

Irish Fatality

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Ireland. A Tale.

Harriet Martineau

1832.

DORA was long in gaol before she could form an idea what was to become of her. The place was crowded, in consequence of the late disorders in her native district ; and her child pined for want of the bracing air to which it had been accustomed from its birth. Night after night when she was kept awake by its wailing, day after day when she marked how its little limbs wasted, did the mother sigh to be one of those whose lot she had till now thought very wretched. She would fain have been among such as were driven from the glen to seek a subsistence in the towns, begging by day, and nestling wherever they could find a hole by night. When she was brought into the town, she met several of these, whose faces she well knew, changed as they were from the cheerful or thoughtful countenances of dwellers in a home to the listless or bold expression which characterises vagrants. She now envied them their freedom, however mournful their condition in other respects. They might carry their babes abroad into the free air, and if too much crowded in their noisome abodes, sleep under the open sky. They might meet their proscribed connexions, if such they had, without other restraints than their own prudence imposed : while she must see her infant languish for want of that which nature designed for all ; and live on from day to day without hope of beholding husband or father, or of knowing what had become of them.

The first relief she found was in forming a desperate resolution respecting her infant. She had passed a long, wakeful night in such a state of distress as even she had seldom known. The heat was stifling, from many sleepers being collected within a small space. Her child would not lie still on her bosom one moment. Sometimes screaming, sometimes wailing, its signs of suffering wrung its mother's heart. She was first irritated and then terrified by the complaints of all who were disturbed like herself, and who seemed to think it her fault that the child would not rest. Hour after hour was she kept on the stretch, watching for tokens of fatigue from the child, or of mercy from her neighbours ; but the heat increased, fresh cries wore her nerves, and new threats of getting rid of the nuisance made her feel as if every pulse in her body would burst. She threw herself down on her pallet, on the side of which she had been sitting, and closed her eyes and ears, muttering—

“ God help me ! and take me and my child where we may sleep in peace and no waking , My mind is just going as it did one night before ; and let it go, if my child was but safe with its father. Little would it matter then what became of me ; for Dan and I shall never meet more. O ! hush, my child ! hush ! I could part with you for ever if I could only ease you from wailing, and from this sore strife. There is a curse upon me, and upon you while you live on my bosom. You never caress me, my child ; you struggle out of my grasp ! Other babes clasp their mothers, but you push me away. Well you may ! God gave you free and strong limbs and an easy breath ; and 'tis I that have laid a withering curse on your flesh, and a heavy load on your little breast. 'Tis I that have dropped poison in your veins. You shall go, my child. I will bear to be haunted all my days with your screams and your throes ; I will bear to lie down without you, and wake, feeling for you in vain ; I will bear to fold my empty arms when I see babes laughing in the sunshine, and wonder whether you are playing on the sod or lying beneath it,—if I can free you from my curse, and trust your little life to those who can

nourish it better than I. O hush ! my child. Bear with me this last night ! If I could but see you but once more quiet, if you would only once lay your little hand on my lips, if you would but look at me !—Again, again, again ! your life will be spent, my child ; you will die before I can save you !—O, neighbours ! do ye think it's my will that my child should suffer this way ? Do you think its cries do not pierce my ears more than yours ? Is it worse for you to lose a night's sleep than for me to be parting with my child for ever ?”

The softened grumblers inquired the meaning of her words, and praised her for intending to send the babe out of the gaol immediately, only complaining that it had not been done long before. All were ready to help her with suggestions how to dispose of it ; none of which suggestions, however, satisfied her.

All difficulty on this head was removed the next day by the appearance of Father Glenny, who came, as he had done once or twice before, to administer to the religious wants of several of his flock who had found their way hither. He was shocked at the change in Dora since he last saw her, and thought the child dying. He engaged at once to have it carried out of the prison and conveyed into safe hands. Whose hands these were, he could not disclose, as Sullivan's retreat was made known to him under the seal of confession, and the circumstances must not be revealed even to the old man's only child. Of Dan the priest had heard nothing. No one had seen or heard of him since some days previous to Dora's capture.

The only thing which struck the priest as remarkable in Dora's state of mind was her utter indifference respecting her approaching trial. It seemed never to occur to her ; and when she was reminded of it, it appeared to be regarded as a slight and necessary form preliminary to her going away for ever. She never took in the idea of acquittal, or remembered that she had a part to perform, and that she was one of two contending parties, with either of whom success might rest. She made no complaints of being a passive instrument in the hand of power, or of any hardship in the treatment she had experienced or was still to bear. She made no preparation of her thoughts for defence or for endurance. She was utterly unmindful of what was coming, taking for granted that she should never more see her husband, and beyond this, having no thought where she was to spend her days, or how she was to end them. This state appeared so unnatural, that the priest, after enlarging in vain on her accusation and means of defence, ventured to rouse her by mentioning a report he had heard that an attempt was to be made to rescue her and her companions by breaking the gaol before the trials, or by attacking the guard which should conduct some to the gibbet and others to the coast, when their doom was to be enforced. For a moment a gleam of hope kindled in her eyes ; but she immediately observed that if the report was abroad, the magistrates were no doubt on their guard, and the white-boys would ascertain the attempt to be vain before they committed themselves. After this, however, it was observed that she could recollect nothing. She had nothing to confess, nothing to ask for, no messages to leave, no desires to express. With a dull, drowsy expression of countenance, she looked at the priest when he rose to leave her, and seemed to ask why he stood waiting.

“ Your child, my daughter,” said he, extending his arms to receive the babe.

With a start and a flushed cheek, she hastened to wrap it in the only garment of her own which she could spare to add to its scanty clothing. After a cold kiss, she placed it in the arms of its new guardian, saying with a stiff smile,

“ I wonder whether there are any more such mothers as I am ! I forget all about my child's coming to me, and I don't think I care much about its going from me. I'm past caring about any thing at times.”

“ And at other times, daughter——”

“ Hush, hush, hush ! don't speak of them now. Well ; there have been widowed wives and childless mothers ; and I am only one more ; and what is to come is dark to us all, except that there is death for everybody. No blessing, father, to-day ! It has never done me any good, and I cannot bear it. Try it upon that little one, if you like.”

As soon as the priest was gone, muttering amidst his tears the blessing to which she would not listen, Dora threw herself down on her pallet and instantly slept. She scarcely woke again till called up, eight and forty hours after, to prepare for trial.

Sleep had restored her to perfect sanity, and a full and deep consciousness of her misery. A demeanour of more settled sorrow, a countenance more intensely expressive of anguish, were never seen in that or any other court. She was silent from first to last, except when called upon for the few necessary words which her counsel could not say for her. Though deeply attentive to the proceedings, she appeared to sustain no conflict of hope and fear. In her mind it was evident that the whole matter was settled from the beginning.

She had all that law and justice, the justice of a law court, could give her. Her countrymen must still wait for the more enlightened law, the more effectual justice whose office is rather to obviate than to punish crime : but all that pertains to law and justice, after the perpetration of crime, Dora had, both in the way of defence and infliction. She had good counsel, an impartial jury, a patient and compassionate judge. She was accordingly fairly tried and condemned to transportation for life, on the first charge ; the second was waived as unnecessary, the issue of the first being a conviction.

As the condemned was leaving the court, she heard (for on this day nothing escaped her) the lamentations of one who had known her from her infancy, over her having had an education. “ If she had never been taught to write,” urged her sage neighbour, “ this murderous letter could never have been brought against her.” To which some one replied that she would still have been convicted of perjury.

“ Is there no language to threaten in,” asked Dora, speaking rapidly as she passed, “ but that which is spelled by letters ? Overthrow every school in the country, empty all your ink into the sea, make a great fire of all your paper, and you will still find threats inscribed wherever there is oppression. There will be pictures traced in the sands of the sea-shore ; there will be pikes stuck up on each side the doors ; there will be mock gibbets for signals, and a multitude of scowling brows for warnings. Let those who are above us look within themselves, and as sure as they find these traces of tyrannical desires, will they see round about them marks of revengeful plots, though the people under them may be as brutish in their ignorance as slaves in their bondage. When do prosperous men plot, or contented men threaten, or those who are secure perjure themselves, or the well-governed think of treachery ? Who believes that conspiracy was born in our schools instead of on our cold hearths, or that violence is natural to any hands but those from which their occupation and their subsistence are wrenched together ? The school in which my husband and I learned rebellion was the bleak rock, where famine came to be our teacher. A grim set of scholars she had——”

“ What is the prisoner talking about ?” cried a potential voice from behind. “ Remove her, officer !”

Irish Disaffection.

THE rumour of the intention of the whiteboys to break the gaol, or otherwise rescue the prisoners, was unfounded. Since the new works were begun on Mr. Tracey's estate, the numbers of the disaffected in the district had lessened considerably, and those who remained were for the most part employed on distant expeditions. Dan had been out of his own neighbourhood so long that he heard of Dora's capture only a few days before her trial, his father-in-law having failed in his attempt to give him immediate intelligence of the event. The exasperated husband vowed, as soon as he learned her sentence, to move heaven and earth to rescue her ; and all that one man could do to this end he did : but he was not heartily seconded by his companions ; they considering the attempt too hazardous for their present force, and not seeing that this case required their interference more than many which were presented to their observation every day. If their attempt had been agreed upon and planned ever so wisely, it would have been baffled by the fears of the magistrates, who, alarmed by the rumours afloat, determined to send the convicts round by sea to the port where the convict-ship awaited them, instead of having them traverse the island. A small vessel was secretly engaged to wait off the coast at the nearest point, to receive the convicts, before it should be known that they had left the gaol.

Father Glenny, who was aware of the scheme, and therefore prepared to make his parting visit at the right time to the unhappy outcasts from his flock, repaired to Mr. Tracey's when his painful duty was done, dispirited, and eager for some relief from the harrowing thoughts which the various interviews had left behind. Mr. Tracey invited him to inspect the works, and see what had been done thereby for the estate and for the people. They rode to the shore just as the labourers were leaving work, and at the proper time for conversing with some of them respecting their prospects, and the hopes and views with which they were about to begin life in another land. An ardent desire to emigrate was found to prevail : a desire arising out of hatred to middlemen and tithe-proctors, discontent with as much as they knew of the law, and despair of permanently improving their condition at home. They acknowledged their landlord's justice in enabling them to remove advantageously, smiled at the victory over Mr. Orme, on which they prided themselves as a grand parting achievement, and spoke with gratitude of the kindness of Mr. Rosso's family during their time of sore distress ; but the only person among their superiors in whom they seemed to place implicit confidence was Father Glenny. To him they said little of the barrier which they believed to separate the rich and the poor in Ireland : on him no man among them looked with an evil eye ; against him were directed no remarks that there was one sort of justice for the powerful and another for the helpless. Their affection being strong in proportion as it was concentrated, they almost adored their priest, and swore that when their wives and children should have followed them abroad, Father Glenny would be the only tie to their native district which they would be unwilling to break.

“ How different an embarkation will theirs be !” he observed to his companion, when he had given his blessing and passed on along the ridge of the cliff. “ How different a departure from that of their brethren who are sent away as criminals ! Here, the husband goes in hope of soon welcoming his family to a home of better promise than they leave ; there a wife is carried away alone, in disgrace, severed for ever from her husband and her child. It makes one thoughtful to consider that the least painful of these departures might possibly have been rendered unnecessary by a wiser social management ; but, as for the the other, we ought to kneel in the dust, crying for mercy, till Heaven shall please to remove from us the scourge of crime, and the heart-withering despair which follows it. If you had seen and heard what I have seen and heard this day, you would tremble at the retribution which is sent upon the people and their rulers. Let us pray day and night to avert it !”

“ And in the intervals of our prayers, father, let us exert ourselves to avert it by removing the abuses from which it springs. Instead of applying palliatives, let us go to the root of the evil. Instead of providing a legal relief for our poor, which must in time become a greater burden than we now labour under, we must remove the weights which oppress their industry, guard against the petty tyranny under which they suffer, and all the while, persevere in educating, and still educating, till they shall be able to assist our reforms ; to understand the law beneath which they live ; instead of defying it, to respect the government (by that time more efficient to secure the objects at which it aims) ; and to act upon the belief that men of various creeds and ranks and offices may dwell together without enmity. May not all this come of education, coupled with political reforms, and sanctioned by the blessing we pray for ?”

“ Heaven grant it may !” exclaimed the priest, who was now attentively observing some one who was sitting on the sunny side of a fence which ran to the very verge of the rock. It was an old man, with a babe on his knee, to whom he was alternately talking and singing in a feeble, cracked voice. His song was of the sea, to which he looked perpetually, and over which the setting sun was trailing a long line of glistening gold, to the great delight of the infant as well as its guardian.

“ It is Sullivan !” exclaimed the priest, “ and it is poor Dora’s child that he holds on his knee. True it is that God feeds the young ravens that cry. Yonder babe has thriven in this desert as if its nightly rest were on its mother’s bosom. The old man, too, looks cheerily. You will not take advantage, my son, of his having ventured above ground in a still hour like this. You will not bid the law take its course on one whose gray hairs came before his crimes began ?”

“ Not for the world,” said Trace y, “ Shall we alight and speak to him, or would it alarm him too much ?”

They drew near while still unobserved by the old man, whose noisy sport hindered his hearing their footsteps. At this moment, a small vessel appeared from behind a projecting rock, her sails filled with a fresh north wind, and appearing of a snowy whiteness as they caught the sunlight. When she shot across the golden track, the babe sprang and crowed in the old man’s arms.

“ The saints’ blessing on ye, my jewel !” cried he, in almost equal glee. “ It’s there you would be, dancing on the blue waves, instead of in my old arms, that will scarcely hold you in more than an unbroken colt, my pretty one ! There she goes, my darling,

Full of boys so frisky
With the sweet-smelling whiskey,
Flying over seas and far away ;
Good luck go with ’em——”

“ Sullivan !” cried the priest, who could no longer endure this ill-timed mirth.

The old man scrambled up in a moment, and made his obeisance before the mournful gravity of his pastor.

“ Sullivan !” continued Father Glenny, “ Do you know that vessel ? You cannot be aware what freight it bears ! You——”

“ I know now all about it,” replied the old man, pettishly. “ How could your reverence expect my old eyes to see so far off what ship Dora was on board of ? And what makes your reverence bring his honour to be a spy on an old man’s disgrace, unless he comes to catch me,

and send me after Dora ? 'Tis near the hour when foxes and justices come out after their prey. You may have me for the catching, your honour ; and much good may it do you to have got me.”

He would not listen to a word Mr. Tracey had to say, but went on addressing the child, as if no one had been present, his glee being, however, all turned to bitterness.

“ Agh, my jewel ! and you knew more nor I, while you sprung as a lamb does when the ewe bleats. Stretch your arms, my darling, for your mother is there ; and fain would I bid ye begone to her, though it would leave me alone in the wide world, where there’s not a thing my eyes love but you, babby dear !”

And so he went on, sitting doggedly down with his back to the gentlemen, who retreated, intending to come again the next day, when he might be in a more communicative mood. At some distance they looked once more behind them, and saw that another man had joined Sullivan, and was standing over him, pointing to the receding vessel.

“ It is Dan !” cried the priest, quickly turning his horse and riding back. Before he could reach the spot, Dan had snatched a hasty kiss of his infant, and disappeared. The old man’s countenance was now fallen, and his tone subdued.

“ You will never see Dan more,” said he, “ though you may hear much of him. The just and merciful will never see his face again, and he has forsworn his priest. Where he will show himself from this time, it will be in the dead of the night, with a crape on his face and a pike in his hand. They that have made him mad must put up with a madman’s deeds.”

“ Mad !” cried Tracey.

“ He means exasperated,” replied the priest.

“ Dan hoped to the last to rescue his wife, and the failure has made him desperate.”

“ I’m alone now in the world entirely,” muttered Sullivan, rocking the now wearied infant to sleep. “ Barring this orphan’s, I shall see little of the face of man. It was the face of a devil that bent over us just now. Long may it be before it scares us again.”

Sullivan said truly, that Dan would henceforth be heard of and not seen by any but the victims of his violence. He who was once the pride is now the scourge of the Glen of the Echoes.

Summary of Principles illustrated in this Volume.

WHATEVER affects the security of property, or intercepts the due reward of labour, impairs the subsistence-fund by discouraging industry and forethought.

Partnership tenancies affect the security of property by rendering one tenant answerable for the obligations of all his partners, while he has no control over the management of their portions.

A gradation of landlords on one estate has the same effect, by rendering one tenant liable to the claims of more than one landlord.

The levying of fines on a whole district for an illegal practice going on in one part of it, has the same effect, by rendering the honest man liable for the malpractices of the knave.

The imposition of a church establishment on those who already support another church, intercepts the due reward of labour, by taking from the labourer a portion of his earnings for an object from which he derives no benefit.

The practice of letting land to the highest bidder, without regard to former service or to the merits of the applicants, intercepts the due reward of the labourer, by decreeing his gains to expire with his lease.

All these practices having prevailed in Ireland, her subsistence-fund is proportionably impaired, though the reduction is somewhat more than compensated by the natural growth of capital.

While capital has been growing much more slowly than it ought, population has been increasing much more rapidly than the circumstances of the country have warranted : the consequences of which are, extensive and appalling indigence, and a wide spread of the moral evils which attend it.

An immediate palliation of this indigence would be the result of introducing a legal pauper-system into Ireland ; but it would be at the expense of an incalculable permanent increase of the evil.

To levy a poor-rate on the country at large would be impolitic, since it would only increase the primary grievance of an insufficiency of capital, by causing a further unproductive consumption of it.

To throw the burden of a pauper system on absentees would be especially unjust, since they bear precisely the same relation to the wealth of their country as its resident capitalists.

In the case of Ireland, as in all analogous cases, permanent relief can be effected only by adjusting the proportions of capital and population : and this must be attempted by means suited to her peculiar circumstances.

The growth of capital should be aided by improvements in agricultural and domestic economy, and by the removal of political grievances ; from which would follow a union in place of an opposition of interests.

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