

Vicissitudes of Families.

Sir Bernard Burke

1860-1861

—The jest at which fools laugh the loudest,
The downfall of our old nobility
Which may forerun the ruin of a kingdom.
I've seen an idiot clap his hands and shout
To see a tower like yon stoop to its base
In headlong ruin ; while the wise look'd round,
And fearful sought a distant stance to watch
What fragment of the fabric next should follow ;
For when the turrets fall, the walls are tottering.

Walter Scott.

THE decadence of noble and wealthy families is a fact of too frequent occurrence to be now a subject of doubt or dispute, but the cause of such decadence, though equally obvious, seems to have puzzled a host of enquirers : the whole matter is referable to a few general agents. Historically considered, the decay and extinction of great houses may be mainly attributed to the Civil Wars, from Hastings to Culloden, and to the law of attainder, which, in England more than in any other country of Europe, undermined and overthrew the landed Aristocracy. So fatal, indeed, was the operation of that law, that, of the twenty-five Barons who were appointed to enforce the observance of Magna Charta, there is not now in the House of Peers a single male descendant ! At the Norman Conquest, a great dispersion of families occurred. Malcolm of Scotland gave protection to the Saxon exiles, and they availed themselves of it in such numbers, that in the words of Simeon of Durham, “ they were to be met with in all the farm-houses, and even in the cottages.”

Passing over the turbulent times of the early Plantagenets, the baronial contests, and the French wars—all more or less destructive of the ancient noblesse—we arrive at the most striking era of family decadence, that of “ the Wars of the Roses.” With regard to the Yorkists (who, by the way, were the Liberals of those days), it was their policy, De Comines asserts, to spare the common people, and to cut off the nobility and gentry : and thus the victors became enriched by the forfeited lands of the vanquished. Through these means, and the fearful loss of life in the battle-field and on the scaffold, very many of the chief historic houses were destroyed. Of the survivors, some that bore the territorial prefix *De*, dropped it, having lost the inheritance to which it applied ; and others were so impoverished, that an act passed to degrade to a lower rank such of the nobility as had not adequate estates. Ruined lords and gentlemen went into exile, to be the miserable pensioners of foreign courts, or wandered in beggary and wretchedness through many of the countries of Europe.

The dynasty which succeeded in uniting the rival roses was scarcely more favourable to the old nobility. It seems to have been the principle of the Tudor kings to break down the ancient families of Norman origin, and consequently, during their rule, the vicissitudes of the Howards, the Percys, the Cliffords, the Dudleys, the Nevilles, the Staffords, the Courtenays, the Greys, and the De la Poles are full of melancholy and pathetic interest. The star of the Stuarts was unlucky to all within its influence. The great Civil War of Charles the First's reign ruined the Cavaliers—the men of pure blood, and long-derived lineage ; and the devoted loyalty of the Jacobites dispersed through the armies of France, and Austria, and Spain many of the best-born subjects of King James. Where these causes for the decadence of

families have been wanting, another not less efficient has occurred to produce the same results in that personal extravagance, so frequent amongst those of large fortune and high position ; exposed as they are to a thousand temptations unknown to the low born and the needy. Then there are the electioneering struggles, the rivalry of one great county House with another, and the efforts of the old gentry to retain their place above the new men advanced by trade or by professional success. Another source of family vicissitude has been overlooked, or misunderstood : the peculiar talents and disposition that have led to the aggrandizement of any one person are seldom repeated in his immediate successor. As a general rule, nature seems to delight in varying her creations, and rarely reproduces herself but at certain intervals. Thus it is not often that a miser is succeeded in the same line by a miser, a poet by a poet, or a commander by a son of the same military ability as his father. More usually in the miser's case, a spendthrift comes to scatter the hoards of his predecessor with reckless and unsparing hand :

Riches, like insects, when concealed they lie,
Wait but for wings, and in their season fly.

But, after all, I am inclined to think, that, in modern times, the main cause of the misery and deplorable fate that have happened to some of our most eminent families maybe discovered in that part of the law of inheritance which, in the absence of direct heirs male, allows the estates to pass to an heiress, while the title to which they belong devolves on a collateral branch that may be equally devoid of wealth or education ; in other words, the property goes to one line, and the dignity to another, incapable of supporting it. I have always considered that it would be of infinite advantage if means could be devised for remedying the evil in some way or other. But for the immense difficulty of rendering, even by legislative enactment, real property perpetually inalienable, it might be well that the crown made it a *sine qua non* that every recipient of an hereditary title of honour should be required, before his patent could pass, to *endow* the dignity granted to him with a landed estate which could never afterwards be detached from it. A Baronet's qualification might be fixed at £500 a year in land, a Peer's at £2000. At any rate, a scheme like the following might be adopted. Each Peer or Baronet should be compelled, by statute, to contribute to government a proper sum (to be arrived at by actuarial estimate), so that out of the aggregate of such contributions, the administration of the day, or some public functionary, say the Lord Chancellor or Lord President, could allocate such annual payments, as it might be competent to pay, to Peers and Baronets in reduced circumstances, *for the maintenance of their dignity*. The great difficulty of all such legislation is to reconcile certainty of payment to, and enjoyment by, persons who are in debt, and whose property, whether in globo or annual, would, of necessity, be liable to claims of their creditors. There appears, however, a way of conscientious reconciliation arising from the consideration of the nature of public dignities, and the requirements of the public service. It has been held in numerous cases, that such stipends, the enjoyment of which is necessary *for the maintenance of the public dignity*, or for the furtherance of the public service, cannot be taken by the creditors of the holders. Consequently, all that need be assumed as an argument for such legislation is, that it is due to the public service and dignity that Peers and Baronets should always, as such, have the right to receive out of a fund, constituted as suggested above, such annual income for the maintenance of their respective rank and position. The statute might provide for this, by an enactment following out the understanding already admitted by the law.

In cases where honours have been won by personal achievement, and where the distinguished men, to whom such honours are given, have not the means to provide the required contributions, a power might be vested in the crown, to authorize a sufficient sum to be paid out of the exchequer to assist or enable a grantee of a peerage, or baronetcy conferred for *great public services*, to contribute the necessary sum to the fund.

Grants were made in the cases of Nelson and Wellington, and similar liberality for the endowment of hereditary honours achieved by merit such as theirs, might be made a general rule, with very immaterial loss to the national income, and with infinite benefit to the hereditary orders of the country.

In Ireland, family history and national history can scarcely be separated ; the Vicissitudes of the one are the Vicissitudes of the other. Ireland is a country of ruins, and among the ruins may be classed the old aristocracy. I often, as I pass the roofless churches with their desecrated grave-yards, “ where princes and where prelates sleep,” think of the lines of Pope—

“ That grave where e’en the great find rest,
And blended lie the oppressor and oppressed.”

For here are mingled in one undistinguished mass the Irish, the Norman, the Elizabethan, the Scotch, the Cromwellian, and the Williamite, who have successively fought and bled for the possession of the neighbouring fields. The vicissitudes of family history in Ireland are ever recurring. The loss of records and the neglect and consequent destruction of monumental memorials evidence the constant revolution of property in that distracted land. What cares the purchaser in the Landed Estates’ Court for the preservation of the tombstones of the old gentry in the neighbouring unwalled churchyard ? What cared the Williamite for the bones of the Jacobite, or the Cromwellian for the relics of the Norman, or the Norman for those of the conquered Irish ? Nowhere can we trace sepulchral brasses, and very rarely indeed, knights’ burial effigies ; but to supply this want in some degree, the remembrance of historic events and of historic names still retained among the people is something quite marvellous. During centuries of gloom and defeat, it was all that was left to them of better days, and like the ivy that adheres to the ruined palaces and mansions of bygone prosperity and pleasure, they clung to these memories with singular tenacity ; and now, when an era of prosperity has at last opened on their country, they love to recall the old times again, and the old families which perished in the national struggle.

It is an interesting and well-authenticated fact, resulting from the same feeling for the past, that the descendants of the despoiled Irish have hoarded up with the greatest care their ancient title deeds.

Mr. Beltz, Lancaster Herald, mentioned to Mr. Weld, the Traveller, having met in the year 1802, at Kenmare, the heir of M’Finnan Duff, a poor Kerry cottager, who had in his possession “ the Proceedings of a Commission” of 12th Elizabeth for the partition of the estates between his ancestor and a rival O’Sullivan—family papers which had been preserved as a sacred heirloom through centuries of destitution and hopeless ruin. These parchments were so decayed that Mr. Beltz could not have deciphered them if he had not been familiar with the originals in the Exchequer. Crofton Croker likewise refers to this remarkable trait in the despoiled Gael, and states, in his “ Sketches of the South of Ireland,” that he knew a blacksmith, living in the West of Skibbereen, who claimed to be the representative of M’Carthy More, and who showed him the M’Carthy title deeds. I myself have heard from a very old friend still living, that he well remembers his grandfather having told him that he had seen some of the ruined heirs of the dispossessed proprietors, with their deeds carefully tied up, wandering about the county of Tipperary. The parchments thus treasured were the only signs they had left them to “ shew the world that they were gentlemen.”

At one time, it was proposed that when parties appeared before the Commissioners under the Act of Settlement to prove their innocence, and failed, their title deeds should be impounded. This was one of the suggestions urged in 1662 by Sir Audley Mervyn, Speaker of the House of Commons, who went up, attended by the whole House, to the Lord Lieutenant (Ormonde) to complain of the too great readiness with which claimants were allowed to

establish innocence. Among other recommendations, was the proposal that where the party *failed*, the deeds he produced should be withheld from him.

Sir Audley said he remembered that in the north of Ireland the people had a practice of stuffing the skin of the calf, which they had taken from the cow, with straw (which they called a Puckan), and then of setting this before the cow, who would low over it and lick it, and in so doing would give down her milk. "These Deeds (wanting the Estate) were," urged Sir Audley, "like these skins stuffed with straw."

"But of what use are they, and what harm to leave them with the old proprietors?" was replied. "They will serve," answered the Speaker, "like the Puckan. The dispossessed will low over them, and lick them over and over in their thoughts, and in so doing they will give down a *memory of revenge*."

Tradition is confessedly the hand-maiden of history, assisting the annalist in his labours, and ministering ever to his wants. Tradition is the lamp which, with flickering but faithful ray, guides the genealogist along his misty path, and is oftentimes the only light to indicate the course he is to take. All this, tradition has been to me. In my researches into the Vicissitudes of Families, the village legend and the peasant's tale have been my constant helps. I am pretty well acquainted with England and Ireland, and in both, but especially in Ireland, I have found the local memories of the old races wonderfully vivid and wonderfully accurate; the details, sometimes exaggerated and sometimes partially forgotten, are of course frequently inconsistent with fact, but the main features of the story are substantially true, and are generally confirmed by the test of subsequent investigation. The original edifice stands boldly out, though additions may have been made to the architecture, or time may have mouldered a portion into decay. In this consists one great charm of an "old country." The boundless prairies, the interminable forests, the gigantic rivers of the far West are wonderful and grand, and strike the mind with awe, but the heart is untouched; whereas with us every vale, and hill, and stream can tell of days gone by, of a long succession of native heritors, and are replete with ancestral story. One little anecdote it may be permitted me here to introduce from the English side of the Channel, as peculiarly illustrative of the endurance of local tradition. The hamlet of Finderne, in the parish of Mickleover, about four miles from Derby, was, for nine generations, the chief residence of a family who derived their name from the place of their patrimony. From the times of Edward I. to those of Henry VIII., when the male line became extinct, and the estate passed, by the marriage of the heiress, to the Harpurs, the house of Finderne was one of the most distinguished in Derbyshire. Members of it had won their spurs in the Crusades, and at Cressy, and at Azincourt. The sons were brave and the daughters fair: one, alas! was frail as well as fair, and the heaviest blow that ever fell on the time-honoured line was when Catherine Finderne, about the middle of the fifteenth century, consented to be the mistress of Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor. In the remarkable will of that remarkable nobleman, who, in 1463, obtained a licence from the king for the transmutation of metals, provision is made for his illegitimate issue by Catherine in terms which were, no doubt, deemed unexceptionable in those days, but which would be deemed highly offensive in our own. The territorial possessions of the Findernes were large: the Findernes were High Sheriffs, occasionally Rangers of Needwood Forest, and Custodians of Tutbury Castle, and they matched with some of the best families of their times. Finderne, originally erected *tempore* Edward I., and restored and enlarged at different periods, was in 1560 one of the quaintest and largest family mansions in the midlands. The present church, then the family chapel, had rows of monumental brasses and altar-tombs, all memorials of the Findernes. In 1850, a pedigree research caused me to pay a visit to the village. I sought for the ancient Hall. Not a stone remained to tell where it had stood! I entered the church—not a single record of a Finderne was there! I accosted a villager, hoping to glean some stray traditions of the Findernes. "Findernes!" said he, "we have no Findernes here, but we have something that

once belonged to them : we have *Findernes' flowers*." " Show me them," I replied ; and the old man led me into a field which still retained faint traces of terraces and foundations. " There," said he, pointing to a bank of " garden flowers grown wild," " there are the Findernes' flowers, brought by Sir Geoffrey from the Holy Land, and do what we will, they will never die !"

Poetry mingles more with our daily life than we are apt to acknowledge ; and even to an antiquary like myself, the old man's prose and the subject of it were the very essence of poetry.

For more than three hundred years the Findernes had been extinct, the mansion they had dwelt in had crumbled into dust, the brass and marble intended to perpetuate the name had passed away, and a little tiny flower had for ages preserved a name and a memory which the elaborate works of man's hand had failed to rescue from oblivion. The moral of the incident is as beautiful as the poetry. We often talk of " the language of flowers," but of the eloquence of flowers we never had such a striking example as that presented in these flowers of Finderne :

Time. Time, his withering hand hath laid
On battlement and tower,
And where rich banners were displayed,
Now only waves a flower.

Tales of fallen houses have all their moral. Some warn against reckless waste, the gambling-table, the race-course, and the countless ills that profligacy entails. Some tell the story of electioneering ambition and ruinous expenditure ; some exhibit the picture of political and religious oppression, and some again of loyalty, right or misguided, but faithful even to the last ; some, for the warning and instruction of mankind, prove that the mighty may be put down from their seats, and the lowly raised up ; and some serve to suggest the ill luck that seems occasionally to be linked with a particular race, we know not why, unless it be from some hereditary failing reminding one of the observation of Cardinal Richelieu, who used to say that he would never continue to employ an unlucky man, because the ill-luck was pretty generally a thing of his own making.

These Vicissitudes, " moving accidents," as they are, of human life, afford lessons of wisdom of incalculable value : the experience of the past is a warning for the future : *Consilium futuri ex præterito venit*.

Yet in commenting on such Vicissitudes, I cannot conclude without observing how all the greater on their account does the blessing appear that has fallen to the lot of those ancient families (and I rejoice to say there are many, many of them in this empire) which " have stood against the waves and weathers of time," have flourished from generation to generation, and still exist in all the splendour of untarnished merit and honour. Thankful, indeed, should be those descendants who have been thus Providentially favoured ; those whom—to borrow the beautiful language of the Psalms the Lord hath been mindful of, and blessed, as He blessed the House of Israel and the House of Aaron, being their help and their shield, and increasing them more and more, they and their children.

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—I'll noble it no further.
Let them erase my name from honour's list,
And drag my scutcheon at their horses' heels ;
I have deserved it all, for I am poor,

And poverty hath neither right of birth,
Nor rank, relation, claim, nor privilege.

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Across the Irish channel, the story is even more significant. There is, perhaps, no part of the world where such violent and almost incessant internal convulsions have disorganised society, and overturned all social happiness and prosperity, as in Ireland. The attentive reader of Irish history rises from his studies wearied with the record of perpetual wars. From the earliest period of its history until within our own memory, that fine country was the scene of civil discord, and for more than ten centuries it can scarcely be said to have enjoyed fifty consecutive years of calm. As a necessary consequence, the Irish annals present a series of the most striking vicissitudes ; and there is scarcely a family or a seat that has not shared deeply in those feverish changes and calamities.

An Irish “ Peerage ” gives a very inadequate account of the royal and noble blood of Ireland. But few of the Milesian races have found their way into the peerage, [1] though some still inherit a portion of their ancient possessions ; and it is in the Austrian, [2] French, or Spanish service, among the middle classes, or, perchance, in the mud-walled cabins of the Irish peasant, that search should be made for the real representatives of the ancient reguli. The territories of most of the old princes, and the lordships of very many of the old chieftains, are now enjoyed by the descendants of Henry the Second’s barons, of the knights and gentlemen of Elizabeth and James, of the shrewd countrymen of the latter monarch, of the staid soldiers of Cromwell, and of the troopers of William III. A Psalter of Tara and an Irish “ Peerage ” have little in common ; still the descendants of some of the aboriginal royal races hold their own [3] even to this day. Kavanagh of Borris in the county of Carlow, male representative of MacMurrough, King of Leinster, retains a splendid estate in the very heart of MacMurrough’s kingdom ; Mr. O’Neill of Shane’s Castle, the heir general of the Kings of Ulster, has succeeded to full 30,000 acres of the old Clanaboy principality, stretching for miles along the banks of Loughneagh ; and it was only within the last two years that the vast Thomond property passed from the regally derived O’Briens. Many of the descendants of the minor dynasts could probably be discovered under the frieze coats of the peasants ; and a genealogical enquirer might trace in the sunburnt mendicant the representative of the O’Rorkes, the O’Reillys, the O’Ryans, or the O’Sullivaus, who were of fame

“ Ere the emerald gem of the western world
Was set in the crown of a stranger.”

Ireland is, indeed, the Tadmor in the desert of family vicissitude ; time out of mind it has been the prey of the spoiler. Strongbow, Cromwell, and William III. spared few of the aboriginal lords of the soil, and the recent alienation of property, under the Encumbered Estates’ Court, has effected a fearful revolution amongst the landed gentlemen of English descent. Confiscation, civil war, and legal transfer have torn asunder those associations between “ the local habitation and the name,” which have for centuries wound round each other. The gentry of Ireland are now, in many cases, dispossessed : new manners and new men are filling the land, and the old time-honoured houses are passing rapidly away. Whoever collects instances of fallen families, some thirty years hence, will have a fruitful field to gather in. No one will gainsay the beneficial influence the Encumbered Estates’ Court has exercised in a national point of view, or fail to trace to its introduction into Ireland the dawn of the prosperity which is now shining on that most improving of countries. That it has worked infinite public good is undeniable ; but it is equally certain, that the general benefit has been effected at the cost of much individual misery. (The condition of the country is increased by it, as the state of a boat’s crew, tempest-tossed, with only a slender basket of provisions, is improved by some of the unhappy sufferers being thrown overboard and drowned. But the relatives of the doomed

cannot but lament, and even the unconnected spectators of such stern and sharp justice cannot remain unconcerned. No cases of vicissitudes would be so pathetic, no episodes of decadence so lamentable as those that could be told in connection with the transfer of land in Ireland ; but the wounds are too fresh, and the ruin too recent, for me to enter on so painful a theme. Many a well-born gentleman torn from his patrimony has sought and found on the hospitable shores of Australia and America the shelter and happiness denied to him in the land of his birth ; while some I might mention, who stayed at home in the vain hope of retrieving the past, or were too old to enter on a new career, ended their days in the Poor-House. What story of fiction is more striking than that of Mr. D'Arcy, of Kiltullagh and Clifden Castle, in the county of Galway, who, after the ruinous sale of his estates, took orders and became a working clergyman in the very district which used to be his own ; or, what more marvellous instance of the depreciation of property, than in the sale of Castle Hyde, in the county of Cork, the inheritance of Mr. Hyde, a scion of the Clarendon Hydcs, and cousin of the Duke of Devonshire, who was deprived of his fine old place in the worst times of the famine ?

One tale only of those tragic times I will in a future page venture to relate, and that will be the story of the heiress of Connemara. I can do so, as no one remains alive to whom the narrative will bring a pang.

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The Princess of Connemara

“ Good Heaven ! what sorrows gloom'd that parting day
That called her from her native walks away ;
When the poor exile, every pleasure pass'd,
Hung round the bowers, and fondly looked her last,
And took a long farewell, and wish'd in vain
For seat like this beyond the western main.”

Goldsmith.

WHO has not heard of the eccentric but benevolent Richard Martin, the Lord of Connemara, the renowned for hospitality in a land of hospitality, and for many years the representative of the county of Galway in the British house of Commons ? Weighed accurately in the scales of merit, he may have fallen short of his ancestors. Most certainly he was not the man to have accumulated the family estates, but somehow his name stands out to the eclipse of those who went before him, and I am thus tempted to give him a momentary precedence.

Even those who have forgotten the eccentricities of this singular character, will yet recollect him in connection with a certain act for “ preventing or punishing cruelty to animals,” an act which is popularly known under his name, “ Dick Martin's Act.” Nor did he content himself with having obtained this parliamentary defence for his four-footed clients, and then leaving the carrying of it out to others ; he was equally strenuous in seeing that they had the full benefit of the law enacted for their protection, and when he was in London never failed to bring up before the police-magistrates such delinquents as had the ill-luck to come under his eye, when he would press the law against them to the utmost. There was something of the *το γελαίον*—of the ridiculous—which for a long time accompanied his best efforts, but eventually the cause of humanity was triumphant.

In Connemara, where, like Selkirk upon the island of Juan Fernandez, he was “ monarch of all he surveyed,” and could do pretty well as he pleased, without the intervention of a magistrate, his benevolence took a shorter cut to its object, and the memory of his doings in behalf of his dumb friends is perpetuated in the ruins of an ancient fortalice upon the shores

of Ballynahinch Lake. The peasants of the neighbourhood still know these mouldering fragments by the name of *Dick Martin's Prison*, and will tell how the Lord of Connemara used, in the somewhat doubtful exercise of his feudal rights, to confine therein such of his tenants as sinned against the laws of humanity towards the brute creation. But I must now leave this redresser of animal grievances, and trace my steps back to the commencement of my story.

The founder of the Martin family in Ireland was Oliver Martyn, who accompanied the first English army, under Strongbow, and settling in Galway, originated one of the thirteen tribes in that ancient town. But the prosperity of the race would seem to have been greatly increased in the time of Captain Richard Martin of Donegan, who received large grants from the confiscated possessions of the O'Flaherties of Ire Connaught. He was a warm partizan of James the Second, and after the abdication, or more properly the flight, of that monarch, joined for a time the so called Irish army. It seems, however, that he knew how to trim his sails to the wind, for upon the Jacobite cause becoming manifestly hopeless, he submitted to King William, and had the good fortune to retain his lands. He then petitioned the reigning sovereign that he might be allowed to erect his estates into a manor, urging as a ground for this request his desire to improve the property by encouraging dealers and handicraftsmen of every kind to become settlers upon it. His prayer was accordingly granted by a patent, July 5th, 1698, which, moreover, ratified the title of all his previous acquisitions, Nor was it probably any drawback to his satisfaction that he had constantly to fight with some one or other for the maintenance of these new rights, which, in proportion as they enlarged his bounds, had curtailed those of his neighbours. Amongst the most troublesome of the enemies so raised up against him was Edmund O'Flaherty, surnamed *Laidier*, or the Stoney, who was far from tamely acquiescing in the alienation of his paternal territories. Many and desperate were the conflicts between the feudal chieftains, for the most part sword in hand, on horseback. But the praise of chivalry must, we think, in fairness, be awarded to the *Laidier*, who seems to have trusted in a great measure to his own good right arm. Martin, being always surrounded by a troop of followers, ran comparatively little risk, while the more adventurous O'Flaherty had often to cut his way to safety through opposing numbers by dint of superior strength.

The estate of the Martins might well be called a principality. Situated in the county of the town of Galway and the baronies of Moycullen, Ballynahinch, and the half-barony of Ross, in the county of Galway, it contained upwards of one hundred and ninety-two thousand statute acres, and extended almost uninterruptedly from the town of Oughterard to Clifden and Claggan Bays, a distance of at least thirty miles, having the navigable Lough Corrib on the north of the Bay of Galway, and the Atlantic ocean as the south and south-western boundaries. Yet their dwelling of Ballynahinch, although styled a castle, was unworthy of the surrounding land. The prodigious extent of the demesne may be imagined from the fact that the grand-father of the last possessor could boast to George the Fourth, "he had an approach from his gate-house to his hall of thirty miles length." Were the greater part of these enormous domains either waste, rock, or moorland, there would be less matter for surprise ; but such is not altogether the fact ; the whole is infinitely diversified with glens, lakes, rivers, and some portion of cultivated land, though far below what the soil would naturally admit of. Many of these waters exhibit scenes of surpassing beauty, their wide surface being broken by beautifully wooded islets. There are about sixty-four of the larger of such watery oases, not to mention a multitude of islets that occur singly or in clusters, and are not the less lovely from oftentimes presenting themselves in the midst of desolation. Moreover the whole coast, washed by the Atlantic, is indented with numerous bays, offering the same panorama of islands that seem to float upon the reflecting element. And then, as might be expected from the natural history of Ireland, the waters abound in salmon and trout, while the land is not less amply provided with grouse, woodcocks, and divers sorts of waterfowl, which make a country life so delectable to sportsmen. At the same time, amidst all these agreeable attractions, there is no want of the useful. The sea affords an abundant supply of manure for agricultural purposes, various parts are rich in blue limestone, and in the *Twelve Pin Mountains*

are inexhaustible quarries of marble. Nothing is wanted but the hand of industry, aided by modern science, to render Connemara equal to some of the favoured regions of the earth, unless I must add thereto a healthier social system, and a better education of the people.

Within this prodigious extent of territory the Martins exercised something very nearly akin to feudal rule, the arms of the law being much too short on most occasions, to stretch into the wilds of Connaught. They were lords paramount. Every head was bared in submission to the owners of so many thousands upon thousands of acres, which, if not generally remarkable for cultivation, at least impressed the imagination by extent. Yet, immense and almost unbounded as the estate was, the seeds of decay had been sown in it by the profuse hospitality of its improvident owners ; and with such marvellous rapidity did they spread, that when Richard Martin ceased to be returned to parliament, he was fain to seek refuge from his creditors by flying to the continent, where, at Boulogne, he died, January 6th, 1834.

Affairs do not seem to have much improved under his immediate successor. Perhaps the evil was already too deeply rooted to admit of cure. At all events, when, upon the death of Thomas Barnewall Martin, Esq., M.P., of Ballynahinch Castle, the property descended to his daughter, popularly styled “ the Princess of Connemara,” she found it so encumbered by the prodigality of her ancestors that it became a serious question in what way she was to keep her inheritance together. Still she struggled on bravely, and for some time maintained a decent appearance upon the balance that remained after paying off the interest of the various mortgages. A continuation in the same line of prudence might perhaps eventually have restored the family estates to something of their former splendour ; but, though sought in marriage by many of wealth and name, she gave her hand in preference to a near relation—Mr. Gonne Bell—who, whatever else might be his gifts, had not the gift of fortune. In this case, as in so many others it was “ all for love, or the world well lost,” a poetical creed which is seldom very strongly believed in when the heyday of life is over.

On the day of marriage Mr. Gonne Bell assumed by royal licence, dated 15th Sept. 1847, the name of his bride, and shortly afterwards both parties united in borrowing a large sum of money from the *Law Life Assurance Company*, in order to consolidate the incumbrances upon the estate at a lower rate of interest. But this attempt to save themselves was defeated by events over which they had no control. The year of famine came on, government works were commenced, and the tenants soon ceased to pay any rents whatever, and as a natural consequence the owners of so many thousand acres were no longer able to pay up the instalments due upon their mortgage. Men acting in large bodies are seldom so merciful as when they are individually responsible for their deeds, and the Law Life Assurance Society formed no exception to this rule of general experience. They insisted upon the due performance of their bond, and that being under the circumstances impossible, this vast Connemara property came into the Encumbered Estates’ Court, and the famous old race of Martin of Ballynahinch was sold out : the times were the worst possible for an advantageous sale ; and the Assurance Company bought in almost the entire of the estate, at a sum immeasurably below its real value, and quite inadequate, even with the produce of the remnant of the lands bought by other parties, to the liquidation of its heavy liabilities. Not a single acre remained for the poor heiress of what was once a princely estate, and while others were thus fattening upon her ancient inheritance, the “ Princess of Connemara,” without any fault of her own, became an absolute pauper. The home of her fathers had passed away to strangers, leaving nothing behind but debts and the bitter recollection of what she had lately been. A more painful example of family decadence will not easily be found, though the roll of such events, as I have already shown, is sufficiently extensive. In most cases the fall is more or less gradual, the downward course speeding on with each descendant. But here, although the worm of decay had for some time been at work, eating and undermining what seemed from its size to be indestructible, yet its progress was almost too rapid for notice, and when the building fell it seemed to fall at once, sweeping everything before it.

In this total wreck of all her fortunes the ill-starred “ Princess of Connemara” retired to Fontaine l’Eveque in Belgium, where for a short while she supported herself by her pen ; but so scanty were the means thus obtained that she at length resolved to abandon the continent for America, hoping to find in the New World an ampler field for her exertions. Some friends of the family now came forward with a small subscription to enable her to carry out this object. Much it could not have been, for we find her embarking on the voyage in a sailing vessel, although she was far advanced in pregnancy. A premature confinement was the result in this den of misery, without medical attendant, without a nurse, without any one of the aids so indispensable at such a moment of danger and suffering. Can it be a matter of surprise to any one that she died soon after she touched the shore ; or, as some will have it, before she left the boat ?

Though the home and the broad lands of the Martins are now in strangers’ hands, the echo of their name has not passed away among the peasants. The people of Connemara yet speak of the Martins as being the legitimate lords of the soil, and never mention them but with affectionate regret.

It only remains to add that this unfortunate lady has left behind her several works that prove her to have possessed more than the ordinary degree of accomplishments belonging even to her elevated condition. Of these the most popular are “ Canvassing,” which was published in connection with Banim’s “ Mayor of Winugap,” and a work in three volumes called “ St. Etienne.” She was also said to have been a good Greek and Latin scholar, and must certainly have been familiar with French, since she contributed to French periodicals during her residence in Belgium. But, beyond all this, she was kind-hearted and of a most independent character.

“ Pride, bend thine eye from heav’n to thine estate ;
 See how the mighty sink into a song !
 Can volume, pile, preserve the great ?
 Or must thou trust Tradition’s tongue,
 When flattery sleeps with thee, and history does thee wrong ?”

[1] The only Milesian families granted peerages by the sovereigns of England, have been the O’Neills, earls of Tyrone, and barons of Dungannon, and, in modern times, viscounts and earl O’Neill, in Antrim ; the O’Donnells, earls of Tyrconnel ; the MacDonells, earls of Antrim, who were Scots of Irish, descent ; the Maguires, barons of Enniskillen : the Magenisses. viscounts of Iveagh, in the county of Down ; the O’Haras, barons of Tyrawly, in Mayo ; the O’Dalys, barons of Dunsandle, in Galway ; the O’Malones, barons of Sunderlin, in Westmeath ; the O’Carrols, barons of Ely, in the King’s County, and co. Tipperary ; Kavanagh of Carlow, baron of Ballyane for life ; the MacGilpatricks, or Fitzpatricks, barons of Gowran in Kilkenny, and Earls of Upper Ossory in the Queen’s County ; the O’Dempseys, viscounts of Clanmalier and barons of Philipstown, in the King’s and Queen’s Counties ; the O’Briens of Clare and Limerick, earls and marquesses of Thomond, earls of Inchiquin, viscounts of Clare, &c. ; the MacCarthys of Cork and Kerry, earls of Clancare and Clancarty, and viscounts of Muskerry and Mountcashell : the O’Callaghans of Cork and Tipperary, viscounts Lismore, in Waterford ; the O’Quins of Clare, barons of Adare, and earls of Dunraven, in Limerick, and the O’Gradys of Clare and Limerick, viscounts Guillamore.

[2] The army list of Austria exhibits a long roll of officers of Irish ancestry ; The First Aide-de-camp to the Emperor is Maximilian, Count O’Donnell, and the senior Field Marshal. Laval, Count, and Prince Nugent, K.C.B., on whom the Emperor of Austria conferred the Order of the Golden Fleece, transmitting the very ribbon worn by Radetsky. The catalogue includes, besides, Count Albert Nugent (eldest son of the Field Marshal), Col. Daniel O’Connor (Kerry), Commandant of Mantua, Count Charles Taaffe (Viscount Taaffe, in the

peerage of Ireland), Baron Herbert of Rathkeale, Baron Piers, Count McCaffrey Maguire, Count Walsh of Carigmain, &c. &c.

France has also a formidable array of officers of Irish descent. First and foremost are the gallant Marshall Mac Mahon, Duc de Magenta, and his equally distinguished companion in arms, Marshal Niel, both sprung from Milesian ancestry, the one a descendant of the Mac Mahons, Lords of Corca Baiscinn, co. Clare, sprung from the famous Bryan Boru, King of Munster ; the other, a scion of the royal and illustrious O'Neills. I have seen a very interesting letter of Marshall Niel's addressed to a kinsman in Ireland, Mr. Charles H. O'Neill, Barrister, of Dublin, in which the gallant officer refers with no inconsiderable pride to his Irish origin. Among the officers of the Cuirassiers of the French Imperial Guard, lately serving in Italy, is Louis O'Brien, the lineal descendant of the O'Briens of Munfin, co. of Wexford, a branch of the once royal O Brians.

In Russian history, De Lacy and O'Rorke are as famous as they were in the Irish annals ; and in Spain, O'Donnell, Magennis (Conde de Iveagh), Sarsfield, O'Neill, and O'Reilly, have not forfeited their old renown.

[3] A valuable and probably unique collection of THE RENTALS of the various estates sold in the Encumbered Estates' Court has been made by Joseph Burke, Esq., of Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin, Barrister-at-Law, so long associated with the administration of the Poor Law in Ireland. These Rentals may be considered the fullest history of Irish landed property ever brought together. They contain a description of the lands under sale, the tenants' names, descriptions of the demesnes, and frequently views of the mansion houses, with maps and local statistics, much more important than the particulars of sales at Chichester House under the direction of the Court of Claims.

Mr. Burke has also collected reports of the sales, the names of the purchasers, and the amount of purchase-money : in fine, this collection is, I believe, the sole perfect series of papers connected with the Encumbered Estates' Court. The Court itself does not possess so complete a set, and I doubt if the British Museum possess any.

Vicissitudes of families : and other essays (1860)

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<http://www.archive.org/details/vicissitudesoffa00burkrich>

Vicissitudes of families : second series (1861)

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