

THE INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION AT
CORK.

IT was a happy idea to institute in Ireland an Exhibition of the products of Irish Industry; nor was the choice of the beautiful and hospitable city of Cork, as the scene of this industrial gathering, by any means less happy than the original idea of the promoters. Every visitor of Ireland – and it has been said with truth that in every new visitor Ireland receives a new friend – is strongly impressed with the contrast presented by the agricultural and the manufacturing districts of that long-suffering country. Where the people depend solely upon agriculture, the land is, covered with roofless tenements, deserted villages, untilled fields, and a squalid, half-famished, and degraded population, who fly from it as fast as ships can be found to carry them across the Atlantic, or who remain at home, either miserable and broken-spirited, or miserable and revengeful. On the other hand, where the people depend wholly or in part upon manufactures and commerce, the mud hovel is replaced by the brick and slated cottage – decent garments are seen instead of the most pitiable of all rags, the rags of the Irish cottier – the faces of the people are bright with the proverbial good-humour and joyousness of the national character – and the appearance of the country is as cheerful and flourishing as that of any part of England or Scotland. In fact, the want of manufactures has been one of the unhappily too numerous, and perhaps the greatest of the causes that have produced the sufferings of a land for which nature has done so much and man so little. All that Protection afforded to Irish in common with British agriculture, failed to protect or feed the people; and it was mainly the misery of that portion of the country and its agriculturists, as all the world know, which compelled the late illustrious Statesman, whose loss we yet deplore, to follow, as Mr. Disraeli is now doing, the spirit of the age, and to establish Free Trade as the only possible alleviation and remedy for their sufferings. Had it not been for trade and manufactures, the condition of Ireland, wretched as it was prior to the year 1846, would have been still worse; and had it not been for Free Trade, the state of the country, bad as it has been subsequent to that memorable epoch, would have been far more deplorable and disastrous; – a visible darkness without a ray of hope. Protected agriculture, and the scantiness or absence of manufactures, brought Ireland to the verge of ruin. Free Trade and free industry, and scope for both, will yet restore her to her right place, unless religious and political squabbles should unhappily defeat the work. We hope, however, for better things. As the

Mayor of Cork aptly reminded the Viceroy, the country has indeed passed through a severe ordeal of calamity and privations; and it is impossible to read the account of the proceedings, and to reflect upon the good feeling which pervaded all classes, as well as upon the highly creditable display of objects of art and industry which the Exhibition presented, without believing that the worst has passed. Every Englishman, as well as every Irishman, will cordially join in the wish expressed on the occasion, “that the Exhibition may prove the commencement of an era of cheering contrast to the years that have gone by, and that it may be followed by the results which its promoters had in view – the more profitable development of the resources of Ireland, and the triumph of the skill and intelligence of her people.”

Among the more prominent objects exhibited as proofs of the ingenuity and proficiency of Irishmen in the industrial as well as in the fine arts, were machinery, carriages, agricultural implements, furniture, carved woods, paper, porcelain, and the staple textile fabrics for which Belfast and the north of Ireland are unrivalled. In addition to these, the genius of Irishmen for sculpture was ably represented by the works of Hogan and Macdowall – familiar to all the visitors of the Crystal Palace, where they previously played no mean part in stimulating and administering to the love of the beautiful. And if Ireland made particularly manifest on this occasion a fact which none denied, that her sons are well qualified to run in the great race of competition with the skilled workmen of the world, it is more for the hopefulness of the occasion than for the greatness of the present results, that the Exhibition assumes a character of national importance.

There are two distinct and yet related branches of manufacture for which Ireland is peculiarly well fitted, and for which her soil and climate, as well as her water power, offer the most admirable facilities, that would, if properly developed, and left free to the vivifying influence of English capital, and to the energies of the population, suffice to eradicate, by no slow process, the moral and physical evils that always attend upon semi-starvation. The one is the manufacture of linen, the other is the scarcely less important manufacture of paper. The first can scarcely be said to have attained its proper growth, or to employ a quarter of the people that it might employ, were the cultivation of flax better understood by Irish farmers. The second can scarcely be said to exist at all: though, were it not for the operation of the Excise laws, that prevent the manufacture of agricultural refuse into paper, many thousands of persons of both sexes, now the tenants of the 'palatial

workhouses, or no less palatial lunatic asylums of Ireland, might be employed as contented and well-fed labourers. But public attention has lately been strongly drawn to both of these great branches of industry, and in due course of time there is reason to believe that they will meet with favour and encouragement, not simply at the hands of capitalists and of the Government, but at those of the owners and occupiers of the soil. By degrees the estates of Ireland will fall into the possession of solvent proprietors, who will find it their interest, as well as that of their tenantry, to introduce and stimulate the cultivation of flax, for the double purposes of the linen and of the paper manufacture; in which case we may expect the south of Ireland to become as happy and flourishing as the north; and the wild and desolate west to wear a smile of prosperity which shall rival that of the now more favoured east. When the land shall be intersected with railways, as it speedily will be – when the submarine telegraph shall be daily at work in conveying the tidings of business to be done – when Galway and the ports of the west shall be the packet stations in direct and immediate communication with the western world over the Atlantic – and, when the subtle agency of electricity shall bring Galway and New York within five minutes of each other, as they must and will be brought before many years shall elapse – we may expect that not even the annual emigration of hundreds of thousands of stalwart and willing men, and – what is far worse – not even the political feuds and religious animosities of ages, will prevent Ireland from assuming her true position – that of an integral part of Great Britain, her equal in worldly wealth, as well as in freedom and intelligence.

Such, at least, are the hopes that may not irrationally or over-sanguinely be formed of the future condition of Ireland, when she shall finally recover from the prostration of energy with which long years of calamity have afflicted her. Of this happy consummation the signs at the present time are neither few nor feeble. The Cork Exhibition is important as being the last and most striking of these signs, but it is far from being the only one. With a little more confidence on the part of capitalists – a confidence which is fast growing – Ireland will be raised from the condition of a purely agricultural, to that of an agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial country. She will then rise in the scale of nations, and her name will no longer be synonymous with turbulence, misgovernment, and misery.

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