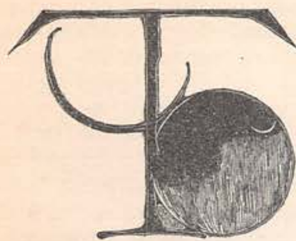
AN IRISH GENTLEWOMAN IN THE FAMINE TIME.



HE great Irish famine — alas for the country which need distinguish its famines — had some beneficent consequences, but among them cannot be reckoned the one consequence most widely and hopefully predicted at the time — the famine did not draw Irish and English hearts together. On the contrary, it added a burning memory to the old grudges. Ever since then the Celt has held his English landlords responsible for the famine's coming, and the English Government responsible for its horrors. Your Irish orator will picture, with savage eloquence, the loaded cars crawling past the dead faces that stared out of the mud, as the grain of starving Ireland was carried away to pay her absentee landlords' rents. Listen to him and you have, on one side, the Irish victims, robbed for centuries until they were the poorest people on earth, and on the other, cynical English oppressors who did not let the wretches all starve because corpses cannot pay rent, but doled out their help as a loan, under intolerable conditions. It is an appalling indictment. But if one turn to the acts of Parliament passed for Irish relief; if he read carefully the narratives of such dispassionate observers as Pim and Mann, and such fair-minded Government officials as Trevelyan, or the reports of the British Relief Association; if he glance down those enormous lists of subscriptions, headed by the Queen, published by the British Relief Association and the Committee of Friends;[1] especially if he read in the newspapers of the day, and in yellow old letters, the affecting details of individual sacrifice and benevolence — he will be amazed at the English munificence, and cannot resist admiring, as well, the courage and sagacity displayed by the English Government in its grapple with Death. For a year and a half, from a third to half of the population of Ireland was supported by charity. During the month of July, 1847, 3,020,712 persons received daily rations of food from the Government.[2] "Advances amounting to nearly two millions[3] were made by Parliament. Local and central relief associations distributed sums which could not have fallen far short of a million and a half."[4] Yet trade was not paralyzed thereby. Neither did this colossal almsgiving pauperize the country. To use the language of one of the ablest and most candid of the Government officials:

> The multitude was gradually and peacefully thrown on its own resources at the season of harvest, when new and abundant supplies of food became available, and the demand for labor was at its highest amount.[5]

That such exertions should have elicited so little gratitude may be sorrowful, but it is not strange. Ireland has always depended upon the richer country's help. Whatever the emergency, landlords and patriots have always been agreed upon one point, to expect aid from the central government; I may say that they have been agreed upon another, to be dissatisfied with the aid given. Naturally they expected aid during the famine, and, in a measure, looked upon such aid as their right — which is not a frame of mind conducive to gratitude. I am not discussing now the claims that the English colony certainly had on England, nor the greater claims of the people subjugated cruelly in the first place, impoverished later, by villainous trade laws; I am only calling attention to a fact as the partial explanation of another fact. Besides, the machinery necessary to support half the population could not be invented and got into working order quickly — and men were dying every hour! It is asking too much of human nature to expect the ragged, ignorant, half-crazed survivors of that awful time to be grateful because only two or three out of a family starved to death. More than all, perhaps, the methods of relief — methods of grim necessity, very likely — were most repugnant to the Celtic temperament. Memories of the bayonets gleaming about the food carts; of the weary, useless dragging from one official to another; of nightmare walks to the relief works, barefooted, through the snow; of the old mother creeping to the poorhouse that she might be buried in a coffin; of the little chil-

[1] One of the most vital yet simple and calm narratives of the famine is contained in the Report of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, Dublin, 1852.

[2] Report of the British Relief Association.

[3] Pounds; nearly ten millions of dollars.

[4] "Transactions during the Famine in Ireland," Report of the Central Relief Committee of Friends.

[5] Sir Charles Trevelyan, "The Irish Crisis," p. 64.

dren moaning out their lives in deserted cabins — these, not grateful thoughts, were what the Irish peasant brought out of the famine. And these he has taught his children. Yet to individual benefactors the people were grateful to a pathetic degree.

In this article I shall try to describe the experience of one of such benefactors, a good woman who belonged to that best abused class in the world, the Irish landlords. Her experience was not exceptional; rather, I like to believe that it was typical, and that all over Ireland women were toiling, like her, for their suffering dependents. There are two ways of viewing a cyclone; we may stand safe on a hill or be down in the stress of the storm. No one can doubt which has the wider vision, but the other's experience is incomparably more vivid. As regards the cyclones of human life, in history we have the post on the hill; but sometimes, vicariously, we may mingle in the storm. A packet of old letters, a pile of moldy newspapers, bring us to the shoulder of some stout fighter, and we see the storm as he saw it, breasting its fury, or spent and conquered in the wreck.

I would look at the Irish famine through the windows of an old manor-house in County Cork. Not very many miles from the ancient town where Sir Walter planted his first Irish potatoes was the estate of the C——s of D——. D——, the town, is a compact little place with the manor-house a mile away at one end, and a big, many gabled, brick almshouse at the other. In 1845 the town had a population of some eight or nine thousand souls. The houses are of stone, whitewashed in Irish fashion, and the doors swinging on the street, where the old crones in their frilled caps and blue cloaks squat on the earth sidewalks to smoke their pipes and gossip. Here and there a sociable pig will be studying the scenery from a second-story window. The shops make a puny show of color with prints, tobacco, ribbons, and such huckster goods, and the shopkeepers live above. A few tall houses of stone and stucco, having stone sidewalks in front and pretty gardens behind, are the homes of the gentry—the rector, the doctors, lawyers, and one or two gentlemen who have property in the neighborhood.

The Bandon River runs through the town. A sparkling thread of a stream it is, and so shallow that one of the C——s assured me that she had waded across without wetting her feet. The explanation is that the bed of the "river" is sprinkled with great stones, from one to another of which she stepped.

Thackeray passed through D—— in 1842, and the curious may find a few lines about it in his "Irish Sketch Book."

> The next stage [there was no railway then] was a place called D——. Here it was market-day, too, and, as usual, no lack of attendants, swarms of peasants in their blue cloaks, squatting by the stalls. . . . There is a little miserable old market-house, where a few women were selling buttermilk; another, bullocks' hearts, livers, and such like scraps of meat; another had dried mackerel on a board; and plenty of people huckstering, of course. Round the coach came crowds of raggery and blackguards fawning for money.

I fear that the women of the people did not strike him favorably; he speaks of not seeing a pretty face at the markets for fifty miles.

> Every woman has bare legs, of course; and as the weather is fine they are sitting outside their cabins, with the pig and the geese and the children sporting round. Before many doors we saw a flock of these useful animals, and the family pig almost everywhere; you might see him browsing and poking along the hedges, his fore and hind leg attached with a wisp of hay to check his propensity to roving. Here and there were a small brood of turkeys; now and then a couple of sheep or a single one grazing upon a scanty field, of which the chief crop seemed to be thistles and stone; and by the side of the cottage the potato field always.
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> The character of the landscape is for the most part bare and sad [he has passed D—— now, and is well on his way to Skibbereen, wretched and squalid town that shall come to have its uncouth name hideously famous for anguish of famine], except here and there, in the neighborhood of towns where people have taken a fancy to plant and where nature has helped them, as it almost always will in this country. If we saw a field with a hedge to it we were sure to see a good crop inside. Many a field was there that had neither crop nor hedge. We passed by and over many pretty streams running bright through emerald meadows; and I saw a thousand charming pictures which want as yet an Irish Berghem. A bright road winding up a hill; on it a country cart, with its load, stretching a huge shadow; the before mentioned emerald pastures and silver rivers in the foreground; a noble sweep of hills rising up from them, and contrasting their magnificent purple with the green; in the extreme distance the clear, cold outline of some far-off mountains, and the white clouds tumbled about in the blue sky overhead. . . . Some way beyond D—— the road takes us through a noble, savage country of rocks and heath. Nor must the painter forget long, black tracts of bog, here and there, and the water glistening brightly at the places where the turf has been cut away. Add to this, and chiefly by the banks of rivers, a ruined castle or two; some were built by the Danes, it is said. The O'Connors, the O'Mahonys, and the O'Driscolls were lords of many others, and their ruined towers may be seen here and along the sea.

This is the landscape to the life. I feel a melancholy pleasure examining the picture. What a simple, narrow, leisurely, thriftless sort of good cheer hangs over the cottages with their pigs and geese and laughing children. Plenty of

time to frolic with the babies or bargain and chatter in the market-place, and potatoes enough to fill all their mouths. Even the beggars, then, were not hungry; they were begging because they craved those luxuries of mackerel and milk and meat described; and, very likely, the dreadful little green apples also, which Thackeray did not see, but which are everywhere in Ireland to this day.

Poor childlike, untidy, cheerful creatures, one wonders how many of them were to die miserably only a few years later.

The manor-house stands a little way from the town amid beautiful gardens and plantations[1] of firs and birches. It is a square stone house, not later than the Georges. The old manor-house is only a ruin. It stood in the center of the town, for when it was built by the first baronet safety was more desirable than any beauty of surroundings. He was a well-hated man, that first Sir Richard; yet there is a letter from Lord Chesterfield to him, in the family archives, praising his "humane policy." But he was a stanch Protestant, and religious feeling ran high when William the Third was king. The kitchen windows of the house have a queer broad shape and look like gable windows that have had a fall in the world, blinking out above a disproportionate length of wall; they were, in fact, windows of the ordinary form, but were built up during the Whiteboy riots. The other windows fared the same, but in their case the masonry has been removed. There were later riots, and the C—— of that day received a sword from the Duke of Wellington for his services with the yeomanry. This C—— inherited the estate by right of his mother, and added the C—— name to his own. He was the cadet of a noble Scotch family whose every title is an outrage to Irish ears, and he was a most irascible and domineering old personage. Once he walked through his village of D—— and smashed every tea-pot. He regarded tea as a beverage above the station of his tenants. "Such airs!" he snorted; "the likes of them drinking tea."

Doubtless it was a relief to the tenants when he went to America and bought property there, and was gone for years at a time. Long before the famine he died, and his son reigned in his stead. He lived in America, making frequent visits to Ireland. But his two sisters had always lived at the manor-house and cared for the tenants. They were both unmarried and no longer young; Kate, the younger, was past forty, while her sister was ten years older. The men of the family were a roving race, but the sisters clung to the old home. Kate was born in America, but I cannot say that she was pleased with her birthplace. She always protested against being called an American: "Should I be a horse, then, if I had been born in a stable?" said she. She was a little, slight, active woman, with the fair Irish skin and the Irish black hair and blue eyes. Frail as she looked, no exertion or fatigue could conquer her spirit. For miles around the cotters knew her flashing smile and gay word. Shrewd as she was kind-hearted, they "niver tried to come the comether over Miss Kate." Martha was the oldest of the family. From the description of one who knew and loved her I imagine a tall woman, gentle and sad, wearing an elderly cap and almost always in black robes, for there were few living then out of a great family whom she had loved with a mother's devotion. Her eyes were bright, and though grief and ill-health had laid a fine network of wrinkles over her features, her skin retained a youthful freshness of color. She had beautiful hands and very small feet. They were a hereditary gift of person; but I do not think that otherwise Martha inherited the C—— beauty. The beauty of the family was married and gone away.

Martha had always been an invalid. Racking headaches tormented her; she had a constant cough. Nevertheless she made so light of her ailments that her weak health is only a second thought in one's impressions.

The life of the sisters was secluded. It is pretty to see what metropolitan splendor Cork assumes in Miss C——'s letters. Indeed, a kind of Old World innocence and simplicity clings to her air of education and high breeding, just as, I am sure, a soft odor of lavender clung to her old-fashioned silken gowns of state. One can see by her letters that she had read widely and was deeply interested in politics. Never was a more ardent Tory. Lord Derby she is convinced is "a *sound* Protestant and real Christian," as well as "a man of real talent," and the Lord Lieutenant she admires loyally when she goes to Cork to see him open the Exhibition; "he is a kingly looking man." But it is hard telling whom she regards with the holier horror, Lord John Russell or the Pope. Either of them would destroy Ireland unless stopped in his fell career; and they never get across her page without a thumping. A deeply religious woman, her piety, in this age, looks a thought austere; but she had the tenderest and most unselfish of hearts, and whenever this good heart and her harsh prejudices dispute, the prejudices are sure to be left in the lurch.

Thus this Protestant lady and her "papist" tenants dwelt together in the utmost amity. Strange, truly; it seems to recall that vanished feudal devotion in these discordant times. The people brought all their troubles to the manor-

[1] Plantations in Ireland are groves of planted trees.

house, from the "baccagh's" inability to find the rent to the "colleen's" quarrel with her sweetheart. Every summer a prodigious store of sweetmeats was put away for the ailing. Flannel and tea were dealt out to the sick; and—matter even nearer the Irish heart—there was always fair harkening to complaints. Under the sister's mild rule the estate prospered — as prosperity is counted in Ireland; tillage was increased, and rents, which were mercifully low, were paid with reasonable promptness. Then the famine came. No one can comprehend the complete prostration of Ireland who does not realize the condition of her social fabric. Here is a country where, save in a small portion, manufactures are practically extinct. A few decaying mills, a few fingers still moving above lace curtains and looms in the cabins, a few rude fisheries[1]—there you have a nation's resources. By consequence the population is virtually thrown on the land. To make matters worse, the land laws tie both landlord and tenant hand and foot.

The acts of the Irish parliament, during the latter half of the eighteenth century, offering a bounty on the exportation of corn and restricting the importation, had the immemorial consequences of such legislation. They lured men of small capital, or no capital at all, into agriculture, which had assumed a fictitious value. Having no money, the new farmers paid their laborers in rent, allowing them bits of ground whereon they would erect hovels and raise potatoes.

Now give to this squalid multitude, living on the edge of starvation, a priesthood loved and trusted by them, which shall have to depend for its living mostly on wedding and christening fees: the Roman Catholic clergy had been more than human if they had consistently discouraged early marriages or small holdings. There was another motive: they conscientiously believed early marriages desirable on moral grounds; and when principle adds its impetus to interest we all know the result.

Finally, supply this population with the very cheapest food, which shall also be food raised with very little labor in a marvelously small space; have no career outside open to the younger sons of the gentry and professional men; have a multitude of middlemen who make profit rents out of subletting their property; cap the cairn of hindrances on the body of enterprise with an absent or a ruined aristocracy, and what happens? Simply this: the ordinary movements of trade and society may go on in a feeble fashion, but any additional load will break the whole.

It is not understood how desperate the position of the Irish landlords was in 1845. Really half of them were ruined. There was a grand show on the rent-rolls, but deduct the charges on the revenues, the annuities, dower charges, marriage portions, interest on debts, and the remnant will cut a shabby figure.

Sometimes a gentleman with a nominal rent-roll of ten thousand a year had hardly two thousand. Yet he must support the position of the man with ten. Inevitably estates of this kind grew more and more encumbered. Half the apparent rapacity of the landlords is due to this frightful disproportion between their revenues and their state. When the famine came many landlords gave up the struggle. Having long paid the bulk of their income as interest to their creditors, now, there being no rents, they had nothing left to pay. The creditors seized on the rent-roll, since at that period they could not sell the land. All over Ireland there were landlords who had no more word in the management of their reputed estates than the poorest cotter. A report of the period tells of one barony where "every one of the landlords—from Mr. ——, who is in possession of 500,000 acres, to the lowest of them—was involved, lived on an allowance, and had his estate managed by the agency, so that the poor" were "placed between a landlord who" was "unable to give them any assistance and the agent who" had "no interest in giving them any." Even those landlords who had a competent income beheld it almost swept away. At one blow the income of the landlord and the subsistence of the people were annihilated.[2] The first hint that I have of the calamity which was to assume such overwhelming size, affecting D——, is in a letter written by Miss C—— to her brother, the landlord, in January, 1845. She describes the failure of the potato crop, "everywhere rotting in the pits," and regrets that she can send him so little money. Less and less money was sent, until during the year 1847–48 the landlord did not, in the words of an old friend, "get enough from the estate to buy the children a pair of shoes."

The damage to the crop this year, however, was only partial. The early crops had escaped entirely, and some potatoes of the later crop could be used. Wheat, oats, and barley were a full average crop. At D—— they planted more "green crops"—turnips, carrots, and the like—than on many estates. Miss Kate, who was her brother's agent, reduced the rents. Relief works were opened by the Government, and some of the poorest tenants earned enough on them to keep soul and body together. The

[1] During the famine people on the sea-shore lived on limpets and seaweed or died of starvation because their tackle was too poor to catch fish, although the sea was full of them.

[2] Report of British Association, Appendix A, p. 96.

relief works were mainly on the highways. Some pottering with so-called "reproductive works," such as the draining and planting of farms, and some attempts to improve the fisheries, hardly ought to count; what an Irishman understands by the "relief works" is work on the roads. The testimony is unanimous that whether the works were good for the men they certainly were not good for the roads. They leveled the hills, or rather they hacked away at the hills; but harvest time found them still standing, and they were frequently left in the condition of the celebrated hill between Castle Richmond and Castle Desmond.

Before the famine was over there was a suffocating rush on the works. This is the description of one of the board:

> The attraction of the "Queen's pay," as it was popularly called, led to a general abandonment of their other descriptions of industry. . . . Landlords competed with each other in getting the names of tenants placed on the list; farmers dismissed their laborers and sent them to the works; . . . the fisheries were deserted, and it was often difficult to get a coat patched or a pair of boots mended.[1]

The C——s were not of the landlords who thus shifted their own burden to the Government's shoulders. Miss C——'s language about the works is as caustic as her usual strictures of Lord John Russell's measures.

> They have cut up the country into a parcel of useless roads; spent more of the immense sums on hired officials than on the poor, who continue dying on the roads by hundreds, of hunger and of cold; and damaged the people still more by congregating them in idle groups and drawing them away from all agriculture—so that now the spring is advancing, no farming doing, no prospect but of a perpetuity of famine and taxes.

Government, however, closed the relief works, and planting was done, although it seems clear that the tillage did suffer on account of the works. Still, at D—— the crops were planted. The sisters told each other, hopefully, that after a scarcity there always came a year of plenty. Kate, who was the active one, brought back cheering accounts of the fields green with harvest. The D—— people had used up the narrow margin of savings, of household furniture or pigs or cows; but they had only begun to be in want. The "Queen's pay" had kept the poorest alive. In July, Ireland drew a long breath of reviving hope; by the middle of August, every Irishman knew that the potatoes were gone. Miss C—— regularly sent her brother the Cork newspapers. Late in August the little circle in America that looked with such painful interest for the Irish news must have read the Cork reporter's despairing conclusions. The crop was clean gone.

> The people are in an absolute state of bewilderment. The blast has been nearly universal; and such is the effect that the stalk and stems thus blasted break off quite rotten like, and the young potatoes that are found are mostly black. All the change has taken place within the last fortnight; until then everything was promising.

That was the shock of the calamity, it was so sudden. In July—this, too, the circle at B—— must have read—Father Mathew passed from Cork to Dublin, and "the doomed plant bloomed in all the luxuriance of an abundant harvest." On his return, a week later, he saw "only one wide waste of putrefying vegetation," and the "wretched people were seated on the fences of their decaying gardens wringing their hands and wailing bitterly." August 16 Miss C—— wrote, with bitter calm:

> Ireland is ruined. God has manifested his continued wrath against us by completely destroying the potato crop. Never was there a greater quantity planted, never a more glorious prospect of plenty, but about three weeks ago the black spots appeared, and the whole crop is gone. It is said to be worse than last year. His arm is bared to destroy us. You thought it bad enough when you were here, but ah! we little knew how happy we were then. And extreme as seemed the poverty then, it was only *seeming* to our present misery. The tide of emigration is as great as ever; all who can are flying from a land which seems doomed to destruction.

Already the times were felt by the landlords. Nearly every one she knows is cramped by loss of rents and the enormous poor-rates. Her brother has been sick, and she fears that it was from anxiety of mind. She longs to see him, but she would not wish him back to "this dismal country"; and she compares the frantic misery of the people, beginning to show itself in riots, to the state of the Jews in Jerusalem before its destruction.

While the potato crop was a total failure, the wheat crop was "barely an average one," and rye and barley were scant. On the Continent, too, rye and potatoes failed. There was famine in Scotland, in Belgium, in France. Miss C—— writes:

> The worst of it is that no one has any heart left. Kate is busy about her farming. Our crops are much better than our neighbors'. Were they not, what would become of us? It is our only resource now.

She alludes to a little farm adjoining the manor-house, which, like many Irish landlords, they farmed on their own account. Kate was the farmer—a very successful one, it appears. She had profited by her brother's American

[1] Sir Charles Trevelyan, "The Irish Crisis."

experience. The tenants stared and howled Irish ejaculations over the outlandish machines that came down from the Cove of Cork. More perplexing and awe-inspiring were the strange grains that sent emerald spikes through the meadows. Both the landlord and his sister had long realized the danger of depending upon a single crop, and that the cheapest of all foods. But it was quite another matter to bring the tenants to this way of thinking. Farmers would come to the manor-house and gaze with awe on the huge pumpkins raised under glass, they would praise the waving fields of wheat and oats, and they would exchange sly winks of amusement over the ragged rows of Indian corn which Miss Kate vainly tried to make grow under that humid and uncertain sky. They said, "Shure, thim will do for the gentry; but 't is the praties that kapes the hunger down." They resisted all innovations with the dogged obstinacy of their race. But there were other crops on the estate. Alas, in that fatal year all crops failed together!

The relief works opened in September and instantly were crowded. Over half a million of men at one time were employed. In the month of March the expenditure on the works rose to the enormous sum of £1,050,722, or something over five million dollars.[1]

Nevertheless the wages of the men did not keep their families. How could they? The wages were only tenpence a day. Besides, there was a great multitude who had no direct providers, widows and orphan children and aged creatures who might have been helped by kinsfolk or neighbors in ordinary times; but now every man's hands were full if he earned bare life for his own. There were the almshouses for such people; but in the remoter districts often they did not know about the poor-laws, and always they hated "the house" next to death.

The year before had swept the wretched cabins clean of all those things which they could sell or pawn; now they sold their pigs and chickens and ponies and cows. They sold the cloaks which the women wore, and the men's frieze coats. Presently there was nothing left to sell; they ate up the scanty harvest, they ate up the potatoes that they had laid by for seed. Then — they began to die.

Early in September Miss Kate raised what money she could on her own and her brother's credit and laid in a stock of Indian meal. This, be it remembered, was before the Government had stirred. The year before, when the crop failed, Indian corn was bought in America, and depots were established in different parts of Ireland where meal was sold under the market price to the different relief committees.[2]

But these depots had been emptied. It was necessary to start afresh. Miss C—— passionately accuses the English Government of not realizing the situation, and doubtless she only echoed the sentiments of harassed and impoverished landlords all over the country. At that time the corn laws were in force. Indian corn in 1845 had a duty laid on it so high that it was practically unknown in the United Kingdom. And it was easier to repeal the law than to remove the ignorance. She says:

> Every measure of our rulers from the beginning has been foolishness and waste. They were warned a year ago of what was coming, but they kept utterly aloof until the distress was at its utmost height and hundreds starved to death; said British commerce must not be interfered with, and though petitioned by thousands to take some step to lower prices they have refused; allow speculators to traffic in the blood of their fellow-creatures, and when, at last, shamed by the loud cry of desperate misery, they did something, it was to set up *relief works!* . . . to support the people in sloth and idleness, and taxes laid on the country that her wretched revenues can never support.

Poor lady! But the Government also was a subject of compassion, confronted by the woful problem how to feed a starving nation without ruining both Ireland and England. It would hardly have helped matters to have made all the corn merchants in the United Kingdom bankrupt.

This letter was written before the repeal of the corn laws, and before the enterprise of the Irish dealers had filled the markets and reduced Indian corn from £19 a ton in February to £13 in March and £7 10s. in August, and it was before the British Association was organized, or that vast and searching system of relief had been arranged which saved the country.

The period between August, 1846, when the Irish landlords knew that the harvest was gone, and the arrival of the first war-steamer loaded with flour and pease on the southwest coast of

[1] "In order to check the exorbitant demands which had been made during the preceding season, the whole of the expense was made a local charge, and the advances were directed to be repaid by a rate levied according to the poor-law valuation, which makes the landlords liable for the whole rate on tenements under £4 yearly value, and for a proportion, generally amounting to one-half, on tenements above that value." ("Irish Crisis," p. 37.) The former relief works expenses were half a grant and half an advance, the advance to be repaid by the barony.

[2] These relief committees were formed all over Ireland, with a central committee in Dublin. They sold meal to those who could buy, and gave it to those too poor to buy. Their funds came from private subscriptions.

Ireland, was a time of dreadful anxiety and of consequent indignation.

Miss Kate bought her Indian meal and established a store in her kitchen, where meal was sold under the market price. As long as the people could buy, they purchased. Miss C—— and her sister knew the circumstances of every family on the estate; when a farmer who still had something left approached, and, in Irish phrase, "made a poor mouth," Miss Kate stopped him briskly: "There 's the dun cow's calf, Higgins; we 'll give you the worth of that in meal. You know every penny we get will go for more meal." Soon they were obliged to guard the door of the impromptu shop. Policemen stood outside to keep back the horde of frenzied, dying creatures, lest they should rush in and fall upon the whole stock of provisions. "Never was Ireland more bloody, more riotous, than now," wrote Miss C——. They had no fear of their own people's violence,— they could be made to understand that the supplies must be husbanded,— but out of caves and bogs squalid, emaciated shapes crawled to the merciful ladies who were feeding the poor.

When they sat down to their niggardly meal, as plain now and hardly more plentiful than the portion they served to the starving, they had to have the shutters drawn in order not to see the ranks of wolfish eyes glaring in at the table.

They were always coming upon hideous sights. Once it was a mother and her two children whom they found crouched against a tree. Her husband was dead, and one child. Maybe it was the fever killed him, she said; they had some of "the yally meal" when he died, and a turnip that a neighbor gave her. With his last breath he had told her to go to the manor-house. She knew she was n't of their people, but she had no one else. They cared for her and she lived.

By this time pestilence was increasing the horrors of famine. They risked their lives by their humanity, but it was a daily risk for them and for others of the helpers in D——; because the fever did not spare the well-nurtured and clean, though it sprung out of filth and want.

The wretches died too fast for burial. Sometimes they dragged themselves almost to the house, then sank on the way. One poor lad the two sisters found with his head on a flower bed and the hydrangeas nodding above his pinched, ghastly brown face. So wasted was he that the two women picked him up and carried him to the house. When he revived enough to speak he tried to point, saying, "They 're beyant!" He meant his mother and sister. They were found and cared for. They survived; but the faithful child, whose last thought was of them, died before they could reach the house, in the arms of his kind bearers. They had no leisure to grieve over him. An awful feature of those days of darkness was that the mind, being so hurried from one scene of anguish to another, lost its capacity for separate pity, and was only sensible of the crushing weight of despair always upon it, pressing a little more heavily each time. Before that terrible winter ended, suffering that formerly the sisters would have discussed compassionately for weeks, they almost forgot in the crush of new agony at its heels.

Well might Count Strzelecki, the volunteer agent of the British Association, write to his chiefs:

> No pen can describe the distress. . . . It has actually reached such a degree of lamentable extremes that it becomes above the power of exaggeration and misrepresentation. You may now believe anything which you hear or read.

What painfully increased the difficulties of the situation was the condition of the roads and transportation. Ireland had few railroads, and as soon as winter came the highways were in a horrible condition. The relief works, so far from mending matters, often had succeeded only in turning what had been merely a bad road into an impassable one. At the same time there was an unprecedented demand for horses, and fewer horses than ever before, for horses as well as men died, and those left were so meagerly fed that they had not strength to pull. Towns were small and scattered. In the region about D—— there were districts without a mill or a granary or a single shop for the sale of provisions. The people of such districts must walk ten or twelve miles to D——. Count Strzelecki tells of men walking twenty and thirty miles to buy meal and then, such was the pressure on the scanty shops, being obliged to go empty-handed away. And twenty or thirty miles away among the bogs the wretches' starved women and children were waiting for them. In all the letters and reports of the time distances are mentioned. Always the people are walking from remote homes to the works or the village or the soup kitchen. Miles on miles, thousands of miles, must have been traversed in torment that winter. To me there is nothing ghastlier in all the famine than this vision of incessant motion; of a squalid procession whose life is dribbling away with every step. Yet what could the relief officers do? It took time to establish depots of provisions, and provisions must be hauled. By water it was no better. There were so few ships that freights jumped to an appalling fig-

ure,[1] and often vessels could not be hired at any price.[2] Bantry must have been the nearest point where the relief committee of D—— could obtain provisions in any quantity; but I am inclined to think from the letters that most of the supplies came from Cork. They sent their own cars and horses, and their own people went as escort, armed to protect the precious grain. Besides the relief committee there was a "Ladies' Association." It consisted of a number of ladies in the town and vicinity, being a branch of the general association of women which extended all over Ireland. Miss C—— was at the head of the D—— committee. Of this committee one of the agents for the British Relief Association wrote as follows:

> They reach many cases that no relief committee could, and are personally daily cognizant, for miles around, of the actual state of the inhabitants of the cottages scattered far and wide. The working is admirable.

The Ladies' Association worked with the relief committee to whom the general supervision of the K—— district belonged. The chairman was a trusted friend of the sisters, a wise, good man; happily, also, a man of wealth. His help of counsel and of money was great; it was a grievous misfortune that he died this year. The rector of the parish was an invalid, but the young Irish curate, Mr. L——, did the work of ten men. The sisters had other helpers in their own household, helpers who knew the character and necessities of the people better than any gentleman or gentlewoman could know; the servants of their house were the private soldiers in that pitiful battle with famine and the plague. It was they who carried the peat for the fire and made the beds and kept the rooms for the sick who were brought within the manor-house to die (for it came to this with the hunger, that those who succumbed very rarely could be revived), and it was they who served in the kitchen, cooking the meal and rice and soup. The head of the men was a bluff, red-faced giant who rose from a boy in the kitchen to be manager at this time, and later a large farmer. He kept the skeletons of men at work in the fields. At one time, so generally had the men gone to the relief works, that he was forced to hire girls to do the planting. Neither was his case uncommon in the southwest that year.

Of the women I see only one head out of the crowd, a square, wrinkled, honest, shrewd Irish face in a frilled cap; her short neck making her chin rest on her blue cloak. She was the cook, a servant of the old time, infinitely attached to the sisters, whom she ruled kindly but firmly, never for a second "forgetting her place," but getting her own way quite as effectually. Like all Irish servants, she had an incomparable ingenuity in makeshifts that served the whole family well. At this time she was a young woman, not cook in chief, only a kitchen maid. She made a cake of Indian meal and water very like our Southern hoe-cake, I fancy. The sisters did not share the prevalent ignorance of the gentry regarding "Indian wheat." Thanks to their brother's American training they were able to cook the new food properly. An American cannot realize the intensity of the Irish prejudice against new foods, especially the "yally male." They believed it would turn black those who ate it. Of course they did not know how to cook it — nor anything else beyond potatoes. The women used to mix the meal with cold water and eat it thus, grumbling with some reason at the "bitter bad stuff." Either from ignorance or avaricious intention some of the millers ground bits of the husk with the corn. "The back av me hand and the sowl av me fut to the yally male!" screamed one irate old woman at the relief committee. "Shure it 's scratched all up me throat is wid thryin' to swally it! It 's needles they put in it."

But before that winter ended the people considered themselves happy if they could get the "yally meal." Undoubtedly, however, its use half cooked did bring on disease.

As winter advanced the distress grew deeper and fiercer. It was a hard winter, cold rains and snows alternating. To famine and fever was added cold. Hundreds of cabins in County Cork had nothing on their earth floors save a few rotten bundles of straw — not a blanket, "not a stick of furniture." Neither could the people afford in many cases even the cheap peat fires. The men tramped barefoot through the snow to the relief works. Their rags hardly covered their bones. It was the commonest thing in the world for men to be "struck with the cold" and die in a day or two.

I find in the letters of this time constant reference to the need of clothes. Writing to a dear friend in America, Miss C—— acknowledges the receipt of two boxes of clothing. "The two boxes," she says, "arrived safely last night all right, according to the lists. Oh, if you could see the absolutely naked state of our whole peasantry, your benevolent hearts would feel a sweet reward in seeing so many comfortably clothed and hearing the bless-

[1] The freight for a barrel of flour from the United States to Ireland before the famine year was 2s. 6d.; by the winter of 1847 it was 8s. or 9s. Indian meal rose from 8s. to 18s.

[2] One gentleman offered £240 to the Cork Company for a steamer to carry a cargo of meal to Kenmare. The offer was refused. (Report of British Association.)

ings poured on your heads by the receivers." Clothing came from England as well. Often the garments were of an incongruous gentility, but the backs under them were as warm. One difficulty in this direction was that the starving people would pawn their clothes. But after a time the pawnbrokers refused to advance money. In this same letter Miss C—— speaks of their efforts to employ the hordes of idle women and children in wool spinning and making flannel. Some of the women were instructed in sewing, and altered or made garments. By this time the destitution had reached the class of tradespeople and farmers, and the terrible circle was continually widening.

I find slight mention in Miss C——'s correspondence of relief received from official sources. So overwhelming and paralyzing indeed was the distress at this time, that districts where the landlords were partly caring for their people were passed by in favor of utterly helpless regions where there was none to pity. But the efforts both of the Government and of individuals were herculean. The Society of Friends raised over a million of dollars, of which a great part came from the United States. The British Association spent £263,251. The Irish local relief committees raised £199,470, to which the British Government added a donation of £189,000. All over the world Englishmen sent money to Ireland. The Irish in America out of their poverty sent a million and a half dollars. Cargoes of corn and rice were sent from every part of the United States. I have before me a list of the freight paid by the British Government on gifts of food from America for the relief of the poor of Ireland and Scotland in the years 1846–47, and the total is more than forty thousand pounds.[1]

Yet in February Miss C—— wrote to her brother:

> No tongue can describe, no one can imagine, the horrors. Independent of hunger, fever, and death, in how many ways our comfort is utterly destroyed. Pigs, geese, fowls, horses dying everywhere; no poor man can keep his horse or cow; carriers knocked up; Indian meal and the coarsest flour 2s. 7d. a stone —how can the laborer on 10d. a day keep his family out of that? People are dying of hunger by hundreds, and the sufferings of women and young children are dreadful. Our porridge-pot and griddle are never off the fire to feed the skeletons at our door, who we fear will die after eating the bit. I have been obliged to send the newspapers with the worst accounts to England and Jamaica to try what they will do—this will cause irregularity in your getting. Kate and I are almost worn out. Since last September we have been every day selling meal in the kitchen below the market price. She works at trading, and I write for supplies of money: we have got about £100 from England by my letters alone; but that is but a drop in the ocean of misery, but I praise God for honoring me by making me in *any* way an instrument.

The work has made her ill, but she is up again, "for the loud cry of misery in the whole south of Ireland will not let us rest. And the north and part of Scotland is little better."

With the spring the tide of misery overflowed. The starving people attacked the marines landing meal on the coast. Vessels laden with provisions were detained in the harbors because no pilot dared take them out to sea. Skibbereen is a few hours' drive from D——. The agent of the Society of Friends wrote:

> This place is one mass of famine, disease, and death; the poor creatures, hitherto trying to exist on one meal a day, are now sinking under fever and bowel complaints— unable to come for their soup, and this not fit for them.

The skeletons crawled along the street and sometimes dropped dead on their way to the soup kitchen.

Another correspondent, writing from Castletown Bearhaven, a neighboring town, begged for help, saying that of twenty thousand souls in that parish the "greater part" were "suffering all the horrors of famine and of fever and dysentery." So reduced were the people that unguarded help was fatal to them. One man said to the relief agent, "If they get any strong dose at all, they die off at once." He explained that by a "strong dose" he meant "a full meal."

In County Mayo there was a more squalid and desperate misery than in County Cork. In one day in a single small town eight inquests were held on the bodies of poor people who had perished "for want of the necessaries of life."

A dreadful kind of apathy or a more dreadful frenzy possessed the starving people. There were crimes beyond any one's remembrance for number. A farmer living near D—— sold a cow. He was killed for the money as he was returning home. The assassins were arrested, and one of them immediately cut his throat with a piece of window-glass. Hope had abandoned all classes. An agent of the British Association describes his visit to one of the miserable hovels not half a day's driving from D——. Says he:

> I found three grown-up emaciated women, with three or four children. On inquiring as to whom they had to work for them they pointed to a corner, where an old man lay, their father, the only male left in the family. None of them had a fraction of money, and the only food in the house was a pannikin half full of a certain kind of thick gruel, of which they all had had a couple of mouthfuls each in the morning. Through an interpreter (the man only

[1] "Transactions during the Famine in Ireland," Appendix VIII.

spoke Irish) the old man said he had lain down to die — as also said all his daughters: there was no help for it.

In one village, "which in better times must have been prosperous, for they had grass for forty cows one side the village and for thirty-five on the other," they had "a *little* seed," that is, potatoes. They would not sow it, because "when the harvest came it would not be their property, and were they alive they would be murdered by those who had none for their crop; they would lie down and die after eating the little they had kept for putting in the land."[1]

All over the country men and women could be seen "redigging the potato grounds, in hopes of finding some few remaining." They were bending over the fields which the sheep had deserted, trying to find turnip roots. Families were known to have lived for weeks "on the flesh of horses that had died."

A Skibbereen man with a family of five had nothing for them all to eat from Saturday to Thursday except eleven and one-half pounds of potatoes and a head of cabbage. He walked several miles to the works, and the superintendent gave him a piece of bread; he tried to swallow it and dropped dead.

Such are some of the "worst accounts" in the papers which would be delayed in coming to her brother, but which did come. Again she writes to him; each letter, now, carries a deeper gloom.

> The approaching summer presents a dreadful prospect. I think half the population will be swept away, and the other half eat each other. And if the landlords do not get their rents they can neither help the poor nor themselves. Yesterday the first person was buried in K—— churchyard without a coffin — poor Davy C——, long ago a laborer of ours. We have kept all our people from starving as yet.

So the winter wore away into spring. The land was tilled somehow, but with almost hopeless hearts. Still Miss Kate sold her meal to the hungry crowds below in the kitchen, and up-stairs her sister filled page after page to go to England, to India, to America. She had asked her brother to interest his American friends. So effectually was this done that a cargo of provisions was bought, and a generous merchant gave the use of one of his ships to take it to the Cove of Cork.[2]

It came at the darkest hour.

For six weeks the kitchen fire at the manor-house had not been allowed to die down. Night and day the haggard crowd besieged the doorway where the policemen stood.

[1] Report of Relief Association, Appendix A, p. 62.
[2] Now Queenstown.

The fever was making the streets of the town horrible. Mr. L——, the curate and the parish priest, used to wrap the dead in tarred sheets and so bury them — together.

In March the agent of the British Association, announcing his purpose to visit D——, had said, "Though I do not fear that they can be suffering the intense misery and raging fever, with perfect absence of food, that they are truly suffering on the sea-coast"; but March 14, after the visit has been paid, he writes:

> I regret to say that in every place I have lately visited, and which I named as about to do in a former letter, I have found the distress, disease, and deaths have very much increased; nothing can exceed the wretchedness that is and has been existing; it is the spreading so rapidly that now principally horrifies the visitor.

The people would not plant, they said the crops would be taken from them, better to die now; and they crouched in the doorways or the corners of their cabins and looked on with dry eyes while their children died; they were a little glad when the moaning ceased, but they did not notice anything any more.

As yet the D—— people had kept famine at a little distance, but the fever and kindred diseases increased steadily. Steadily, too, those precious sacks in the pantry grew lean.

It was at this juncture that news came of the American gift; I have Miss C——'s letter of acknowledgment before me. The first words are a copy of the resolution of thanks.

> The D—— Ladies' Committee for the Relief of the Poor beg leave to make their most grateful acknowledgments to the ladies and gentlemen of Binghamton for their generous exertions on behalf of the starving people of D—— and Skibbereen, in contributing the sum of four hundred dollars for the purchase of Indian meal to be divided between those two parishes. The meal is not yet arrived, but is daily expected. They are also informed that about six hundred dollars has been sent from Binghamton to other parts of Ireland. The committee particularly express their thanks to the family of E. W——, Esq., of Binghamton, who have been actively instrumental in directing the attention of their friends to these parishes, and to the ladies who have so kindly exerted themselves as collectors. Truly our American sisters have not been appealed to in vain. May the Lord reward them as he only can; and may the blessing of those who are ready to perish be on their heads.

This is dated April 28, and signed on behalf of the D—— Ladies' Committee by Martha C——, her sister, the rector's daughter, and three gentlewomen of the vicinity.

Miss C—— continues on the same sheet to her sister-in-law:

> I have sent this according to your directions, and I have also sent the same to B—— W——, who is the kind and dear friend in Philadelphia who has done

so much for us in collecting and publishing, and I have requested him to have it published and send it to the W——s, and you can also, if you think fit, send it to Charles C——, to be published in New York. I feel so grateful to the Binghamtonians and to you that I should like to publish it everywhere. We have put it in the Cork paper, which I will send you; but you know ladies don't like to have their names in print when they can help it, therefore our committee would not sign their names for the Cork paper, but directed me to acknowledge it, as I have done. We got the paper with the account of the relief party at the W——s', and I beg you will make my most grateful thanks to all the kind friends in and about Binghamton who have stretched out the hand of compassion to Ireland in this her day of utter and hopeless misery. To you my dear, dear —— and ——, we feel most grateful. I did not at all doubt your wish to exert yourselves for Ireland, but I feared in your remote place [Binghamton is a wealthy town in the State of New York!] little could be done. How mistaken I was! I should have written this before, but was in hopes I should be able to announce the arrival of the meal — but got tired of waiting, thinking it appeared so negligent. Now when we get the meal we shall let you know by newspaper, for it is better for both you and us to save postage as much as we can; it will fill *some mouths*. We are in as miserable state as ever nation was, and the coming summer presents as dismal a prospect as that which has passed. Famine and pestilence are rioting over the land. All the best of our people are flying to America, leaving behind them an inconceivable legion of idleness, filthiness, and beggary to drag the whole nation into the gulf of pauperism. [She complains that the people hang about the roads and will not plant; and the overcharged heart brims over in wild invectives against the Government.] I have long suspected that British speculators, with Lord John Russell at their head, wish to get possession of all our lands by breaking or starving us out of them — and see when poor Paddy, who is always complaining of his own landlord, has an English one whether he will be the better for the exchange. But it is useless to complain; our tyrants have no pity, and absenteeism and popery have ruined the land. If they would only tax those wretched absentees who have drained our vitals it would be some comfort.

They are still laboring with their meal sale and their gifts of food: "Now our labors and expense are tremendously increased by having to cook rice, arrowroot, sago, stewed biscuit for the sick." Rice was valuable food, especially for those suffering from dysentery. By this time there was very little buying of food. Another soup kitchen was established in the town, but there seemed no diminution in the numbers at the manor-house door, nor to the demands on the sisters. "In fact," Miss C—— writes in this same letter, "our labors, combined with the shocking circumstances and the hurry and confusion in which we are kept, are very harassing. And not being able to *hope* for the end thereof, . . . I am glad most that those I love are in your happy land. God bless the Americans; they could send a war vessel with meal for our wants, though our own *paternal* government could not!" [1]

She continues her recital of the horrors attendant on the famine:

The dogs are constantly digging the scarce covered bodies out of the graves. Even at K—— [part of the estate] the women carry their dead on their heads and scratch a little hole to lay them in. Whole families are laid down in fever, and as their neighbors are afraid to go near them, they die one after the other, and remain unburied sometimes until it is too shocking to describe. At D—— I do not know of anyone who has died of actual want of *any* food; but *slow* starvation, never having enough, and so often what they have bad, is killing as surely: when the creatures get the fever or *any* ailment they sink at once. Do not be unhappy about us; we are breasting the storm bravely, and the Lord supports us under all. Let us say, His will be done. If we are driven from this land we have the right of citizenship to an American home. One of our priests is just dead of fever, and poor Mr. B—— got his from a man who rushed out at him holding up two dead children. He only lived five days.

In the same letter Miss C—— acknowledges the receipt of five hundred dollars from Petersburg, Va., and "a most excellent letter from Peggy C——'s husband." "We are amazed," she says, "at the success of our appeal, and say again, God bless America!" She did not then realize how much greater was to be the American gift than she imagined. I find in the list of ships' cargoes one consigned to "the Misses C——," and entered at Cove of Cork. The fever-stricken skeletons stood in the streets as the carts loaded with meal and rice and flour rolled by, and called on God to bless the Americans.

Autumn saw the potato patches green again, and though the blight appeared, the crop was not destroyed, while oats, wheat, and barley were gathered in quantities which had not been known for years. In August, Miss C—— could write to an American friend: "I am thankful to say the pestilence seems abating. American supplies have relieved our famine and lowered the price of food." In another part of the same letter she says:

The public papers have probably told you all. I need only say that there was not the slightest exaggeration in the appeal — no language could enlarge the horrors of our situation. I have passed through deep waters of domestic affliction; have seen the

[1] Miss C—— refers probably to the *Jamestown*, which was manned by volunteers and sent to the coast of Ireland, while the *Macedonian*, provisioned and manned in the same way, was sent to Scotland. But I do not understand the allusion, since the *Dragon*, the *Vulcan*, the *Terrible*, and half a dozen revenue cutters had been or were landing provisions on the south-west coast.

ravages of cholera which swept over D—— with peculiar and fatal malignity; have encountered the perils of flood, fire, and storm; but never did my eye see, my ear hear, such sights and sounds of misery as in the last year, and fatigue of body and distress of mind have almost worn us away. We seldom had time to think of our danger from the pestilence which crowded around our doors and windows: the Lord has graciously kept it from our dwelling, but many of the helpers have fallen, . . . all by the pauper fever, and within a very short time. Its ravages among the respectable in other places are equally great; for it is remarked that the poor don't often die *in* the fever, but of weakness and want of nourishment *after* it. The disorder caught from them is most malignant.

The famine indeed was stayed, but its effects remained, and are to be discerned to this day. The small tradesmen were bankrupt almost in a body; the middlemen were rooted out of the country; all professional people had suffered; while the gentry were three-fourths of them ruined, in fact if not in name. There is a letter from Miss C—— to her brother, written in 1848, which describes their own straitened condition and incidentally reveals the distracted state of the country.

That fatal year [she says, meaning the famine time] seems to have rung the death knell to the hopes of this doomed country. I have not written for a long, long time. But my silence has not been because my heart is grown colder to you or feels less pain on your account—far from it. I have not yet attained that privilege of old age—in my case it would be a privilege—of being weakened and indifferent in natural affection; but when I cannot write cheerfully I have no heart to write at all. . . . I wrote you last to Philadelphia and sent you an order for [word illegible] pounds, all I could save out of my pocket-money. (I have never had any to save since.) . . . Think of Lord ——'s estate being brought to the hammer of the "Encumbered Estates" courts! . . . As we grow older troubles seem to thicken about us and all our friends. I think God in mercy ordered your and the children's return to America, grief as it was to me at the time. Hundreds of gentlemen's sons and daughters, whose rank and prospects were as high or higher than theirs, are now scattered, the sons listed for soldiers or common sailors or clerks in the poorhouses, the daughters gone as governesses, waiting-maids even. . . .

Lord B—— is almost ruined by . . . the change in the times. . . . I don't know what you have heard of deaths and other changes in D——. All the old stagers are either dead or emigrated to America save John P——, who is still our faithful manager. Peggy B—— is dead, and her husband died last year in the poorhouse. Joan R—— dead, her sons all gone to America. D—— of B—— a ruined man and said to be deranged, Dan H—— sold out of all his property and become an idiot. Larry —— a ruined man, still at —— tormenting us about his rent, which we are always obliged to process him for. . . . I saw Nora L—— lately. She is settled near Ballydeman, her man farming—is very, very poor. She came to see us, driving a little donkey butt; the same lively, cheerful creature, but looking sadly wasted and worn. Poor Dr. —— is forced to resume his profession again; has twelve children and nothing else left.

And so the careless, sad gossip slips down the page, and the curtain drops on the kind, gloomy lady among her ruined neighbors. But I would lift up a corner for one pleasanter scene, since it shows the Irish heart. After better days came, the C—— tenants, headed by the parish priest (it pleases me to fancy that it was the same good fellow who worked during the famine), clubbed their shillings and purchased a splendid silver service for "the ladies of the manor-house," in recognition of their efforts during the famine time. The presentation was made by the parish priest, and the moment was one of the few bright memories in many somber days.

Long ago that tender and sorely tried heart ceased to ache. She died amid the blessings of the poor. Her life had many sharp sorrows, yet we may count her happy insomuch as she, an unworldly, elderly gentlewoman in feeble health, with no weapon but her pen, saved hundreds of humble homes, and won, as no soldier or statesman in her long line of ancestors had ever won, the wild gratitude and love of the most unhappy, intractable, and faithful of races.

Therefore it is that I, child of another age and different hopes than hers, reared to a pernicious tolerance — so it would seem to her — of the principles that she abhorred, lay this little sprig of remembrance on her grave.

Octave Thanet.

THE TWO SPIRITS.

I DREAMED two spirits came — one dusk as night:
  "Mortals miscall me Life," he sadly saith;
The other, with a smile like morning light,
  Flashed his strong wings, and spake, "Men name me Death."

James B. Kenyon.