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IRELAND BY AN AMERICAN.

I have crossed the Irish Sea, and set foot upon the land of sorrow, of merriment and tears, of hope and despair, of smothered fires and volcanoes.

Ireland is a problem which is yet to be solved.—Up to this hour she has continued in an embryo state, and yet she is an enigma. What resources, what gems she has locked up within her, none can tell.—Only an occasional lightning gleam shoots across her darkness.

Never was a more beautiful country spread out beneath the canopy of heaven, or one more prolific in the means of enjoyment; and never in any people was the human heart better attuned for enjoyment. Why then should they not live comfortably and happily upon this highly-favored portion of the globe?

Their neighbors over the channel say it is because they are so lazy. But who ever hears of their laziness when they get thousands of miles away? In our own country, where there are hundreds of thousands of them, who ever hears of their laziness? When did they ever refuse to do our hardest work for pay?

This then cannot be the reason—it is but the swagger of bloated idleness itself, to cover its own shame in treading them down. The Irish may be lazy here for aught I know, but if they are, how manifest is it that it comes of the lack of motive to exertion. Pray, tell me, who is not lazy when all such motive is removed? Who does not droop and languish, and become idle and vagrant, when all motive to try to be any thing is taken away?

Take this issue then, if you prefer it—why are the Irish lazy in their own beautiful country, and there alone? Why do their energies droop and languish under so genial a sky? Why does gaunt poverty meet you at every step? Why does anarchy utter her screams, and run riot through the land, and murder stalk forth at noonday?

These are grave questions, and should be gravely considered. And I undertake to say that these evils are all traceable directly to the landlord system, the failure of the potato crop serving only as a temporary aggravation.

Nor am I disposed to cast the reproach that some have upon the tything branch of this system—an adjunct by the way which I by no means regard with favor. The tything system comes in for its share of the blame, as part and parcel of the landlord system, and nothing more. For instance: here is a parish with not more than half a dozen members of the Established Church in it, and yet a clergyman is supported by the tythes collected for the most part from those who have their own clergyman to support besides, which seems, at first view, to be shockingly oppressive upon the tillers of the soil.

But the truth is, the tythes are paid by the tillers of the soil as part of their rent. Every cultivator of the soil pays rent to two landlords, one of which is the lord of the manor, who holds but a part of the proprietorship (the greater part to be sure) and the other is the Established church (or the person or persons to whom her interests have been transferred) which holds the remaining portion of the proprietorship, the tythes being the rent of it, fixed by law.

The tything system then is chargeable with blame no further than as it comes in as a component part of the general landlord system. Upon this subject I have taken special pains to inform myself. It is the landlord system as a whole which sheds down such blighting influences upon the working classes, sipping in the bud every noble aspiration, and spreading desolation over the whole field of rural industry.

The peasantry here are very differently situated, for the most part, from those of England. There are tenant farmers here who employ them as laborers, as in England; but the greater part of them live upon and work pieces of land rented directly from the landlord. Their leases generally extend through several generations; and each succeeding generation of children, have subdivided among themselves the lands they inherited by means of these long leases, until an Irish farm has come to be, in most instances, a rather diminutive affair, often consisting of no more than one, two, three, five, or ten acres in extent, surrounded and cut up by huge, unsightly open ditches, and set with mud hovels. But if fringed and bordered with gold, and set with jewels, it could not be dearer to the heart of the Irish peasant.

These people have always been put to all they could do to pay their rent; and of late years they have found it difficult to pay them at all—so difficult that they have to repair, in vast numbers, to England and Scotland, in harvest time, to raise a little money for the purpose. In both England and Scotland I have met troops of them, consisting of men, women and children, toiling the long summer day in the harvest field for so paltry a pittance as one shilling to one shilling and three pence a day to the men, and half price to the women. On one occasion, fifty of them sat by the road-side eating their dinners as

I past, which consisted only of sixteen ounces of poor bread each; and I learned from them that they were allowed nothing but oatmeal porridge for their breakfast, while they were left to provide their own suppers and lodging out of the above named pittance.—And yet I have heard their employers brand them as thieves because they made free with their turnips in the fields to satisfy their hunger.

On one occasion I was passing with a landlord over a portion of his premises, which brought us in view of some sixty or seventy of these poor Irish laborers consisting of men and women, boys and girls all bending to their task; and as we paused to admire the magnificent sweep they were making through the golden harvest-field, the grain falling before them to the breadth of half a quarter of a mile, he remarked to me with a jeer, "These are Irish farmers, who are working for money to pay their rent."

But what aggravated the evils of the landlord system far more than the failure of the potato crop, has been the non-residence of the landlords. Almost to a man, they have forsaken the country, to lead a dashing life in England swarming about the metropolis. Of course the entire land rent of the country has been drawn away from it, to be expended there upon their extravagances, and this has contributed to increase the general distress here.

But their enormous rags did not suffice—to meet their profligate expenditures they had to mortgage their lands, and to aggravate their distress thus entailed, just as far as the potato crop failed, their rents were not paid at all, and that brought on the crisis—a law had to be passed authorising the sale of the incumbered estates of the nobility and gentry of Ireland and they have been going off under the hammer ever since I have been in the country; and, in most instances, they have been sold for no more than was barely sufficient to pay incumbrances.

What will be the remoter consequences of the breaking up of an agricultural system whose sole dependence was upon "one single lazy root," remains to be seen; but the immediate consequences have been calamitous enough to these poor people. Everywhere they have been ousted from homes which they and their forefathers have occupied for many generations, only to perish by thousands. Even those who have fled to the workhouses seem not to have found a refuge from death. According to a parliamentary report, eighteen hundred of them died in two workhouses alone in the course of a few months; and the *Dublin News Letter* says that "a vast majority of all who have been ejected have perished."

I believe it will be found a principle of human nature, that the heart clings to its accustomed locality, and the few objects it embraces with a fondness of grasp about in proportion to the greatness of its remove from those refinements which we are apt to think make up the sum total of life's happiness. The wider the range of enjoyments, the more divided the affections seem to become, and the less intense.

The Irish peasant's home, though humble and lowly, and to our eye forbidding, and though his paternal domain be but a small spot, is all the world to him, and around it cluster all his earthly hopes. He dreads removal as he dreads death; as though, having vegetated there, he feared, as the effect of transplanting, that he would be certain to lie down and perish.

And it is almost enough to reconcile one to wretchedness and filth, to see Pat sitting upon the manure heap which looms up directly in front of his lowly hut, calmly smoking his pipe, as he looks abroad with ineffable self-complacency over a potato-patch; or as he sits at his frugal board, with the humble esculent before him, while the pig (the gintlegin that pays the rent) is domiciled in a recess of the same, and squeals out a craving desire for a participation in the banquet.

And I am almost prepared to say that were it not for the sad contingencies which so often overtake him, and subject him to suffering, starvation, and death, with his ideas of comfort, he would be a happier man than the lord, who, with his ideas of comfort, looks from the balcony of his palace over his broad domain, swarming with dependents, with discontent sitting personified upon his brow; or as he sits at his loaded tables, and fairly groans that he has but a single stomach to gratify—and upon whose ear the strains of the guitar pour less grateful melody than does the music of the sty upon that of his humble dependent.

Humble indeed is the lot of the Irish peasant, small are his wants, and modest and lowly aspirations—despised by the great ones and the little ones above him, are the objects around which his heart dances with delight, the chiefest among them all being the spot which he calls home.

Co-existent with this attachment to his humble home, there is in him a total want of versatility of character—an utter incapacity, for the time being, to

adapt himself to the necessities of change. Jostled out of the little sphere in which he is accustomed to move round and round, he becomes bewildered and lost, and knows not what to do, or which way to turn.—In the present emergency, those few who can, are crowding their way to our shores, and upon those who cannot, despair is fast doing its work.

"What shall be done with Ireland?" is the standing interrogatory on the other side, especially just before the meeting of parliament, and various measures have been set on foot for the "regeneration of Ireland," but all to no purpose, and for the good and sufficient reason, that they have no applicability to the case.

At this moment, it is gravely proposed to take advantage of the breaking up of the hitherto existing landlord system here, to substitute another on the English basis of large farms, on which the Irish peasantry may be employed as laborers at stated wages, and many English and Scotch farmers have already emigrated and taken farms; the favorable terms offered by the new proprietors (on account of the supposed insecurity of life and property here) holding out great inducements, and all the English and Scotch papers are cheering them on, and raising hal-lalujahs for Ireland, as though the time of her redemption were near.

And what is to be gained to the poor Irish by this importation of hated task-masters from over the channel? All that these devout friends of Ireland hope or expect from this measure, is that the Irish peasantry will be reduced to the condition of the English farm-laborer, such as I have described it, that thus, as they say, the poor creatures may be saved from liability to starvation, by an occasional failure of the potato crop.

Astonishing exhibition of philanthropy!—Dazzling orb of hope to rise upon benighted Ireland! Far rather would I be a wild Irishman among the bogs, with rags and independence, than to be such an embodiment of ignorance, stupidity, and brutality—nay, I would sooner turn up an untamed Indian in his native wilds, a Bedouin in the desert, a Hottentot, any thing, than such a shrivelled anomaly, such a deformed lump of humanity, such a reproach to christianity and civilisation, such a plague spot upon the creation of God.

If any think I am dealing in hyperbole, I have only to say, *come and see*. You have no data on which to form an opinion upon the other side of the Atlantic, nor upon this, unless you go out of the beaten track. There you see one side of the matter, in the tens of thousands of the Irish poor who are flocking to our shores, but you see not the other, for the English farm-laborer has hitherto neither had the manhood and spirit to think of such a thing as crossing the sea, to escape from his oppressions, nor the means to accomplish it. What sort of an estimate is to be put on a people who can be made to believe that a steeple, whose top has been blown off, will shoot up again upon being manured well at the root? Do you say the story must be false? Then, I ask what sort of an estimate is to be put upon a people, concerning whom such things are said, whether true or false?

With all their degradation, all their poverty and rags, and laziness, and crime even, there is a vivacity and spirit, and, in one direction or another, a degree of intelligence, which raise the Irish peasant many degrees above the English farm-laborer, in his multilicness, his stolidity, and his brutality.

And, as I said, their capabilities of improvement are demonstrated by what they have accomplished when set free upon our shores. The wonder is not that the Irish laborer accomplishes no more and makes no larger figure when he comes amongst us, but that he accomplishes so much and makes so large a figure, emerging as he does from beneath the chilly and paralyzing influence which makes him what he is here. And coming as he does, galled, chafed, bleeding and smarting, we have only to take him by the hand, speak words of kindness to him, and throw around him the plastic influence at our command, to make a man of him—and he is capable of it, he is.

There is an openness and warmth of temperament a galloping flow of the spirits, and an open-armed hospitality about the Irish which I like, and which shows off in repulsive contrast, the barricaded selfishness, the measured formality, and heartless show, which too often characterize their neighbors over the way. There is no truer heart than throbs in the bosom of an Irishman when everything is right within him and without him, and there are no nobler specimens of humanity than have risen up, from time to time, among the Irish people.

They have been accused of duplicity, and, for aught I know, the charge may be founded in truth. But if it be, think you, that they are sinners above all other men? Think you that the Irish peasant is born with a lie in his mouth, any more than the rest

of mankind? I tell you nay, they are just what oppression makes every people under heaven. To hunt the world over, take the circuit of the globe, and explore it from pole to pole, and where will you find an oppressed people that are not both liars and thieves, in self-defence, and, I had almost said, by necessity? I have found quite as much duplicity and thievishness among the farm-laborers of England as among the peasantry of Ireland. I have found the same cause to produce the same effects everywhere, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as among the Fellahs of Egypt, and other oppressed countries of the world. Everywhere oppression casts a blight upon every virtue, and quickens into life the seeds of vice which lie dormant in every heart.

How little is to be hoped from this plan of transporting English landlordism to Ireland, as a contrivance for letting down the Irish peasant to the level of the English farm-laborer!

But another response has been made by the government itself to the interrogatory, "What shall be done to regenerate Ireland?" and made too at an enormous expense, but it is of a piece with the bright attempt above recorded, and worthy its paternity, and of course it has proved barren of useful results—English landlordism and English brutalization of the working classes, forming the *beau ideal* after which the government always shapes its measures.

I refer to the establishment of what are called the Queen's Colleges, three enormous structures, located at Belfast, Galway, and Cork, built and endowed by the government at an enormous outlay, to furnish educational facilities for the higher orders, and thus to arm them with still greater power to trample down the people, who are left in ignorance at their feet. The same outlay would have extended the facilities of common school education to every mud hovel in the island, but that would never do, it would defeat the great ends of government here, and so they will tell you with great complacency what the *national schools*, with 500,000 pupils, are doing for the people; that is, the schools of a private society, embracing one in thirteen of the population, to which £120,000 are doled out by the government.

This is the way the government goes to work to "regenerate Ireland," and it is but another exemplification of the knavery which for ages has been so successfully played off upon the English working classes, to swindle them out of their earnings and their humanity alike.

The fact that these colleges have been laid under the ban by the Pope, so far as the Catholics are concerned, does not affect the question at all. It is better, far better, that they should stand empty, monuments of government folly, with their troop of professors feeding upon the government pab, without the footsteps of a student to break their solitude, if the people are to be left in ignorance.

There is a way to regenerate Ireland; nor is it necessary to empty its people upon some other portion of the globe to accomplish it. Hitherto they have received only insolence from their masters over the channel, and they have returned only undying hate. They cannot succumb to power as the English peasantry can, for they never were so enslaved and degraded in the feudal ages. They were bound to their feudal chiefs by the ties of kindred, and the authority exercised over them was paternal. And so it was in the highlands of Scotland, and hence the mistake that they can be cowed into submission with the same appliances which are so effectual in crushing the peasantry of England, who were slaves *de facto* in the feudal ages, and have *virtually* continued so to this day. (See Hallam, vol. ii. p. 90.)

There is a way to regenerate Ireland: give the Irish peasantry a chance to live, try the effect of kind and gentle treatment upon them, and see if they do not rise from their degradation. No people are more susceptible, more tractable and docile, or show a greater aptitude for improvement than the Irish, when approached in the right way.—One of the great woolen manufacturers of England, was formerly extensively engaged in manufacturing in Dublin, and he seemed to be well acquainted with the character and condition of the Irish people. I asked him if they were the intractable, remorseless, and savage beings the English generally represented them to be; to which he replied, that that they were very far from it, and that they only required suitable treatment to make them as tractable and docile a people as exists upon earth. Often, he said, when goaded to desperation by their oppressions, they had collected in mobs, he had rode into the midst of them, and, when vengeance breathed from every lip, and murder flashed from every eye, had laid the tempest in a moment, by calling out to them in tones of gentle rebuke, tempered with words of kindness, and soon they would drop away, one after another, quietly to their homes, until all were gone.

And what a spectacle we have here, in the mutual