

**FRENCH THOUGHTS
ON IRISH EVILS.
[LONDON-1868]**

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French Thoughts on Irish Evils. [London-1868] by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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IRISH EVILS.

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FRENCH THOUGHTS

ON

IRISH EVILS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE 'REVUE DES DEUX MONDES' WITH NOTES

BY

A SON OF THE SOIL.

Sažann na ba bar a'f bideann an fear a'f a'f.

The cows die while the grass is growing.

Tur ma'è lea'è na h-oibhe.

A good beginning is half the work.

Irish Proverbs.

LONDON:

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1868.

A SPECTATOR is commonly said to divine the game better than the players, and the same rule is perhaps applicable in politics. The foreign essayist seems to have studied the Irish question with a care and impartiality which may claim attention in the game about to be played in Parliament and before the public. This reflection led to the translation.

To the oft-told tale of Irish difficulties the translator cannot venture to hope he has added any fresh ideas in the notes appended to the essay, though he thinks he may have put before the reader, especially an English reader, some facts often overlooked.

FRENCH THOUGHTS

ON

IRISH EVILS.

THE YEAR 1863 has bestowed on Ireland a good harvest—wheat, oats, hay, potatoes; nothing is wanting. When the soil feeds its inhabitants, Ireland has little more to suffer than the ordinary ills of mankind. In countries where wealth has been accumulated from a distant time, national capital supplies in part the deficiency of a harvest: it acts like a well-filled granary, and, thanks to this, an alimentary crisis is transformed into a financial or monetary crisis. In Ireland, where there is no reserve of food or of capital, a deficiency in the harvest produces its direct effect—famine. We ought to welcome the present good harvest, yet not allow it to delude us; the causes which have made in Ireland distress habitual, and famine periodical, have not disappeared. We have had merely a moment's respite, of which we ought to profit to study the causes of a misery which resists civilisation, and almost makes us doubt its efficacy.

Ireland is free (an opportunity for saying so was afforded us in a previous 'Revue'), as free as England.¹ She enjoys civil liberty, political liberty, commercial liberty,

¹ Note A, page 33.

religious liberty. Between the Irishman and the Englishman, between the Catholic and the Protestant, there is complete equality in the eye of the law. Though five functions are interdicted to Catholics¹—that of Regent of the United Kingdom, of Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, of Chancellor of England, of Chancellor of Ireland, of President of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland—these are exceptions which, save one, are justified by the nature of the duties, exceptions which, as is commonly said, justified the rule—wherever the action of the State extends, practical equality makes progress. Successor to several Lord-Lieutenants who have governed Ireland in a spirit of justice and stonement, Ireland possesses now a Viceroy who of all English statesmen is the one most devoted to Ireland, and of whom it may be said, as of the Fitzgeralds, ‘that he is more Irish than the Irish.’

It is necessary to repeat that in fiscal matters Ireland is treated equitably, and is even favoured. Excepting the income tax, and perhaps patents, all the taxes levied by the State are taxes on consumption, customs, excise, stamps, and postage. The Irishman thus pays much less per head than the Englishman.² All the money, and even more, levied in Ireland is expended there. If England ruins Ireland, it certainly is without profit to its own finances. Still property is heavily taxed for the relief of poverty; the poor-tax is, of all taxes, whether on landed property or whether local, the most considerable.³ Since the establishment of this tax in 1846 up to 1861, thirteen millions eight hundred thousand pounds sterling have been expended. As this tax is local, and increases as distress increases, in some places and in some years it has exceeded the amount of the income of the landed property. Besides this, dispensaries have been established, where advice

¹ NOTE B, page 34.

² NOTE C, page 34.

³ NOTE D, page 35.

and medicine are given gratuitously, and of which the annual cost, exclusive of the public expenditure for county hospitals, amounts to more than one hundred thousand pounds sterling. Finally, primary education is gratuitous, and the sum expended by the State on National Schools amounted in 1861 to three hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling.

At the time of the great famine, the Government of the United Kingdom gave or lent to the counties of Ireland money sufficient to maintain three millions of persons for more than a year. Since then large sums are annually voted as loans for agriculture, and for the encouragement of agricultural improvements. Other sums are also allotted in favour of fisheries, and in aid of seamen for procuring the implements necessary for fishing.

Occasionally England has succeeded in subduing her religious and social prejudices: the parochial tax for the maintenance of edifices devoted to the Anglican worship has been suppressed; a portion of the property of the Established Church has been secularised and employed for the general benefit; the ecclesiastical tenth has been converted into a rent which has notably diminished the amount, and which is paid by the proprietor instead of by the farmer.¹ A radical measure has been adopted with regard to landed property: a Court called the 'Encumbered Estates' Court' has been established to sell properties by dividing them when overburdened with mortgages. This Court, and another with larger and wider powers, under the name of the 'Landed Estates Court,' which has been substituted for it, have sold and divided within twelve years in the interest of the creditors a mass of landed property to the value of thirty-one millions one hundred and thirty thousand pounds sterling. The conversion of large into middling-sized properties, of burdened into

¹ NOTE E, page 27.