not a felony; but the most wicked and mischievous custom was that called coin and livery. The English soldiers kept in Ireland had no pay, but were ordered to take man's meat, horse, meat and money from the inhabitants, so that in one night and day the whole year's labour was eaten up by soldiers. The better classes left the place, and those who had to remain became idle and discontented, expecting only misery."

"Chill penury repressed true courage,
And froze the genial current of the soul."

The extortions of coin and livery have been succeeded by enormous taxation and absentee rents and the constant drains upon the poor people which I mentioned before.

An eminent Irish lawyer (John Philpot Curran) said, speaking of the Criminal Code:

"Open the statute book at the word Ireland, or the word *penalty*, 'tis equal which, for you can trace Ireland through the statute book as you'd follow a wounded man through a crowd by blood!"

The policy of the penal laws was successful indeed and left its mark on Ireland; most of the historical families have disappeared long ago. John Keogh, a Catholic merchant, the founder of the "Catholic Association," at a public meeting in Fishamble street theatre, Dublin, March 25, 1792, made a speech in which he declared, as a plea for Emancipation, "that there was no longer any reason to fear a claim to the forfeited estates as the descendants of the ancient possessors had sunk into the *dregs of the people*, were laborers in the fields or porters on the quays of Dublin, or beggars in the streets, *unable to read or write*, prove their legitimacy or trace a pedigree."

It is charged that the Irishman is thriftless and ignorant; and he is generally represented, by the popular jestures of the day, with a face like a baboon or gorilla. Poor Paddy is not free from the faults that slavery and misery engender; living in mud cabins, bare-footed and half-clad, starving on potatoes and salt does not conduce to refinement. The railway commission reports of laborers in Tipperary stated: "They go through the fields and gather the wild weeds and boil them with salt and live on them, *often without even a potato to eat with them*."

"The tyrant's load upon you lies—ye writhe within the dust;
Ye fill your mouths with beggar's swill, ye grovel for a crust;
Your Lords have set their blood-stained heels upon your abject heads;
Yet they are kind—they leave you still their ditches for your beds!"

Victor Hugo's novel, "L'homme qui Rit," reminds me of Ireland's case. The heir of a noble family, while young, was carried away by force and disfigured, to prevent his identity being discovered.

A surgical operation was performed on the unfortunate to make him appear to laugh or grin in a grotesque manner; but the eyes, those mirrors of the soul, silently revealed the depth of sadness in the noble heart. England has taken Ireland by force and by treachery and deformed and disfigured her and her people; England's brand is on her—she is not what she was nor what she ought to be. L'homme qui Rit, the man who laughs; it is with Ireland: L'homme qui pleure, "The man who weeps."

In the reign of Queen Anne all rights which not before had been taken from the Catholics were swept away by law. They were reduced to a condition closely resembling the bondage or status of the black slaves in the Southern States of America, excluded from all offices, from Parliament and from the franchise. Education was forbidden. Professor Barlow M.A., Professor of History in Trinity College, in a lecture stated the following:

"One statute prohibited any papist from instructing another papist or a Protestant from instructing a papist; a third statute provided that no papist should be sent out of Ireland to receive instruction. If these three laws had been lapped by a fourth, ordering for execution every papist who did not provide a first class education for his children, the whole edifice would have been beautifully complete and symmetrical."

Three eminent Catholics were permitted to be heard at the bar of the Commons against these laws; and they, with eloquence of head and heart, portrayed in all its gravity and pathos this frightful injustice to the nation, present and future. They were answered by the prime minister that if they suffered penalties the fault was their own; let them *all conform to the religion of the state* and there would be no penalties!

"Come Premier who doubtless, so mild are thy views
Whether Bibles or bullets are best for the nation;
Who leavest poor Paddy no medium to choose
Twixt good old Rebellion and new Reformation."
—MOORE.

One more fact on education. The Penal Code had left four millions of Irish who could neither read nor write and nearly a million and a half who could read but not write. (From Parliamentary returns, 1840.)

Burke says:

"While this restraint of foreign and domestic education was part of a horrible and impious system of servitude, the members were well fitted to the body. To render men patient under a deprivation of all the rights of human nature everything that could give them a knowledge or feeling of those rights was naturally forbidden. To render humanity fit to be insulted, it was fit that it should be degraded." (Edmund Burke's letters on Irish affairs.)

When the religion of the Irish was fiercely repressed and when all Catholic Bishops were banished, and all religious orders, priests, &c., with them, there came from the monasteries established on the continent a succession of priests of Irish blood or birth who were trained as soldiers of Christ. Inspired by the same heroic courage which impelled their brethren to devote their lives to the service of God amongst the hostile Indians of America, "a courage to endure and to obey," they came in disguise to Ireland; they wore the dress and eat the food and suffered the privations and shared the labours of the wretched peasants, to administer the sweet consolations of their holy religion to that persecuted race. Spencer, the poet, writes thus of the "Popish priests" of his time: "They come from Spain, from Rome and Rheims by long toils and dangerous travayling hither, where they know perill of death awaiteth them and no reward or riches is to be found, only to draw to and minister to those people of the Church of Rome" (I omit Spencer's invidious comparison against Protestant parsons.)—Spencer's Ireland, 254.

It was a touching spectacle to see a crowd of ragged peasants on bended

knees under the dripping roof of a cave, with reverence and devotion offering up the sacrifice of the Mass solemnized by a priest who served God at the constant peril of his life—

"Who made the dark Goth's home
Of Erin's fate his palace,
And first before all others pressed
To drain her bitter chalice."

The tithes of the established church were a heavy burden on the peasantry. "A return laid before Parliament showed that (11) eleven Anglican bishops in less than fifty years bequeathed to their families an average of one hundred and sixty thousand pounds each (£160,000), and that in two thirds of the parishes there were no congregations and no school houses. The parsons were more merciless creditors than even the landed gentry."

"When the Union had lasted 10 years the country laboured under a burthen of paupers, without hope of employment. One million and a half of people were existing mainly on alms, and four millions of people could neither read nor write." (Parliamentary Reports, 1841.)

Mr. Gladstone says the Act of Union *fatally* weakened the personal ties between landlord and tenant by drawing the peers and gentry to London (causing absenteeism); * and to succeed the centuries of *extirpation, conscription and penury*, we ushered in the century of *evictions*.

You will agree with me, I feel assured, when you understand the question that these facts plainly point to the utter incompetence of English legislation to secure prosperity or content in Ireland, and the consequent need of a home parliament to take charge of Irish interests. The past and the present alike demonstrate the necessity of Home Rule for Ireland.

"O pallid serfs, whose groans and prayers
Have waivered Heaven full long,
Look up! There is a law above beyond all
legal wrong;
Rise up! The answer to your prayer shall
come tornado-borne,
And ye shall hold your homesteads dear and
ye shall reap the corn."
Amen. (Mrs Fanny Parnell.)

It is said that the fact of the number of Jews still practising their ancient faith and preserving their ancient literature is an incontrovertible proof of revealed religion as opposed to the fallacies of atheists and infidels. Why should not a similar test apply to the Irish Catholics, who have preserved in all its purity and integrity that Faith taught by St. Patrick in 432, and which has been handed down from generation to generation. There were never any heresies amongst the Irish.

In Holy Scripture it is written: "Those who instruct others unto justice shall shine as stars for eternity, and they shall rule over nations." The prayers of St. Patrick for the Isle of Saints and Martyrs, in which he laboured for over sixty years, have guarded and preserved that faith which "Gives light in darkness, comfort in despair."

O'er all the world no land more true
Than our dear Catholic Ireland;
Through ages of blood to the "Rock" hath
she stood,
Firm and true was that suffering Island.
O! ne'er may the Cross which St. Patrick
placed
On her noble brow decay!
God bless the dear old Emerald Isle,
The gem of the sea! Cushmanachree!
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