

propriety of resting too heavy responsibilities on industries and districts already depressed. Nor were the results of English administration for all sorts and conditions of men in England always of the happiest. In the years immediately before the famine, the English newspapers are full of the scandals of what had happened in certain English workhouses. They are not on the scale of the Irish famine, but they are sufficiently horrible and they are a standing testimony to the potential cruelty of the workhouse test and to the incapacity of the administration to control the houses in which paupers were tested. The same system and the same administration had been transferred to Ireland; it was put to greater strain during the famine and failed more conspicuously, but it was not intrinsically worse. The famine is closely followed by the Crimean War and the terrible winter of 1854-5 when, through maladministration, the British lost an army of which they were very proud before Sebastopol. A study of the experiences of Florence Nightingale, or such records as the report of the Roebuck Committee, or the results of the inquiry of Sir John MacNeill and Colonel Tulloch, seems to suggest much similarity here with some of the things that happened in the famine. There is the same official niggardliness and tight exchequer control which fatally delayed the provision of fodder necessary to keep alive the transport animals which had to carry food and supplies to the troops, the same official pedantry which prevented the issue of overcoats to men shivering in the trenches, or produced interminable delays in the release of desperately needed medical stores for the hospitals at Scutari. In fact, the suggestion might be hazarded that men died unpaid on public works in Ireland or in the frozen mud in Russia for much the same reasons. Eleven years later still there was an outbreak of cattle plague in the English counties and its process fully demonstrated again how unsuited was the liberal policy of non-interference, and the habits of Whig insouciance in this case exemplified by Sir George Grey, the very apathetic Home Secretary, to deal with a sudden serious agricultural epidemic. The conclusion might seem to be that the British system was the result of a long historic process; it had suited and still suited certain purposes very well, but that there is ample evidence that its principles and methods could not compass much that the simplest humanity, or the most desperate need, demanded, for Irishmen or for Englishmen. It had to learn how to supply these deficiencies by trial and error, only the trial was long and the errors very dreadful indeed.

To this reflection must be added a realization of the full difficulty of the situation which confronted the British government in the potato famine. It is a salutary exercise to consider yourself in the position of the government of Lord John Russell in 1847 and

then to try to think out what you would have done for Ireland; or rather it is a salutary exercise, if you remember certain things. For you must remember how little you knew about what is going to happen, or what is happening, how little you know about the disease that has destroyed the potatoes, or the diseases which are destroying the people of Ireland; for the interesting medical facts in Sir William MacArthur's article were not even guessed for many years afterwards. You must remember how inadequate to meet this gigantic catastrophe is the government machinery at your disposal and that any effective remedial measure must inevitably mean drawing deeply on the pocket of the English taxpayer. You must also remember that any effective remedy must also probably mean that, whatever you do about land tenure, a large number of people must in all probability leave Ireland, if they are to be able to live such lives as ought to be lived by men and women.

However, none of this exonerates that government. If they had only put into effect such schemes as Lord John Russell and his colleagues fitfully considered, and as fitfully abandoned, perhaps if they had only listened to Lord George Bentinck, much might have been saved. Even if they had only spent such money, as in the result they did spend, more effectively, more sympathetically and with fewer delays, they would have saved lives and avoided causes for hatred. But they failed, and their failures, as fairly revealed in this book, teach us much that is important about the history of Ireland and of England as well.

Indeed, I think they teach us something about all history and about the whole human condition. Even among Englishmen there was, I believe, at this time much good intention, much generosity and a sense of responsibility. Now ordinary good intentions and ordinary generosity, ordinary principles and the limited sense of responsibility which the normal man believes to be adequate for the usual business of life may possibly be good enough for ordinary circumstances, but there are extraordinary circumstances when they do not suffice, particularly, perhaps, circumstances bedevilled by the results of ancient wrong, or when a man's thought ought to transcend the limitations and conceptions his historic situation has provided for him. Something more is needed, a more passionate sense of personal obligation, a wider range of feeling. It might perhaps, with better fortune, in this case have come from the "agony" of Sir Robert Peel: it did come from the Society of Friends. But there were not enough Englishmen who were prepared to supply it, and that I am afraid is normally true of most races at most periods. It is a sombre lesson, but one which it is well worth pondering, and if for nothing else I would be grateful to this important, if sombre book, because it drives it home. (Reprinted from *University Review*, Vol. 1, No. 10, 1957).

From A Chant for Irishmen, befitting the times

by Thomas Dillon

All hail! to the Dame with the diademed brow,
Who comes like an angel to visit us now,
What kind condescension! - what goodness! what grace!
To show us the light of her right royal face.

She comes when the country is glorious to see -
The seed in the earth, and the fruit on the tree -
She comes when the corn is ripe in the ear,
And hope cheers the heart of the rough mountaineer.

Yet, Death at her coming a banquet has spread,
And the tears of the widow and orphan are shed;
She comes when her last felon transport departs,
With her last martial law still like ice at our hearts.

But she comes, and she'll visit 'the Causeway' and 'lakes,'
And put on a green poplin dress for our sakes;
The shamrock she's cull from our famine filled graves,
And graciously smile back the smiling of slaves.

And Saxon and Celt will no longer be foes,
And both will put on their best holiday clothes;
And serfs will come bending the neck and the knee,
To worship the court of her great Majesty.

And bells will ring out all their joy on the air,
And lights will make lurid the night with their glare;
And men from their hovels, 'mid mountains and crags,
Will come forth, forgetting their hunger and rags.

And chargers will prance in the foam of their might,
And men will look mighty in scarlet bedight;
And stars will blaze brightly, and ribbons will flaunt,
To keep in the distance the shadows of want.

And we shall be told that the Queen of the Isles,
Has come 'mong her people with blessings and smiles;
And how she loves dearly the land of the green,
And grieves at our grief as becometh a Queen.

(The Limerick Reporter, Friday, 27 July, 1849).