

O'MEAGHER'S MESSAGE TO IRELAND.

PART II.

I now come to poor O'Brien; and of him I have much to say that will distress you painfully.

In consequence of his refusing to pledge his word not to escape, the "ticket of leave," as I have already mentioned, was withheld from him; and he was conveyed to Maria Island, there to remain in close confinement during the pleasure of his Excellency, Sir William Denison. The restrictions imposed upon him were most stringent and severe. More than this—they were cruel to an excess.

He was confined to a little cottage, and suffered to take no exercise beyond that which a miserable plot of ground, attached to this cottage, would permit. He was denied the use of a servant; had to light his own fire, make his own bed, and perform every other menial duty that was necessary. He was denied all intercourse, forbidden to exchange a word with any person on the Island, save and except the Protestant chaplain. He was dogged, night and day, by constables, who had to report his presence, every four hours, to the Superintendent of the Station. He was denied permission to receive a few little luxuries, in the way of sugar, rice, and raisins, which he had requested a gentleman in Hobart Town to forward to him. In a word, he was detained under these and other restrictions, he was obliged to submit to these and other privations, until, at last, his health gave way, and the medical officer of the Station pronounced it no longer safe to enforce the discipline to which he had been subjected.

On the 16th of January, I received from our dear and noble friend, a letter, from which I give you the following extract:—

"A new phase has occurred in the arrangements adopted with respect to me. The Doctor of the Station (Doctor Smart) having reported that my health was giving way under the system prescribed by Dr. Hampton, I was allowed yesterday to take a little exercise, attended by a keeper. Until I had an opportunity of testing my powers, I had no idea how much my strength had been reduced. I am now convinced, that, had no change taken place, Sir William Denison would have had very little trouble with his prisoner at the expiration of another fortnight. Hereafter these proceedings may become a subject of inquiry, and, in case I should be prematurely extinguished, it will be right to inquire, whether Dr. Dawson, the principal medical officer of the colony, did, or did not, after his visit to this Island, represent to the Governor and to Dr. Hampton, the Comptroller-General, that the course of treatment adopted towards me would most probably be injurious to my health."

Upon the receipt of this I felt bound to bring the statement it contained under the notice of the local government; and, if that did not produce any desirable result, to lay the matter before the public, through the colonial papers.

Fortunately, the very day I received it, I met O'Dogherty and Martin at the Lakes, and had the advantage of their advice. It was agreed, then, I should write a respectful remonstrance to Sir William Denison, stating the facts I had heard with regard to O'Brien's health, and praying for such alterations in the treatment adopted towards him as would avert the fatal consequences it was bringing on. In case no alterations took place, it was further agreed upon, we should throw up our "tickets of leave," and no longer bind ourselves, by any honourable engagement, to a Government that could act in so unmanly and cruel a manner.

In consequence of this arrangement, I wrote the following letter:—

"Hope's Hotel, Ross, Jan. 17, 1850.

"MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,

"Sir—I feel called upon to inform you respectfully that I have received a letter, dated January 11th, from Mr. Smith O'Brien; who, as your Excellency must be aware, is at present under close confinement in the probation-station of Maria Island.

"In this letter Mr. O'Brien mentions, that, in consequence of the restrictions which have been imposed upon him, and the privations to which he is subjected, his strength has been greatly weakened, and his health in general very seriously impaired.

"From what I know of Mr. O'Brien—and I have the honor and the happiness to know him well—I feel convinced that the treatment in force against him must have produced very injurious effects, indeed, to induce the avowal he has made, and which—whatever be his wishes to the contrary—I conceive it my duty to lay before your Excellency.

"I write without having ascertained the feelings of Mr. O'Brien with regard to the step I now take: I write, indeed, with the conviction, that, had he been apprised of my intention in this respect, he would have condemned it strongly, and have urged me to renounce it. There are times, however, when friendship is best evinced in disobedience to the wishes of those, for whose health and happiness one has been led to cherish an anxious and a deep desire.

"For my part, I could have no peace, no enjoyment, no repose—a thorn would rankle in my heart, and excite within me the most painful emotions—were I to be silent in this matter.

"With these sentiments, I respectfully, but urgently entreat, that your Excellency will be pleased to institute an inquiry into the treatment pursued towards Mr. Smith O'Brien, and the state to which, in consequence of this treatment, his health has been reduced.

"I am assured, that, upon ascertaining the truth of the statement I have now put forth, your Excellency, influenced by a sense of common justice and humanity, will direct such relaxations to be made in the discipline to which he is subject, as will restore the health, and guarantee the life of my pure-hearted and noble-minded friend.

"I have the honor to be,

"Your Excellency's obedient servant,

"THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER.

"To his Excellency, Sir W. Denison, Knt.,

Lieut. Governor of Van Diemen's Land,

&c., &c., &c."

To this communication I received the following note from the Office of the Convict Department:—

"The Comptroller-General has been directed to acknowledge the receipt of the communication addressed to the Lieutenant-Governor, by Thomas Francis Meagher, dated the 17th ult."

The envelope of this note measured eight inches in length, and on the back exhibited a plaster of red wax, pretty nearly as broad as the seal on the mouth of a bottle of anchovies. This elegant adhesion bears some

elaborate device, which, as yet, I have not had sufficient leisure to examine.

On the other side, I found the subjoined inscription:—

"On Public Service only.

Thomas Francis Meagher,

Hope's Hotel,

Ross.

"Convict Department, 22nd January, 1850."

The information it contained, you will admit, was not very satisfactory; limited, as it was, to the simple announcement that my letter had arrived safe. The morning it arrived, however, I received a letter from a friend of mine, assuring me that the treatment I had complained of had been considerably modified. Four or five days subsequently, I received one from O'Brien himself, from which I make an extract or two; for, I am sure, they will afford you greater satisfaction than any statement, borrowed from them, of my own:—

"I am happy to be able to relieve your anxiety with respect to my health, by assuring you that I have felt better to-day than upon any day for several weeks, and that I have every reason to believe I shall soon be in a condition to undergo another of Dr. Hampton's experiments upon the strength of my constitution.

"My letter to you of the 11th was written under the impulse of vehement indignation, excited by the discovery, that I had been very much enfeebled by confinement and solitude. When first I was shut up in solitary confinement, after Dr. Hampton's visit to this Island, I could not help feeling, that, in the case of nineteen men out of twenty, a strict enforcement of his regulations would destroy reason or life; but still I was in hopes that I should be able to bear it without injury, as my constitution is naturally a very strong one. I found, however, that after I had been in confinement for a few weeks, I became constantly oppressed by a palpitation of the heart—a sensation I never before experienced, not even at Clonmel—and it is my firm conviction, that if the restrictions had not been somewhat relaxed, I would have fallen a victim to what certainly has worn all the appearance of a deliberate design to shorten my life.

"Since the 11th, I have been allowed as much opportunity of exercise as I could reasonably expect. I ramble about in the neighborhood of the station, attended by a keeper, so upon this head, there is no longer, at present, any ground for complaint.

"With regard to the request which I made, that you would not mention anything about my health in your letters home, the reasons for such an admonition no longer exist, as I have thought it right to let my own friends know, both that my confinement has been relaxed in consequence of its having proved injurious to my health, and also, at the same time, that there is no longer any reason for alarm."

So far, then, so good. But, is it not sickening to think, that the treatment which brought on his illness was enforced for no other reason than this—that he declined to give his word not to escape! He declines to give his word not to escape, and, forthwith, he is subjected to the most harassing privations and indignities; is shut out from all society; is gagged, and cramped, and half-stuffed in a hut; is buried alive, in fact, upon a scrap of an Island; and from all this, knows no exemption until his life is perilled!

Ah! the race of Hudson Lowes is not extinct; and there are other rocks in the ocean besides that famous one of St. Helena;—sweet, secluded spots—remote, snug nooks—just large enough for gaolers to test their skill and venom on, in foul experiments upon a noble life.

I have now said everything—everything that could be said, I believe, about ourselves, our voyage, and the circumstances in which we are placed. A few words, in conclusion, about the Colony.

With regard, then, to the Colony. It is a beautiful, noble Island. In most, if not all, those features which constitute the strength, the wealth, and the grandeur of a country, it has been endowed. The seas which encompass it, the lakes and rivers which refresh and fertilize, the woods which shadow, and the sky which arches it—all bear testimony to the excellence of the Divine Hand, and, with sounds of the finest harmony, with signs of the brightest coloring, proclaim the goodness and munificence of Heaven in its behalf.

The climate is more than healthful. It is invigorating and inspiring. Breathing it, manhood preserves its bloom, vivacity, and vigor, long after the period at which, in other countries, those precious gifts depart, and the first cold touch of Age is felt. Breathing it, Age itself puts on a glorious look of health, serenity, and gladness, and, even when the grey hairs have thinned, seems able to fight a way through the snows, and storms, and falling leaves of many years to come. Breathing it, many a frail form which the Indian sun had wasted, acquires fresh life; the dim eye lights up anew; to the ashy paleness of the sunken cheek succeeds the sparkling blush of health; the heart resumes its youthful action, and drives the blood once more in clear and glowing currents through the frame; whilst the mind that was sinking into gloom and forgetfulness, touched, as it were, by a miraculous hand, starts into light and playfulness, and breaking far away from the shadows of Death that were closing round it, exults in the consciousness of a new existence.

Oh! to think that a land so blest—so rich in all that makes life pleasant, bountiful, and great—so formed to be a refuge and a sweet abiding-place, in these latter times, for the younger children of the old, decrepit, worn-out world at home—to think that such a land is doomed to be the prison, the workhouse, and the grave, of the EMPIRE'S outcast poverty, ignorance, and guilt! This is a sad, revolting thought; and the reflections which spring from it cast a gloom here over the purest and happiest minds. Whilst so black a curse is on it, no heart, howsoever pious, generous, and benignant, could love this land, and speak of it with pride.

I have now brought my letter to a conclusion, and it was time for me to do so. But yet I cannot prevail upon myself to wish you good-bye without congratulating you, as I do most sincerely and affectionately, upon your second appearance in public life, and the assurances of success and honor which have accompanied it.

Up to this date I have not received a single copy of the *Nation*; some of the colonial papers, however, have published extracts from the leading articles, and from them I have had a pretty clear conception of the views with which you have started.

I am delighted to find you have made the *Lund* Question the basis of the new movement. Bring that question to a clear, definite, permanent, conclusion, and the solution of the other vexed questions of our

country will surely follow. It was a grievous error on our part, that in January, 1847, we did not start with it, and to the settlement of it dedicate all our sympathies and efforts.

True it is, an armed revolution, eventuating in success, would have settled that question in a day. But in 1847 we did not contemplate an insurrectionary movement. We thought to build a National Parliament by Act of Parliament, and dazzled with the project, we lost sight of the fact, that the soil beneath our feet was as unstable as a quagmire. Reclaim that soil—"disenchant it!" as poor Mitchel exclaimed one day to the Landlords in the Irish Council—bind it firmly together, render it sure, solid, and immovable—and then you may rear upon it the noblest institutions.

You have opened with the declaration, that "the independence of Ireland cannot be achieved by a sudden blow, but must be worked out in detail." Adhere to that. Submit to the bitterest taunts; submit to the most odious and irritating suspicions; submit to be called a coward and a renegade; submit to everything that is most galling to an upright, generous mind, rather than swerve one inch from the path to which that declaration leads you.

This is my advice, since it is my belief that, for many a long day to come, you cannot cope with England in the field. To this conclusion I have come, from a patient, slow consideration of the materials with which you have to work, and the difficulties that confront you.

Looking back to the events of 1848—studying them in a fair and candid spirit—I have become convinced that in the summer of that year we aimed far beyond our strength, and sought by wild and vehement efforts the accomplishment of a work immeasurably greater than the resources we had organized, and the influence we possessed.

Had we adhered firmly to the system of action with which we set out—had we patiently and resolutely resisted the influence of the European movements—I solemnly believe, that a National Confederacy, of formidable strength, intelligence, and power, would have grown into existence, and have been by this time omnipotent in Ireland.

I recollect well, that when we were in Paris, a little after the Revolution of February, Arthur O'Connor, warning us of the danger into which we were hurrying, begged of us to be more temperate and reserved. But, amid the flaunting of the tricolor, the trees of liberty, the bayonets of the Garde Mobile, and the chaunting of the Marseillaise, we lost sight of the old soldier, his example, and his precepts. We thought that Ireland, by a sudden spring, could do what France had succeeded in doing after a series of attempts and failures, and the active indefatigable propagandism of republican ideas ever since the Three Days of 1830. We presumed thus far, and were flung down in a pitiful attempt to realize the hope we had so extravagantly conceived.

The path you have pointed to is, certainly, a long and irksome one, and will painfully test the patience, the moral courage, and the endurance of the people. But, after all, it is the surest one, and the one best adapted for the progress of a nation the energies of which have been so cruelly reduced.

It may be difficult for you to lead the people to that path, and keep them to it. The defeat of 1848 may have so disheartened them as to induce an unwillingness to make another and a wiser effort. But why should this be so? The defeat of 1848 was not the defeat of a whole people. It was nothing more than the rout of a few peasants, hastily collected, badly armed, half starved, and miserably clad.

The country did not turn out. The country was not beaten, therefore. And hence it should neither be disheartened nor ashamed.

Why a more general movement did not take place, I have no time at present to explain. There were many reasons for it, and as I intend to write a little narrative of what occurred in Tipperary during the period to which I allude, you shall have them at some future day.

I feel, however, it would not be candid of me to conceal the opinion I have frequently stated in private, that we who went to Tipperary, did not put the question properly to the country—did not give the country a fair opportunity—did not adopt anything like the best means for evoking the heroism of the people, and bringing it into action.

I owe it to the people to make this avowal. It pains me to reflect that such an avowal has been so long withheld, and that in the absence of it, they have been charged with cowardice and desertion.

There is another slander, too—a slander no less unjust and scandalous than the one I have this moment mentioned,—which I feel bound also to refute.

Since the affair at Ballingarry, it has been repeatedly rung in our ears—"The Priests betrayed you!" The Priests did not betray us. As a body, they were opposed to us—actively and determinedly opposed to us—from the day of the Secession down to the very day on which the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act was announced by express in Dublin. In not joining us, therefore, in the field—in not exhorting the people to take up arms—nay, in setting themselves against the few who rallied round us, and warning them to their homes—in all this they did not act treacherously; they acted simply with strict consistency.

I do not, of course, applaud them for the part they acted. With the belief that is rooted in my mind, I could not do so. For I firmly believe, that had the Catholic Priests of Ireland preached the Revolution from their altars—had they blessed the arms and banners of the people—had they gone out, like the Sicilian Priests, or the Archbishop of Milan, and borne the Cross in front of the insurgent ranks—had this been the case, I firmly believe there would have been a young Nation, crowned with glory, standing proudly up by the side of England at this hour.

And yet, strong as this belief is, I sincerely admit, that, in opposing the insurrectionary movement of 1848, the Catholic Clergy of Ireland were influenced by the purest love for the people.

They had witnessed the ravages of three famines—had seen the mass of the peasantry wasting away before their eyes—had seen the blood of the country turning into water, and its vigorous, gallant form shrivelling to a spectre—they had seen all this, and could not bring themselves to bestow their sanction on a struggle in which the odds appeared so numerous against the country. This feeling, I am confident, prevailed to a very great extent amongst them. I know it was the feeling of certain brave, charitable, high-minded men, in parishes I could mention; and

in their efforts to suppress the rising, they were governed by this feeling.

Besides, why should we hesitate to admit, what all the world knows, that the Confederate Leaders did not possess the confidence of the Catholic Priests and Bishops of Ireland? Why not manfully avow, that the latter remained faithful to the principles of O'Connell, conceiving it would be an insult to his memory to support a movement which sprung from a repugnance to his views, his policy, and dictation? And this being the plain truth, how, as honourable men, can we tolerate the slander that has been levelled at them ever since our imprisonment?

For my part, I feel deeply grieved, that whilst I remained in Ireland it was not permitted me to give a public refutation to this slander; but now, that I have an opportunity, I feel happy, beyond measure, in doing so.

To return, however, to the subject from which I was forced to make a deviation. Let me repeat it—the people have no reason to be disheartened or ashamed in consequence of our failure. It was no fault of theirs. As we have accepted the penalties it imposed, so we acknowledge and accept its responsibility and disgrace.

But I go further, and I say, that even if it were the case, that the people had fought, and had been worsted, it is now their duty to resume the struggle.

The necessity of that struggle is just as clear, just as urgent, just as imperative as ever, if it is not a hundred times more so. Nothing has occurred since July, 1848, to exonerate the people from the contest which at that period sustained so discreditable and mean a check. The severest blow they might have then received, would not have justified them in signing the abdication of the right to possess and rule their country. It is victory alone that can absolve a nation from the struggle in which her flag, her sceptre, and her honour are at stake.

Ah! there is one great lesson they have to learn in Ireland yet; and that is, to bear up against adversity with a patient, resolute, indefatigable will. It is a ruinous irregularity of their disposition to be so susceptible of hope at one time, and so liable to depression at another. To-day, they soar to the giddy heights of rapture and enthusiasm; to-morrow, they cower before a passing cloud, and sink into the coldest currents of despair!

And so they pass from one extreme to the other, and in both unfit themselves for the hard, rough work, which, amid the wreck and ruin of their country, lies open for them. Warned by the strange and sad transitions to which this disposition has so often led, it is time for them to govern and correct it; and, in doing so, acquire a calm, a strong, laborious spirit; a spirit that will toil at its appointed work spite of every temptation and reverse; a spirit that, in sunshine and in storm, will preserve the same placidity and force; and steadfast through all vicissitudes to its faith and holy mission, will, in the end, conduct the sons and daughters of our fair and noble land to a destination of peace, serenity, and joy.

I know well that these are somewhat distasteful truths to tell to a sensitive and impassioned people. But, adversity is sure to teach a little wisdom; and it would console me much—it would pleasantly and proudly reconcile me to the fate I now endure—if the lesson I have learned, in these my silent, lonely hours of exile, served in any way to regulate the impulses, and correct the errors, which prevail at home.

The sentence which now binds me to this strange land has not removed me from my country. I am with her still. Her memories, her sorrows, and her hopes, mingle with my own, and have become a portion of my life. While that life lasts, my heart, with all its affections and aspirations—my mind, with all its thoughts, energies, and experiences, are hers. From the duty I owe to her as my Mother-Land, nothing can absolve me.

And what nobler act could I now perform in her regard, than to turn my misfortunes to her best account, and give her that advice, which, were it not for those misfortunes, I might have never thought of? It has been beautifully said, that adversity brings forth bright truths, as the night brings forth the stars; and I, for one, am sensible that, in the gloom which surrounds me here, lessons of wisdom have shone out, which, in the brightness of a happier fortune, might have remained invisible. These lessons I offer to my poor, sad, old country. They are the only pledges of affection I can give her now; and, as such, I know they will not be refused.

With sincere esteem and the deepest trust,

Believe me, my dear Duffy,

Ever to remain,

Your affectionate friend,

T. F. MEAGHER.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE IRISH FRANCHISE BILL.

(From the Tablet of August 10.)

The Government compromise of the Irish Franchise Bill has at length, and after much reluctance, been acceded to by the hereditary branch of the Legislature. On Tuesday night the 12th qualification clause was affirmed in the House of Peers, after a warm debate and a close division, in which, by the aid of an unusual proportion of proxies, Ministers attained the very moderate majority of eleven. The other amendments of the Commons—including the restoration of the self-acting registration—were afterwards quietly submitted to by their lordships. Thus the measure, as it is now about to become law, differs but in one very material point from the original Whig proposition—the substitution of the 12th qualification for the 8th one—and this mutilation of the Bill is not, as we strongly suspect, altogether opposed to the secret inclination of the official promoters of the measure.

The *Times* felicitates their lordships upon this resolution of the problem of Irish electoral reform, which it terms "one of the most satisfactory events of the session." How far the "settlement" will give satisfaction in Ireland, yet remains to be seen. That it is a vast improvement on the present, or late law, is evident enough; but is it, on the whole, such a reform as the Irish people had a right to expect, or such as the altered circumstances of the country imperatively demanded?

Under the 12th rating qualification, it is said, the