

A MEMOIR OF IRELAND IN 1850

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A Memoir of Ireland in 1850 by An Ex. M. P.

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&c., &c.

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IN 1850.

BY AN EX-M.P.

*“Sciagurata condizione di questa mia patria! Se patria si può chiamare una terra così
avvilita dalla fortuna, dagli uomini, da se medesima.”*

DUBLIN
JAMES M^cGLASHAN, 50 UPPER SACKVILLE-ST.
JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY, LONDON.
1851.



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A MEMOIR OF IRELAND

IN 1850.



CHAPTER I.

SKETCH OF THE PAST AND PRESENT CONDITION OF IRELAND.

THE degraded and forlorn condition of Ireland has long been the subject of cheerless and unprofitable investigation. The remedial measures proposed from time to time have been abandoned as impracticable; or, when carried into execution, have proved either utterly inefficient, or, not unfrequently, have aggravated the evils they were intended to palliate. This unfavourable result has arisen from the want of accurate knowledge of the case, from infirmity of purpose, or from the idea so prevalent among men of narrow intellect, that it is easier to rule by artifice, by corruption, and by internal discord, than by the higher policy of a wise, humane, and equitable government. These causes, some of long standing, and all of most injurious effect, have produced a state of society altogether unparalleled and hard to be understood. From the first invasion of Ireland, the dominion of England has been exercised in abuse and maintained by violence; the constitutional authority of the laws has

never been firmly established, and for a lengthened period, the body of the people groaned beneath the jealous tyranny of a triumphant faction. The power of oppressing has passed from the hands of the few, and, as it often happens, has been replaced by the licentiousness of the many. The country was not thoroughly conquered, hence there was no blending of races, no community of interest, but an interminable warfare waged in a spirit of the most vindictive and atrocious retaliation. Unskilled in the art of war, and ever at variance with each other, the natives might have been completely subdued or extirpated; but the descendants of the original settlers, "*Hibernis Hiberniores,*" took up and maintained the conflict with even more determined hostility to the parent country.

To these elements of contention was added, in the course of a few centuries, the deadlier ingredient of religious hatred, which quickly absorbed the others, and has ever since continued to exercise its pernicious and desolating influence over all the relations of social existence.

There are many difficulties to be encountered in the ungrateful task of describing the actual state of Ireland, the chief of which arises from the almost impenetrable cloud of falsehood and misrepresentation that is spread over everything Irish. The whole frame of society is one vast fiction of no very reputable kind. From motives of self-interest, from party feeling, from egregious national vanity, or from a thirst for popularity to be gained on one side of the channel only by exaggerated and preposterous praise, and on the other by wholesale calumnies of the foulest and most malignant nature, the real position of Ireland is far less known than that of any other nation

of Europe. Then, the strange discrepancies of disposition and habits, the deep-rooted prejudices, the cherished animosities of sect and race, make it nearly impossible to define the national character, or to apply successfully a system of general legislation. There are, no doubt, some features which may be treated as national: some master evils must be met and eradicated before a reasonable hope of improvement can be indulged. This great object can be accomplished only by an Executive at once irresistibly powerful and unquestionably honest. For a series of years Ireland has had no government for any useful or salutary purpose. It has had government for official details, for paltry backstairs intrigue, for balancing factions, for theoretical experiment, and, above all, for the judicious management of patronage; but the greater and more important functions of government were nowhere exercised for the regeneration of an impoverished and distracted people.

In Ireland no man would venture to state all that he knows to be true; if he did, he would be met at once by a storm of denial and invective which would render his assertions nugatory, and his position neither safe nor agreeable. No public man can obtain influence, nor will he be even tolerated—he is a “bad Irishman” unless he begin by heaping incense on the shrine of national self-esteem.

There are matters, also, of paramount interest and of imperative necessity, that should be dealt with, not discussed.

One of the most momentous phases of national character has been little observed; the morbid and restless spirit of democracy tinged to a considerable extent, as it ever must be, with the principles of what is termed commun-

ism, appears to have taken a strong hold of the popular affections. Already may be distinctly perceived those tumultuous and revolutionary heavings that precede the birth and the development of democratic society. Imagination cannot figure a position of greater unhappiness and disquiet than that of a nation at strife with existing monarchical and aristocratic institutions. The sore and rankling passion of equality allows of no repose, and excludes every other thought in its desperate pursuit of an unattainable object. The great Author of our existence has decreed that there shall be rank and order among his creatures; superior talent, greater industry, more successful enterprise, all tend to produce a difference of station which no human efforts can destroy. But, although superiority of mind cannot be annihilated, it can be reviled, insulted, and excluded from political power. A man of genius and independent spirit will never stoop to the abject prostration that the multitude exacts. How little talent of a high order is to be found in the House of Representatives of the United States. How small an amount of distinguished ability, information, or eloquence, has been contributed by democratic Ireland to the Imperial Senate!

In the great Western Republic men of higher mind shrink from the public view; they are content to be tolerated in their obscurity, surrounded and oppressed by a despotism that will acknowledge no superiority and tolerate no difference of opinion.* Many circumstances have

* "En Amérique, la majorité trace un cercle formidable autour de la pensée. Au dedans de ces limites l'écrivain est libre, mais malheur à lui s'il ose en sortir. Vous resterez parmi les hommes, mais vous perderez vos droits à l'humanité. Quand vous vous approcherez de vos semblables, ils vous fairont comme un être impur; et ceux qui croient à votre inno-