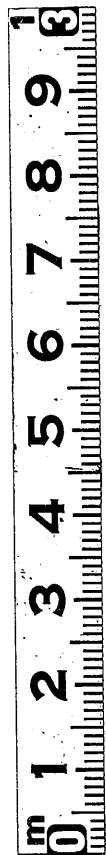


94-10



0001

A  
DESCRIPTION  
OF THE  
*CONDITION AND MANNERS*  
AS WELL AS OF THE  
MORAL AND POLITICAL CHARACTER,  
*EDUCATION, &c.*  
OF THE  
**Peasantry of Ireland,**  
SUCH AS THEY WERE  
*BETWEEN THE YEARS 1780 & 1790,*  
WHEN IRELAND WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE ARRIVED  
AT ITS HIGHEST DEGREE OF PROSPERITY AND  
HAPPINESS.

By ROBERT BELL, L. L. B.

London.

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,

BY CHARLES BARBER, 15, FLEET-STREET.

SOLD BY VERNOR AND HOOD, POULTRY; SYMONDS, PATER-  
NOSTER-RROW; HATCHARD, PICCADILLY; AND CLEMENT,  
201, STRAND.

1804.

---

## INTRODUCTION.

*MOST of the following statements having already appeared in a Public Print\*, several of the Author's Friends were pleased to speak of them in terms of approbation, and strongly recommended him to publish them in a separate Pamphlet. He now complies with their desire: and, without claiming any other merit than that of having faithfully described what he saw, he agrees in their opinion that such description cannot be too much known. The turbulent and barbarous habits of the lower orders of people in Ireland, their abject poverty, and their sufferings, have long been a subject of unavailing complaint. From these have originated most of the rebellions and insurrections which, for centuries past, have agitated that unhappy country. As every measure hitherto adopted for the correction of this dreadful and dangerous state of society, has generally tended to make it worse; there is reason to suppose that former Legislators acted from ignorance and prejudice: and if so, there is still ground to hope that success may crown the efforts of those, who, with full and accurate information on the subject, shall proceed on the broad principles of wisdom and justice, in devising some great plan for converting the native Irish into peaceable, loyal, and in-*

\* THE WEEKLY DISPATCH, Sunday Newspaper.

*dustrious subjects. The first step towards this important undertaking must be to possess a thorough knowledge of the state, condition, habits, and sentiments of those people. This is a knowledge which few of the Irish Gentlemen who come over to England have ever had the means or the inclination to acquire. They have been so widely separated from the common people in their own country, that they seldom thought or knew more of them than that they were a race of animals fit only to be despised and coerced. It was by mere accident, that the Author, while very young, had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with their real situation, and habits of thinking: on which subject he could dwell much more extensively than he now does, were he not fearful of fatiguing the reader by long and circumstantial details. His chief object has been to present such striking parts of the Native Irish Character, and relate such facts, as shall point out the origin and cause of those evils which have so long distracted and disgraced the Irish Nation: and shall shew the practicability, as well as the necessity, of a radical cure.*

---

## A DESCRIPTION, &c. &c.

---

THE peasants of Ireland have differed from persons of the same denomination in almost every other country of Europe. Living under a constitution similar to that of Great Britain, they were supposed to enjoy some of its civil and political blessings; they were mocked with the appellation of free subjects, while they possessed nothing of liberty, but its turbulence, its ferocity, and its viciousness. Their independence consisted neither in tranquillity nor competence; but generally displayed itself in a sort of hostile resistance to superiors, attempting acts of injustice, or endeavouring to enforce the execution of the laws. Literally speaking, they were not slaves, but they suffered all the hardships of slavery, without that indifference with regard to future wants which belongs to such a state; without any of those benevolent relations which might be supposed to exist between the lord and his vassals. If they wished to be industrious, (and numbers were so in spite of every discouragement and difficulty,) they laboured under perpetual anxiety, lest the produce of their unceasing drudgery might not be sufficient to pay for the liberty of cultivating the soil. In many parts of Germany, and in almost the whole of Poland and Russia, there exists, at this very day, such a system of vassalage, that the peasants or boors are as much the property of the owner of the land, as the cattle which feed upon it, and it is not in their power to abandon the estate to which they belong. These wretches, however, are not precluded from enjoying comforts: if their master is a man of common sense, he finds it his interest to feed them well, and treat them kindly; besides, their habitual dulness and ignorance blunt the edge of every feeling which, to other men would make the loss of liberty appear the greatest misfortune. They have nothing to do but cultivate the land, the produce of which goes into the stores of their masters, except what is reserved for their own subsistence; beyond this they have no further care; no further vexation.

But what has been the situation of the Irish peasant? With livelier sensations of pleasure and pain, with a quicker intellect, and superior knowledge, he has undergone all the toil, without that exemption from anxiety enjoyed by the Bohemian, Polish, or

Russian slave. He is the lowest and the weakest link in a chain of men (often amounting to half a dozen) who stand between him and the proprietor of the land, and who appear in the double capacity of tenants and landlords. These intermediate landlords consist generally of the middle and lower orders of gentry; some of whom, from their more frequent opportunities of access to the proprietors, had obtained from them leases for farms, which either pride, idleness, or want of capital, prevented them from occupying. They, therefore, have let them at a considerable profit to men a few degrees inferior in rank; who, from similar causes, again consign them to others at an advanced rent; till at last, swelled to the highest price, they fell into the hands of the very lowest and most ignorant classes of the people, who, without either capital or agricultural knowledge, have laboured to raise the money that was to support in affluence and luxury so many gradations of lordlings. Yet, incredible as it may appear to an English farmer, these men, so poor and so ignorant, with few, and those but imperfect implements of husbandry, with scarcely any of those artificial means of lessening labour which have been adopted in more favoured countries, where science was not confined to idle speculation; labouring under every species of discouragement; those wretches have, with an astonishing degree of labour and perseverance, caused the land to produce such abundance, that in certain periods of the interval of peace, which succeeded the American war, considerable bounties were given for the exportation of corn. The inhabitants of London know very well, that immense quantities of butter are annually exported from Ireland; but perhaps they do not know, that this valuable article, which contributes so largely to their domestic comfort is produced by the toil and industry of those very peasants who scarcely ever tasted of it themselves. Irish linen constitutes one of the most useful and necessary parts of an Englishman's dress; yet perhaps, he is ignorant that that which adds so much to his health, cleanliness, and comfort, is, after several laborious processes, wrought into that fine consistence, which it ever after retains, by the hands of female peasants, who generally live in rags, wretchedness, and filth.

The misery of the Irish peasant has been aggravated by the circumstance of his producing, and having in his possession, luxuries which he dared not to taste. Bread made of flour of wheat was to him a luxury; but whenever, by any uncommon effort, he was able to cultivate that species of grain, it bore a price at market so comparatively high, that ruin would to him be the consequence of not selling the whole of it. Hardly ever in possession of any sort of flesh meat but pork or bacon, he always considered this as an article of too much value to be converted to the use of him-

himself or his family, however craving their appetites might be. Yet on the festivals of Christmas or Easter, they ventured, as it were by stealth, to feast upon a small portion of what was already looked upon as the property of the landlord. The butter, the poultry, and the eggs, were equally his property, and the miserable family by whose care they were produced, were equally prohibited the use of them.

But then it may be asked, what did these people live upon? They lived on those things for which little or no money could be procured at market: potatoes constituted their chief food. A person who has never been thirty miles from London, and who pays a most exorbitant price for potatoes, may naturally suppose that these would be a very expensive article of food. In London they certainly would; but in Ireland, where they grow in great abundance, and with little cultivation, where the conveyance of them to market-towns is mostly difficult, sometimes impossible, they may be purchased for a twelfth, and sometimes for a twentieth, part of the sum they sell for in London. The Irish peasant, therefore, retained for his own use that which was of the least value to any body else. The next article which he retained for his use, was one of still less value; it was that part of the milk which remained behind after the butter had been extracted from it. They call it butter-milk. In England it is given to the hogs. But it was not at all times of the year that the cultivators of Irish land could even enjoy this miserable luxury. Throughout most of the winter their cows, either from pregnancy or want of nutritive food, yielded no milk; and from ignorance, or inability, they never contrived to have such a change of cows as would supply milk the year round. There was then wanting some substitute for sour milk, to enable them to eat their potatoes; something like what the Romans call *obsonium*, for which there is no adequate term in the English language. Under such circumstances, a salt herring was sufficient to answer the wants of an entire family. It served for their Sunday's dinner: it was a kind of feast which did not every day come within their reach. It was not even every cultivator of land who had a supply of potatoes that were sufficient to last throughout the year. But he who had so ample a supply, and was, besides, able to procure from his own crops a certain quantity of oaten meal, was looked upon by his neighbours as living in circumstances of comfort and prosperity. It happened, however, too frequently, that the stock intended for the consumption of the year, was exhausted before the produce of the succeed-

† When neither butter-milk nor herrings were to be procured, they had recourse to another substitute, which consisted of a minced onion immersed in salt and water, into which they dip their potatoes.

ing year came to maturity: the scenes of rustic distress which ensued on such occasions are not easily to be depicted. But as this scarcity always happened in Summer, there was in every cottage a tolerable supply of milk; which, with coarse garden vegetables, and a small quantity of oaten meal, purchased at a very high price, was all these miserable people had to subsist on, for one, two, and sometimes three months. The effect which this kind of food produced on their bodies, was shocking. Their aspect was meagre; and, from the crude vegetables they were obliged to subsist on, their skins assumed a green colour.

A person unacquainted with this subject, in the first moments of his astonishment at hearing such facts as have been stated, may ask, why should not that man whose farm yielded him abundance of good things, have the liberty of converting some of them to his own use, as an alleviation of his toil? The answer is short and simple: every thing which his own labour, and that of his family, were capable of producing, except those vile articles of subsistence already described, was converted into money to satisfy the claim of him who was neither proprietor nor the cultivator of the land. The father and sons worked continually like horses in the fields; the mother and her daughters occasionally participated in their toil, but were more commonly employed in spinning yarn, which was afterwards to be converted into those fine linens so much esteemed throughout England. Yet, after the sale of every commodity produced by their united labours, after the sale of their bacon, butter, their poultry and their eggs, it often happened that a sufficient sum of money was not raised to pay the rent. What was to be done under such circumstances of accumulated wretchedness? The landlord to whom the rent was immediately payable, had in his turn to pay rent to another landlord one degree removed, and he again probably to a third. Some of them were obliged to forego their profits to a longer time: some were capable of being actuated by feelings of humanity; and acts of indulgence often took place from necessity: but all this was only increasing the difficulties of the miserable occupier; whose fate it ultimately was to have his cattle driven away, and sold by public auction, if, by borrowing and begging from his neighbours, he was not able to pay all his arrears within a limited time. After this deprivation of all his little property, he could no longer remain on his farm, which was again disposed of to the highest bidder, at a price not inferior to what the last occupier had agreed, but was unable, to pay,

But if it sometimes happened, as it certainly did, that the industrious cultivator was competent to pay his rent at regular periods

riods, and at the same time to preserve his family from want, a stranger to the country might observe that the situation of such a man was comparatively happy. That depended very much on the nature of the tenure by which he held his farm. In the central, and some of the western counties of Ireland, those peasants who occupied farms, held them generally upon leases of about twenty-one years: and therefore such of them as were able to pay their rents for any series of years, though living on the coarsest food, were constant objects of envy to their less fortunate neighbours. This however was but the lot of a few, and those residing in particular parts of Ireland.

The author has never been in the province of Munster, and therefore cannot speak from his personal knowledge of the condition of its peasantry; but that it was considerably worse than that of the peasants of Leinster or Connaught, he entertains no doubt whatever. He has been informed by persons of credit and respectability, who were perfectly acquainted with that province, that the periods for which lands have been let to the lower order of its inhabitants seldom exceeded ten years: they were oftener let for seven and three years; but most commonly no longer than from year to year. Whenever any of these, by extraordinary efforts of industry, by denying themselves almost every comfort of life were able to pay their rents at the stated periods, then the lowest of the intermediate landlords (for the real owners never held communication with the cultivators of the soil) conceiving the situation of those people to be too happy, and that those who could pay so punctually were able to pay still more, set up the lands again to sale, at the expiration of any of the tenures just mentioned, and disposed of them to the highest bidders; and had it even appeared to them, that the immediate occupiers were unable to bear any further pressure, yet they supposed it possible that some more adventurous persons, with a larger portion of capital, might come forward, and bid a higher price for the lands. They were not often disappointed in their expectations. Without much difficulty they found men of that base and unfeeling disposition which systems of oppression will always create, who readily became the instruments whereby whole families were driven from their homes into beggary and ruin. But this was not all. Evils a thousand times worse than beggary grew out of those cruel practices. The moral character was changed and shockingly perverted. The most deadly animosity was engendered in the mind, and sought every opportunity of venting itself in acts of secret revenge or open outrage.

The scenes of complicated misery under which the peasants of Munster have laboured, became so notorious throughout the Irish nation,

nation, that the individual, however obscure, who should now mention them, can hardly run any risk of contradiction. The truth of those melancholy facts does not rest on the hearsay authority of individuals. They stand recorded on the page of Irish History, in characters which will never be erased, but which posterity will scarcely credit. They were amply detailed in the Irish House of Commons, at the time when Mr. Grattan brought forward certain propositions concerning tythes. The Roman Catholics of Munster were then represented as labouring under most grievous hardships in consequence of the oppressive manner in which tythes were collected; added to the oppression of their landlords. Had the strong assertions then made, had the horrible facts then related, been false and groundless, a host of witnesses would have come forward to put the authors to shame, and overwhelm them with confusion; but they have to this very day stood uncontradicted; and will for ever continue as a monument of the tyranny which one set of men, not forming a part of the Government, had it in their power to exercise over the majority of the inhabitants of a country possessing a free constitution and a mild administration.

But something more remains to be said of Irish lands, particularly those in the province of Munster. It is generally understood that the soil of Ireland, in point of richness and the abundance of its animal and vegetable productions, is not equalled by any other country in Europe. But it must not from this be supposed that the labour of the peasant was light in proportion to the smaller quantity of cultivation which such a soil might require. This would be a very natural supposition, had all the lands been equal in quality. But as it generally happens in every country, there was a mixture of good and bad; and no option was left to the peasant. The intermediate landlord felt neither the necessity nor the inclination to stock his fertile plains with an industrious race of men. They were destined to purposes that more nearly concerned his interest and his pleasure: they were appropriated to the support of another species of animals far more productive to him than his fellow creatures could be. While his oxen and his sheep ranged and sported on the richest pastures, there was no portion of those grounds allotted to the laborious husbandman. The lands chiefly which were neither fit for pasture nor for the immediate occupation of a country gentleman, those which neither produced grass nor trees, those whose surfaces consisted of stone or of water, those which partook of the nature of mountain or bog, in short, all those lands on which it was necessary to create a productive soil, were let to the starving peasants at high rents, which they fondly hoped to be able to pay, on account of the small portion allotted to each person.

These

These people were very numerous as well as poor; and therefore the distribution into small allotments of such land as they were allowed to cultivate, was a matter of necessity as well as choice. It generally happened that five or six families became the joint tenants of a farm containing not more than thirty or forty acres; and therefore, although the sum paid for it annually was much greater than its real value, yet the burthen, when divided between so many was not considered so heavy as if the whole farm had been in the occupation of a single person. These barren lands, in the course of some few years, became productive; but they were productive only to the immediate lessors, while the wretched tenants, in return for their incessant toil, reaped no other benefit than that of not actually dying of hunger; and in order that this horrible state of Helotism should have neither termination nor relief, the permission to cultivate was no longer granted than while such cultivation was necessary to the purpose of improvement. The tenants, perhaps, might have leases of such a length, as would secure to them the possession of the lands for a few years after they began to derive some advantage from their former labours; but this did not often take place: and a landlord of a violent and avaricious character could sometimes, under the colour of law, eject the tenants before the expiration of their leases, in order that he might convert the lands, which they had reclaimed, into pasture; or let them out at higher rents. This, as the author has been informed, was no uncommon practice throughout Munster; but he thinks it just to observe, that it was not carried to the same extent of severity in Connaught or Leinster; and that in the former province, (which some writers, who pretended to give a description of Ireland have falsely described as a barbarous country,) there did exist a sort of feudal attachment between the gentlemen and the peasants, which sometimes produced the happiest consequences, not only in the security which the former enjoyed, from outrage to their persons, or destruction to their property, but in a mutual interchange of good offices. A gentleman of good information, and conciliating manners, was always ready to assist the poor and the ignorant around him with his advice; and the authority which they, by tacit and general consent, allowed him to possess, was often exercised in allaying their animosities, and settling their differences. A man of this character was almost idolized, and every peasant was ready to do him personal service.

There is no part of the country where the original manners of the Irish prevailed more than in the province of Connaught; no part that has been more calumniated; and none that has deserved it less. The old Gaelic language, older even than that of ancient Rome, was spoken here in greater purity than in any other part  
of

of the world. The people were simple and obliging in their manners, and hospitable to strangers beyond even what their narrow means allowed. The gentleman, far removed from any place of public entertainment, and overcome with fatigue and hunger, was generally supplied with the best refreshment which the poor cottager could afford, without any expectation of reward.—The wandering mendicant was always sure of finding a night's lodging at the first habitation he entered; and to have shut the door against him at the close of evening, would have been considered as an act of sacrilege. Happy people! had not the strides of pretended civilization taught them the wants and the vices of polished society, without imparting to them any of its comforts!

There was another class of peasantry still more abject, though not more wretched than those who have been just described. They were persons who, not holding, or unable to hold, any lands on their own account, were obliged to work for their subsistence, throughout the whole year, for such cultivators of land as called themselves gentlemen. These labourers went by the denomination of *cottiers*, and most generally had wives and several children to maintain. They were employed on the following terms: the master allowed each cottier an acre or two of ground to plant potatoes in, with liberty for his cow to graze on the pasture grounds; and he agreed to pay him a certain sum for every day's work. The sum in many places, was not more than four-pence per day; in some places it was five-pence; and scarcely ever exceeded six-pence. But whatever it might be, this was very certain, that the whole amount of the cottier's wages, at the end of the year, did not exceed what the master charged for his potatoe-garden, and for the grazing of his cow. For the one he was obliged to pay upwards of thirty shillings an acre, and for the other, a like sum, per year. These were the only means which he or his family had to depend on for support throughout the year; for the master never fed a labourer of this description. It was, on the contrary, a chief object with him to keep such a person as far away from his dwelling as possible. He therefore allowed him to occupy, at some remote corner of his farm, a miserable hut—a mere shell—formed of mud or sods, without loft, apartment, or partition; and sometimes without any other covering than that of scraws\*.

\* This word is found in Johnson's Dictionary, and is exemplified by a quotation from Swift. Scraws are a kind of turf, of a spongy, adhesive quality, consisting generally of the green surface of a flat, moorish ground; which is cut off, with a sharp spade, to the thickness of two inches. The pieces are rolled up like sheets of lead, being of the same length and breadth; and in this form they are carried to the roof of a new built hut, over the skeleton of which they are spread with the grassy sides outwards. After this is done, the roofs are thatched with straw, when the occupier of the hut can afford to purchase that article.

or without any other chimney than the door. In one corner of this hovel was lodged his cow (and indeed it was not every cottier who possessed so much property), while in the opposite corner, his wife, children and himself, retired to rest, without any thing to separate their naked bodies from the cold earth, except a truss of straw, or to protect them against the chilling blasts of winter, except a coarse rug, together with the rags they carried about them in the day time.

This was not the sort of habitation he would have fixt upon from choice: he had the same feeling, the same capacity to distinguish between good and evil, with other men. Of all the distressing situations which a man not offending against any written or unwritten law could be placed in, that of an Irish cottier, living under an unfeeling master, was one the most calculated to excite commiseration. His wages, so far from enabling him to procure food, were scarcely sufficient to balance the claim his master had on him, for the liberty of keeping a cow, and occupying an acre of ground, which never yielded so much as could maintain him and his family throughout the year. This acre of ground he was obliged to cultivate himself for his own use; and therefore, in proportion as his time and his labour were employed in rendering it productive, he suffered a proportionate diminution of wages; and if, with a view of making those wages amount to the greatest possible sum, he should work every day for his master, his garden must then have been neglected, and he must have been destitute of subsistence. The only remedy he had therefore in this melancholy dilemma, was to work in his garden for an hour or two at night, after having laboured all day for his master. It often happened that the wife and children of a cottier, when they were totally destitute of food, were obliged to become vagrants, and beg their bread through the country. This cruel necessity occurred only in the summer season, after the produce of the preceding year was consumed and before that of the ensuing year was grown to maturity. The wretches who were thus obliged to quit their homes, were not without some honourable feelings: an ingenuous sense of shame would not suffer them to ask alms from their neighbour's; they therefore retired to a distant part of the country, where they were totally unknown.

Great as the hardships were under which those poor wretches, called cottiers, laboured, their situation was not always so deplorable as that of men who rented lands and worked on their own account. Many of them were fortunate enough to get into the employment of masters, who, without possessing wisdom or magnanimity sufficient to break through a system of barbarity and injustice, were impelled by the dictates of humanity to alleviate the

miseries of that condition which they would not attempt to alter. Sometimes the master raised the wages of the cottier; sometimes he permitted him to occupy a better-sheltered habitation near his own dwelling; he would order the fragments from his table to be sent to feed his children, and caused their nakedness to be covered by the cast-off clothes which his own children would no longer use. If, besides these and other kind offices, a master treated his cottier with mildness, and spoke to him with that degree of familiarity which took not away from his dignity, the gratitude and attachment of the latter were unbounded.

There was a third description of Irish peasants, scarcely differing from the two former in any other circumstance than that of their emigrating annually to some part of Ireland or England, where wages comparatively large were given for labour. These emigrations always took place in the beginning of autumn; at which time the roads leading to the metropolis of each kingdom might be seen covered with wretches\*, half naked, and barefooted, with hardly the means of defraying the expences of their journey, which their extreme frugality rendered very trifling; and sometimes without any other resource than the scanty stock of oaten bread which they carried along with them on departing from their homes. Those that did not leave Ireland, generally found employment for about three weeks in several places within the distance of 30 or 40 miles from Dublin, where great quantities of corn were sown, and where, on account of the large farms held by individuals†, there was always a scarcity of labourers on any great emergency. The wages for which these men travelled a distance of from fifty to one hundred miles, was generally one shilling, and sometimes eighteen-pence, per day; out of which they were obliged to provide themselves with necessaries. It was, however, three times as much as they could have received in their own neighbourhood, provided they could have got employment there, which was impossible.

These itinerant labourers lived in the most mountainous and uncultivated parts of the interior of Ireland: but extensive as the range of unproductive territory must have been around them, the quantity of cultivated or reclaimed land which each enjoyed as his share, was very small; sometimes it did not exceed one acre; sometimes it might consist of five. And let it not be supposed, that, like the wandering Arab, the Irish mountaineer had a right to occupy and

\* They were called SPALPEENS, an Irish word expressive of great contempt, and applied to those employed in rustic drudgery of the lowest kind.

† In the counties of Meath and Kildare, it was not unusual to see a farm of one thousand, or one thousand five hundred acres, in the hands of an individual.

enjoy any fertile spot which he might meet with in the midst of the desert. There was not an inch of surface for which a proprietor was not found; nor was there an inch of the arable part of that surface for which some agent or intermediate landlord was not ready to demand a price beyond its real value. That this was the case with the unhappy men in question, must be evident from the circumstances of their situation. The meagre scrap of land which each of them occupied, was hardly sufficient to afford him a bare subsistence throughout the year. If the whole of its produce, after deducting a tenth for the use of the established clergy†, were sold, it would fetch very little more than the rent that was paid for it. The only resource, therefore, which they had for the payment of their rent, was that of travelling to some distant place, where by hard labour, and harder economy, they generally made up what was wanting to satisfy the demands of their landlords.

But as there was not, in the best cultivated parts of Ireland, employment for half of those who in the beginning of autumn, used to shut up their huts and wander from their native mountains, it was necessary to seek for labour at a greater distance from home. The holds of the packets sailing from Dublin to Parkgate and to Liverpool might, at this season, be seen crowded with poor wretches, who, after paying half-a-crown for their passage, had scarcely as much more money remaining to defray the expences of their journey to the counties situated near the Metropolis. This journey they generally performed barefooted, because they were obliged to spare their shoes for certain kinds of work which could not be performed without them.

Having at length, after a most fatiguing march of 200 miles, arrived at the lands where their services were wanted, their evil destiny seemed to pursue them even through England. Fresh difficulties and discouragements started up before them at the moment they thought they were on the point of reaping their golden harvest. It is a well-known fact, that, in many parts of Hertfordshire, and other places, there have been, and without doubt still are, a species of contractors, or, more properly speaking, *spalpeen-brokers*, whose business it was to furnish the farmers with Irish labourers, for the purpose of cutting down their corn. The farmers, to save themselves trouble, made an agreement with these men, who used to receive the labourers on their arrival, and engage them to work at the lowest prices. It was not always that a poor labourer could have the honour of an audience from one of those self-created ministers of oppression, who, being Irishmen them-

† About the years 1786 and 1787, Mr. Grattan moved for a bill in the Irish House of Commons, for exempting barren lands from the payment of tythes. The ecclesiastical interest prevailed, and the motion was rejected.



selves, were well acquainted with the nature and circumstances of those they were to employ, probably knew how to speak to them in the language they best understood, and therefore could easily impose on their ignorance and credulity, by giving them to understand that the number of candidates for employment was greater than the work to be done. The consequences of such practices must be obvious to all those who know that the price of any commodity is always lowered in proportion to the quantity that really is, or appears to be, brought to market. If it was represented to the starving mountaineers of Ireland, newly arrived in a strange country, and offering up the labour of their bodies to sale, that they could not all find purchasers, the price of their labour must necessarily have been less, than if such an abominable fraud had not been practiced. Nobody was a gainer by this fraud but the contractor; and whether he had used any fraud or not, he certainly put into his pocket that money which but for the indolence of the English farmer, would have gone into the hands of so many deserving persons. To swell their profits to the utmost pitch, these contractors like West India negro-drivers, would call out the labourers, at break of day from the barns in which they were permitted to stretch their wearied limbs, and make them work ten times harder than their sable brethren of the torrid zone. The quantity of work which they performed was astonishing, and would scarcely be believed by those who had not seen it. An Irish mountaineer of small stature would cut down more corn in a day, than two large, well fed English boors. What might not such men have done in their own country, had they received any sort of encouragement!

The English harvest being over, they travelled back to their homes, over a space of four hundred miles, and arrived there time enough to reap their own corn, if they had any. They brought back with them so much of their wages, that one would be astonished to think how they had lived while they remained in England. But not one farthing of this hard-earned money were they at liberty to enjoy. Many of them on their return were seized with agues, which continued upon them during the winter. This misfortune was occasioned by their sleeping in cold damp barns, by hard labour and scanty food.

Such was, with very few exceptions, the condition of three-fourths of the Irish peasantry, between the years 1780 and 1790. During the whole of that period, the author of these observations had constant opportunities of knowing the truth of the facts which he now states, not only from his residence in several counties, and his personal knowledge of many families of peasants, but from the concurring testimony of numbers of the gentry who came from those parts of the kingdom with which he was unacquainted. Besides what has been already said, a short account of their manners,

ners, customs and habits of thinking, may serve to throw some further light on this subject.

The British historians, when speaking of those whom they called the Wild Irish, have described them as a barbarous race of people. But, notwithstanding the prejudices they must naturally have entertained towards a nation which had so often rebelled against its conquerors, they allowed the very men from whom the present peasantry of Ireland are descended, to possess virtues that were not much practiced in their own country: they gave them credit for the most unbounded hospitality (a proof that, in those early times, they had the means of being hospitable); they observed that although there were the worst, there were also the best\*, characters among them; and that their attachments were the warmest that could be imagined. A priest, of the name of Good, who had a school at Limerick in the year 1566, has been quoted by Camden, as giving the most authentic account of the Original Irish of his time. He has described them as warlike, patient of fatigue and hunger, but preferring indolence and liberty to every thing else: as ignorant, credulous and superstitious in the highest degree; remarkably fond of music, feasting and merriment. He has particularly noticed a class of men, very numerous at that time, who travelled over the country at night, for the purpose of committing robberies, whose depredations were attended with the greatest cruelty, and whose occupation was not considered dishonourable. And it is very remarkable, that the most noted among these robbers, or tories, were the bastard sons of the Romish clergy, who in those days used to convert the places of worship into brothels, where they passed away their lives in the lowest debauchery. Whenever the tories were setting out on a fresh expedition, they prayed to God that they might be successful in obtaining plunder; and, when obtained, they considered it as a gift from him. Camden also takes notice of the obstinacy with which the Irish retained their original customs; and observes that the English settlers, so far from reclaiming them, adopted their manners, and in a short time became degenerate.

Surely there must have been something in those manners that entitles them to a different name from that of barbarism and savageness! Has it ever been known that any of the European colonists in North America forsook their habitations, and spent their lives in wandering through the woods with Indians? Did any of the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope ever turn Hottentots, than whom no race of animals are more tenacious of their customs? But, what is still more remarkable, we have not heard that the English who settled in India, were ever so captivated with the manners, customs or religion of those they conquered, as to adopt

\* Gens in omnes affectus vehementissima, qui mali nusquam peiores: et bonis meliores vix reperias: GIRALDUS CAMBRENSIS. them

them instead of their own. And all who are conversant in History know that the inhabitants of Hindostan were highly civilized at the time our ancestors were wandering like savages through the forests of Germany. It is impossible, therefore, to conceive that Englishmen would have done what the historian complains of, had the people whom they conquered been savage and barbarous, and had they not possessed some qualities uncommonly amiable and attractive.

Another writer, named Richard Stanihurst, published a book in Dublin, in the year 1584, concerning the state of Ireland; in which it appears that something like the feudal system existed there at the time, the vassals holding lands on condition of rendering personal service in war; but that they were constantly harassed by the number of quarrels in which their lords were engaged, and the continual depredations committed every night. The Chiefs were often concerned in the most extensive robberies; and to protect themselves against similar outrages, they lived in castles, surrounded by great mounds. They had scarcely any laws and those extremely defective, as appears from the circumstance of theft having only been punished by an obligation to restore the thing stolen or an equivalent. He has vindicated the Irish against the calumnious assertions of those who said they used to eat raw meat. In those days they were in the habit of eating meat; but it was always either boiled or roasted, and rather under than overdone. They were then, as well as now, very fond of drinking whiskey. Their *brehons* or judges, their physicians, their bards, and their harpers were hereditary: the two former were ignorant of every thing, except the art of imposing on the ignorant multitude. The same author speaks of their extraordinary hospitality, their good-natured and generous disposition, their credulity, and extreme reverence towards their priests.

It must be recollected that the writers who speak of the Irish in terms of reproach, were natives of Britain, and that the hostility of mind which always existed between a conquered people and the conquerors, (and which to this hour has never been effaced in Ireland), must have thrown no weak tint of prejudice on the picture which they drew. The accounts which men give of a people whom they either fear or despise, are not to be received as authentic: and still less are they to be relied on, if it be considered that the authors, from the very nature of their situation, are unable to acquire a knowledge of those whose manners they attempt to describe. Can it be supposed that English governors or English officers going to Ireland in the character of enemies, unacquainted with the language of the country, and having no intercourse with the people except the ceremonial visits of perfidious Chieftains who pretended to enter into their views, were capable

pable of giving a true description of Irish manners? Among the fragments of Irish literature which still remain, there is sufficient evidence to prove that many of the accounts of Giraldus Cambrensis are false or exaggerated. Yet this author is quoted by modern historians as an unquestionable authority.

It was not until the present enlightened era that men of liberal and philosophic minds came forward to assert the antiquity of Ireland, to examine the few records that had escaped the ravages of her invaders, and to vindicate her character from unmerited obloquy.

But whatever grounds the English historians might have had for representing the native Irish as savage and ferocious, it has been clearly ascertained that they were not so previously to the invasion of Henry II. The cause of their degeneracy must therefore be obvious to every person who has read the history of conquered countries where the dominion of the victor was only to be retained by force: and still more to those who will take the trouble of reading Dr. Leland's History of Ireland. It is a fact as well authenticated as most parts of antient history, that there were many seminaries of learning in this island for four or five centuries before it was conquered by England; that numbers of persons from other countries resorted thither for instruction\*; (the greater part of Europe being at that time in a state of deplorable ignorance): that there were Princes in the country who displayed the talents of great statesmen and generals; that the Irish were often as successful as their English neighbours in repelling Danish invasions; and that in the reign of William the Conqueror they had made a generous though unsuccessful, struggle to restore the exiled family of Harold to the throne of England.

It does not appear that there was much civilization in England or Germany during the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries; but it is very evident, that while it was, in subsequent ages, gaining ground in those countries it was denied admission into Ireland. Mr. Hume, however, without quoting any authority, and in direct contradiction to the evidence of English as well as Irish writers, has taken upon him to assert—"that the Irish, from the beginning of time, had been buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance—that they were distinguished by those vices alone to which human nature, not tamed by education, or restrained by laws, is for ever subject—that the most simple arts

\* The venerable Bede, whose authority, in this instance, cannot be questioned, says, that about the middle of the seventh century, many Nobles and other orders of the Anglo-Saxons retired from their own country into Ireland, either for *Instruction*, or for an opportunity of living in monasteries of a stricter discipline.

of life, even tillage and agriculture, were almost wholly unknown among them," &c.\* Whoever wishes to ascertain whether this native of Scotland wrote with prejudice and partiality, may be satisfied by comparing his history of the Stuarts with that which has been written by Mrs. Macauley.

The reader is requested to pardon this digression, which has not been made with a view of entering into a dissertation on Irish History, but to shew that the native Irish had suffered a gradual deterioration from the time of Henry's invasion; and that this change was occasioned by the absurd and fatal policy of England. Every conquered people must undergo a change either for the better or the worse: if, having lived under an oppressive government, they continue to be governed by their conquerors with less oppression: if, having been ignorant of all the means of promoting domestic comforts they are instructed in agriculture, manufactures and arts; then their new masters should be considered as benefactors, not as conquerors. But when a people, content with their government and manners, resist their invaders, and submit with reluctance to a foreign yoke, the perpetual exercise of armed force will be necessary to keep them in subjection: the conquerors and conquered will be in a continual state of war; and the condition of the latter must be much worse than it ever was under any circumstances before their subjugation. Their miseries are even aggravated by the weakness of their enemies; because weakness is always a principal source of tyranny. How far these observations apply to the relative situations of England and Ireland between the years 1172 and 1600, must be obvious to those who can patiently read over the disgusting narrative of wars, rebellions and massacres, which during those centuries took place in Ireland.

If it shall appear that the Aborigines of Ireland underwent this perversion of character: if it shall appear that the conduct pursued towards those people for many centuries was as impolitic as it was unjust; that the means adopted to keep them in subjection only increased their disposition to rebel: and that rigorous punishment, deprivation of property, and religious restrictions, rendered them ferocious, desperate, and fanatic:—there remains one consideration which must be as pleasing to the generous English, as it is consolatory to the unfortunate Irish of the present day: there remains a well-grounded hope that measures of a nature different from those formerly pursued, will produce different effects. In an undertaking so important as that which is expected to involve in it the fate of millions, and the security of the government; perhaps the British legislator may derive some assistance from the in-

\* See Hume's Hist. of England, Chapter IX.

formation

formation already contained in these papers, as well as from what is to follow.

The manners of the ancient Irish have been very much done away by the increase of English commercial civilization; such of them as survived the lapse of time, or escaped the restraints of law, have prevailed chiefly in places remote from towns, and seldom resorted to for the purpose of traffic. Here, if the people were not actually in want of the necessaries of life, every man's door was open to a neighbour or a stranger, who might walk in without ceremony, even at meal time, and partake of whatever fare the house contained. Such a visit, so far from being deemed an intrusion, gave pleasure to every individual of the family, who were not only impelled by their natural feelings, but conceived themselves bound by a kind of sacred duty, to perform those acts of hospitality. If the visitor was a stranger, he was received with the greatest attention; and if he could play on any instrument of music, or tell tales of old times calculated to excite the admiration or interest the feelings of his hearers, the inhabitants of every neighbouring cottage vied with each other for the honour of entertaining him as a guest.

Living for the most part on vegetable food, and with scarcely any other beverage than water or milk, these people had a flow of animal spirits and a vivacity of temper unknown in countries whose inhabitants constantly feed on flesh and strong drink. After the labours of the day they never sat looking at each other in sulky silence; the aged would smoke one after another out of the same pipe, and entertain each other with stories; while the young would dance until near midnight either to the tunes of some instrument, or of their own voices: and although the rudest music was capable of rousing them into merriment, they had taste enough to distinguish and appreciate the performance of persons who played so well as to be sought after by people of a higher condition. Their national harp in later years fell into almost total disuse; their favourite and most frequent instrument was a bag-pipe on a different but superior construction to that of the Scotch Highlander†. It is impossible to describe the joy that used to sparkle in the countenances of those rustics on the arrival of an itinerant performer of celebrity among them: they would flock to the house where he took up his residence, and make it a scene of festivity as long as he remained there.

There was this strange peculiarity in the character of the native Irish; that on occasions of great joy and merriment they indulged

† During the last Season at Covent-Garden Theatre (i. e. in 1803—1804) an instrument of this kind has been played on, during a part of the entertainment of Oscar and Malvina, by a Mr. O'Farrell.

D

them.

themselves in grief and melancholy; and under circumstances of mourning and sorrow, they ran headlong into the most extravagant mirth. At a wedding feast they felt uncommon pleasure in singing and listening to the most plaintive ditties; and if they had drank any quantity of whiskey, they would whine and weep at the relation of some woeful story. But on the death of a neighbour and a friend, although they went for the avowed purpose of weeping over the dead body: yet in the very room where it was laid out, they would spend the night in performing all kinds of sports and gambols that were calculated to excite laughter.

Those peasants who could afford the expence, used to give a feast to all their relations and neighbours when any female belonging to their family was married. The dinner, which was the only meal on this occasion, generally consisted of mutton, salt pork, bacon and poultry; with an abundance of potatoes and common garden vegetables. All these articles were supplied from the stock of the person who furnished the entertainment: but sometimes the relations of the parties would each contribute a share towards the wedding dinner. No part of the fare was purchased by money except the whisky or beer: the latter was not always to be procured. The chief personage at this entertainment was the parish Priest, or his deputy. The next in pre-eminence was the Squire: but it was not every country gentleman who could attain the honour of being present at a wedding feast: for if he had not resided long in the neighbourhood; if he had not by a gentle and familiar deportment, but above all, by conversing with the peasants in the Irish language, commanded their esteem, and conciliated their affections, he would not have been invited. The Squire, however, could have been easily dispensed with: but, next to the Priest, the Musician was the most necessary person to render the entertainment complete. He was generally a performer on the bagpipes; and the host was often obliged to send for one to the distance of near 20 or 30 miles. Doors taken off the hinges and laid on benches, constituted a dinner table, of which no part was covered with a cloth except the head: here the Priest sat as president or lord over all the guests, and had the most delicate of the viands placed before him. The others sat in order according to their rank; which was estimated by the consideration of their property, their age, and their reputation. The meat was usually cut into pieces about the size of brickbats, and placed along the table in large wooden platters, out of which the guests helped themselves often without the aid of knives or forks: for the few instruments of this kind which could be procured, were appropriated to the service of the Priest and the select party whom he chose to honour with his conversation. The host and hostess, instead of sitting down to dinner, waited upon the company, and pressed them

them to eat with an earnestness and familiarity that would have been highly disgusting to persons of more refined manners. The marriage ceremony was generally performed before dinner; and on this occasion it was sometimes necessary to force the timorous bride from the place where she had concealed herself on the first approach of the company. The company afterwards amused themselves in dancing, singing and drinking. The Priest retired about eight or nine o'clock: and if great care was not taken after that hour, to prevent the distribution of liquor, the night would have ended in intoxication, riot, quarrelling and bloodshed. In the course of a week or fortnight the bridegroom took his wife home to his own habitation; the portion he received with her, consisted chiefly in cattle. In places where English law and English manners were unknown, the married women were always called by their maiden names.

Of all the scenes of merriment enjoyed by these people, that which has been called an *Irish wake* appeared to afford them the highest degree of pleasure. An Irish wake was an assemblage of men and women round the corpse of a deceased neighbour. To accommodate as many persons as possible, the corpse was decently laid out in one corner of a barn or some other extensive place. The next of kin, together with some old men and old women sat near the dead body all night, and amused themselves the greater part of the time with smoking tobacco, and telling stories of ghosts, goblins and witches. The rest of the people began shortly after night-fall to arrange the plan of their sports and diversions, which hardly ever ceased until break of day. These sports consisted chiefly of rude buffoonery, boisterous mirth, coarse jests, songs, &c. all of which were regulated by some one person, selected by the company to act as master of the ceremonies; and who was most noted for his drollery and vivacity. The mirth of the company was however interrupted once in every hour, sometimes every half hour, by the cries of those who sat next the deceased: the sports were then suspended, and every person present was supposed to join in the general lamentation, which lasted about five or six minutes. These cries have been described by the appellation of the *Irish howl*; and, shocking as they would have been to a delicate English ear, they were not destitute of modulation. The tones were few but plaintive; and the voices of the women always predominated. While they were crying or howling they frequently repeated a set of unmeaning words, and would ask the deceased why he was so cruel as to leave them. Many women who had neither been related to, nor acquainted with the deceased, would join in the howl with every appearance of affliction, would beat their bosoms dishevel their hair and bedew their faces with tears: the same women would perhaps, in ten minutes after, take

a leading part in the mirth which succeeded. The corpse was accompanied to the grave by similar cries and howlings. It has often been said that persons were hired to cry at wakes and funerals; the author of these accounts cannot deny the existence of such a practice; but must say that he never knew an instance of the kind. He has also to add, that he never knew or heard of any liquor being drunk at wakes: the company was treated only with pipes, tobacco and snuff: and the whole expence of waking and burying an adult, seldom amounted to a quarter of the sum which the interment of an infant three days old would cost in London.

The amusements of the native Irish chiefly took place on Sundays and holidays. On Sunday morning they regularly went to their popish chapel, which was sometimes not sufficient to contain one half of the people: those therefore who could not gain admittance prayed in the open air, near the doors of the chapel. As soon as service was over, the greater part of the congregation went home and dined: after which, during the summer season, they assembled in large bodies in some adjacent field; where the old sat in circles and entertained each other with stories, and the young danced to whatever music they could procure, and some of the young men exercised themselves in feats of bodily strength. Good humour and contentment always prevailed at those meetings as long as they drank no whiskey: but whenever that fiery spirit was introduced, intoxication and quarrels were the inevitable consequences.

In the winter season, they assembled on Sunday evenings at some house where whiskey was sold: but more commonly where some one belonging to the family played on an instrument of music. The people belonging to the latter description of houses never demanded or expected any recompence for the accommodation thus afforded their neighbours, except the satisfaction arising from the consciousness of having contributed to the happiness of others. The love of society was, in short, so prominent a part of the character of those people that hardly any part of a peasant's family remained at home on a Sunday evening; and in winter they would often go a distance of three or four miles, through swamps and bogs, to any place where a considerable number of people were assembled. Even in their ordinary occupations both in the field and in the house, they shewed an uncommon fondness for social intercourse. Every evening of the week throughout the winter season, a party of young females went successively to the houses of their respective parents, with their spinning wheels, and dedicated a great part of the night to the double purpose of industry and innocent amusement. Hither they were generally followed by their lovers: the song and the tale went round, and labour ceased to

to be a toil. The happiness enjoyed by those simple rustics in places where oppression had not spread her iron hand, was such as those who live in polished societies might envy.

But of all the amusements of the native Irish, there were none so remarkable for variety, for the multitudes that partook of them, and for the interest they excited, as those which were called *Patrons*†: nor were any of their meetings oftener concluded with drunkenness and broils than these. An Irish patron resembled, in some manner, the old English wake: probably they both sprung from the same origin. It was a large assemblage of people from all parts within a distance of ten or twenty miles, collected together round a sacred fountain dedicated to, and called after the name of the Saint, in honour of whom this festival was celebrated. In the morning or forenoon the priest of the parish performed mass on a large stone, which was called an altar. Several old men and women at the same time performed penance round the well. Here were all sorts of hawkers, mountebanks, conjurers and itinerant musicians: and tents and booths were erected chiefly for the sale of liquor. The day was not uncommonly concluded by a general battle. Outrages of this kind sometimes proceeded from family feuds; but more frequently from local animosities. If there were none others than the people of two parishes collected together; these, when elevated and maddened with liquor, would fight against each other, for what reason they knew not. If the assemblage of people had been collected from more distant places, the inhabitants belonging to one barony or county would contend with those of another. The battle was most commonly preceded by a challenge. Some fellow, whose bodily strength—whose boisterous and ferocious temper, gave him such an ascendancy over others as to be chosen their leader; would come forth, and flourishing his cudgel over his head, bid defiance to all who did not belong to his clan, parish, barony, or county. A champion on the adverse side would instantly rush forward to meet him. Their followers soon joined them and the engagement became general.

The original inhabitants of Ireland were perhaps more credulous and superstitious than those of any other country. Their system of Popery was no more like the Roman Catholic Religion of Monarchical France, than the liberty of the modern French Republic resembles that of England. It was a compound of ancient paganism, together with all the absurdities into which Christianity had ever degenerated. To eat eggs during Passion Week was by them considered an unpardonable offence against Heaven: and on certain days of abstinence, it was more criminal to taste a drop of milk, than to get drunk with whiskey. Besides the Polytheis-

† So called from the Saint on whose day the meeting took place. These meetings were held in defiance of an act of Parliament (the 2d of Anne) by which the *wise* Government of Ireland hoped to check the progress of Popery.

tical worship prescribed by their Religion, they paid homage to several imaginary demons, to which, in their language, they gave names corresponding to those described in the old English mythology under the general denomination of fairies. But their veneration for these beings was entirely the result of fear, for they considered them capable of doing a great deal more mischief than good. The loss of cattle was often attributed to their malice: when a child died, it was frequently suspected that the fairies had carried it away while living, and that the corpse was nothing more than an artificial substance placed by them instead of the real body of the child. Similar suspicions arose if a child, from a good state of health, became sickly and consumptive. The poor little patient was no longer looked upon as the offspring of human parents, but the creation of demons. If the child survived the neglect occasioned by the idea of its unnatural origin, and recovered its former health, the fairies were thanked for their supposed interference.

In all whirlwinds and sudden tempests the fairies were thought to be the principal actors; especially if any damage was done to the houses or stacks of corn. They were also supposed to enter habitations at night after the family retired to rest, indulge in sportive gambols, and particularly to wash themselves in clean water, but if there was no water in the house, it was understood they would play some mischievous tricks in revenge. Possessed with this belief, the people made a point not to go to bed, until they had deposited, in some large vessel, the libation which they conceived necessary to keep these whimsical divinities in good humour. The superstitious rustics would sometimes endeavour to find out a more respectful name for those beings than that of fairies\*: and whenever they spoke of them, they made use of the expression—"God bless them."

The habitations usually assigned the fairies, were those small hills, or mounds, so frequently to be met with all over Ireland, called forts, because they were supposed to have been erected as places of defence, during the time of the Danish invasions of that country. Many of these hills might be seen; covered with wild shrubs, in the midst of arable fields: and the superstition of the cultivators would not suffer the sacred spots to be violated, either by the plough or the spade.

Many families were supposed to be followed by a female spright, who, on the death of any person, belonging to the family, used to haunt the borders of some neighbouring lake or rivulet, whence her lamentable cries were said to be distinctly heard. This harmless mourner was called the *Banshee*: and her existence was believed by several above the condition of peasants.

\* They generally called them, instead of *Fairies*, the *Good People*.

A. gene-

A general belief in ghosts and apparitions, prevailed here as well as in other countries. The people had a variety of charms and nostrums to keep away and defeat the machinations of evil spirits. The most common, were those of nailing an old horse-shoe on the threshold of the door of their dwelling house, and sprinkling the place once a week at least with holy water. Their superstitions, however, did not alone consist in a fear of invisible agents: like most people, in a state of barbarous ignorance, they always dreaded the effects of witchcraft. They believed there were many evil-minded persons, who had the power of destroying their cattle by a certain malevolent look, as well as by incantations: and that there were old women who, by a kind of charm, could take from the milk of their neighbour's cows, all that part which constituted the butter, and add it to their own: that they could raise storms, tempests, &c. The people had their good, as well as their evil sorcerers and sorceresses; to whom, in cases of theft or sickness, they applied much oftener than to magistrates or physicians.

Such was the credulity of the native Irish, that those among them, who lived in comfortable circumstances, were always liable to be preyed upon by the vilest and shallowest impostors. Itinerant mendicants would frequently carry about them bits of old wood, &c. which they pretended to be sacred relics, possessing great virtue.

The reputation which men of this description acquired for sanctity, caused them to be looked up to with reverence. They used to enter the houses of ignorant husbandmen without any ceremony: they were received, not only with hospitality, but with veneration: and, in return for the holy treasure which they left behind, they were feasted with the best things the soil produced, and lodged in the best bed the house contained.

But there were no persons for whom the people entertained more respect and veneration than their priests. They considered them as the most virtuous, the most learned and religious of all men. In their private disputes they would often appeal to, and abide by the decision of their priests; who, in many remote parts of Ireland, had all the authority, without any of the responsibility of Civil Magistrates. From these men, the common people received all their religious, moral and political instruction; and placed implicit faith in every thing they said, however absurd or monstrous.

In taking an oath, these people considered the obligation as sacred, if the oath was sworn on a piece of iron. Of the bible, they knew little or nothing; because their priests prohibited those who

who had received any instruction from reading it. There was a thing called St. Patrick's Crosier, which was thought to possess such extraordinary power, that the persons swearing by it could not fail to obtain credit; for it was believed that, if they swore falsely, their faces would instantly become distorted and deformed. But as there were no more than two or three of these miraculous relics in Ireland, a cross made of iron, or some other metal, with mystic letters marked on it, was often provided as a substitute, and it was not uncommon to swear upon it in preference to the bible, even before persons authorised by law to administer oaths.

The moral character of the Irish peasants, depended on the circumstances under which they lived. In some places they were not only simple and harmless, but extremely generous and benevolent: in others, they were selfish and depraved. They were all equally unacquainted with the principles of moral rectitude.

Of those who laboured under hardships and oppression, the reaction was great and terrible: it was not a measure of equal retaliation regulated by the rules of reason; but a furious indiscriminate and unjust revenge, the exercise of which corrupted the heart and prepared the individual for the perpetration of every crime.

The sudden removal of men from habits of life nearly resembling a state of nature, to a state of civilized society, regulated by laws and upheld by commerce, has, but too frequently, a dangerous effect on the human mind. The individuals are not prepared to fill their new character: they are generally incapable of practicing the virtues required in this kind of society: the virtues which distinguished their former state, operating as vices, and producing private inconvenience and public evil, they at last become so mischievous, that if the persons on whom they act are sufficiently powerful, they must keep the government continually employed in resisting their violence, or counteracting their artifices. How much greater evils are to be apprehended if such men are treated so as to make them think they have been injured and oppressed.

The most impolitic act that any government can commit, is that of prohibiting the lower orders of people from being instructed in the common rudiments of learning. Instead of sending a school master into every village, to teach the children the simple principles of morality, to inculcate obedience to the laws, and impress them with sentiments of attachment to their rulers, the old Government of Ireland, adopting a contrary policy, gave strength and permanency to every thing that constituted the source of national calamity. Under pretence of discouraging popery, they enacted laws for prohibiting, under very heavy penalties, any per-

son of the Popish Religion from teaching in any school, or instructing youth either publicly or privately\*. The consequence was, that the children of the peasantry were either brought up in a barbarous ignorance, which increased their turbulent spirit, or received, by stealth, that kind of instruction which only inspired them with contempt for the laws, and hatred towards the government. These odious statutes have indeed been repealed, during the reign of our present most gracious Sovereign†: but, alas, the infection which bad and impolitic laws will always generate, had taken too deep a root to be at once extirpated by lenient treatment.

The author entertains no peculiar partiality towards those people whose manners he is describing: his chief object is to state, as accurately as possible, what he saw himself. He must therefore say, that there was not an amiable quality, attributed by the old English writers to the native Irish of their time, which he had not witnessed in such of their modern descendants as lived in remote parts of the country, and were not rendered ferocious by oppression, nor debased by low habits of commerce. He must also add, that almost all the vices of these people, destructive as they were, sprung out of passions that might have been the source of so many virtues. He certainly knew of many petty instances of meanness, ingratitude and treachery, not only among peasants, but among persons of a much higher condition: but confident he is, that almost all the horrible outrages committed against persons, and the still more horrible depredations on property, had their origin in a mad spirit of revenge for injuries suffered, or supposed to have been suffered, by the parties themselves or their relatives; with whom they always made a common cause. It is a fact, capable of the clearest proof, that Popery, considered merely, as a religious system, had hardly any share in such outrages; for, during periods of insurrection and devastation, the author has known the property of wealthy Roman Catholics to have been destroyed by the peasants, while that of Protestants, living in the same neighbourhood, and to which they had the same facility of access, remained uninjured. The English reader must recollect that every Irish peasant was a Roman Catholic. About the years 1779 and 1780, a most atrocious practice prevailed over the greatest part of Ireland: it was that of *houghing* cattle in the fields at night, by which they were disabled from walking ever after. It is well known that, at that time, there were many gentlemen whose cattle were never injured, and that they used to receive anonymous letters stating the cause of this forbearance to be, that of their being good and indulgent landlords. It must not

\* See the 7th of William III. ch. 4. s. 9. and the 8th of Anne, ch. 3. s. 16.

† See the 21st, 22d, and 32d of Geo. III.

however be concluded that all persons, whose property suffered this species of injury were bad men; the facts are mentioned merely with a view of shewing what the motives were which led to the commission of such crimes. In no part of Ireland were the people so vicious as in those counties which were supposed to have been most civilized—as in places which abounded with land speculators, rich graziers, and tythe jobbers. There were also some places, where the active zeal of country gentlemen, in support of Protestant ascendancy, was such as to provoke the most deadly animosity on the part of their Popish neighbours\*. It is very remarkable, that it was in places of this description, where the rebellion raged with the greatest violence in the summer of 1798. And it is also worthy of notice, that, in the Province of Connaught, where the country gentlemen did not much attend to agricultural commerce, where tythes were always collected with comparative leniency, and Protestants and Papists lived in a good understanding with each other, there did not occur one act of formidable insurrection or of rebellion, except in the instance of that rabble which joined the French force at Killala.

The next, and most important part of our subject, is a view of the Irish peasants, in their character as members of the state:—a subject little understood, and hardly ever attended to by that legislature, which, happily for the British Empire, is now extinct: Its members appeared never to have informed themselves of the nature, to have studied the sentiments, contemplated the habits, or soothed the prejudices of a people whom they had to govern, and whose numbers and physical strength were alone sufficient to have raised them above contempt. Between the former legislators of Ireland, and the mass of the common people, there existed no community of interests, no reciprocity of benefits: no kind of confidence, nor good-will. When the former made laws that affected the latter, they generally made them in anger. To legislate *for* the dregs of the people; to render palatable the measures adopted *against* them; to endeavour to convince them that such measures were intended for their benefit; was a condescension, to which the Parliament of Ireland seldom stooped. The Irish legislators seemed, in most instances to consider the interest of the lower orders of the people, as incompatible with their own; and as dangerous to that of the government. It has been the policy

\* The Protestants and Roman Catholics of the County of Wexford had long associated together on the most friendly terms: and quiet and good order reigned there; until about 35 years ago, some zealous persons formed themselves into a club called the *Protestant Boys*: and with a view of converting Roman Catholics, began to persecute them in every way which the obnoxious statutes against Popery, enabled them to do. The consequence was, that from the most united people, those of Wexford became the most hostile to each other, of any in Ireland.

of

of every wise government, of which history furnishes us with an example, to improve the condition of the mass of the people, in order that they might have an interest in the defence and preservation of the state. A principle directly the contrary always prevailed in Ireland. The poorer, and more ignorant the peasants of that country were, the less danger was to be apprehended from their turbulent and rebellious disposition. This false and narrow-minded policy, was avowed by several writers; it was acted upon by the government: and the effects which it produced, can easily be traced to the cause.

The political character of the Irish peasants, if such people could be said to have any, was distinguished only by their hatred of the English name, and of the laws under which they lived. Whenever they spoke of the English, or their descendants who settled in Ireland, it was in terms of rancour and detestation†. Ignorant and obscure as they were, many families among them used to trace their pedigrees back to a very remote period; they knew the rank and the estates which their ancestors once held in the country; and they felt no small degree of pride at the recollection that noble blood still flowed in their veins. These families could ascertain every spot of ground which was said to have belonged to their forefathers; and of which, they looked on the modern possessors as so many usurpers. It was not because the English were Protestants, that they detested them: for the same deadly animosities prevailed between the English and Irish, before the reformation. But it was because they considered them as masters, who had robbed and oppressed them; who retained those estates, which they themselves would otherwise have enjoyed; and the titles to which did not, in their opinion, derive any validity from length of possession, or from the number of transfers they might have undergone. Their gross understandings were satisfied, with learning by tradition, that the lands had once belonged to their ancestors, who had been driven out of them by powerful invaders; and they never lost sight of the prospect of being one day reinstated in them.

These assertions might be illustrated by various facts, which came within the author's knowledge. The descendants of antient Irish families, who happened to have so much property as kept them from sinking below the level of the gentry, availing themselves of the influence they possessed over the neighbouring peasantry, have often, assisted by large parties of their adherents, seized upon the lands of others which they claimed as their rightful inheritance. It will be sufficient for our purpose to mention one instance of this kind, which occurred in a remote part of the

† Their usual expression was *na sassanich broddagh*—The execrable Saxons.  
E 2 county



county of Roscommon, about the end of the year 1786, and which, as it stands recorded in the proceedings of the Irish Parliament of that time cannot now be discredited or doubted.

A gentleman of the name of O'Connor, who happened to have been lineally descended from the pusillanimous Roderic, monarch of Ireland, when it was first conquered by the English, took it into his head that he had a better right to the possession of certain lands in that county, than the gentleman who then owned them; and whose title to them was as just and as legal, as that of the Duke of Bedford is to the domain of Woburn. Possessed with this notion, Mr. O'Connor collected several hundred peasants, armed with muskets and pitchforks, placed himself at their head and actually took possession of the lands in question, which he held until he was ejected by superior force. And, as a proof how badly the laws were administered in Ireland, no prosecution was ever carried on against him or any of his followers, for this act of violence. Some of the most active of the party were apprehended and lodged in gaol: but were dismissed without a trial. It is a fact well worthy of notice, that this illegal proceeding was countenanced by many persons above the condition of peasants, who actually furnished O'Connor's adherents with provisions, at the time they were setting out on their expedition. If that expedition had succeeded, it was the intention of many others to have recovered hereditary estates in the same summary way.

The dislike which the native Irish had for the laws of their country, was manifested by their constant efforts to evade, and by the attempt they made whenever they were likely to prove successful, to resist the execution of them. Although the personal taxes, imposed on them by Government, were very trifling, they could never be brought to consider them in any other light than that of grievous hardships; and, therefore, in places, remote and difficult of access, the tax-collectors could hardly venture to make their appearance. The hearth-tax was the only direct contribution which those people were obliged to pay to the government, between the years 1780 and 1790. This was no more than a duty of 2s. a year for every fire place†. And as each peasant had but one fire, it could hardly be supposed that the payment of so small a duty as that of 2s. a year on each family, should have been objected to. Yet, incredible as it may appear to persons unacquainted with the character of the people, they would frequently suffer the collector to distrain their household utensils; they would sometimes, on his approach, shut up their cabins, and go to some place where he could not find them; and, whenever they could do

† An act has since been passed in Ireland, exempting all persons having but one hearth from the payment of this tax.

it

it with safety to themselves, they would by threats or violence, compel him to keep away from their habitations, and abandon the collection of the tax altogether. It was no uncommon thing for the officers of government to consider, whether the whole of the taxes collected in some particular districts, would be equal to the expence that must have been incurred by the armed force which it would be necessary to employ, in order to compel the payment of them.

In no way did they shew so great a disposition to evade the laws, as in the practice of smuggling, which they eagerly pursued. By smuggling, is here understood not only the clandestine importation, but the clandestine manufacture and sale, of all commodities liable to the payment of duties. There was hardly one cabin in ten on an average, throughout the interior of Ireland, in which an inferior kind of ale and whiskey was not sold\*: although the venders lived in continual fear of revenue officers, and ran the risk of having their whole stock seized. Such was their opinion of law and of government, that these frauds were considered as most meritorious acts.

The same opinion was entertained by the common people, concerning their private distilleries, which were carried on not only by the more wealthy peasants, but by many other persons who ranked themselves among the gentry. Places difficult of access, such as morasses, bogs, islands in lakes, &c. &c. were generally chosen for these illegal practices. So numerous were distilleries of this kind at the period we are speaking of, and so determined and formidable was the resistance made against those who attempted to suppress them, that no revenue officer would venture to approach the places where they were, without a strong military guard; and numerous detachments of cavalry were stationed all over the country for no other purpose than that of *still hunting*. To inform against a private distiller, was considered infamous.

It was with the greatest reluctance they ever consented to pay tythes. But, when any unusual imposition was laid upon them, which appeared unreasonable and unjust, they did not scruple to resist the levying of them by force and violence. The author was witness to a very remarkable instance of this kind which occurred in the county of Longford, in the summer of 1778. A small assessment had been laid on the parishes of a district in that county, for the purpose of raising a sum of money to indemnify a person who had lost a great part of his property, in consequence of its having been maliciously set on fire. Among other parishes, there was one of considerable extent, and about eight or nine miles dis-

\* They were called *Shebeen* houses.

tant

tant from the residence of this person, the inhabitants of which openly refused to pay the contribution. They had received notice, on a Sunday at their parish chapel, that persons would come to collect this money at an appointed time. On the morning of a subsequent Sunday, the most violent and inflammatory bills were seen posted upon the doors of the chapel, purporting to be written by a man who described himself as captain of the *hougberst*, and threatening to maim and destroy the cattle of all persons who should pay a farthing towards this most iniquitous demand. On the same day, some friends, belonging to the party who was to be indemnified, had a conference with the people of the parish, after the service was concluded; and by persuasions and threats, endeavoured to obtain their consent to the payment of the money. The people became more obstinate than ever in their refusal, and bid defiance to any force that might be used to compel the payment.

A party, of about a dozen horsemen, armed with muskets, pistols, and swords, arrived in the course of a day or two after, and proceeded to distrain the goods of those who refused payment. The inhabitants immediately assembled in large numbers, and attacked them with stones; the others defended themselves, for a considerable time, with their fire-arms; but were at length forced to fly, and narrowly escaped with their lives.

No attempt was ever made afterwards to levy this assessment by force; but, in the course of the following year, the parish priest prevailed on the people to consent to the payment of it. The conciliating manner in which he addressed his flock on this occasion, and the success with which this application was attended, might serve as a wholesome lesson to those Governments who think they can do more by coercion than by mildness. He told them, "that however hard and unjust it might appear to them, to be obliged to make good the losses sustained by a man whom they had never injured nor known; yet such things were always done; it was the law; and, if any of their cabins had been burnt by evil-minded persons, the law would make good their loss in the same manner. Besides, it was impossible for them to dispute the business any longer, because the judge, at the assizes, had declared that the money must be paid; and whatever the judge said was a law." This address, coming from a man whom the people venerated, had the desired effect; and they paid the money afterwards without a murmur of disapprobation.

Except in great trading towns or well cultivated counties, the laws were at this time very badly administered in Ireland.

† The horrible practice of houghing cattle raged at its greatest height at that time.

They

They were detested by the common people: and many of the higher orders held them in contempt, and even wantonly violated them in the face of day.

As a proof of the former assertion there were few executions at which the mob did not commiserate the fate of the criminals; and a strong military guard was always necessary, not only to prevent them from being rescued, but to save the executioner from being stoned to death. If a man in any public place was charged with a felony, the spectators would frequently assist him in making his escape. Happy would it have been for their country and themselves, had the Irish gentry proceeded no farther than acts of negative injustice! a criminal relaxation will always lead to a criminal violation of law. Many of those gentry would, in the spirit of insolence or unprovoked revenge, commit acts of personal violence against the wretched peasants; of whom some dared not, others were not able, to make resistance: and none could obtain redress in any other way, except by acts of clandestine outrage, either against the persons or the property of their oppressors.

Every body, who has read ancient history, recollects Solon's definition of the happiest and best governed state: if the converse of his proposition be true, few countries could have been less happy or worse governed than Ireland; for there was hardly a country in the world, where injuries offered to individuals, were less resented by persons not immediately affected by them. The author of these statements has in the town where he was educated, and in many other places, frequently witnessed the most wanton assaults committed by gentlemen as they passed along the streets, upon poor creatures, whose only crime was that of gazing, perhaps with admiration at their splendid apparel. And such was the slavish spirit, the vicious apathy; such was the cold-blooded indifference, and the base selfishness of the surrounding spectators, that these outrages were suffered to pass not only without punishment, but without censure; and if noticed at all, it was only to applaud the gallant exploit that had been achieved.

The injured parties, if their condition was very low, might as well have applied to the Grand Seignior for a guard of Janissaries, as have sought redress from the laws of that country, whose life and strength their hard labour had contributed to support. To have brought an action for damages, would have required more money than they themselves, and all the relations they had in the world, possessed. If they attempted to prosecute by indictment, the Magistrate, in the first instance, would either not attend to their complaint, or recommend an accommodation, which, if listened to by the party accused, was generally concluded by the pay-

payment of a sum of money by way of compensation, so small and insignificant as not to have the least effect in preventing a repetition of the outrage†. If the injured parties, raised above the dregs of the people, and holding some kind of rank in society, were able to bring their charge before a Grand Jury, it was ten to one that it proceeded no farther. It was a common boast among the inhuman part of the superior classes, "that they had friends on the Grand Jury, and that they could always get bills of indictment against them thrown out." The Judges of Ireland, about this time, began to see and feel the great public mischief which arose from the frequency of wanton assaults; and it would be doing injustice to those highly respectable characters not to say, that whenever offenders, of this description, were convicted before them, they were punished with some severity.

But injuries of this kind, so far as they affected individuals, were mere trifles, compared to those that were often inflicted on poor people, under the colour of law. It was no uncommon thing to see whole families of peasants, dispossessed of their small lots of ground, and driven out of their habitations, on pretences that could not be maintained in law. Any effort to resist such injustice, would have been fruitless; their adversaries were wealthy enough to baffle every attempt at redress in a Court of Justice; and all this was done for the accommodation of wealthy individuals. The persons who generally practiced acts of tyranny like these, were not the great and respectable owners of land; but agents, middle-men, and upstarts, who had acquired property by having been tax-collectors, tythe-jobbers, petty-foggers, attorneys, &c. all of whom thought themselves of sufficient importance to tack the title of *Esquire* to their names. It was from these and the little gentry, that the poor peasants felt all the pressure of their grievances. The higher orders were culpable only in permitting such practices to exist.

Had the lower orders of people in Ireland been ever so well affected to their government, it would have been impossible to expect from them obedience to those laws which were so often broken by their superiors—by those who should have been the guardians and preservers of them. Various instances might be produced to illustrate this assertion, were it not foreign to the particular subject now under consideration. It will be sufficient to observe, that the conduct and example of the Irish gentry, so far from improving the common people, served to render them more turbulent and profligate. The former, whose passions generally predominated over their reason, were in the habit of considering the latter either as mere machines, calculated to answer a present purpose, or

† Magistrates used often to fix the price of a violent assault and battery so low as half-a-crown.

as nuisances, that might be thrust out of the highway of their pursuits and humours. They very rarely looked forward to future benefit, and seldom entertained any dread of future evil. They had not always the prudence to content themselves with excluding these wretches from the possession, or obstructing them in the acquisition of property. Besides the wanton assaults already mentioned, they added scoffs and insults to the injuries they had inflicted. They did that which must either debase the human mind, or exasperate it into frantic revenge.

The influence of their example produced still greater evils. Their idleness, dissipation, extravagance, and boisterous deportment, led to similar habits in a barbarous multitude, who, like most imitators, copied the vices, without being able to adopt or to practice the virtues of their superiors.

God forbid, however, it should be understood that every gentleman in Ireland was of this description. The author would be guilty of flagrant injustice and ingratitude, were he to stamp this character on all his countrymen, or even to insinuate that the conduct he has described, proceeded from any native depravity of heart.—There was not a country in the world where nature and habits were more at variance with each other: with an unbounded flow of benevolence and generosity, the gentlemen of Ireland often acted the part of tyrants and oppressors; with quick and lively perceptions of wrong, they felt no hesitation in depriving their fellow creatures, by thousands, of their natural rights. This was the custom of the country; and therefore it excited no surprise, and little resentment. They found the system ready formed to their hands; and they moved and acted in it, without ever reflecting on its injustice and pernicious tendency. The injured parties, from the meanness of their condition, seldom excited any interest; and some of them were so completely debased as to submit to their wrongs with satisfaction.

If any Gentleman, after having passed much of his time in learned reflection, after having made himself acquainted with the liberal manners of England and other countries, and after forming true notions of moral justice and sound policy, attempted to break through the established usage; if, magnanimously laying aside the prejudices of his rank, he set, in his own person, examples of industry and frugality to those whose pride and indolence never suffered them to adopt any means for increasing their small incomes: if he endeavoured to establish plans for relieving the distresses and improving the condition of the peasantry in his neighbourhood, he was seldom or never countenanced by others, whose co-operation might have crowned his efforts with success; he met with op-

position from the ignorant and the invidious ; he was often exposed to ridicule , and if he was not armed with some authority, either resting on public esteem, or arising out of the consideration of his rank and fortune, he ran a great risk of becoming an object of persecution.

It would be high injustice in this place not to mention, that there were to be found in Ireland numbers of gentlemen with the best hearts and the best intentions, who, unable to struggle against the torrent that sprung out of this fatal system, suffered themselves to be carried away in common with the crowd. But there were some splendid exceptions : there were persons who, raised by their rank and fortune above the effects of prejudice, had the fortitude to disregard the opinion of these neighbours who despised and ridiculed them for acts of economy which in England would have excited applause and esteem. Yet these persons were the best benefactors to the public, and the most generous patrons of the poor.

Attempts were made by the gentlemen of some counties to procure the adoption of a general resolution for raising the wages of labourers. Sometimes they succeeded, but more frequently failed. In short, the whole system of moral and political relations existing between the different orders of society in Ireland, was disproportioned and absurd ; and it was not to be expected that the efforts of the most enlightened and liberal individuals or even of whole societies, could effect any permanent improvement. The very persons intended to be benefited were often the most instrumental in defeating the plans of amelioration. A mixture of pride, envy, selfishness and indolence, often characterised all the parties interested in promoting a particular measure ; while the generous proposer of it, not only saw his fair prospects blasted ; but had the double mortification of finding himself exposed to the ridicule of those whose welfare he had at heart. There was a kind of fatality attending all Irish plans of improvement, by which they were either not adopted at all, or were converted into jobs for enriching individuals. This very spirit found its way into the Parliament of Ireland, where measures intended for the benefit of particular districts, were generally defeated by the secret manœuvres of those whose immediate interests might be affected by them ; and where bills were sometimes passed, or rather smuggled into laws, the object of which was to promote the private views of some individual member, to the injury of the community.

Yet with all this want of public spirit ; with all this grasping selfishness on the part of the few ; with all this shameful abandonment of public interest on the part of the many ; there is not a country in the world where the ties of private life were drawn more

more closely ; where the affections of kindred and of friendship glowed with more warmth, or endured with more sincerity ; nor where individuals of equal rank were more assiduous to make each other happy.

The hospitality for which the Irish gentry have been so justly famed, displayed itself in a spirit of generosity, and with a shew of disinterestedness, rarely to be met with in any other country. The guest, even when uninvited, was not repelled by any coldness of reception : he felt no embarrassment, no impatience to depart ; and the entertainer endeavoured to make it appear that the visit was a favour conferred upon him. Although invitations among genteel families were punctually returned, yet their entertainments were not given with any view towards remuneration ; for numbers partook of them who were not in a condition to make a return. It is a well known fact that in many remote parts of Ireland, a country gentleman, when he happened to be without company at his house, would ride out on the highway and solicit the unknown traveller to come and partake of his cheer. To a stranger introduced into the houses of such men, the stories related by Homer of ancient hospitality, must no longer have appeared fabulous. Young persons without any fixed habitation or employment, accompanying their friends merely with the intention of spending the evening, on such occasions, were frequently prevailed on to stay whole weeks and months. The most amiable and unremitting attention was always paid to visitors ; and every thing was done that could make them pleased with their entertainment, and prolong their stay.

Could any thing appear more captivating than this system of disinterested benevolence ? A man unacquainted with the world, would imagine that the people among whom it prevailed, had risen to the most perfect state of human society. He would not believe that in the same country there could exist such a hideous mass of wretchedness and vice, as that which has already been described. But the philosopher, who minutely examines all parts of this splendid picture, will perceive its numerous incongruities and deformities. The hospitality of Ireland not unfrequently produced the ruin of whole families. That the children of those who outlived their fortunes became outcasts upon the world, was but a trifling evil, compared to the crush which the fortunes of industrious tradesmen and others used to suffer. Those Gentlemen whom they supplied with commodities or with money, had only a life interest in their estates ; while they lived they had the address to keep their creditors in good humour ; and after their decease their representatives could not be compelled to pay their debts. It frequently happened, that one half of a country Gentleman's guests consisted

of his creditors, who were so dazzled with the elegance of their entertainment, and so delighted with the attentions they received, that although they had come for the express purpose of demanding their money, they often went away without introducing the subject. It was a common remark that many of the creditors ate and drank more than the amount of their claims.

Unjust and mischievous as were the immediate consequences of this system, its remote effects on the public at large were a thousand times worse. It was one of the principal causes of that oppression and misery under which the peasantry of Ireland groaned; and which was the necessary consequence of idleness and extravagance on the part of the higher orders.

One of the greatest evils occasioned by the unbounded hospitality and extravagance of the gentlemen of Ireland was a general want of money. Had money been entirely banished from the country, as it was from Sparta; and had commerce consisted merely in an interchange of commodities, the inhabitants might have enjoyed a state of comparative felicity: but, to make the grievance approach to the highest degree of absurdity, every commodity had its pecuniary value affixed to it; and the nominal sums at which each was estimated, were far beyond the intrinsic value of the commodities themselves. Although every thing was to be paid for in money, money was seldom to be procured; and for things of the least value the greatest sums were demanded. The wretched peasants, the tenants and the cultivators of land, had often to pay a higher price for it than was paid in places where specie was in abundance. The perpetual want under which they laboured rendered them incapable of tilling the ground to advantage: the produce, as has been already stated, was not, when sold, sufficient to pay the rent: and sometimes purchasers were not to be found. Thus did the most enormous disproportion exist between the prices of land and of its produce, which never could have happened had there been either a sufficiency of money in the country, or no money at all. A perpetual drain to distant places, from whence no return was made, imposed a necessity of procuring money by any means: and an erroneous opinion that no real scarcity prevailed, filled up the measure of general distress.

The gentry of Ireland rarely took into their consideration these impediments; or when they did, they made few serious attempts to remove them. They only wanted money to satisfy their wants; and when the people who worked upon their lands had none to give, they drove away their stock of cattle, and consequently precipitated them into beggary and ruin. These cruel hardships were often

often exercised by persons of whom the tenants had no knowledge; with whom they had made no contract: persons who were called the head landlords; and between whom and the cultivators there was a chain of intermediate landlords, such as have been described in the beginning of these observations. This most pernicious system of middlemen originated in the idleness and poverty of the Irish gentry. A gentleman, involved in extravagance, and unable to provide for his immediate wants, would often let a portion of his estate, on a long lease at a rent so small as three, four, or five shillings an acre; on condition of receiving a sum of money at the moment. The immediate lessee, either too proud or too lazy to cultivate this land himself would let it on lease to another, at a profit rent of ten or fifteen shillings an acre; and the next lessee would dispose of it at an advanced rent to a third person, until at last the most ignorant and indigent of the people became the occupiers and cultivators of that land, which, in the hands of an English Yeoman, would have produced double the quantity it was in their power to make it yield. Yet these miserable drudges paid a larger rent than is now paid for some of the best farms in England, and had to run the gauntlet between all the gradations of landlords, from the proprietor to their immediate lessor, who were ultimately obliged to look to the soil itself for their profit rent.

Land thus rack-rented, thus curtailed of its productive powers, and of which the profits were divided among so many idlers, and consumed as soon as received, could never add any thing to the stock of national wealth. The gentry derived their incomes from no other source, and as soon as their rents were received, they were instantly sent off to the capital of the island, or to some other trading town, to pay for the luxuries which were consumed in their houses. This money did not flow back into the interior of the country, any more than the sums sent over to support the Irish land-owners who spent their fortunes in England.

To enter more fully into a description of that system of violence and injustice, of folly and extravagance, which we have noticed, would far exceed the limits prescribed to this publication. Enough has been said to shew that the seeds of the late dreadful rebellion have not been sown in modern times. And the facts that have been stated are sufficient to point out the necessity of entering upon an extensive and minute enquiry concerning the state of Ireland: and of adopting some great and efficacious plan, for curing the distempers that have so long prevailed there: for reclaiming the mass of its population: and for introducing among them peaceable and industrious habits. Such a plan could not be carried into effect without

without great labour, difficulty, and expence. But if once accomplished the benefits resulting from it would exceed all calculation. The British Government would be no longer disturbed by internal commotions: they would have a numerous and powerful body of subjects zealously attached to them: and the national wealth would experience an encrease, of which none can form an adequate conception, but those who are acquainted with the soil, and the hardy natives of Ireland.

---

## EDUCATION

OF

## THE NATIVE IRISH.

---

Perhaps there never was a race of men who had a stronger desire, and less means, to procure scholastic information, than the wretched Peasantry of Ireland. Great numbers of them were ignorant from absolute necessity; and the consciousness of that ignorance often became a source of unhappiness. The instruction received by those children who happened to be sent to what they called a school, was not only bad, but sometimes worse than no instruction at all. Instead of expanding, it served to narrow their minds; and instead of inspiring them with notions of morality, it paved the way for the commission of every species of vice.

That this barbarous system was caused by that government which long ruled over Ireland with violence, oppression, and folly; is as well ascertained as any historical fact can be. A government which expects its subjects to be peaceable, orderly, and obedient to the laws, must take care to have the rising generation instructed in the principles of public and private virtue. But the old rulers of Ireland with a degree of sottish bigotry, of stupid pride, and active malevolence, of which a parallel is scarcely to be found in the Turkish history; not only forbore to encourage public instruction: but did every thing in their power to check and crush it. The laws passed in the reigns of William and Anne, with a view of converting the natives of Ireland from the Popish to the Protestant Religion, by force; have been already noticed. The direct and avowed object of those laws was to shut out all kind of instruction from the children of Irish Roman Catholics. If ever there was any one legislative measure more pregnant with folly and mischief than another, it was that of telling the majority of the subjects they must not read, unless they changed their religion. It was a law of such monstrous injustice and tyranny, as to render the enforcement of it impracticable.

Like

Like every other bad law, it vitiated those that were good: and the people having broken through it from necessity, were led into habits of disobedience of all law. This was actually the case with the Catholics of Ireland. They openly violated all the laws that forbade them to be instructed: and they did so in a manner that was at once degrading to the legislature, injurious to themselves, and dangerous to the State.

The only way by which the Catholic Peasants could have been prevented from reading, was to have ordered a party of soldiers to be posted in every village, and to destroy all the pieces of printed or written paper they could find. Had this been done, one solitary advantage would have followed.—The peasants, learning nothing good, would have imbibed nothing that was bad, in the course of their reading. But in the very act of violating a public law, they received a certain kind of instruction which was worse than ignorance. Their teachers were generally men of the very lowest class: a knowledge of writing and of the common rules of arithmetic, was generally considered a sufficient qualification for them to assume the office of schoolmasters\*. But of moral truths, of history, geography, or the construction of language, they knew nothing. They could barely read a common English book; and what little they knew of the English language, they spoke incorrectly. They could not therefore communicate to their scholars what they did not know themselves: and if they could, the poverty of the parents put it out of their power to procure the necessary books for the children. Books that could have conveyed any knowledge of history were too voluminous, and consequently too dear to be purchased: books of morality were above their comprehension: and their Clergy would not permit them to read the bible or testament†. Their reading then, consisted of vile stories, which, without conveying instruction to the mind, either filled it with extravagant romantic notions incompatible with their station in life; or gave scope and activity to the worst passions. The books that were used at these wretched schools, tended as much to prevent the peasantry of Ireland from becoming good subjects, as any of the circumstances already noticed. Romances describing the manners of barbarous and superstitious ages‡, were not calculated to inspire youth with correct notions of

\* They were called hedge-schoolmasters; because, unable at all times to get the use of a barn, a stable, or any other house; they frequently, in the summer season, kept their schools under hedges in the open air.

† The Author in stating this fact does not mean to throw a shadow of censure on the Roman Catholic Priests of Ireland. He has heard some very worthy men among them say, that in order to prevent the ignorant and lower orders of people from putting erroneous interpretations on the Holy Scriptures; it was a part of their system to prohibit such persons from reading them at all.

‡ Such as *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, *Guy Earl of Warwick*, *Valentine and Orson*, *Don Belianis of Greece*, &c. They were printed in a small and abridged edition, the price of which was never more than sixpence.

law

law or government: especially when unaccompanied with any other kind of reading that might do away the bad impressions they had made. But this was not all: the evil would have been comparatively trifling, if the young Peasants had read nothing worse than the wild miraculous tales of other times and countries. The histories of some of the very worst characters\* from among themselves also formed a part of their studies. In the perusal of these, youth became familiarized to offences of the most violent and atrocious nature; and were taught to look upon robbers, incendiaries, murderers, and violators of women, as objects of admiration. The transition from theory to practice was but short.—And crimes proceeded more frequently from an inherent depravity in the perpetrators, than from that desire of gain which constitute their origin in most other countries.

Besides those just alluded to, the country was frequently inundated with another species of publications, perhaps equally as destructive to public and private morality. These consisted of songs and ballads † composed in the vilest and the coarsest language, and conveying sentiments the most obscene and vicious that ever tended to corrupt the human mind. And such was the extent to which they prevailed among the lower orders of the Irish, that their Priests were frequently obliged to denounce anathemas from the altars, against persons who should sing or repeat certain ballads.

To that defective and pernicious mode of instruction already noticed, there was one exception, which the philanthropic mind cannot contemplate without some degree of pleasure; because it shews to what an extent the love of learning prevailed among these people; and to what useful purposes they might have been converted, under any system erected on the basis of wisdom and justice. An English gentleman, whose son has stood him in SEVEN OR EIGHT HUNDRED POUNDS, before he acquired that insignificant portion of classical learning which was necessary to qualify him for admission to the University of Oxford; will hardly believe that the sons of some of the most indigent and obscure peasants in Ireland, were able to study and become acquainted with the best Greek and Roman authors; that they had taste to discriminate the beauties contained in them; and frequently conversed with each other in the latin language; which (by the bye) they spoke much more

\* Of these the following were most in use:—*The History of the Irish Rogues and Rapperies*—*The Adventures of Captain Phreny*—of Redmond O'Hanlan, &c. They were also sold for sixpence each.

† There was a Printer in Dublin of the name of Corcoran, who made a large fortune by publishing halfpenny ballads of this description: and he had people constantly employed to circulate them all over Ireland. The civil power never interfered to prevent him.

6

COF.

correctly than English. It was no uncommon thing to see poor lads who had left their homes without shoes or stockings, or perhaps the smallest sum of money in their pockets, wandering through the country in search of scholastic instruction, and living on the bounty of those whom they had applied to for relief, which was hardly ever refused them. In this latter circumstance they were distinguished from all other mendicants, as well as in the compassionate attention they experienced from most people.— They called themselves *poor scholars*: and that name was always a sufficient passport for a temporary lodging and entertainment in the house of any peasant, whose hospitable spirit the cold hand of want had not extinguished. They were hardly ever refused admittance into any school; where they were instructed gratuitously; and of which the master took care they should not be reproached for their poverty. In return for this kindness, after they had made some progress, they assisted in teaching the younger boys. The part of Ireland to which poor scholars chiefly resorted was Munster; because in that province the classical schools were always the best and the most numerous. The ultimate object which they had in view, was that of being admitted into the Romish Priesthood. If they were diligent in their studies, and correct in their conduct, they seldom failed of having their ambition gratified. Among the Roman Catholic Clergy were many men of learning and exemplary lives, who had acquired their education in the manner just described. There were even instances of some poor scholars having been admitted into the University of Dublin, and there distinguished themselves by their progress in classical and scientific knowledge.

It would be foreign to the present subject to enter into the history of those institutions called endowed and chartered schools, which the benevolent zeal of individuals, had founded from their private property, with a view of extending the protestant religion. It may be necessary, however, to notice them, so far as they formed a part of that general system of corruption and absurdity, which prevailed throughout the whole of Ireland. The peasantry, as must appear from what has been already said, could derive no benefit from these schools: for such of them as had not fallen into abuse and decay were inaccessible to the children of any except Protestants. And their utility was of a very limited nature. But the greater number of these foundations (particularly those which had promised superior advantages, and to which superior endowments had been granted) were not only useless but mischievous. While they neglected and injured the cause of learning, they operated as so many monopolies to drive all fair competition out of the market. They were sinecure places for the nominal masters of them, who received almost all the emoluments arising from the endowments, without doing any public service: and the men who did the

the duty that was to be performed, had scarcely a sufficiency to subsist on\*. About the year 1787 or 1788, certain Commissioners † were appointed by Parliament to make a general enquiry into the state of education and of schools in Ireland. They proceeded in their enquiries with the most laudable activity, zeal, and perseverance. They performed the whole of their duty; in the course of which they discovered the most flagrant and shameful abuses‡. The public was given to understand that all these would be radically cured, and that a great, extensive, and effectual plan of education would be adopted. No such thing was ever done. The business was hardly proposed when it met with resistance, and fell to the ground. Like every other fair blossom that had shot forth for a moment, as it were, in mockery of the Irish nation; this was blasted by the pestilential breath of selfishness and corruption.

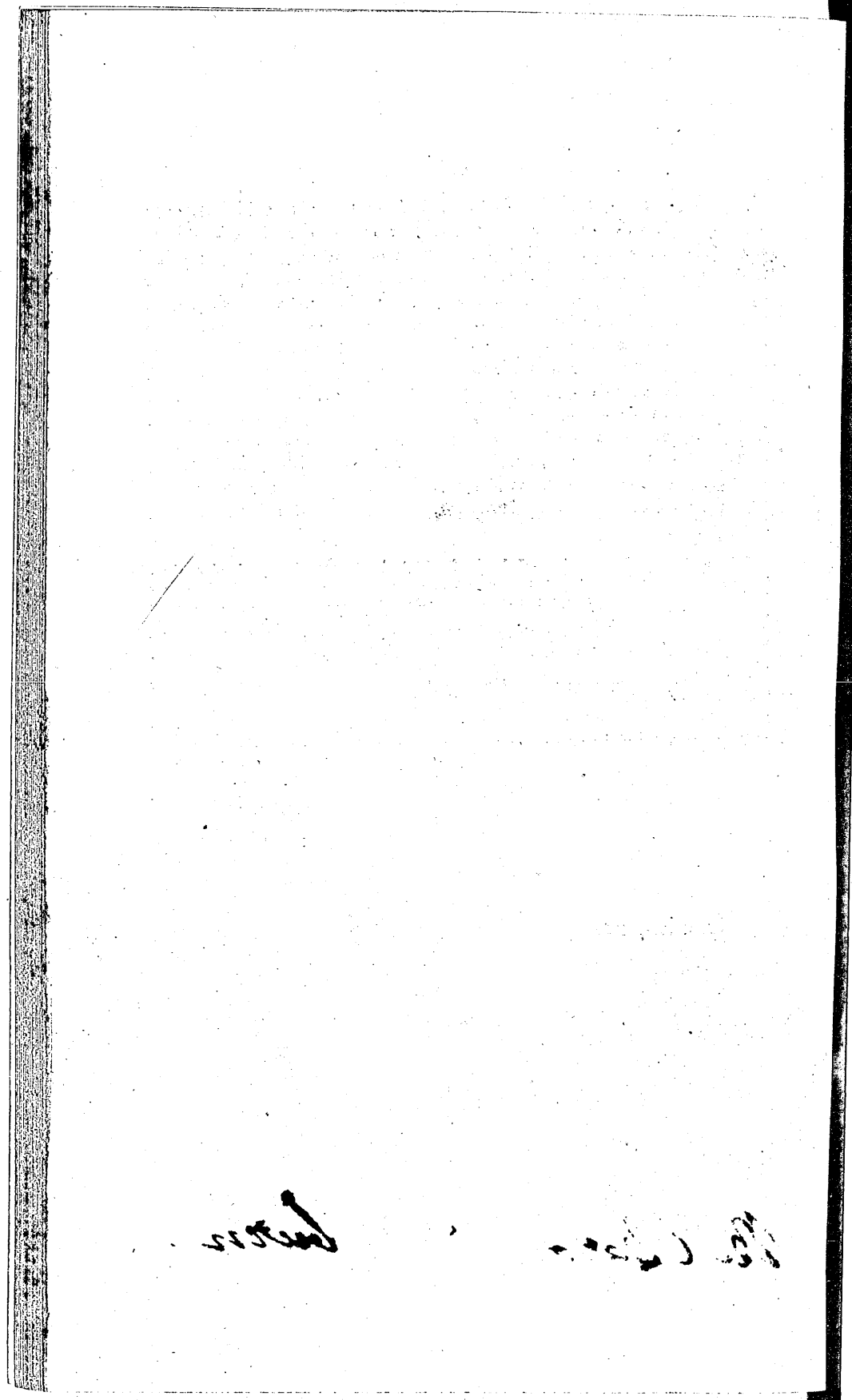
\* The Author knew of one School of which the Master (a beneficed clergyman who never went near it) received FIFTEEN HUNDRED POUNDS a year from the endowment: while the Usher, a man of learning, who did all the duty, had but Forty !!!

† The Right Hon. Isaac Corry, Member for Newry; and the late Right Hon. John Healy Hutchinson, Provost of Dublin College were among the number.

‡ The Author was summoned before these Commissioners at the Castle of Dublin in 1788; in order to give information, on oath, concerning a certain institution, of which he had some knowledge. On that occasion, he stated facts, at which they all lifted up their hands with astonishment and indignation.



0025



*[Handwritten scribbles]*