
Glimpses of Ireland in 1847

East John

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Author: East John

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Glimpses of Ireland

IN 1847.

BY THE

REV. JOHN EAST, M.A.,

RECTOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S, BATH.



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MDCCLXVII.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

**The Highland Ferryman and his Little
Granddaughter ;**

OR,

A DAY'S RAMBLE IN THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

Twelfth Thousand.

THE Author takes this opportunity to acknowledge gratefully the kind acceptance given to his simple narrative, and the liberal response made to his call for aid to the distressed Highlanders and Islanders of Scotland. For their relief he has received above ONE THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED POUNDS ; and thereby has been, and still is enabled to afford important relief to many hundreds of the most numerous and distressed families in various parts.

For the distressed Irish, he has also received and dispensed, through the Protestant Parochial Clergy, nearly FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS.



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A GLIMPSE OF DUBLIN.

NEVER did an April sun give to a stranger a brighter glimpse of the Emerald Isle than that, which my eye caught just after sunrise on the 14th of that month. A stiff breeze from the east aided our gallant steamer from Liverpool, as she made her way through the waters, which playfully tossed themselves and numerous fishing-smacks, in the gay beams of the morning. The sea-birds joyously sported upon or above the swelling bosom of the deep; while the fleecy clouds seemed instinct with life, as they flew before the dissolving sun and the driving winds. "Goodness and mercy had followed us," more richly, too, than at the time I was aware of; and I enjoyed the true luxury of an interchange of grateful reflections with a fellow-voyager, who was no stranger to the joy of thankfulness. To the west, a-head of our vessel, expanded "the noble bay of Dublin, bounded on the north by the beautiful lands of Clontarf, finely terminated by the bold peninsula of Howth; and on the south by the remarkable hill of Killiney, and the rich environs running thence into the city." The eye and the mind could not but

wander in delighted interest to the spires, and towers, and columns of the capital; to innumerable mansions and villas on the rich slopes and hills of the southern shore, that spoke of wealth and comfort; to the noble harbour of Kingstown, with its commercial navy floating there in calm security; to the granite rocks and island of Dalkey; to the lovely bay of Killiney; to the bluff headland of Bray; to the Dublin frontier, broken by the wild mountain pass of the Scalp; and to the bold range of the Wicklow highlands. On that fair scene one could not help dwelling in almost a transport of pleasure, notwithstanding many sad thoughts—many painful forebodings that would arise within, and before which all the loveliness of the beautiful, and all the grandeur of the sublime in natural scenery, would soon sink into unassuming insignificance. For I was about to realize the words of a powerful writer upon the subject of Ireland's sorrows, and find myself "in the presence of such a visitation as has never perhaps been witnessed in any period of high civilization—as the Marquis of Lansdowne well compressed the truth, 'A famine of the thirteenth century acting on a population of the nineteenth.' The spectacle is more terrible than the poet's dream of the infernal regions. Here, as

in the jaws of hell,
Revengeful cares and sullen sorrows dwell,
And pale diseases, and despairing age,
Fear, want, and famine's unresisted rage.

But this picture is poor and dim compared to the mighty visible tragedy."*

The awful calamity of the sister island was at that very hour being typified by a disastrous event, which, had we been aware of its occurrence, would have drawn every eye on board our vessel to the north-eastern horizon. At the moment when we were safely entering our desired haven, a well-appointed steamer, that started from Liverpool the previous evening just after us, suddenly burst into flames, and was speedily consumed. One third of her crew and numerous passengers perished. She was on her way to Drogheda, where I was to pass the first night of my brief sojourn in Ireland; and whither, had I been fully aware of my own destination, and of her sailing, I might have taken my passage as the direct and natural route. How blest are we in our constant dependence on his gracious care and guidance, "in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways!" Let Him indeed be "glorified!"† It is too probable that Ireland will lose one-third of the rural population of her southern and western counties. If the other two-thirds are preserved, they will owe their deliverance, under God, as did the saved ones of that lost bark, to the hand of persevering benevolence.

As I rapidly travelled from Kingstown to Dublin, and from thence to Drogheda, to the

* Quarterly Review on "Out-Door Relief," March 1847.

† Dan. vi. 23.

banks and the mouth of the memorable Boyne, for the purpose of spending a few hours with Christian friends, long known and loved, there appeared so many symptoms of national wealth and prosperity, that I almost doubted the truthfulness of report. The general state of agriculture; the loveliness and profusion of the flowers of spring; the beauty of the waters, that washed the coast almost up to the very railroad, and in parts actually breaking over it; the seats of nobility and gentry around; and the majestic mountain heights of Armagh and Down, in the distant north; made me half incredulous as to my being in a land of famine. But the joyless aspect of my fellow-travellers, and of all I met at the stations away from the capital, and of all I glanced at in the intervening towns and villages; the heartless and strengthless manner of the employed upon the roads, and the vacant gaze of the unemployed, prepared me for the discovery, that even in Drogheda, where there was said to be *comparatively* little distress, some thousands were mainly dependent upon one daily meal dealt out by voluntary charity. The pressure of surrounding circumstances was there being deeply felt, with an evident and acknowledged dread of greater impending evil. I saw not a smile as I passed to and fro in that populous town. The general gloom was, however, at that time heightened by the agonising intelligence of the burnt steamer, a few of the survivors from whose

miserable ashes were then mingling with the melancholy groups in Drogheda's streets, and telling their tale of woe. I conversed with some of them. I heard that one of the lost had been an Irish cattle-dealer, who had recently converted his little property into cash, proceeded to Liverpool, and secured berths for himself and family in an emigrant vessel about to sail from that port to America. His widow and orphans were now weeping over his melancholy death in Drogheda. How overwhelming are the sorrows that sometimes befall those, who are just behind or before us in a voyage or a journey, wherein we may experience the most perfect security and abundant mercy! It is difficult to imagine how such sorrows are endured, when they alight upon that class of the afflicted, who are described as having "no comforter."

Prepared to witness a large amount of wretched mendicancy in the capital of Ireland, a stranger might not, at the time of my visit, attribute much of the misery evident around him to any recent aggravation of distress. It is true, that some thousands of the destitute were daily fed at the doors of that admirably-conducted establishment, the Mendicity Society; and M. Soyer's soup-kitchens were in full operation and popular with the needy, though cried down by many of the public journals, whose editors or contributors seemed ready to defeat every plan of general benevolence, to chill the heart of bounty in the rich, and to make the poor disaffected and