

Erin mavournin - Erin go bragh

A fortnight in Ireland 1852

Sir Frances B. Head, Bart

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“Buried and cold, when my heart stills its motion.
Green be thy fields, sweetest Isle of the Ocean !
And may harp-striking bards sing aloud with devotion,
Erin mavournin ! Erin go bragh !”

CAMPBELL

SECOND DAY.

In the morning I arose at six o'clock, and on going into the yard to order a car I asked the driver, who was to accompany me, whether it was not going to be a wet day ? “ Yere Arnh'r,” he replied, “ I think ut's very apt! Ut's very dark !” I returned to my parlour, and, as soon as my breakfast was over, amused myself for a few minutes by looking out of my window. I was in Monahan's inn, and accordingly, as if by reflection, PATRICK MONAHAN in large letters was the name of the grocer over the way. It was now raining slowly, steadily, and unremittingly. Women with uncovered heads and bare feet were standing round the shop ; one—pattering as she walked—entered it, and in a very short time came out with a clasped hand containing a small paper parcel, which every one of the wet-faced women slightly looked at. In the window was written on a large placard

“ Souchong,
5s.,
The best Black Tea.”

For some time I watched the ragged dresses of a group of men and boys, also loitering before the inn. Their clothes formed a species of dissolving view. Occasionally I rubbed my eyes, and yet I really found it impossible to decide whether the garments before me had begun life by being blue cloth or thick flannel, for, as correctly as I could calculate, there appeared about as many shreds of the one colour as of the other. The trowsers, usually of dark cloth, literally and without exaggeration, looked as if they had been borrowed for half an hour by somebody who had filled them with rats that had then been baited with Skye terriers, who, to get hold of the vermin, had not only bitten pieces out of the garments, but in many instances had literally torn them to atoms, which, with the assistance of scraps of cloth of a variety of other colours, had been hurriedly replaced by people who had never before used a needle; indeed, in many places the stitches were as rough as network. But in several cases a considerable portion of the garment had apparently been eaten up by the dogs, and accordingly, before me I saw a lad of about 18 in trowsers, which could not grammatically be called “ a pair,” inasmuch as the whole of one portion of the right leg was gone from the middle of the thigh down to the ankle, where, supported by a narrow irregular shred, say 3 inches broad, there hung a remnant of about the size and in the position of a gaiter. Several men, down whose honest-looking faces the rain was slowly trickling, were in coats which, although in holes and tatters, appeared to have originally been three coats of three different colours. Nobody had buttons behind, and one man, although he seemed perfectly unconscious of it, had moreover lost a whole skirt, and was, therefore, in fact, in half a jacket and half a long-tailed coat ; and yet how painful is it to reflect that the most astonishing part of the enigma I have just described is, that every one of these apparently degraded beggars has under his rags as much intelligence, ingenuity, ability, and infinitely more wit, than the smock-frocked peasant of England, or the decently-clothed labourer of Scotland ! As regards the women of Ireland, their native modesty cannot fail to attract the observation of any stranger. Their dress was invariably decent, generally pleasing, and often strikingly picturesque. Almost all wore woollen petticoats, dyed by themselves, of a rich madder colour, between crimson and scarlet. Upon their shoulders, and occasionally from their heads, hung, in a variety of beautiful folds, sometimes a plaid of red and green, sometimes a cloak, usually dark blue or dingy white. Their garments, however, like those of the men, were occasionally to be seen hanging in tatters. I was informed by different

people that the ragged clothes I have described do not characterize the whole of Ireland, but, with certain exceptions, are principally to be found in the counties of Kerry, Mayo, and Galway.

As in point of clothing I was myself very ill provided against rain, I sent to a house on the opposite side of the street for a horse-rug. Among them the shopman brought one with a small slit in the middle, for a purpose which, at a glance, I happened well enough to understand. "Ut's whart we ca' here a Poncho!" said the man; and he then, expending a great many words, proceeded to expound to me exactly how it was to be used—and so, thanking him for the explanation, and, as he thought, entirely on his recommendation, I bought it.

In the route I had drawn out for myself I had intended to have proceeded from Ballinrobe to Westport, but I had been so much affected by the sight of so many unroofed cabins—I had been so much astonished at the sudden difference of appearance in the country under the new system of cultivation, and during the night I had been haunted so repeatedly by the appalling facts I had gleaned from the sub-inspector and master of the workhouse at Ballinrobe, that, as it was evident that before my eyes there was a problem of vast importance to the civilized world in general, and to Ireland in particular, I resolved that I would alter my course,—that I would call upon Lord Lucan, with whom I was not acquainted (he lived about fourteen miles off), and frankly ask him whether or not he would object to explain to me the extraordinary system on which he was proceeding.

Accordingly, in a car as light as a feather, with a little wiry well-bred horse, all life and spirits (*i.e.* "material"), and with a lively small driver, whose joyous sporting shriek every now and then of "Jip!" invariably enlivened me as well as the horse, I started sideways from Monahan's inn at half-past seven A.M., in a quiet, soft, small rain, that, I may as well at once say, never ceased for a moment until nearly midnight.

"Is this system of eviction," said I to the driver, pointing to a small cluster of unroofed cabins we were passing at the moment, "good or bad?" "Well! yere Arnh'r!" he replied, "ut's good and ut's bad. Ut's good for them that hould large lands, bad for the small. Ut laves nothin for tham but the workhouse."

In a short time we trotted through a poor country, composed, in almost endless proportions, of three ingredients, bog, stones, and peat, and yet within it I passed here and there a healthy pretty child, with uncombed flaxen hair, bare feet, and a red petticoat. After travelling some miles I met a young girl, apparently leg weary, with the bright eyes, yellow bills, and sharp intelligent heads of two live fowls peeping out of a crimson-coloured cloak, that in a variety of folds was gracefully hanging about her slight figure.

At five miles from Ballinrobe we came to a constabulary station, and, as I was now lord and master of my own carriage, I desired the driver to stop, and in I went. It was really a picture and a pattern of cleanliness; the walls and ceilings of the rooms were milk white, the floor as clean as a farm kitchen table, and the men, notwithstanding the rain, in perfect parade order. I asked the sergeant commanding, whose arm was distinguished by three chevrons, whether there was much crime in his neighbourhood. "Very little indeed," was his reply. He said there had been no evictions lately.

As I was jogging along, with my umbrella over my head, we met a car, in which there was seated by himself a healthy, ruddy, respectable-looking priest.

"What do the poor people pay to their priest for being married?" said I. "Yere Arnh'r," my driver replied, "they pay 1*l.* 5*s.*; a few of the very poorest 'll have ut done for 1*l.*"

"What do they pay for christening a child?" "Two and sixpence," he replied; adding that's a *riglar* charge." "And for funerals?" He replied, "Nothing at a' for thim—they can get a mass read for from 1*s.* to 2*s.* 6*d.*"

We now drove through a "muckle-stane muir," in the middle of which I observed a solitary cabin with three or four goats, with their legs tied together, grazing in front of it. We then came to a region of small ideas—that is to say, of little fields enclosed by crooked tottering stone walls, from one to

three feet high, and by little roads similarly bounded that apparently led to nothing. Among them, pointing to heaven, were the stark, stiff, rugged gables of a small evicted village, of which not a human being had been spared. All were gone, and rank weeds were here and there flourishing on the very floors on which probably several generations of honest people had slept. Indeed several of the gables were deeply marked by the smoke of fires now extinguished—not for a moment—but for ever !

The road we were travelling on was not only a by one, but, by the by, it was as crooked as if it originally had been the track of a drunken giant. Within the little fields, now deserted, were here and there to be seen, cropping from and peeping out of the earth, rock and large stones, that altogether gave to each of these tiny enclosures the appearance of a small church-yard ; and yet among this gloomy grey mound of loose stones, it was striking beyond description to see occasionally, like a gaudy tropical bird, a woman in bright scarlet, carrying on her head a pitcher of water she was bringing to her cabin from some distant spring.

After meeting a barefooted boy walking in the rain with a couple of peats under each arm, we trotted by a party of men who were constructing, from the little stone divisions and from the ruins of the evicted cabins, good substantial straight walls upwards of four feet high, cemented with lime, and then rough cast. At ten miles from Ballinrobe we came to some cultivated land around Bally-hayne, a small, poor, straggling village, where I observed a neat, substantial Protestant church, which, as it happened to be open, I entered. The sittings were composed of nine open pews on each side, and above them, in the solid wall, there was a comfortable-looking fireplace and fender ! On coming out of my church I went into a substantial cabin adjoining. The roof was jet-black from smoke; a quantity of clothes, as if to dry, were hanging on a straw-rope ; the pig was not only sleeping immediately beneath them, but, like John Bunyan's Apollyon, " straddled over the whole breadth of the way." At the farther end of the village we passed a plain spireless Catholic chapel, neatly whitewashed. On the left, at a distance, were the ruins of Kenturk Castle, looking like an old monastery. We now came again to land subdivided by low walls, of no use whatever, into innumerable small fields, in many of which the weeds were higher than the tottering boundary that enclosed them ; indeed there passed before me in review all sorts of crops but the right ones. Sometimes rushes prevailed—then they turned for a time into broad strong green flags—then came white weeds—then tall yellow ones—then beautiful purple ones—then, all of a sudden, we slowly trotted through heaps of black peat, here and there to be seen moving in lumps on the backs of women and men. Above them, hovering in the air, was apparently a great raven. But by far the most appalling feature in the picture was that, wherever, through-out all the country I had visited, the potato was growing, there was more or less a discoloration in its leaf, that but too clearly announced the existence of subterranean disease.

About a mile from Castlebar we, all of a sudden, came to a most extraordinary change. The road on the left side was bounded by a stone and lime wall, rough-cast, and within it, to Castlebar, the eye roamed, or rather revelled, over an expanse of corn waving or standing in sheaves ; green crops, of great luxuriance ; cocks of hay standing in emerald-green fields ; the whole—like France—without a fence of any description.

On the right of the road, the country, to a considerable extent, had been similarly altered. In the middle of all I observed the tall chimney of a steam-engine : in short, the change was really magical ; and whatever the heart might say on the subject, it was utterly impossible for the judgment of any man to deny, for an instant, that a most astounding improvement of the surface of Ireland had been effected ; indeed, in the course of my life, I have certainly never beheld a contrast so striking. In the centre of it my companion pointed out to me with his whip, among some trees, the residence of Lord Lucan, whom I had come to visit.

Castlebar, the county town of Mayo, is situated at the north-west point of that vast plain of mixed bog and pasture land which characterises the greater part of the counties of Roscommon, Galway, Sligo, and Mayo. It is also very nearly at the head of that broken valley that separates the high lands of Connemara and Joyce country from Erris and Tyrawley. The most remarkable point in its history is, that in 1798 it was occupied for a few days by the French army, under General Humbert, that had landed at Killala Bay.

As we were trotting along one of the main streets leading to the principal square I observed about a dozen well-appointed men in blue uniform, standing outside a door. As they evidently did not belong to our army I desired the driver to stop, and, entering the house, I was soon in the presence of two officers in blue military frock coats, gold scales on their shoulders, and wearing swords exactly as if they were of a regiment of the line. The one was a sub-inspector and the other a lieutenant of what is called in Ireland “the Revenue Police.” On producing my order to the constabulary these officers very readily and obligingly explained to me—who had never before even heard of their force—that its especial duties, which, previous to the year 1836, were performed by the military, accompanied by an excise officer, are to suppress illicit distillation and malting. In order to do so, armed parties, four times a week, by day and by night, and for at least eight hours per diem, make excursions to search the town lands, every suspected house, concealed caves, &c. The whole force consists of about 1000 men under officers whose ranks are as follows : —

1 chief inspector, residing at the Custom-house, Dublin, 9 second inspectors, 9 sub-inspectors, and 55 lieutenants. There are also a due proportion of sergeants, and about 1000 privates, almost all of whom are Catholics. The principal stations are commanded by sub-inspectors, and the out-stations by lieutenants. The men, like those of the constabulary, are armed, efficiently equipped, and well disciplined and drilled. Their uniform consists of blue military jacket, trowsers, brass buttons, blue foraging cap, with a brass bugle above the letters R. P., and a patent-leather chin-strap. I asked the officers whether religion in any way interfered with the duties their men had to perform. They both at once, nearly in the same words, replied, “ Oh no, our men seize as soon from a Catholic as from a Protestant !” “ What a moral,” said I to myself, “ is contained in those few words !”

Crossing the square, which, bounded by trees on one side, strongly reminded me of the “ Grande Place” of an ordinary French town, I proceeded through crooked streets, swarming alive with bare-footed women, and little girls in red petticoats, to the workhouse, composed of a series of well-arranged buildings, surrounded by a very high wall. As I was about to ring at the bell I was accosted by one of the relieving officers of the union.

“ There appear,” said I, “ to be a number of unroofed houses in the neighbourhood of Castlebar.”

“ Yes,” he replied, “ there are, but many who had good means took advantage of the badness of the times, and, on being evicted, went off to England and America.”

“ Have these evictions had much effect on the town ?”

“ They have made a number of empty shops,” he replied.

“ Had you any rows here during the election ?”

“ Yes,” he replied, “ the Priests’ party came down and got over the wall there” (he pointed to a spot where the iron spikes had apparently been forcibly wrenched off) : “ six were indicted for it, tried, and found guilty.”

“ How many relieving officers have you in the union ?”

“ There are four of us. Three of us are Catholics, the other is a Protestant.”

On entering the workhouse I ascertained from the master, a highly intelligent man, that his inmates consisted of—

82	Men	
122	Women	
17	Infirm	
57	In hospital	
218	Boys and Girls from 9 to 15.	
60	„	5 to 9.
13	„	2 to 5.
26	Infants.	

Total . 595

During the famine the numbers in the house were from 2500 to 2800.

On going up stairs, we entered a room in which were fifteen little, clean, healthy, bare-footed children from two to seven years of age, in old blue frocks and white pinafores.

One of them was standing close to the knees of a tidy woman, who, with her left fingers, kept on picking up lock after lock of the child's hair, and then with a pair of scissors mercilessly snipping it off close to the head.

In a handsome stone building I found boys employed in weaving, tailors' work, and in baking.

In the girls' school were, seated on benches and writing, 168 children, clean, healthy, and well arranged. In an opposite school were 72 boys from five to fifteen, but though they looked healthy, they, like the rest of the children I had seen in the Irish workhouses, were exceedingly diminutive for their ages. Among the men were only four that could fairly be called "able-bodied;" each of them told me he had been evicted by Lord Lucan. I asked the master what had become of the rest? His answer was very instructive. "Most of them," said he, "if they can scrape up half-a-crown, go to England, from whence after some little time they send from 2s. 6d. to 10s., and, as soon as their families get *that*, they are off to them."

"Does the father go first?" I thoughtlessly asked.

"Oh, no! we keep *him* to the last. One daughter went off to England from here a short time ago and sent 7s. 6d. *That* took out the mother and another sister. In a few weeks the mother and sister sent enough to get over the remaining two sons and the father. Total of the family, 6."

From one of the relieving-officers who were present I was told, that "the temporary destitution caused by Lord Lucan had been immense;" but, said he, "if I were a landlord I would do the same, for it *must* eventually be of enormous benefit to Ireland."

"How comes it," said I to the master, "that we hear of so many landlords being shot, and yet that Lord Lucan escapes?"

"I regret to say," he replied, "that among English people a *part* of Ireland is taken for the whole. I have been here four years, have usually attended petty sessions, and know of no one instance such as you have referred to. I allude," he added, as if correcting himself, "to the counties of Mayo and Galway." Pointing to an eminence in the immediate neighbourhood, enclosed by a capital wall, and in a state of good cultivation, he said, "That was a densely populated hill called 'Staball.' All the houses were thrown down, on which many of the inhabitants thereof just descended the hill into this workhouse."

We now passed into a room full of infants in cradles. In another clean, healthy, barefooted women were spinning and working. In the laundry they were washing. The master informed me that of the whole of the inmates about nine-tenths are from evictions.

On leaving the workhouse a gentleman intimately connected with it told me, as we walked along, that the reason of the mob breaking into the premises was to get possession of a voter who had sought refuge there from them. On gaining admittance they demanded this man from the master, who replied, "I will give you nobody, but, if you think he is here, you have full liberty to search for him." They did so, forcing the master to unlock every room, excepting the little dark closet in which he was secreted, which, strange to say, they passed unnoticed; and having satisfied themselves he was not in the house, they were departing, when one of the paupers betrayed the secret. With imprecations they demanded the key from the master, who said, "I will only surrender it on condition that you will not take his life." On their promising that they would not, he unlocked the door, and, following the mob and their captive, he proceeded with them to a hotel where he found collected thirty or forty priests.

"Here he is, yere Reverence!" exclaimed the ring-leaders, as they led in their prisoner.

“Your Reverence” said the master of the workhouse, addressing himself to apparently the chairman, “this man (pointing to the prisoner) took refuge in my workhouse. I hope you will see he is not hurt.”

“Who are *you* ? ” replied the priest.

“I am the master of the workhouse.”

“You deserve,” replied the priest, “to be turned out of it. Here !” he added, addressing himself to the captors, “put him out !” and the master accordingly was turned out “neck and heels.”

The mob had divided into two sections. One of the leaders of the larger one outside, on seeing the master, whose fearless conduct at the workhouse he as well as all the rest had witnessed, said to him, “You have done your duty, man, and we’ll give you three cheers !”

“No ! no !” exclaimed the party who had just left the priests, and the whole then followed the master, hooting, striking their sticks furiously against the wall ; in fact, said my informant, who was present on the occasion, “they were on the point of murdering him.” “And yet,” said I to myself, “the constabulary force has repeatedly assured me that the people of this very county are particularly honest, and now, that their passions are not improperly excited, that ‘there is scarcely any crime at all.’ ”

The main serpentine street of Castlebar, composed of houses generally of two stories high, and of all colours, gradually dissolves or dwindles into a long series of white-washed hovels. In various parts of this line were to be seen, with their eyes closing and heads drooping, donkeys laden with panniers of peat, and occasionally of coarse vegetables. Around them were women in parti-coloured shawls crossed in all sorts of picturesque folds over crimson petticoats, often fringed at bottom by their own rags. I also observed a number of children with bare hair nicely combed. In the barracks at the head of the street were quartered about 200 soldiers.

I now inquired the way to Lord Lucan’s, and, as it had never ceased raining for a moment, I proceeded, under my umbrella, to a lodge on the edge of the town opening by iron gates into a verdant, handsome, old-fashioned park studded with large trees.

The house, called “The Lawn,” appeared smaller than I had expected ; however, it was large enough for all I wanted, so, ringing at the bell, I gave my card to the servant and requested to know if Lord Lucan was sufficiently disengaged to see me.

I was shown into a large drawing-room, in which I was left for about a quarter of an hour, and I was getting a little tired of Bluebeard’s hall, when the servant entered, and begged I would follow him. I did so, and in a small study I was received by Lord Lucan, a tall, slight, intelligent, and very gentleman-like man, of apparently about fifty.

I told him at once, what I had not deemed it necessary to mention to any one else, namely, that in travelling through Ireland I was taking notes, which I intended to publish ; and having thus, as was due to him, put him on his guard, I asked whether he would have any objection to give me certain information I desired.

“None whatever !” he replied.

“What do you pay your labourers, if you please ?”

Without replying, he took from his table the pay-lists of his various farms, and, putting them into my hands, I perceived that he was not only giving from 9*d*. to 10*d*., throughout the year, but that most of his labourers were cottiers.

I asked him how much land he had cleared ? He replied, “I have in the neighbourhood of Castlebar about 15,000 acres stocked and cropped, and about 15,000 more in a transition state. The former is

farmed by myself ; the latter, when properly reclaimed, will be farmed by tenants for whom I am building houses costing about 500*l.* each.”

His lordship now said very kindly, “ We had better adjourn to my establishment, where we shall find my head steward, who will give you correcter information than I can. At all events,” he added with a smile, “ I had rather *he* should make a mistake than *I*.”

On proceeding to the establishment, in the centre of which stood erect the tall chimney of the industrious steam-engine that had already attracted my attention, I was led by Lord Lucan into a series of rooms full of what he termed “ *Cheshire* cheeses,” and with grammatical precision I was secretly rather cavilling to myself about the appellation, when, turning round, I perceived on either side of me a fine, strong, rosy-faced, plump young woman, neatly dressed, with, strange to say, shoes and stockings on !

“ There,” he said, with a smile, “ are Cheshire dairy-maids under the direction of a Cheshire woman married to a Cheshire man.”

“ Then,” said I to myself, “ they’re Cheshire cheeses, and no mistake !” Indeed, the young persons beside me looked as if they had been created on purpose to turn milk into Cheshire cheeses.

At a farm I found admirable stalls for 400 head of cattle, sties for 200 pigs, 48 boxes for horses or animals of any sort, 10 cattle-yards, 2 bone-mills, a flax-house, and that “ Jack-of-all-work” a steam-engine of 12-horse power, that was thrashing, cleaning, grinding, chaff-cutting, sawing, besides lifting water to supply the whole premises, and, moreover, heating a kiln for drying corn. The engine, which was in charge of a Scotchman, was heated by turf, at a cost of about 5*s.* a-day.

We were now joined by the head steward—a sedate, highly intelligent, respectable-looking Scotchman, who has been in Ireland thirteen years. He told me that the number of persons that had been ejected was about 10,000, of whom one-tenth were employed by Lord Lucan, who had given most of them cottages. He said that two Scotch bailiffs superintended the new farms at Ballinrobe, and that he had also one other Scotch bailiff under him at Castlebar. I asked him how the new plan was working.

“ At Ballinrobe,” he replied, “ where the system has been completed, the result is, that the land has become of double its former value ; that is to say, would keep double the amount of stock.”

“ But,” said I, “ how has it answered to the poor people ?”

“ Oh,” he replied, “ I think they are vara much improvit.”

Question.—If Canada fell into the hands of you Americans, how would you deal with the French population ?

Answer,—Well! I reckon that in about six months we’d just improve ’em off the face of the globe ?

“ In what way ? ” I asked.

“ The cottiers,” he replied, “ are better dressed, have cleaner cottages, have wages all the year round—from 1*s.* to 8*d.* a-day, and the greater number of them have gardens.”

“ What wages do other people pay ?” I inquired.

“ From 6*d.* to 8*d.*, without a house ;” but he added, “ few people here employ men all the year round.”

“ Have you ever been attacked by any one ?” I asked.

“ I have never met with a threat or an insult, nor have any of the bailiffs, nor any of the thousand men that work under them, excepting a little angry noise at the elections.”

As a curious addition to these statements, I was told by Lord Lucan, that, as Protestant Chairman of the Catholic Board of Guardians, he had only last week, in recommending several necessary reductions, proposed that the salary of the priest should be lowered from 60*l.* to 50*l.*, and that, his reasons being deemed satisfactory, the recommendation was agreed to without a word. How clearly does this show what can be done in Ireland—as indeed everywhere else—by decisive conduct !

From Lord Lucan's I walked to the constabulary barracks, where I found 1 sub-inspector, 1 head ditto, 3 constables, 2 acting ditto, 18 sub-constables, and 5 recruits for other stations, all in the same admirable order so often described. The ceilings and walls of the rooms, five in number, and of the passages, were literally as white as snow. On the table of one room, in which I ascertained there slept several Roman Catholics, I observed a Bible, showing that a Protestant was among the number.

“ Have you ever any differences between your men on account of religion ?” I inquired.

“ Oh, no,” said the sub-inspector, with great gravity, “ we never allow anything of that sort to exist among us !”

On walking towards the town at which I had left my carpet-bag, I saw to my astonishment, among bare-footed women and children, a footman in livery, with as much of his hair as was not covered by his hat a mass of white flour ! ! It is only fair to add he had not been thus victimised by Lord Lucan.

As the car I had ordered was all ready at a few minutes past four, I started for Westport ; but on leaving Castlebar, as I had to pass the county jail, I desired the driver to pull up, and, ringing at the bell, sent for the governor, to whom I produced my order to the constabulary. The establishment, which is on an extensive scale, is composed of a central building, containing the governor's house, chapel, store, and cooking offices. From this building there radiate, in various directions, six others : two for convicted male criminals, one for prisoners not convicted, one for debtors and revenue offenders, one for female prisoners, and a hospital. To each department there is a yard, in which the governor, by signal, assembled the prisoners belonging to it for my inspection.

Among the men there were two or three who appeared to be of violent dispositions, but generally speaking their countenances did not denote either vice or depravity.

Among the 72 women 14 were under confinement for felony, 20 for larceny, and the rest for begging or debt.

As the car proceeded along the hard wet road every now and then a great black crow stood, as if it was his intention to dispute our progress ; indeed, it was not until we got within a very few yards of him that, taking two or three preliminary elastic hops, he slowly and reluctantly flew to a short distance, and then again, bounding round sideways, stood, and with his brilliant black eyes inquisitively looked at us.

Excepting here and there patches of cultivated land, the country was bleak, wild, and moorlike ; and my mind was so engrossed with the various subjects that had flitted before it, that I believe I travelled nearly a mile without hardly knowing that, close to my back, I had a companion.

At last, pointing indolently to a deserted house from which the door and window had been abstracted, “ Is that part of Lord Lucan's new system ?” said I.

“ Tissur !” my driver replied, almost before I had completed the question.

“ Is that Lord Lucan ?” I added, as a very short stout man on horseback passed us.

“ One-of-his-tinnantsur !” he answered, almost in one word.

We passed a cabin, and, closing my umbrella and leaving it on the car, I walked in.

“ Will y’re Arnh’r take a sate ?” said a woman about thirty-eight, with a fine open countenance, her eyes being listlessly fixed on the daylight.

I sat down. On her lap was an infant. Three bare-footed children, as if hatching eggs, sat motionless on the edge of a peat fire, which appeared to be almost touching their naked toes ; above the embers was demurely hanging a black pot. Opposite sat, like a bit of gnarled oak, the withered grandmother. The furniture was composed of a dingy-coloured wooden wardrobe, with a few plates on the top, and one bed close to the fire. There was no chimney but the door, on the threshold of which stood, looking exceedingly unhappy, four dripping wet fowls ; at the far end of the chamber was a regular dungheap, on which stood an ass.

“ Where is your husband, my good woman ?” I said to the youngest of the women.

“ In England, yere Arnh’r,” she replied, “ saking work.”

Taking into consideration the rain, I thought altogether it was about as melancholy a scene as I could well witness ; nevertheless, I can truly say to the reader, “ Tarry a little, there is something yet !”

After trotting slowly on for about a mile, and after I had left Lord Lucan’s property, I came, as usual, to a small village of unroofed cabins, from the stark walls of which, to my astonishment, I saw here and there proceeding a little smoke ; and, on approaching it, I beheld a picture I shall not readily forget. The tenants had been all evicted, and yet, dreadful to say, they were there still ! the children nestling, and the poor women huddling together, under a temporary lean-to of straw, which they had managed to stick into the interstices of the walls of their ancient homes.

“ This is a quare place, yere Anrh’r !” said a fine, honest-looking woman, kindly smiling, to me, adding, “ Sit down, yere Arnh’r !”

One of her four children got up and offered me his stool.

Under another temporary shed I found a tall woman heavy with child, a daughter about sixteen, and four younger children—her husband also was in England, “ saking work.” I entered two or three more of these wretched habitations, around which were the innumerable tiny fields, surrounded by those low tottering stone walls I have already described.

Besides women and children, I observed among the jagged, sharp, triangular stone gables of these unroofed cabins two or three men listlessly standing stock-still ; and as I was a Saxon stranger in their land,—as I was of the same religion as the landlord that had evicted them,—and lastly, as I happened to have in my pocket, besides silver, a quantity of loose gold, I might not unreasonably have expected to have received among their ruined hovels what is commonly called a rough welcome

“ Ride your ways,” said the gipsy ; “ ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan—ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram ! This day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths—see if the fire in your ain parlour burn the blither for that. Ye have riven the thack off seven cottar houses—look if your ain roof-tree stand the faster. Ye may stable your stirks in the shealings at Derncleugh—see that the hare does not couch on the hearth-stane at Ellangowan. Ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram ; what do ye glowr after our folk for ?”—*Guy Mannerling*.

As however I was resuming my seat on the car I saw among the tottering walls women and children worming their way towards me ; as soon as I started, with uplifted hands and bare feet they exclaimed almost simultaneously, “ May the Almighty God preserve yere Arnh’r !” Indeed, long after I had left them I heard the same sounds reverberating through the rain that was cruelly falling on us all. They were really good people, and, from what I read in their countenances, I feel confident that if, instead of distributing among them a few shillings, I had asked them to feed *me*, with the kindest hospitality they would readily have done so, and that with my gold in my pocket I might have slept among them in the most perfect security.

The devotional expressions of the lower class of Irish, and the meekness and resignation with which they bear misfortune or affliction, struck me very forcibly. "I hav'nt aten a bit this blessed day, glory be to God !" said one woman. "Troth, I've been suffering lhong time from poverty and sickness, glory be to God !" said another. On entering a strange cabin the common salutation is, " God save all here !" On passing a gang of comrades at labour a man often says, " God bless the work, boys !" In meeting a person, if you want to get quickly into friendly conversation with him, it is usual to say to him, " God save ye !" to which, like the " Aloom salicoom !" and " Salicoom aloom !" of the Mahometans, the answer always is, " God save ye kindly !" the pronounciation of which is sure to secure a courteous and favourable reception.

A Protestant clergyman of great experience told me that in all his intercourse with Irish Catholics he had *never* met with an infidel.

In a few miles we came to an immense region, the property of Sir Robert (Somebody), bounded by distant hills, all utterly houseless, but turned into large fields teeming with crops, green and brown. On proceeding further I met with a similar picture on the property of Lord Sligo, and, although the recollection of the tragedy I had just witnessed was fresh both in my heart and mind, I could not but admit that the contrast between the old system and the new is so striking, that the superiority of the latter, to any one who witnesses it, does not for a moment require an advocate.

In all regions of the world it has been, and is, the stern decree of Providence that civilization, sooner or later, should override and overrun those feeble tribes who are innocently revelling in what is usually called a state of Nature ; and, accordingly, throughout the great continents of North and South America, and elsewhere, the virtuous and simple aborigines have, since the discovery of their respective countries, rapidly melted away, as they themselves figuratively express it, " like snow before the sun."

It might therefore not unreasonably be expected that, even if the land the poor people on which I had visited were their own property, it would be as impossible for them as it has been for the Red Indians to withstand the torrent of civilization that is steadily and irresistibly rolling over the world. But they are not, like the Red Indians and other aborigines, the lawful owners of the soil on which they sleep. It belongs to what in the scale of civilization may justly be called another race, by whom they are permitted to live upon it, on conditions to which both parties have agreed. Now, even if the poor people I have alluded to could have continued to pay their rents, any well-educated friend might have admonished them that, if they persisted in sleeping with their pigs and asses, and in subsisting with them on one single article of food, no payment they could offer could possibly prevent their being eventually swept away.

But in consequence of certain dispensations of Nature, they became first of all unable to pay their rents ; then destitute of subsistence ; and thus, by creating a necessity for poor-rates, they became a burden, gradually increasing in weight, until the landlord had absolutely not physical strength to bear it ; in fact, not only did the landlord get no rent, but for his land which gave him nothing he was out of that nothing required to pay rates he had no funds to supply ! By the interference of Nature the whole system, therefore, rapidly began to fall to pieces, and I have no hesitation in stating, as my humble opinion, that it is out of the power of man to attempt to hold it together any longer. The decrees of Providence are often, to our judgment, dark, mysterious, and unfathomable. In the present instance, however, the sentence pronounced, not *against*, but really IN FAVOUR of that portion of the Irish people who are at this moment—I repeat the truth—sleeping with their pigs and asses, may be thus expressed. The backwoods of Canada—the new settlements of America—the gold of California and Australia—endearingly pronounce to them the word " COME !" Simultaneously the potato disease very sternly utters to them the monosyllable " GO !" and with attraction on the one hand, and repulsion on the other, these virtuous people, in my opinion, have no alternative but to emigrate from their beloved and beautiful country, OR COMPLETELY TO CHANGE THEIR HABITS OF LIFE. This is not *my* decree, it is not the decree of the British Government, it is not the decree of the petty Irish landlord,—but it is the decree of a Beneficent and Omnipotent Power whose inflexible will no man can oppose.

As we were trotting along, a barefooted boy of about fourteen, after the car had passed him, ran after it, and then, holding on behind, he very cunningly kept his eye on the whip. Observing that when I turned towards him I did not frown, he smiled, looked at the lash, at me, and then smiled again, until, conspiring with him against the driver, I occasionally now and then treacherously fed him with a halfpenny.

Descending a narrow valley, through which runs a small stream, we now trotted through the welcome street of the sea-bathing town of Westport, nearly all built by the late Marquis of Sligo.

On driving at about six o'clock up to a capital inn, built and furnished by the late Lord, I was suddenly and politely asked by the landlord whether I would have any objection to sit down with some other gentlemen to a hot dinner which was just about to be placed on table? And as the subject of dinner had occasionally been uppermost in my mind for some hours, I most readily replied in the negative.

"Has this marn any claim upon you?" kindly added mine host, pointing to a fellow muttering something to me, in a hat the brim of which had apparently been gnawed off by rats, and in a pair of breeches that looked as if they had just been riddled with grape, canister, and musketry. I again, as briefly as before, replied in the negative; and begging that I might have some hot water, I was conducted by a very respectable-looking chambermaid into a room containing two beds, *one* of which she said I could have; in short, I found that the house was over-flowing with English tourists, each carrying in his or her right hand a pea-green 'Handbook,' that had been given gratis at Euston Station, and which, very unfortunately for me, had gratuitously told almost everybody to come to Westport. Without asking for a description of my bedfellow, I at once so positively declared I would not have one, that by persuasion and more effectual means I extorted a promise that I should be alone. At dinner we had a splendid turbot, a superabundance of lobster-sauce; but as I was rather too hungry to be at all particular, nothing else has lived in my memory excepting some potatoes of a sort called "*Protestants*," which, on my making some remark as to the oddity of their name, elicited from the waiter, as with a white napkin under his left arm he bustled around the table, an anecdote, showing how a gentleman had won a sovereign by betting with a party of jolly good Papists, with whom he was dining, "that he could prove there were, at table, more Protestants than Catholics."

As soon as our repast was over I walked for a short time about broad streets (most of which were at right angles), of houses two stories high, constructed on the acclivity of an exceedingly steep hill. At the intersection of four of the principal thoroughfares I observed on a Grecian pedestal the statue of a bald-headed hero of some sort, standing with his right hand on his heart, and evidently thinking hard. "Who is that?" said I to a wet boy, on whose bare head the rain was steadily pattering. "He was," he replied, "a rich marn of this place, and so they made hum a startu."

From the statue of Dives I went to the barracks of the constabulary, where I found the beds of a subinspector, a head constable, two Protestant constables, and nine sub-constables, of whom eight were Roman Catholics and one a Protestant. Of the above force, eight, with the sub-inspector, and twenty-seven more from other parts, had the day before proceeded to Clare Island, a most beautiful elevated spot, about four miles long by one and a half broad, situated in the entrance of Clew Bay, nearly seventeen miles from Westport, for the purposes of eviction.

The head constable, an exceedingly well-educated intelligent man, who had been at Westport five years, and who had been present at nearly all the numerous evictions in its neighbourhood, told me that, although in unroofing the houses the women often stood by, crying bitterly, excepting a trifling animosity at Kilmeen, no resistance whatever had been made.

"They have always," he added, "been quite amenable to the law. Indeed, considering their sufferings at the time, it was a matter of wonder they were so submissive."

"You must surely," said I, "sometimes have had great difficulty in the execution of this duty?"

"Well, Sir," he replied, "we certainly have, but we endeavour to joke off anything that is said against us; and even if it comes to blows, we will bear a good deal rather than have re-course to deadly weapons."

“ Has there been much crime in the county ?”

“ None whatever,” he replied—“ some petty larcenies, that’s all.”

“ Have you had any religious disagreements among your force ?”

“ Oh no !” he replied, “ if any person insults one he insults all. Our force is paraded, as on other days, every Sunday. Every man then goes off to his own place of worship.”

I asked him from whom I could obtain the most correct account of the numerous conversions to Protestantism which of late years had been effected in the West of Ireland ? In compliance with my wishes he at once conducted me to two gentlemen who appeared to be well conversant with the subject.

The serious mistake which the English Government made long ago was appointing Protestant clergymen who could not preach in Irish to localities in which the native language was in current use. In those localities, as well as in all others, a zealous Catholic priest has naturally always deemed it his duty by every means in his power to keep his own flock separate from those of a different creed ; and as the same policy was not pursued by the Protestant clergy, it follows, of course, that conversions, if any, were more likely to be effected from the latter creed than to it.

As death, however, is said to level all earthly distinction, so did the famine in 1846 bring the suffering Catholics and the Protestant clergy into close communication. The poor, when they saw the tenderness and indefatigable exertion of the clergy of the Established Church, applied to them for relief—obtained it—and the barrier of prejudice which had separated them having been thus broken, they listened to their doctrines, and, being simultaneously relieved by their charity, they willingly became converts to a religion which they practically found to be so different from what it had been represented to them. But the greatest success has been among the Roman Catholic children, who, having in like manner originally been forced by famine to congregate around the Protestant clergy, have had the Bible put into their hands, and by it and by the schools have subsequently been converted.

The innumerable conversions which, from their commencement in the little island of Achil in 1835 to the present day, have been effected in the West of Ireland, from Achil to Dingle, and from Dingle to Oughterard, in the counties of Donegal, Cork, Kerry, and even in Dublin, have been most extensive and extraordinary. For instance, in the town of Westport there are now three Protestant churches, and five more in the parish, extending over an area of 153,675 acres. At Clifden the conversion burst out so rapidly that already by far the greater portion of the inhabitants are Protestants. Indeed, the extent of the change that has been effected is sufficiently demonstrated by the recent violence of the Roman Catholic priesthood, especially against education ; for, as may be well imagined, it is impossible to have educated, as has been the case, nearly half a million of children for twenty years on the National System I have described without producing immense effects. The Sisters of Mercy zealously combine with the priests to stop the movement, and their efforts are extraordinary. In short, every engine is brought to bear against this alarming conversion ; a regularly organised denunciation is levelled against all aiders and abettors of the Protestant missionaries, as well as against every one who affords them any countenance whatever. Any Roman Catholic who listens to a Protestant clergyman, or to a Scripture reader, is denounced as a marked man, and people are forbidden to have any dealings with him in trade or business, to sell him food, or buy it of him. For instance, a shoemaker at Westport lately seceded from the Catholic Church ; the Sisters immediately offered him 2*l.* a-week, which he refused. Not a journey-man dared work for him. A priest went round to every man that dealt with him, until only one person would sell him leather ; in short, he lost his custom, and rapidly came to a state of starvation.

It is, however, only fair to state that by the Roman Catholic priesthood it is declared, that of this extraordinary amount of conversion, which they do not attempt to deny, almost the whole has been effected by what they call “ the meal system ;” and, accordingly, they sneer at those who have deserted them as “ jumpers,” belonging to what they term “ the stirabout religion.”

I must say, however, that I highly approve of this stirabout movement.

It would, no doubt, be extremely satisfactory if, among the followers of different creeds, the question of religion could be left entirely to find its own level according to its own intrinsic merits ; and, if this calm judgment could practically be obtained, I believe the Protestant religion would gain all it could possibly desire. But there exists no religion whose ministers are immaculate. On the contrary, excited by zeal and enthusiasm, they but too often contend one against another, until, in the case of Protestants and Catholics, not only has much angry language been used throughout Ireland, but in a late instance, over the body of a dying convert to Protestantism, the two ministers, as is notorious, actually came to blows. As the subject, therefore, is not, and cannot be, one of calm unruffled judgment, it appears to me that, instead of there being any harm, there is much good in the benevolent Christian practice that has lately been adopted by the Protestant missionaries in Ireland, of offering a wholesome breakfast of meal to all indigent children who may be desirous to attend their schools ; for what can more clearly demonstrate to young people the inestimable advantages of the Christian faith than that its ministers and supporters should openly practise the charity they preach, so powerfully recommended, as follows, by St. Paul ?—

“ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. . . . And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.”
— 1 Cor. xiii.

But it is said, “ Meal is a bribe, and people ought not to be *bribed* to change their religion.”

But a slated house is a bribe, desks are bribes, benches are bribes, books are a bribe, pens are a bribe, ink is a bribe, yellow soap is a bribe, a towel is a bribe ; and, accordingly, if little children are to find all these articles for themselves, how barren and uncharitable is the invitation that is made to them ! But the poor of Ireland have not the money to pay for these elements of education ; and if, therefore, it be absolutely necessary for the rich to provide their children with a comfortable school-room, wash their faces and hands, and give them books, ink, pens, and paper, surely there can be no great sin in filling their poor little hungry stomachs as well as their empty heads.

I, therefore, most earnestly and fervently hope that all who are friendly to the Irish will promote the good cause of supplying these distant schools with meal. In this friendly effort the rich Protestant has the power of contributing infinitely more, and consequently of producing infinitely more effect, than the poorer Catholic ; but while religious antagonism ought, generally speaking, to be condemned, in this struggle the poor children, whichever way the scale may preponderate, are sure to be gainers by the contention ; and with this prayer and recommendation in their behalf, after the toils of my journey, I must now wish my gentle reader “ Good night !”

A fortnight in Ireland (1852)

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