

Letters from Ireland 1847

Letters from Ireland During The Famine of 1847

Alexander Somerville

The following letters were written while travelling through Ireland in the spring of the disastrous year 1847. They were published in the Manchester newspapers at the time and are reprinted here with a view to being circulated where the newspapers were not read :—

No. I.

Dublin, 20th *January*.

I devoted my first day in Dublin to inquiries at the relief committees—at that for the city of Dublin and that for the country generally. I was referred to the inspectors of the poor, who in the different parishes take the office upon them, each a week at a time, of visiting the dwellings of the numerous applicants for relief. I visited some of the poorest districts of the city, also the wharves where vessels were unloading cargoes of food, and the offices of some parties extensively connected with the railway works in the interior of Ireland.

I have also read several of the pamphlets relating to the present crisis of Ireland, of which the booksellers shops in Dublin possess many.

One, entitled “ The Case of Ireland Stated, by Robert Holmes, Esq.” was advertised by bills in every street. It was selling at the price of two shillings, so, thinking two shillings might be worse disposed of than in getting “ The case of Ireland stated,” I parted with them. Robert Holmes, Esq. I was told, is a barrister of long-standing and an able man. He was the brother-in-law of the celebrated Robert Emmett. No man knew Ireland or loved Ireland better than he did. This made me the more desirous to have the case of Ireland stated by him. If I say that Nero, playing the fiddle while Rome burned, was similarly employed to Mr Holmes, my meaning will be understood ; but even fiddle-playing might have some excuse if Nero neither cared nor professed to care for Rome. Mr Holmes professes to care for Ireland, and yet fiddles her sentimental tunes in her ears while she is famishing. He contrasts the generous manner in which Rome treated her conquered provinces with that in which England has treated her conquered countries, and particularly Ireland. For one single practical suggestion or symptom of a practical thought in the writer’s mind, the pamphlet is read and read in vain. It is long, wordy, eloquent, and useless.

Not so a pamphlet entitled “ Observations on the Evils resulting to Ireland from the Insecurity of Title and the existing Laws of Real Property, with some Suggestions towards a Remedy.” There is no author’s name to this ; but I believe the author is Mr Pym. Here are a few brief passages, in which he states the case of Ireland :—

“ *Landlord*—Title doubtful, or difficult to prove ; so much so as to interfere with the sale of the property.

“ *Tenant*—Has no lease, or a lease at so high a rent that, being always in arrear, he is always liable to be ejected.

“ *Landlord*—Estate heavily mortgaged, or liable in a jointure or payment to the younger members of his family ; so that his nominal income is barely sufficient to pay the annual demands, and he has consequently no capital to improve the property.

“ *Tenant*—Bound for a rent that takes all he can spare beyond a mere subsistence, and consequently cannot improve his farm.

“ *Landlord*—Estate being entailed, or closely bound by settlements, he has only a life interest in it, and is therefore disinclined to spend money on improvements which will not be immediately remunerative.

“ *Tenant*—Having no certainty of possession, he will not, of course, give any labour or expend any money for which he does not expect an immediate return.”

On a former visit to Ireland, I found those leading facts, as here stated, to be prevalent everywhere ; and everywhere then and now the natural results shew themselves. Thus, says Mr Pym, “ A country naturally fertile is left almost unimproved and only half cultivated ; the fields are undrained ; the rivers, left without care, overflow their banks and turn good land into marsh ; straggling hedges and uncultivated spots deform the face of the country ; the hay or corn, insufficiently secured, is exposed to the weather ; and much land capable of culture is left to its natural wildness, or is so ill tilled that it is but little better than waste.”

It may be as well to proceed to business at once. I am only entering upon Ireland at present ; but I have been through the country before, and have studied its agricultural condition, and the causes which make that a bad condition. And the business to be done is to authorize the sale of the land by act of Parliament. A supply of food for the starving peasantry is a temporary necessity, and must be attended to immediately ; indeed it is being performed to an extent never known in the history of nations. But this is only a temporary expedient. Remedies, permanent and comprehensive, must be applied to Ireland, and the first of the permanent remedies must be the simplification of the transfer of land. All land in Ireland must be made saleable. Capital will then flow in to improve it, not before. When the land is bought and sold on commercial principles it will in like manner be leased to tenants. It may be a daring thing to say that the law of entail must be abrogated, but no one step can be taken to save Ireland from the recurrence of those terrible visitations of famine which come so often upon her, or from the continuance of that squalid misery which is always upon her, until this is done. And now is the time to do it.

“ This fertile but neglected land,” says the pamphlet before me, “ is occupied by an embarrassed gentry, striving to maintain the position in society to which their nominal income would entitle them, and by a pauper tenantry, multiplying to excess, outbidding one another in the ruinous contest for land, and at length resorting to lawless violence in order to retain its possession as their only means of subsistence. The peaceful and industrious annually retire by thousands from the scene of contest, to exert, in the forests of America, the intelligence and energy which, under more favourable circumstances, would have strengthened their country with a happy and independent peasantry.”

The unembarrassed landlord of an entailed estate stands thus—“ He is in reality not the owner ; he cannot deal with it as an owner ; he is merely a trustee for others ; he has no interest in its future, though permanent, improvement, except so far as he may wish to benefit his successors ; he can never reap the benefit himself ; he cannot sell ; he cannot dispose of a part, even though the alienation of a part might greatly enhance the value of the remainder ; he holds it during his lifetime, as his predecessor has held it, unaltered, unimproved, to transmit it to his heir, clogged with the same restrictions, alike injurious to him and to his country.”

So much for an unembarrassed landlord. Here is the landlord with an entailed estate and debts upon it :—“ As is unfortunately too often the case, he has received the estate,

encumbered under a settlement, with a jointure to the widow of the late possessor, and provision for daughters and younger sons. In what difficulties is he at once involved—this owner for life of a large tract of country, with a large rent roll, but, in fact, a small property ! He cannot maintain his position in society without spending more than his income ; debts accumulate ; he mortgages his estate, and ensures his life for the security of the mortgagee. Of course he cannot afford to lay out anything in improvements ; on the contrary, though, perhaps, naturally kind-hearted and just, his necessities force him to resort to every means of increasing his present rental. He looks for the utmost amount ; he lets to the highest bidder, without regard to character or means of payment. If his tenants are without leases, he raises their rents. If leases fall in, he cannot afford to give the preference to the last occupier. Perhaps, with all his exertions, he is unable to pay the interest, or put off his creditors. Proceedings are commenced against him, and the estate passes, during his lifetime, under the care of the worst possible landlord, a receiver under the Court of Chancery.”

There can be no doubt that if the entailed estates were sold, the portions of the younger sons would more commonly be a business education, with means to start in business, instead of some money to buy a spirited hunter, as now. The very name of a castle, with a brother in it, and a wide tract of country, with that brother’s name upon it as landlord, is delusive, through all the lives of the younger members of the family, while the tenant of the castle is himself unfit for any good purpose. If his wide domain were sold to those who could make it perform its natural and national purposes, he would have money wherewith to purchase and cultivate and make profit on a smaller estate, or to enter upon other business, or give his sons a business education. Are he and all his race too proud to be men of business because they are entailed landlords ! If they be, let them cease to be the chiefs of entailed beggars in any other way they can devise. They must do something. The fertile soil of Ireland and her millions of people are not to be perpetually blighted and famished, that heirs-entail may masquerade as landowners and play at living in castles.

I shall not pursue this topic farther at present. As to the immediate wants of the peasantry, these are urgent. I do not judge from the hordes of people whom I see begging in the streets and at all public places ; these have always abounded in Ireland. But persons whom I have seen, whose vocation is not to write in newspapers—men of business, who have recently been in the west and south of Ireland, declare that no newspaper account of the distress is exaggerated. The people are famishing. It will be my business to give such details as I meet with as soon as I can. But, in the meanwhile, let no hand that can help be held back, under the impression that the distress has been exaggerated.

No. II.

Dublin, 23d *January* 1847.

One of the first things which attracts the eye of a stranger in Ireland, at least such a stranger as I am, and makes him halt in his steps and turn round and look, is the police whom he meets in every part of the island, on every road, in every village, even on the farm land, and on the seashore, and on the little islands which lie out in the sea. These policemen wear a dark green uniform and are armed ; this is what makes them remarkable, armed from the heel to the head. They have belts and pouches, ball cartridges in the pouches, short guns called carbines, and bayonets, and pistols, and swords. The only difference between them and the regular military is, that the military do not always carry guns and pistols primed and loaded, not always bayonets in their belts, not always swords sharpened. The Irish police never go on duty without some of these.

In the Phoenix Park at Dublin, a barrack of large size, with drill ground, is devoted to the training of these armed police, from which barrack they are drafted into the provinces, as soon as they are trained to prime, load, and fire, to fix bayonets and charge ; to march, counter-march, and so forth ; these to be distributed and shaken out upon the land in half dozens or dozens.

The next thing that has struck me as remarkable in Ireland, previous to the present time, has been this—that rent was usually paid through the sheriff, his officers, the keepers put in possession of the pigs and potatoes, corn and cows, and the armed police who assisted the keepers to keep possession. The property distrained upon was sold by any one whom the landlord or his agent appointed ; it being legal for a mere labourer to act as auctioneer, if so ordered. The agent of the landlord was usually himself the buyer, at least virtually so. He got legal possession of the crops by means of this distraint and by the aid of the armed police, and he sent the corn, pigs, potatoes, or whatever the property might be, to a seaport town for shipment to England. Arrived in England, they were sold readily. The landlord got his rent by their sale in England, not by their sale under the hammer in Ireland ; and the people of England were pleased to find so much food coming from Ireland, though often wondering why the Irish people should be so poorly fed at home, as report said they were, when they sent so much food to England. That food left Ireland by the process I have described. Some landlords and some districts of country might be exceptions ; but in the south and west of Ireland, and in most of the midland counties, that has long been the method of collecting rents, and of exporting provisions to England.

The stranger could not get so far through the country, nor be so long in it as to understand this system of distraint, without seeing that the people were ragged to a degree of wretchedness not seen in any other country ; that they were lodged with their pigs, the pigs not having a better lodging than a sty, and that the food of the people was potatoes, and only as many of them as the distraint system of getting rent left them. There being all the staff of sheriffs' officers, keepers, attorneys to sue out warrants, fees for warrants, attorneys to work on the other side to urge the tenant to repletion and resist, and so draw from the wretched man costs ; there being all these to pay in addition to the rent, while the rent was paid by selling the crops at prices over which the tenant had no control, it is no wonder that the Irish tenantry were always poor and starving, or only kept from starving by a miserable diet of potatoes, while those who saw the Irish corn, cattle, and pigs coming to England, thought the Irish should be well-fed to have so much to spare.

This was rendered all the worse by the next characteristic of Ireland, namely, that those tenants thus distrained upon were tenants in the third or fourth degree. The head landlord was not the receiver of the rents. Some leaseholder was under him, both of them perhaps being non-resident. A person of some capital, of much energy, and little conscience, took a townland or other such portion of an estate. He let that out again at a rent which none of the peasantry who became his tenants could pay, which he knew they could not pay, but which, in the intense competition for land to keep in bare life, they engaged to pay ; they not being able to get out of arrears at any time, could always be seized upon by him, and this has been his system—whenever they had anything. He was thus able at harvest or potato time, by the arrears due, to seize, sell, and send to England, or to certain stores to be ready for the English market, the corn and potatoes, before the producer of them eat too much. But this system of exacting engagements to pay rents which could not be paid, which never were expected to be paid, in order to have always the power of seizing the crops and selling them before the producers had time to eat them up stump and rump, was not confined to middlemen ; it has been done by the head landlords, and by many of them. As much was left to the miserable tenantry, but no more, than would keep them in life, with strength enough to put another crop in the ground.

But this system went farther. The enmity of Protestant and Catholic led the first, he being usually the landlord, to allow the latter, the potato-eating tenant, to get in arrear, that he might be at any time evicted by means of the law when a better tenant offered for the land. The Protestant landlord, having all the law on his side—all the officials being Protestants, from the lord-lieutenant to the hangman—he was seldom particular about the moral justice of such cases. There were the armed police ever at hand to help the landlord, if the tenant did not yield possession, and betake himself to a ditch, to lie and die quietly. If he took vengeance into his own hand while in that ditch, or behind the hedge that skirted it and the high-way road, there was the hangman for him ; that is, if they could catch him, and get the noose on his neck. But such a man was not easily caught in such a country, among such people. To be sure the pursuing law was not always particular about the right man ; so as one or two or three were caught and hung up, the law, and the landlords, and the juries whom they employed were pretty well satisfied ; pretty well satisfied, unless a fourth or a fifth should be caught and sworn against ; then the law was not satisfied until these were hanged by the neck also. And when the right man, the actual criminal, fell into the law's hands at last, he too must go as the two or three, the four or five innocent men charged with his crime, and found guilty by means which could only be found in a country corrupted by faction as Ireland has been;— he must go at last as they went before him.

Such was Ireland up to the time when the mysterious famine came, and, with a warrant more potent than that of all the sheriffs and sheriffs' officers of Ireland, (and they are no feeble band,) seized the crops and kept possession, from each and from all, Protestant and Catholic.

Heaven's purpose in executing that awful warrant is not for me to scan or scribble at. It is only for me and others to believe that good will come of it, and to do our best to turn it to good account, for Ireland's sake.

Let us see what are its results, so far as yet visible. Not the least of them is this, that men who lived in enmity, who nourished political and religious hatred, and threw it on the wind to grow on every spot of the island where the wind blew , who blighted such commerce as they had, and scared from their shores such men of capital and commercial enterprise as ventured to settle among them to sow the seeds of profitable industry—the first element of national power ; they are now meeting in common calamity, driven together by the common danger, and calling each other brethren and countrymen.

But where the end is to be I have no penetration to see. People are dying of want, and of diseases induced by want. Those alive are, day by day, becoming too feeble to work. They have just been able to do enough to break up half the roads in Ireland in the process of giving public work for public relief, and in that state, almost impassable—in many parts utterly so—the roads must be left. The feeble beings are not able to continue at them if it were desirable they should. It is not desirable. It is imperiously necessary that the fields should be prepared, and planted, and sown. The people have no seed. They have no interest in the land themselves ; they never had. The most they ever obtained was a meagre subsistence ; the rent was taken from them as I have described. The pay they now receive is not enough to get them food, at present prices, to keep up their working strength. Such as it is on the roads it would only be on the land ; they see no difference. Those who can pay rent will not do it ; those who have nothing to pay rent with cannot. The landlords, most of them only nominally land-owners, are not receiving rent ; and they are without funds and without credit. The estates are mortgaged to their full value. Never, in the known history of mankind, was there a country and its people so dislocated as Ireland is now ; so inextricably ravelled, and its people in such imminent hazard of perishing utterly. Apart altogether from the claims which one human being has upon another for life, if that other can save his life, I urge the imminent distress of

Ireland upon the attention of England on another ground, which is, that if the land is not sown and planted, the famine of next year will be immeasurably more disastrous than the famine of this year ; and if the people are not fed to keep them from sinking down upon and under the earth, which they are now doing, the land cannot be cultivated.

No. III.

Kilkenny, 27th *January*.

Coming from Dublin to Carlow, I had day-light only for the distance of thirty-five miles. Over that space, consisting of the county of Dublin and part of Kildare, I saw no land which seemed to have been corn and potato fields, but what was ploughed or undergoing the process of ploughing ; while several fields which had been lying in grass were ploughed up ready for seed-sowing. Two-thirds of that country is lying in grass. It feeds cattle and sheep, and furnishes hay for Dublin. The farms are nearly all of an acreage, to be counted by the hundred, and not by units of acres as in other parts of Ireland. The surface of the country on both sides of the railway is nearly a dead level all the way. The meadows, even at this advanced period of winter, have a rough herbage on them. Some of them are partially flooded. The enclosures, fenced by ill-conditioned thorn hedges, seem to range in measurement between six and ten acres. Several elegant villas and mansions are seen, and a good many humble dwelling-places ; but not so many of the latter as to give one the idea of a dense population. Were it not for the Wicklow hills, a few miles southward, running from east to west as we are running, the country might be likened to Staffordshire, as seen from the Birmingham and Manchester line of rails.

This Irish South Western, or Dublin and Cashel line, now opened as far as Carlow, fifty-six miles, is the smoothest line of rails I ever travelled on ; the carriages are well fitted up, more roomy than on the English narrow gauge lines—the Irish railways being a medium gauge between the narrow and the broad, and going so steadily as to make the passenger think he is sitting in a parlour. The station building at Dublin promises to be almost regal in magnificence.

A railway contractor, whom I have seen, has contracts for three hundred miles of railway in Ireland ; throughout the whole of which he has hands at work, at the rate of a hundred men per mile. This gives 30,000 men employed by him alone on railways. I cannot yet give their wages, but shall endeavour to reach that important branch of information soon.

Of Carlow I have not much to write. It is a pleasant little town on the banks of the Bourne, which falls into the Barrow a little below the town. The latter river, uniting with the Noire from Kilkenny and the Suir from Tipperary, sweeps through a lovely and fertile country, passing Waterford in all the grandeur of a broad, deep, clear, mighty river, hastening to hide itself in the Atlantic Ocean, as if ashamed of having such a volume of water with so little work to do. Around Carlow the best cultivated farms in Ireland are to be seen—so some people say.

Awful havoc was made among the small tenantry a few years ago, in getting them cleared away to make large farms and to substitute a Protestant population for a Catholic one. Carlow town and county is a stronghold of the Protestants—the political Protestants. The land is a free fertile loam, which grows prodigious crops of onions. London is sometimes supplied with Carlow onions. Turnips are also produced in a considerable quantity, and cattle are fed and manure produced in the farm-yard. Wheat is grown as a leading crop, and the wheat is always of good quality.

After writing the foregoing, and staying a night in Carlow, I walked through and around the town. From Mr Spong, seed-merchant, I obtained a good deal of information, of which the following is the substance :—From 700 to 800 tons of bere are sown, or will be sown, within a circuit of twenty miles more than usual ; more oats will be sown than usual. The farmers are not generally behind with their work. The small farmers are behind. There are more than a thousand people in and about Carlow town called quarter-acre men. They rented a quarter of an acre of land—some more, some less—for potatoes, and found manure for it. They are not now collecting manure. That article could not, in any former year at this season, be obtained for less than 3s. 6d. per cart load. Now every one of the quarter-acre men are trying to sell what manure they have, and it is offered at 1s. 3d. and 1s. per cart load. This is a sign that they do not think of planting potatoes again. They may be doing this because they have no seed potatoes, nor money to purchase them. There are more potatoes in the country around Carlow than is generally known. The mass of common people have none ; they have either consumed all which the disease spared, or had them taken from them for rent, or sold them, (they rented the land from the large farmers, not from the landlords.) But the large farmers have all potatoes stored away. They keep them very quietly. Some have 100 barrels, some 200 barrels, and others 300 barrels. They are beginning to let them be known now, lest they should not be able to sell them at all.

Yesterday, 25th, there was quite a panic in Carlow with wheat and oats ; wheat fell five shillings per quarter, and oats about the same ; flour and meal did not fall, because the millers and dealers know the prospects of the markets better than the farmers. There are many mills about Carlow, all in full work, binding meal and flour. It is supposed that the millers and dealers united to spread an alarm among the farmers, to induce them to bring their grain to market, which they were always holding back in hopes of higher prices. It poured in last week, and seldom has such a day of bustle been seen in Carlow as Saturday. Yesterday (Monday) the panic increased. Every farmer offered to sell, but the millers would not buy, in hopes of forcing them still further into the panic.

A great many men have been employed, and are now on public works. A soup-kitchen is open in the town, which supplies 1500 persons with soup daily. When the spring advances, work will be plentiful on the land. The small farmers who are not able to cultivate their holdings and get seed will sublet them. Subletting is now going on to a great extent. The country around this town is called the garden of Ireland ; it well deserves the name. There are about 500 acres of onions and parsnips grown annually ; the parsnips are sown with the onions. The disease did not affect the onions last year ; but many of the growers got bad seed from Dublin, because they got it cheap there, and it did not grow. The parsnips were a splendid crop. They are now selling at L.6 : 10s. per ton ; and are bought up for the Dublin market to supply the place of potatoes. They did not formerly sell for more than L.2 per ton. The farmers generally in Carlow county have seldom been so prosperous as they are this year : that is, the farmers holding above ten acres, say from twenty acres upwards. They have only lost on their potatoes ; they have gained enormously on everything else. Turnips are a good crop, and selling at a great price. Swedes at from 35s. to 40s. per ton, and other sorts at 30s. per ton. The owners of the land in this district are Colonel Bruen, Earl Fitzwilliam, Earl of Besborough, (the Lord-Lieutenant,) Lady Cavanagh, (for her son, a minor,) and Mr Horace Rochford. Colonel Bruen is a resident landlord, and has been very attentive to the poor. All the others have taken their share of the burthen liberally. Upon the whole, it is questionable if any other part of Ireland is so well-conditioned. The railway terminus has centred in this place the whole traffic of the south and west of Ireland with Dublin. The hotels were never so full before ; shopkeepers were never more busy ; mills are grinding night and day, and

farmers never had better prices, with more corn to sell. The sufferers are the labouring population—the quarter-acre men, the small householders, *and the small farmers whose holdings are under ten acres.*

I should like the prize-holders of the Chartist land-scheme to note those words printed in italics—they who never handled a spade, and who are supposed to be able to do such great things on two, three, and four acres of poorer land than this is around Carlow ; who are to live on the best of English fare and pay so large a percentage on the money advanced to them to purchase their land and stock it. Miserable delusion ! A better soil, a more industrious people, and better managed farm-gardens are not to be found anywhere than around Carlow, and yet every family holding only a few acres is reduced to Indian meal and the soup-kitchen by the failure of their potatoes.

I must proceed to sketch my journey from Carlow to Kilkenny. It is half-past ten ; the coach starts at eleven from Carpenter’s hotel, where I now am, after it comes down from the railway station where it has just gone to meet the train from Dublin. Other coaches and cars are to start from here, to Kilkenny, Clonmel, Waterford, Cork, and other places. Already the professional mendicants are assembling outside the door to besiege the coaches as they come. They arrive muffled up in tattered cloaks, greatcoats, and all manner of garments slung, hung, wrapped, twisted, and tied upon them. Fifteen or sixteen have arrived, and more are coming. Already they begin to unfold to the public eye their sores, which form their stock in trade, to do a little preliminary business with such as me. One woman begins to beg for Chrises sake. “ Oh, it will be the lucky day to your honour if you give me a handsel.” (Another)—“ Give something to the poor, for God’s sake.” (Another)—“ Long life to your honour ; God bless your honour ; you are a gentleman, any one may see.” (All, but the last)—“ Divide it amount us, your honour ; do, for the love of God, divide it ; the devil a bit will that old man you gave it to divide with any of us : remember the poor women.”

The coaches begin to arrive from the railway. The mob of beggars now rush to the windows and doors of the coaches and around the cars. When they see a lady and a gentleman together, they assume that she is his wife and may be in the family way. Before her eyes they open their hideous sores, and beg of the gentleman, for the love of God, to give them something. I get upon the box-seat of the Clonmel coach, which is to take me to Kilkenny. “ Oh ! now your honour has got the box-seat, you’ll give us a handsel : do, for the love of God, give something to the poor. Give the poor creatures of women a handsel, and it will be the lucky day to you.” (A sergeant of the 64th regiment gets upon the front seat.) “ Sergeant, give a trifle to the poor, and the blessing of God be upon you. Do, sergeant, and you’ll never want a copper to bless yourself.” (Many voices)—“ Do, sir, give something to the poor creatures.” (Sergeant)—“ I really have no coppers. I would give you something with pleasure if I had it.” (Several women)—“ Well, it’s yourself that gives a civil answer any way.” (A Waterford coach comes up and halts alongside of us.) “ Oh, blessings on you, doctor, but we are glad to see you down again. Oh, doctor, good luck to you this blessed day.” (To a lady inside.) “ Give something for the poor baby ; please your ladyship, look at its head how sore it is. God be with your ladyship.” A gentleman, mounted on a fine hunter, with scarlet coat, and booted and spurred, living close to Carlow, returns from the hunt and rides through the crowd. A passenger asks some of the mendicants why they don’t beg from him. “ From him is it ? they reply, “ sure we know him better ; it would not be a ha’penny he would give the like of us.”

The quantity of luggage to go with the coach I am on is unusually great. Men who have shouted to one another, “ Paddy !” “ Larry !” “ Hardy !” “ Billy !” “ Barney !” and “ Dan !” for the last ten minutes by the hotel clock, are lifting it up, laying it down, moving it back, moving it forward, building it up, pulling it down, building it up again, and they are not one

whit nearer an end than when they began, for down it all tumbles, Paddy running one way, and Larry another way, and Dan and Billy a third way, to save themselves from being knocked on the head with rolling hat boxes and portmanteaus.

At last, after adding pieces of rope to straps that were not long enough, and knotting rope to rope, the new to the old, the old breaking and other knots being made of new to new, the tarpauling was got over the luggage, the driver got on the box, and off we rattled, overtaking and passing all the other coaches in succession. Hardy was guard and Larry was driver, and never did a better driver handle whip or reins than Larry. He had shewn himself but a poor hand at loading the coach ; that was not his business ; his business was on the box. Once on the box, Larry was a prince of coachmen.

We came down upon the river Barrow, and rattled along its left bank. Some of the land bore evidence of having been well cultivated ; some of it looked the reverse. Ploughs were at work on every hand, and as much seemed to be doing as could be done for the ensuing crops of corn. Some fields of young wheat looked green and healthy. Larry still smacked his whip, and made the horses canter, and admonished us to mind our hats as we passed beneath the hanging branches of the roadside trees. Behind those trees, close on our right hand, a little below the level of the road, the Barrow, rolling broad, deep, and strong, still kept us company. The high frontiers of the Queens's county rose up a mile or two beyond the river, with their cultivated steeps subdivided into innumerable fields ; the whole forming a picture which seemed to be set on its edge in the plain, and leaning back upon the walls of the horizon.

Now we ascended through a cutting which hid the plain from view, and again we descended, with the Barrow once more beside us, as broad, beautiful, and idle as before. At one of those points where we came suddenly upon it after being hid from it for a short time, between four and five miles from Carlow, the sight of the noble river sweeping for several miles before us through meadows and trees inspirited and inspired me to enthusiasm. But the way-side houses were beginning to look more miserable, the farms were smaller, much more numerous, and the people poorer. Close on the road-side, on our left hand, when ascending a gentle eminence, we passed a number of mean huts, all standing in pools of filth, the thatched roofs broken, the walls leaning in and bending out, and one or more faces looking over each of the low half-doors ; the faces looking squalid, dirty, shrivelled, and famine-stricken. One face was an exception ; it was that of a girl approaching womanhood. The under half of her door was open, and she stood in the doorway at full length, her unshod feet in the puddle of a filthy sink and dunghill, which was making itself level with the road outside and the floor of the house inside. She was not dirty in clothing. She had washed her face, for she could not be insensible to its beauty. Poet or painter never saw a face which would more readily strike a light in the onlooker's eyes at one glance than that one.

I shall not in this letter proceed to describe Kilkenny, its country, and its people : there is more distress here than at Carlow. The distress deepens as we go west. At Carlow the potatoes were English reds—they did not all fail. In the south and the west the potatoes were the lumpers ; planted always because large and prolific. The disease is peculiarly a lumper disease—they have all failed.

No. IV.

Clonmel, County of Tipperary, *29th January.*

This is a large busy town of about 16,000 inhabitants ; the most fertile land in Ireland lying around it, save on one side, the south, where rises a high hill less fertile, and the river

Suir rolling at the bottom of the hill, and partly through the town, driving many flour mills of great extent, and able, from its vast volume of water and velocity of current, to drive as many mills as would grind meal for all Saxon and Celtic mankind.

Clonmel being thus furnished with mills of great power, and the consumption of meal in Ireland being now great, far beyond its consumption at any former time, the Indian corn is conveyed here from Waterford and other seaports, to be reduced to meal. The redistribution of the meal to other districts causes a great traffic with carts upon the roads in every direction. The 34th regiment of infantry is located here with some artillery and the head quarters of the Scots Greys. The latter regiment is broken into detachments lying all over the county of Tipperary and in part of Waterford county, engaged in the harassing duty of guarding the transit of meal. The infantry are similarly engaged, and all of them are worn and wearied with heavy duty. The duty is all the worse that they are continually on their feet if infantry, on horseback if cavalry ; and because they are not marching in the ordinary sense of the term—to shift quarters—they do not get marching money, nothing but their bare pay, which with dear prices is not much.

Ascertaining, on my arrival here from Kilkenny, on Wednesday, that military escorts would go out with carts loaded with meal on the following morning, one of them towards Dungarvan, I resolved to accompany them, and made arrangements accordingly.

In the morning, at half-past five o'clock, the low rumble of carts was heard on the streets. At six the sound continued, and so on occasionally until seven. Not knowing at what hour the carts would be loaded and ready to start, nor at what hour the military escort would turn out, I was ready long before daylight to start on the journey with them if they went so soon. The morning was dark and stormy, and the rain poured from the dark sky upon the darker earth.

As soon as daylight served, I went out, and going up the spacious and handsome main street of Clonmel reached the narrower streets which lead down to the river banks, to the bridges over the various divisions of the river, and to the islands which divide the river, and to the great, the gigantic flour, meal, and malt mills which stand upon the islands. That noble stream, the Suir, rolled and roared through the bridges and among the mills ; while drivers of carts, millers, meal-dealers, and police, amid hundreds of carts that choked up the narrow thoroughfares, shouted, pulled, and swore at one another. The buyers of meal from Cahir, Tipperary town, and other remote places were there, to purchase for the expedition which will go out to their towns to-day and on Saturday morning, as the expeditions to Clogheen and Dungarvan were going this morning.

Small progress was made in loading, as the loaded carts could not get out from among the empty ones, until after disputes and struggles amounting to a kind of civil war. A party of sixteen men, and an officer of the 34th regiment of infantry, marched from the barracks on the east through the town westward, to a point where the loaded carts were to assemble. Then came two of the Scots Greys, as the advanced guard of the party of dragoons ; then four of the greys ; and, fifty yards behind, two of the same as rear guard. The sergeant who commanded this party rode on in front, and in himself made the ninth man. There were also some of the armed constabulary. In all, the escort for Dungarvan consisted of one officer, two sergeants, and twenty-five men ; that for Clogheen was of a similar strength. I hired a car and attached myself to this expedition for Dungarvan ; it was only going, however, to the Half-way House, about fourteen miles distant, on the top of the mountains.

When an hour beyond the appointed time for the whole party to start had elapsed, and the soldiers had been standing in the rain, and in the deep mud half-a-mile beyond the town on the Dungarvan road, until they were soaked, the infantry through their greatcoats, the cavalry

through their cloaks, or nearly so, twenty-six carts out of the hundred, or thereabouts, which were to go to Dungarvan, had reached the place of rendezvous. The carts were each drawn by one horse ; and each driver had been at liberty to take any number of hundred weights of meal, according as he judged of the strength of his horse, up to sixteen ; none were allowed to take more. Most of them had 12 cwt. or 14 cwt. The payment for carriage to Dungarvan from Clonmel, the distance being about twenty-five English miles, and road bad, was 1s. per cwt. Most of the carts had come from places far distant from Clonmel. Any owner of a good horse can get employment for himself and horse in carrying meal. The poor horses, and the poor men who own them, have no chance, as none are sent out under the military escort but those supposed to be able to perform the work. When I saw the loaded carts assembled on the road, and was told how bad the road was, so bad that Mr Bianconi, the celebrated car proprietor, has ceased to run his public conveyances between Clonmel and Dungarvan, it seemed to me impossible that such small horses could go over the mountains with such loads. But I judged wrong of them ; they went well, and went through places where larger horses that I have known would have stuck fast.

Five cars were obtained to carry the foot soldiers, the officer commanding, and the two armed constables. I had provided a conveyance for myself on the previous evening. It was, like the rest, an outside jaunting car. The seats hold each two persons when required ; in which case the driver gets up in front. The drivers of the cars carrying the foot soldiers were all sitting aloft in front.

Few travellers stir out here at present without being armed. The pay-clerks of the public works are attacked and robbed frequently. Land-stewards and agents are never at any time particularly safe : commercial travellers and merchants, formerly safe, are now liable to be mistaken for officers and clerks of public works. Nor are they in their own character of men travelling through the country with property in their possession quite free from danger, now that highway robberies have begun. Were it not a very serious matter, it would be amusing to see the arming of travellers. And, as it is, the commercial travellers occasionally make merry with one another when they come into the commercial hotels from a journey on the road, pulling off their gloves as they enter, throwing the gloves into their hats ; pulling off wrappers from their necks and throwing them down ; taking a horse pistol with a spring dagger attached to it from the right side pocket of the top coat ; another horse pistol with a dagger to it from the left side pocket ; a pistol of lesser size with revolving barrels from the breast pocket of the top coat ; then taking the top coat off and hanging it up, cautioning the waiters, and boots, and other persons present, not to touch one of those pistols, for all are loaded and have percussion caps on ready to go off. Then proceeding, the top coat being hung up, to pull a small pistol out of the right hand trousers' pocket ; another small pistol from the left hand trousers' pocket ; a third from the breast pocket of the coat, with ball cartridges from the same place, and percussion caps from the pockets of the waistcoat ; all which being done, they may lock them up in bag or box until the morning, and proceed to sit down to tea and tell the news. Such is commercial travelling, at present, in Tipperary and the counties adjoining.

As I had no pistols, powder, bullets, nor percussion caps, I was seriously warned on the Wednesday evening not to go out on the morning with the expedition to Dungarvan without them, particularly as it was not my intention to return with the military escort to Clonmel. Accordingly, as arming seemed the order of the day, I armed myself, and did it as follows :— I took one of my carpet bags and emptied everything of luggage kind out ; took it to a baker's shop and purchased several shillings' worth of loaves of bread, and to a general dealer's shop, and purchased a piece of cheese. I put them in the bag, put the bag on the car by my side, ready, if any hungry Tipperarian or dweller on the Waterford mountains should present a blunderbuss at me, to put my hand into the bag, pull out, present, and throw to him a bullet of bread ; not fearing but this style of defence would be more effective than a defence by

powder and lead. Besides, it had this other advantage, that if bad roads, or bad weather, or other mischance detained me in the mountains, or if no inns or provision shops could be met with on the road, I could begin and eat my ammunition ; which, if that ammunition had been gunpowder and leaden bullets, I could not have done.

Thus prepared for the journey, I joined the procession, which, as already said, at starting consisted only of twenty-six loaded carts ; but which increased to the number of sixty-one before we proceeded five or six miles. An advanced guard of two of the Scots Greys rode on fifty yards in front. I followed them in my car. Then came three cars, with the officer commanding, eight of the infantry, and one of the constabulary. Next were four of the Scots Greys. Then came the long line of single horsed carts loaded with bags of meal. Then followed the cars, with eight of the infantry and a constable ; and, last of all, two of the Scots Greys, a corporal and a private, came up as rear-guard. The sergeant of the Greys in command of his party trotted and galloped from front to rear and from rear to front, urging the straggling carters forward, and halting those in front until the rear closed up to a manageable distance ; for the line was often extended to a great length by some horse, which was too heavily loaded for its strength, stopping and keeping the rest back.

The line of horsemen, cars, and carts wined up the narrow valleys and on the hill sides, gaining a higher and higher altitude at every step, the hills rising still higher above the road as the road ascended, until we had the mountains on each side at the distance of only a few miles capped in snow, with sunshine on the snow and blue clouds girt upon them at their middle height. As we passed along, groups of squalid beings were seen at road corners, or running from the multitudinous houses, hovels, huts, or cabins dotted on the slopes and in the bottoms by the streamlet sides, to see the meal go past them under the protection of bullets, bayonets, and cavalry swords, on its way to feed people beyond the mountains hunger-stricken like themselves, but to whom they would not let it go if bullets, bayonets, and cavalry swords were not present. To look on all this from some prominent place it was extremely picturesque and striking on the perceptive senses. The beautiful grey horses of the dragoons—the men with their large scarlet cloaks flowing from their shoulders to their knees, and covering the backs of the horses, and the horses with their long white tails waving beneath the scarlet cloaks—the long swords dangling from the waistbelt to the men's feet—the feet booted and formidably armed with spurs, one touch of which would have made the gallant greys leap from the ground to the roofs of the ordinary wayside houses—gave a liveliness to the picture which it would not have possessed had it been merely a military line of march. The liveliness of the scene was increased by the cart-drivers, who holloed and whooped to their horses to get them up the steep roads, and ran, half a dozen of them at a time, to push behind the cart of some horse that stooped.

But how miserable was the scene when looked upon otherwise than as a picture ; when dwelt upon in thought. Because the land was mountainous and poor, the best of it of indifferent quality, it was thickly peopled. The landowners of Ireland have generally succeeded in clearing their good land of its dense population. In Tipperary there are exceptions ; the soil is of the richest quality, and the population is dense ; but even in Tipperary some large rich tracts of land are seen lying in grass, as pasture farms, from which the cultivating people have been driven away. Driven from the good land they find refuge upon the bad, such as I saw yesterday amid the Waterford mountains. I found none of it rented even in that wild region for less than 20s. per acre ; it was generally 30s. 35s. and 40s. per acre. The owners were various, the Earl of Donoughmore, Colonel Green, the Marquis of Ormonde, and some others whose names I did not take note of. But all of them have middlemen, who become security to them for a moderate rent, and then exact and extract whatever beyond a moderate rent they can obtain from the cultivators of the land. The constabulary stations, with armed men in them, all along the road, to aid in the exaction of the rack-rents,

and the meagre efforts made by the peasant farmers on the undrained kind—all of it easily drained, but sour with rushes and pools of water, the best of the deep soil buried in foul bogs, the worst of the shallow soil being the portions scratched at under the name of cultivation by the rent-eaten tenantry—those things shew what the natural result is of the disorderly customs of Irish landlords. It was to save the cart-loads of meal from being plundered by those starving tenant farmers of those and other Irish landlords with high sounding titles and long family traditions that the militany were employed. And that meal, thus guarded, was going over the mountains to save from death the equally wretched peasantry of the princely English Duke of Devonshire around Dungarvan.

We reached the half-way house, which stands in a gullet on the top of the mountains, about three o'clock. A military escort was to have been there from Dungarvan to take the charge from the Clonmel party, but it did not come. One division of the carts was to leave Dungarvan road at the half-way house, and go by a cross sectional road to Cappoquin, a poor densely populated place in the mountains of Waterford. An escort of armed constabulary was waiting for this division, and took it in charge. The orders of the officer commanding from Clonmel were, to conduct the carts to the half-way house and no further ; so he left them there, and returned with his party. I came back with them. We had our road all down hill now ; the Scots Greys trotted out at a slapping pace, the Irish car drivers whipped and holloed to their horses, and came home in lively style. A wheel came off one of the cars, and the soldiers on it were rolled out upon the road, which afforded all the other drivers, and all the dwellers by the wayside, who saw them, much merriment. Another failed to come on from the feebleness of the horse, and was likely to detain the whole, as the rear-guard of the Greys could not pass and leave any of the party behind. I was asked if I had any objection to take the soldiers on my car, and, having none, we soon scoured down the hills to the valley of the Suir, and so into Clonmel.

While I write this at a window looking into the street, another party of the Grey's has passed with drawn swords at the " Carry," going to escort carts to Tipperary, To-morrow a party sets out for Cahir, which is a town situated ten Irish miles (eleven Irish are fourteen English miles) up the banks of this beautiful river Suir.

The whistler at the plough : containing travels, statistics, and descriptions of scenery and agricultural customs in most parts of England: with letters from Ireland: also " Free trade and the League ;" a biography history (1852)

Author : Somerville, Alexander, 1811-1885

Volume : 1

Publisher : Manchester : J. Ainsworth ; London, W. French

Year : 1852

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : University of Michigan

Collection : americana

Notes: " This volume comprises a selection of letters and essays, written by me, and addressed to the demerits of protection, from 1842 to 1847, inclusive. The two succeeding volumes are a biographic history of free trade and the League. They embrace memoirs of persons identified with the rise and progress of commerce and constitutional liberty, from earliest English history to 1850." Dedication to vol. 1.

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March 11 2013