

**A TWELVE MONTHS' RESIDENCE
IN IRELAND, DURING
THE FAMINE AND THE
PUBLIC WORKS, 1846 AND 1847**

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A Twelve Months' Residence in Ireland, During the Famine and the Public Works, 1846 and 1847 by William Henry Smith

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WILLIAM HENRY SMITH

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TWELVE MONTHS' RESIDENCE
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IRELAND,
DURING
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1846 AND 1847.

WITH
SUGGESTIONS TO MEET THE COMING CRISIS:

Practical Suggestions to English and Irish Landholders, on
Improved Agriculture, Reclamation of Bogs, Mooses and other Waste Lands;
Physical and Social Aspect; The Famine and Public Works;
Monetary Suggestions for Irish Property;
Harbours and Fisheries.

BY
WILLIAM HENRY SMITH, C.E.
LATE CONDUCTING ENGINEER OF PUBLIC WORKS.



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LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMANS
PATERNOSTER-ROW.
HODGES AND SMITH, DUBLIN.
1848.

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE DEDICATED

TO THOSE

FRIENDS OF IRELAND,

Who, during the late National Calamity, so nobly aided by their contributions their suffering fellow creatures; with a view to show, that were its powers *permitted* to develope themselves, THE COUNTRY WITHIN ITSELF CONTAINS AMPLE RESOURCES, without again inflicting so severe a tax upon the benevolence of the people of England; and with the ardent hope that this little volume may so far aid in enlisting their sympathies, as to lead to the formation of a new Era — the tranquillity and ultimate regeneration of Ireland.

INTRODUCTION.

THE present unhappy state of Ireland is a subject engrossing such universal attention, that there needs no apology for bringing forward any practical suggestions for alleviating the sufferings of that unfortunate and misguided country. I should probably, however, have refrained from adding to the number of publications, valuable or otherwise, already issued upon the subject, had I not, during the last twelve months, been in a position affording peculiar facilities for investigating the cause and root of the existing evils, and of ascertaining, from personal intercourse and apart from all prejudice, the real grievances of all classes.

A civil engineer, moreover, as dealing largely in human labour, as the groundwork of material productions in almost every variety, and in the numberless combinations of engineering science, connected with the employment of the people and with the improvement of the mechanical

part of husbandry, ought to be able to form the best judgment as to whether the deficiency of results is owing to a misapplication of such labour, or a fault in the prime mover itself. This I have had ample opportunity of doing, having had the sole management of a tract of country containing from twelve to fifteen thousand labourers, employed on that most irksome and unsatisfactory of all tests,—a new occupation conducted upon new principles.

The evils of the present working system in Ireland have been ably and fully demonstrated by writers with whom I do not for a moment venture to compete; yet it is almost impossible for those who have not visited the country, and been engaged in extended occupations, exciting the interest of all, to form a correct idea of the actual position and sentiments of opposite classes, owing to that power of misleading, so essentially Irish, and likewise to the violence of party feeling, which, deceiving the well-intentioned, causes facts to be distorted, and theories to be built up, to suit individual views and interests.

My endeavour, therefore, has been to supply this information; to present the unbiassed

views of an impartial spectator; describing the country and inhabitants as I found them,—“in nothing exaggerating, and setting nought down in malice.” The facts here related will speak for themselves; and being in no way coloured, the reader will be enabled to draw his own inferences. I have circumstantially detailed things as they are, in order to illustrate the characteristics of the people, in a part of Ireland sufficiently populous to be formidable, and yet sufficiently isolated to retain, to the fullest extent, all the national peculiarities. I here take no merit for this impartiality, being by birth an Irishman, and in parentage and descent English; thus connected by ties with both, and forming a type of that real union, which, I hope and believe, we are on the eve of establishing between the two nations.

My first introduction in Ireland arose from my having been referred to the Irish Government on some business, which is detailed in the course of the following pages. In result, I undertook the engineering conduct of a tract of country embraced by the towns of Athlone, Roscommon, and Ballinasloe, and including

a great number of men, and several engineers, with a double motive: firstly, to give my share of labour in aid of the people, during a period of such frightful calamity, when every engineer connected with the country, who could not afford a proxy, should have gone himself in aid of so Christian a work—a crusade, in fact, against famine; and, secondly, not having spent any time in Ireland for sixteen years, to discover how it was, that a country with such vast resources, and adjoining so great a nation as England, was, nevertheless, always steeped in poverty, her lands untilled, and her sons generally enduring the extreme of privation.

I finally left England on the 31st of October, 1846, and, after exactly twelve months most chequered existence, returned to London on the 1st of November, 1847, with the intention of prosecuting plans, some of which I had been several years in maturing, and upon which I had the honour of an audience with his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant a few days previous to my departure. A portion of these are here submitted.

With respect to those more immediately

connected with my own profession, I wish to express the strongest conviction of their practicability; a certainty as great as any man can be expected to entertain of a subject yet in theory, — a matter not demonstrably evident.

In this, it is gratifying to me to say, I am supported by some of the first authorities of the day. Their value must, however, be tested by public opinion.

I have therefore felt it a moral obligation in the present critical state of Ireland, when the balance upheld must shortly descend, for good or for evil, upon the country, and every *Irishman*, nay, every philanthropist, should *add his share, however small, to the vast amount of talent already concentrated in her behalf*, to bring prominently forward the gleanings of my experience in the country; together with their results, or the deductions which I have made, as to the nature of the remedies required, both for her immediate relief and gradual regeneration.

Ireland has long been a paradox in the social state of Europe, and, like most paradoxes, difficult in the solution. In order ultimately