

Irish Adventure

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Ireland.

A Tale.

Harriet Martineau

1832.

THE accidental bounty of the Mr. Rossos enabled Dan to furnish himself with the few tools he needed to begin his tillage, and his wife with a wheel and a small stock of flax. As for clothes, they were obliged to wear, day and night, those they had on, having neither a change for the day, nor a bed which might supersede the use of them at night. This was thought no great hardship by any of the family, for it was a very common one. Many of their neighbours never attempted to undress after their garments had passed a certain point of wear. The most tidy, who really did patch their clothes very patiently while the patches would hold together, were for the most part content, after that time, to tie them on till they dropped away in fragments. Their reason for not undressing was one which their reproving superiors could not gainsay ;—that, once off, no power on earth could get the garments on again. This was nearly the condition now of Sullivan's clothing and that of his wife ; but they could scarcely trouble themselves to think of such a trifle in the midst of the affairs they were undertaking. New life and spirit had been given them by the timely support yielded by their connexion with Dan ; and they all, under his direction, gave full play to the spirit of enterprise which ever distinguishes the Irish when in prospect of an equitable recompense of their exertions. Sullivan might now be seen toiling as a labourer under his son-in-law, thatching the cabin-roof (now in earnest) with rushes from the sandbanks, or bringing sand from the beach to work into the boggy soil of the potato-field, or cutting turf for fuel, or even carrying loads of it on his back for sale. The first money thus gained went to hire a pack-horse from one of Mr. Rosso's tenants, for the carrying out a further supply of turf ; and this answered so well, that Dan finished by selling their own store, and making fuel for home consumption, after the manner of the Irish peasantry, when the turf in the neighbourhood is exhausted ; that is, by scraping up what is left in the state of mire, and baking and shaping it with the hand till it becomes dry enough to be combustible. Their food was but poor as to quantity and quality, till Dan thought himself justified in adding a quarter of a cow to his establishment ; from which time, potatoes and milk, milk and potatoes, were thought as good a provision as they had a right to look for.

When that which is usually the idle season came round, namely, the weeks which succeed the potato-sowing, when nothing more is to be done to the crop, Dan proposed a grand scheme to his father-in-law, nothing less than to enlarge their cabin by adding a room at the end. Sullivan smacked his lips, and stretched himself, somewhat mortified to have his expected period of rest broken in upon by new toils : but, remembering that the summer nights were, indeed, somewhat oppressive to four people sleeping within a space of twelve feet by eight, with no air-hole but the door ; and looking forward, moreover, to the in-conveniences of Dora's confinement in such a place, he gave a groaning assent to the undertaking, and went through his part of it with a tolerable grace. He cursed, for his own sake, however proud for his daughter's, the grand notions which Dan seemed to have about a cabin, making the

new apartment half as long again as the old one, and leaving space in the mud wall for a window. When finished, however, all was right in his eyes, and he did not sigh, as did the young folks, for yet more comforts ; if indeed, they were not rather necessities. Dora wished for a bed for her mother, who was growing more and more weakly, and got little rest on her bundle of straw. Dan wished for the same comfort for Dora, but was obliged at present to content himself with looking forward to the time when they might increase their stock of fowls, and obtain feathers enough from them, to sew up in a sack, and make a bed of. He had a little money by him, and was often tempted to spend it in Dora's behalf ; but they both agreed that the first necessity was, to keep out of the clutches of the agent and the tithe proctor. Of paying the whole rent, there was but little chance ; but as they had no partners, and as nobody near was likely to pay better than themselves, they hoped to satisfy the agent with such a proportion as might fairly average what he was in the habit of receiving in lieu of the nominal rent. On the whole, they considered themselves going on " fair and easy, and prosperous entirely."

They had been nearly a year in their abode, the rent-day was coming round, and many jokes were continually suggested by that fruitful topic, when Father Glenny looked in upon them, in the course of his customary circuit among his people. Dora came curtseying to the door to invite him to repose himself on the turf seat within ; her mother rose feebly to pay her reverence as he entered, and hoped he would be pleased to remain till her husband and Dan returned ; the one being at work some way off, and the other having business to settle with the agent. The priest, who looked remarkably grave, assured her he was in no hurry, and examined their countenances as if to discover whether they had any thing particular to communicate. As they waited, " mannerly" for him to introduce his own topics, he began by remarking on the improvements in the place, and enquiring into the worldly condition of its inhabitants. His countenance brightened as he listened to their cheerful reports of their prospects, but he still seemed uneasy till he had put one question. Had Dan taken care to secure the lease ? he asked ; adding that this was a point on which many tenants were unaccountably and disastrously careless. They would put off signing and securing for months, if not years, after taking possession, and many were the cases in which he had known them rue their procrastination. Dora replied with a smile, that she hoped she might, by this time, say that the lease was in her husband's pocket ; it had been drawn up, almost ever since they settled in this place, but, for some reason or another, never signed till now, such being her husband's business with the agent this morning, and also to pay the first year's rent. At this moment, Sullivan burst in, exclaiming, " Lord save us ! your reverence, what can have fallen out now ? Here's Dan coming up the glen, raving like mad, and my own eyes seen him hold up his fist at the agent ; and they, as quiet as lambs together till now.

Dora was flying out to meet her husband, when the priest laid his hand on her arm.

" Stop, my daughter, and listen to me," he said. " I know it all. For your husband's sake hear it from me, that you may not add to his passion. Remember your vow of trust, daughter, and renew it now, in your time of need."

Dora sat down trembling, beseeching, by her looks, that she might hear the truth at once. Father Glenny related that Mr. Tracey had written to his agent to say, that it was evident to him that his property had been much injured, and the condition of his tenantry no less so, by the subdivision of land having been encouraged to too great an extent : that it was his pleasure that the reverse process of consolidation should immediately begin ; and that for this purpose, no new leases of small portions of land should be given, and no partnership tenancies allowed henceforward ; his intention being, that instead of a small plot of ground supporting many holders, one substantial holder should unite several small plots of ground

into a respectably-sized farm. The zealous agent, Father Glenny went on to say, had looked round him to see how many tenants he could eject, and had put Dan and his family down in his list ; the unfortunate delay in signing the lease having put their little possession into his power. When Dora had made sure that this was all, she turned to her father who was standing against the wall, tattooing with his brogues upon the threshold. She might have thought that he did not hear the news, but that he was humming in an under voice the tune to which he had sung, on a somewhat similar occasion, the burden—

“ The curse o’ Jasus light on ye all !”

His old wife not daring to give vent to her anger in the presence of the priest, had hooded her head with her petticoat tail, and ceased her spinning. Father Glenny was beginning a strain of consolation when Sullivan cried,

“ O murther, Dora, my darling, what a sight it is to see Dan raging like the sea itself ! King of Glory ! he is mad entirely.”

The priest placed himself by the threshold, so as to be the first to meet the unhappy man. At the sight of the black coat, the oaths and threats were silenced ; and presently the knit brow relaxed, the fierce eye was tamed before Father Glenny’s mild, serious gaze. Before any words were exchanged, Dora drew her husband in with a smile, and asked him how they were worse off now than on their wedding morning, and where was the wonder of young and poor people like themselves having to go forth again to seek a home ? She did not doubt they should again find one, and have a warm corner moreover for her father when he should be past his work.

Her husband impatiently stopped her, saying that there were no more homes to be had for poor tenants, and that if she wanted a warm corner, she must seek it among the beggar’s haunts in the towns,—warm enough, with seven families in a cellar ; a comfortable place truly, for her babe to be born in, and her parents to end their days in and disregarding the priest’s presence, he prayed for confusion on every mother’s son of the Traceys from the first that had gone before, to the last that should come after. This brought Father Glenny to interpose.

“ Peace, my son !” he said. “It is blasphemy to curse man for the judgments of heaven.”

He was going on, but Dan interrupted him to say that he was not thinking of heaven at all in the matter. What he cursed was the clearing of the estate, and the cruelty of those who would turn so many out of house and home.—Father Glenny still insisted that this was heaven’s work, since the Traceys were no Protestants, no strangers in the land, but members of the true church, ancient possessors of the soil, only kept at a distance by being deprived of their political rights, and as anxious as gentry should be, for the prosperity of their people. He mentioned that Mr. Tracey, while giving the fatal order, had mentioned the good of the tenantry as one of the motives thereto. It was clear to him that good would arise out of this measure, since poverty had increased in proportion to the subdivision of the land ; and the distress which must prevail in the mean time, should be patiently borne as the judgment of heaven on the sins of the poor, and on the slowness of the rich to divide their substance with the needy.—Dora, who was accustomed to receive with reverence whatever her priest let fall, enquired humbly whether he would have them go and ask assistance from Mr. Rosso, he being the only person in their neighbourhood who had substance to divide with the needy. Father Glenny shook his head, sighed, and advised them to remain where they were, till he

should have considered their case and that of some of their neighbours, who were suffering under similar calamity. On inquiring whether they had any savings, Dora joyfully mentioned the rent, naturally supposing that Dan would not part with it when he found how matters stood ; but her countenance fell when she extracted from her now moody husband the fact that the agent had received him with a smiling countenance, requested him to count down the money while he prepared his pen and ink, signed to his assistant to sweep off the gold, silver, and copper into a drawer and turn the key, and then, and not before, explained the necessity he was under, of refusing to fulfil his engagement, scoring the lease from corner to corner with his newly-mended pen as he spoke, and bidding the insulted Dan move aside to make way for his betters, who were fortunate enough not to have put off signing and sealing.

“ Then we have nothing left,” said Dora calmly.

“ Murther !” cried her father, “ and we might have had an elegant bed to have carried away on the shoulders of us, instead of a coat that has nothing left but the sleeves, by reason of their having never been used. And much besides is it we might have had if you had let us be comfortable, Dan, and leave the rent to take care of itself in peace. By dad, we may very well pass for beggars without any pretending.”

His son-in-law looked fiercely at him, and the priest interposed to show that it was all right. All were to have their dues, and Mr. Tracey should, therefore, receive his rent ; for paying which honestly, Dan might fully trust he should never suffer. After more words of exhortation and comfort, the priest gave Dora a small present of money, and expressed his hope of seeing them all at mass in the morning, after which he would converse further with them on their affairs.

Dan stood watching him from the door, after receiving his blessing with a dubious expression of countenance. Dora had sunk down at her mother’s feet, hiding her face in her lap, when she heard her husband say, “ Praise to the powers, he’s out of sight! Up with you, you women, and all ready for nightfall.”

To the question of all three, what he meant to do ? Dan replied, by giving orders, in a tone which none dared disobey. He made Sullivan take a spade and dig up, with all his might, potatoes which were not yet fit for cropping. Dora found up sacks and turf-panniers, and Dan proceeded, as soon as twilight came on, to impress into his temporary service a horse which grazed in the neighbourhood. On this animal he packed the panniers, so as to afford a seat between them, and then commanded the trembling Dora to mount by his assistance. She clasped her hands, crying,

“ O, Dan ! where will you be for taking us in the dark night? You are over full of haste, I’m thinking, Dan.”

His only reply was to lift her upon the horse.

“ My mother !” cried Dora, weeping. “ You will not leave her alone ; and if my father stays without us, depend on it he will call in the neighbours.”

Dan lifted her down again, went for the old woman (who had seemed stupified ever since the news came), placed her between the panniers, gruffly desired Dora to remain behind till her turn came, and began to lead the horse up the hill which stretched towards the seashore. Dora followed, however, at some distance, determined to see whither her mother was to be conducted. The horse was a grey one, which enabled her to keep within sight, and out of

hearing, amidst the increasing darkness. It was a dreary walk, over four or five miles of boggy ground ; and many times would she have called out for her husband's help, if she had not feared his present mood more than the stormy sky above and the treacherous soil beneath. Gusts of wind blew from the sea, piercing her with cold through her scanty raiment. Drenching showers were dashed in her face, blinding her so effectually for many minutes together, that she would have lost the track and have sunk yet deeper than she did in the bog, if the same cause had not obliged those whom she followed to stop also, and turn their backs for awhile to the storm. The fitful gale brought to her the feeble wailings of the old woman, and the growlings of her impatient husband, who cursed heaven, earth, and hell, at every impediment to their progress. During one of their pauses on a ridge, over which the roaring of the sea rose more distinctly to their ears, Dora came closer upon them than she intended. The horse started, and his snort seemed to be answered from a distance by a cry. The old woman saw something waving near her, and screamed, and Dan himself shook with superstitious terror at the very moment that he swore another oath at those who were scared when the echoes were up and awake on a stormy night.

“ The echoes *are* up and awake,” said Dora, venturing round to her husband's side. “ Take care, Dan, that they repeat nothing you would not have heaven hear.”

As she expected, his anger was now turned on her, for risking her own life and her child's by so perilous a walk. She made no reply, but held by his arm till they arrived at their destination, thankful that he had slackened his pace and moderated his wrath somewhat, as if in consideration for her. They stopped on the extreme verge of the cliff when Dan desired his wife to hold the horse while he carried her mother home. She was not left for many minutes to conjecture what this home could be. Her husband led her down to a doorless and half-unroofed cabin, placed just so far below the verge of the cliff as to be unseen from the land. Having lodged both the women under shelter, Dan tried to strike a light with a flint and steel he had brought with him ; but as fast as the little rush candle was lit, it blew out again, there being no corner of the hovel free from draughts. There was nothing for it but to abide in wet, cold, and darkness, till dawn. The horse being unloaded, Dan mounted, and bidding the women expect Sullivan and himself before morning, set off again across the bog. Three hours afterwards they appeared with another horse, and a heavier load ; and, to Dora's disappointment, her husband again left her, not saying this time when he should return. Sullivan expressed his belief that Dan's purpose was to spoil the place as much as possible before morning, and then to hide himself for a time in some such convenient sort of place as he hinted he had thoughts of betaking himself to the next day. No inquiries could get out of him what sort of place that was

Dora spent the rest of the night in mounting from the hut to the cliff, and descending from the cliff to the hut, trying to comfort her mother meanwhile, who lay moaning and peevishly complaining of manifold evils that it was impossible to remedy. Towards morning, it startled Dora on her watch to perceive a bright light burning in the direction of their late abode. She called Sullivan to look at it, who forthwith began to wave his hat, crying,

“ Hilloo, hilloo ! Dan is the boy in the world to deal with Flanagan. Hilloo ! Dan, my darling, you've finished the job out of hand ! 'Twill be as good as a year's rent to see the agent overlook the place, let alone the tenant. It's burning—the cabin is, my jewel, and the turf-stack beside it ; and it warms my heart at this distance !”

“ And Dan—where is Dan, father ?”

“ O, the cratur, he'd just stop up the drain, and cut the pig's throat, and throw him into the

bog, and see that everything that he couldn't bring with him is put in the way of the fire ; and then he would set it alight, and creep off some roundabout way to us here."

This was exactly what took place : and the device was so much to the taste of most of the ejected tenants, that the example was followed to a great extent before a sufficient force could be summoned to check this destruction of property. For the next three nights, fires were visible here and there in the dark and dreary glen. As fast as the agent and his body-guard galloped from one point of watch to another, a blaze arose in their rear ; and as soon as they arrived at the scene of destruction, the perpetrators had vanished, and it was too late to do any good. A mocking laugh came, from time to time, out of the darkness which surrounded the horsemen, in the intervals of the conflagrations ; but this always happened on spots where the ground on either side the road was not of a kind to be attempted on horseback. In the morning, slain pigs, not in condition to be made food of, were found scattered on the road ; houghed horses lay groaning about the fields ; and many a poor cow was burned in its shed. The agent was driven half frantic by these insults and injuries. He sent messenger after messenger for soldiers, called on Mr. Rosso, his sons, and tenants for assistance ; and besides taking these necessary measures of defence, pointed out every cottier already ejected, or about to be so, as a criminal ; exasperated every man he met by his insults ; and rode against the women and overthrew the children as often as he passed a party of homeless wanderers, going they cared not whither, and to be kept alive they knew not how. It appeared so clear to the young Rossos that Flanagan was endangering his own life, and aggravating the evils of the time, by awakening the revengeful passions of the people, that one or other of them kept continually beside him, in order, by their presence, to impose a restraint upon him, and, by their mediation, to sooth the wounds he inflicted. They well knew that, by thus associating themselves with so obnoxious a person, they ran the risk of being hated by the people ; but this risk they had courage to brave for a time in a good cause.

Alexander had taken his turn one day, when he rode up to join his father and brother, who had compassed a circuit of observation in a different direction, and were now returning home to refresh themselves before beginning their evening watch.

" Father," said Alexander, " do you mean to forbid your tenants to receive any of these ejected cottagers ?"

" Certainly not : it is no affair of mine."

" So I thought ; but Flanagan has not only been routing out some poor creatures from a barn of one of Tracey's tenants, but has taken upon him to declare that they must remove themselves out of the district, as they would be harboured neither by you nor any of the proprietors in it."

" What business has the fellow to answer for anybody but himself ?" said Mr. Rosso. " However, the poor people know more of the matter than he does. They know that I am harbouring many,—as many, alas! as I can afford to relieve. Would this were all over, boys ! Every case I hear of seems a harder one than the last ; and it breaks one's heart to leave them to take their chance, See, from this very point, what melancholy groups of them :—aged parents, or helpless children, or weakly women in each, to be a burden upon the spirit-broken cottager !"

" Where will they go ? What will become of them, father ?"

“ The greater part will crowd into the towns, and herd by hundreds under the same roof, till the fever sweeps half of them away. Others will stroll the country as beggars ; and others will live by plunder. The most fortunate of them will be those who will beg enough in crossing the island to pay their way over the sea in search of English wages. The noblest in their natures, the brave and high-spirited, will become whiteboys, and die amidst acts of outrage, or on the gibbet. So much for that policy of landlords, by which they first increase the numbers of their tenantry, in order, by force of competition, to let their land high ; and then, finding that they have gone too far, take a fit of consolidation, and make no provision for the crowd they called up around them, and now deprive of the means of subsistence. What think you of such policy, Henry ?”

“ I was just thinking, Sir, that it is rather surprising to me that you lift up your voice, on all occasions, against establishing poor-laws in Ireland, while you have such scenes as these before your eyes.”

“ While that question is pending, Sir,” said Alexander, “ and it is a question which will not be speedily settled, and which, if settled in the affirmative, will bring tedious arrangements after it, in the meanwhile, is not Tracey bound, by every merciful consideration, to give his ejected tenants dwellings elsewhere ? Ought not each one of them now to have a slip of land on yonder mountain-side, and wherewith to build himself a cabin ?”

“ That would afford no present relief,” observed Henry. “ Besides having to build their cabins, the people must drain and manure their ground by a process of many months, before it will yield them the food they are this day in want of.”

“ Even supposing these new lots to be prepared before the ejectment was served,” said Mr. Rosso, “ the plan would be a bad one. It would secure a future repetition of precisely the same evils we are deploring to-day. Bad cultivation and over-population, through the too extensive subdivision of land, are our grievances ; and to remedy them, Alexander, you would begin afresh to divide and subdivide, and encourage the increase of numbers as before. This seems to me scarcely reasonable.”

“ But the poor-laws we were talking of, Sir,” interrupted Henry ; “ do tell me how you can resist pleading for them. Tell me, if you please, that these poor people have been idle and improvident—tell me that they have brought families into the world without a prospect of maintaining them; but tell me whether such destitution as theirs is not a dreadful punishment for what are, after all, more faults than crimes. Look, too, at the number of innocent persons that suffer : the old, who lie down to die by the wayside after a life of toil ; the infants, who expire of hunger on their mothers’ breasts ; the sickly, who, instead of being tended by careful hands, are shrinking and shivering in the wet and cold ;—look at these wretches, in contrast with Tracey, living in luxury abroad, on funds wrung from the misery of his tenantry. . . .”

“ Tracey is a benevolent man,” interrupted Alexander ; “ he may be mistaken in the way in which he sets about improving the condition of his tenantry, and he may have chosen his agent badly ; but he is far from being a hard-hearted man.”

“ True,” replied Henry, “and all this makes for my argument. Levy a rate upon him, and he will no longer be insensible to what passes at home ; the burden of relieving distress will no longer fall wholly upon the charitable, upon you, father, and your kindhearted tenants, who are giving up their barns for lodging, and rood after rood of their potato-grounds, for food for the destitute. O, father, when I see these things,—the calamity of the oppressed, the insensibility of the oppressor, the liabilities of the charitable, the exemption of the selfish and

the avaricious, I cannot but cry out for the interposition of the strong arm of the law to rectify these monstrous abuses, by making charity compulsory.”

“ If the law could rectify these abuses, Henry, I would cry out with as loud a voice as you. It is because I am convinced that a legal charity would only aggravate them, that I advocate other methods of rectification. We all know that a permanent state of comfort depends on character. Do we not ?”

“ Certainly : we might give and give for ever to a set of depraved paupers, without any better result than impoverishing ourselves.”

“ True. Well ; the mistake seems to me to lie in supposing that, as character and comfort are connected, we must produce character by giving comfort ; whereas this is beginning at the wrong end ; and the results have always been the direct reverse of what was expected. We must begin at the other end. . . .”

“ But, my dear father, how long it must be before education can work. . . .”

“ Remember, Henry, there is another kind of education always going forwards, besides that of our reading and writing schools—the education of circumstances. By our present institutions, we educate our peasantry to indolence and improvidence ; and by calling in poor-laws, we should only be appointing an additional teacher to enforce the same bad lessons. Instead of this, I would fain have institutions which should stimulate, instead of superseding industry,—which should cherish, instead of extinguishing true charity,—and ensure its due reward to prudence, instead of offering a premium to improvidence.”

“ I know the evils you speak of have grown out of the English pauper system ; but must they, therefore, be inherent in every system of legal charity ?”

“ They must ; because the supposition of a *right* to assistance is involved in the very notion of a legal provision ; and herein lies the mischief. You will never improve character (which is the same as improving the external condition), while you separate character and its consequences,—while a right to support is accorded to any man, whether his conduct be wise or foolish, correct or profligate. Lay hold of a child, teach him effectually that industry and prudence are the means of comfort, and you put comfort within his reach. Take the profligate, or the reckless man, in his middle age, give him the means of comfort, and you will not give him character ; he will presently be as poor as ever, and the more reckless for having received arbitrary assistance.”

“ The more arbitrary charity there is, the less natural will there be,” said Alexander. “ In England, our peasantry are held in respect for their filial duty and neighbourly kindness ;—too little known there, alas! except in the remote districts where the poor-laws have not yet shed their blight over the growth of kindly sympathies. Give us poor-laws, and here, too, the aged will be committed to the cold care of strangers, orphans will be without a home, and the maladies of the body will involve the soul-sickness of pauperism.”

“ Such is the fate of the helpless in England,” said Mr. Rosso ; “ and their calamities are aggravated in precise proportion to the amount of legal relief provided. The most deplorable misery prevails in the southern counties, where the poor-rate is highest : the condition of the poor improves to the northward, where a dislike of this species of relief has been longer kept alive. There is still less distress in Scotland, where assessments for the poor are rare ; and least of all where their condition is confided to voluntary charity. That the misery is as much

the consequence as the cause of legal relief, is proved by the result of an experiment of abolishing a stated mode of relief. Pauperism was on the perpetual increase in a populous district under a system of assessment ; the assessment was discontinued, and pauperism vanished. It was swept away by the current of human affections, as soon as they were restored to their natural channels.”

“ It seems rather absurd, to be sure,” observed Alexander, “ first to complain that the misery about us arises from the obstructions imposed on human powers, and then to seek to remedy it by obstructing the current of human affections.”

“ But what, after all,” inquired Henry, “ have these human affections done ? Whence comes all this misery, if they have been left free ?”

“ They have been rendered impotent by the force of bad institutions,” replied his father; “ they live and act, but are baulked of their natural rewards by the injustice of our economy, and the impolicy of our government. While industry is overloaded and foresight baffled, as at present, children may honour their parents, and the poor have compassion to one another, but they can yield little mutual support against indigence.”

“ It seems rather an injury to Ireland, brother,” said Alexander, “ to ask what its benevolent sympathies have done. Our public provision for lunacy and sickness, is greater than in England ; and innumerable plans have been tried, at a great expense of capital and trouble, to lessen the amount of pauperism. That all have failed, betokens not a want of charity, but an overpowering counteraction from other quarters. If we look only at the Mendicity Associations, what vast sums have been raised by them as often as the increase of pauperism suggested to some the idea of a compulsory rate ! All this voluntary charity would cease, as it has ceased elsewhere, Upon the establishment of a poor rate.”

“ But, father, we ought to give more every year as our resources increase ; and they certainly are increasing on the whole.”

“ They are ; and this is another reason for deprecating an institution which would swallow up all we have gained, and effectually prevent the further progress to improvement. The vast and increasing unproductive consumption which takes place wherever there is a poor-rate, would presently absorb our now growing capital, and repress the spirit of improvement which is beginning to stir among us. Let our capital be allowed to spread itself naturally ; let more and more of the lower classes be encouraged to clothe themselves decently, to add a room to their cabin, to exchange a portion of their potato diet for oatmeal or bread ; and far more will be done for the lowest class of all, than if the earnings of the industrious were directly applied to the maintenance of paupers. I see bakers’ shops beginning to appear in many of our villages ; and I regard them as an indication of growing prosperity. If, in their place, I were to see workhouses, or any part of the apparatus of a legal charity, I should regard it as an indication that a final and overwhelming curse had lighted upon the land.”

“ But, father, every poor-rate need not have the abuses of the English system. It is not an inherent necessity in a poor-rate, that it should grow in one century from five hundred thousand pounds to eight millions.”

“ No ; but the principle of growth is inherent in the system, whether that growth be rapid or slow ; and the destruction of the country in which it is established becomes merely a question of time. The only way to get the better of it is, to annihilate it in time ; and this being the case, it is mere folly to call it in for the relief of temporary evils.”

“ It seems to me,” said Alexander, “ that such a system would aggravate the very evils we want to remedy. It is for want of capital that the land is subdivided too far. If revenue is so far absorbed by a poor-rate as to check its conversion into capital, this subdivision will go on.”

“ Undoubtedly such would be the effect in our agricultural districts ; and in the manufacturing towns the case would be as bad. Our linen-weavers would be a burden upon the rates in slack times, and their masters must encroach upon their wages-fund to support them ; and thus the masters would be brought lower and lower, to the permanent injury of their men.”

“ I do not believe,” observed Alexander, “ that the thing could ever be done here. We have not the requisites. All have a nearly equal horror of an assessment ; and I could name many parishes where there are none to manage the business, and many more where no one would undertake it.”

“ There would soon be an end of that difficulty,” replied Mr. Rosso ; “ there are people enough ready to administer the fund for the sake of living upon it. We should have a new class of unproductive consumers introduced ; and for very one of them we should lose a hardy labourer, who would commit to them his aged parents and helpless little ones, and go to seek good wages in England. A poor exchange truly !”

“ Do you complain of numbers, father, and yet object to the emigration of our poor ?”

“ To that of productive consumers who leave all the helpless members of their families upon our hands ; and of this kind of emigration there would be a vast increase upon the establishment of a pauper system. The same influence which would supersede domestic charities, would dissolve domestic ties : and would not a legal relief be an irresistible temptation to a man to throw his burdens upon the public, and go to seek his fortune elsewhere ? If it is done already while no legal provision exists, it would be done more extensively upon the establishment of such a provision.”

“ Well, then, Sir, what would you do ? Something, I suppose.”

“ By all means. I would do much, and without loss of time, lest there should be many lives to answer for.—Till education can be made universal in Ireland, so that the interests of the people can be safely committed to their own guardianship, we must weather the evils which surround us, opposing peculiar methods of relief to their peculiar stress. We must consolidate our small farms.”

“ O, father, look about you and see the consequences !”

“ Hear me out, Henry. We must gradually consolidate our farms, removing our ejected population, not to other small holdings in the neighbourhood, but to regions where population is the one thing deficient. The people are already making efforts to do this for themselves, at a tremendous expense of hardship and danger. It should be done for them on a better plan by those who eject them, on the understanding that it is a temporary measure, caused by the new arrangement of landed property. The tenants who remain should be freed from the burden of supporting two religious establishments, from all interference between themselves and their landlords, from all impediments to the free exercise of their industry, and to the gradual accumulation of capital.”

“ Might not emigration remedy the worst evils of the poor-laws, father ?”

“ We cannot afford, Henry, to be for ever doing and undoing in any such way. To increase numbers by poor-laws and lessen them by emigration, would cost endless toil and expense, and leave our grievances untouched : but as a temporary measure, as a specific remedy for a specific grievance, nothing can be wiser, or, in our case, more necessary. Tracey meant to do a patriotic thing when he ordered the consolidation of this estate : the deed would have answered to the will, if he had done it more gradually, carefully providing a settlement in Canada or Australia for every family that he displaced.”

“ And why not on some of our waste tracts at home ?”

“ Because much capital is required to bring them into a productive state ; while, in the case of emigration, the only cost incurred is that of transportation to a place where capital super-abounds and labour is the one thing wanted.”

“ And this then, you think, opens a fair prospect of improvement.”

“ I do. If this plan be pursued in conjunction with the removal of the most galling of our political fetters, we may see Ireland the flourishing region nature intended her to be. If a pauper system be introduced instead, our case is hopeless. To use the words of one who well understands our maladies and their causes, ‘ its probable effect appears to me to be to fill Ireland with a population multiplying without forethought ; impelled to labour principally by the fear of punishment ; drawing allowance for their children, and throwing their parents on the parish ; considering wages not a matter of contract but of right ; attributing every evil to the injustice of their superiors ; and, when their own idleness or improvidence has occasioned a fall of wages, avenging it by firing the dwellings, maiming the cattle, or murdering the persons of the landlords and overseers ; combining, in short, the insubordination of the free-man with the sloth and recklessness of the slave.’ ”

Illustrations of political economy (1834)

Author : Martineau, Harriet, 1802-1876

Volume : 3

Publisher : London C. Fox

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Robarts — University of Toronto

Collection : robarts; toronto

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/illustrationsofp03martuoft>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org

July 11 2011