

The Examiner.

"THIS IS TRUE LIBERTY, WHEN FREEBORN MEN—HAVING TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC, MAY SPEAK FREE."—EURIPIDES.

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SPIRIT OF THE ENGLISH PRESS.

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ENGLISH AND IRISH DISTRESS.

The condition of affairs in the home portion of this empire is such as may well make the stoutest heart quake, and must certainly fill with apprehension the minds of the men who are called the Government of the country. Not only Ireland, but England has a fearful winter to look forward to, and the sufferings of both are likely to be doubled by this sad community of woe. Friendship, it is said, doubles our joys and halves our griefs. This is no doubt true with nations as well as with individuals; but if the strange relation between England and Ireland may be dignified with the name of friendship, we seem doomed to furnish a memorable instance to which the saying is not applicable. We very deeply regret that, in this case, the friendship, such as it is, between the sister countries, so far from alleviating their respective griefs by joint endurance, will increase the burden of each by increase and accumulation of disaster. Each of the 'friends,' besides bearing its own share of distress, will have to groan under an additional portion, derived from the other's misery.

The commercial crisis under which England is suffering is becoming more intense every week that passes over our heads, nor does there appear any present symptom of its cessation. Having indulged itself with a sweep through the commercial world, as if to prove by experiment how many failures for above half a million it would be possible to bring about in a quarter of a year; having performed a terrific dance through every department of commerce with every part of the world—at length the Monster-Crisis makes an inroad into the world of Banking, and at one blow levels the most powerful establishment of the second city of the empire. How far this dire calamity may reach; what may be its direct results; what the effect of its example; what panicterrors may spring from its roots, and how many neighbour-trees of the forest it may tear down in the violence of its fall, no man can possibly predict. The general solvency of the great Banks appears to be no adequate defence against such a wide-spread catastrophe. The Royal Bank of Liverpool is solvent it would seem, but the disastrous complication of the present time render it impossible for this solvent bank to continue its operations.

Solvent as it is the derangement of its affairs adds another to the enormous stock of difficulties which already benetted round the thousands of merchants, tradesmen, and operatives who come directly or indirectly within the sphere of its influence. 'Monday,' says the commercial newsmen, 'was the dreariest market day ever experienced in Manchester, not a single sale having been reported.' All through the manufacturing districts of Lancashire and Cheshire this 'dreariest market day' will already have produced increased distress, increased difficulty, increased fear—which fear in this sort of disasters is the most fruitful parent of both distress and difficulty.

Nor are the materials at all wanting from which to generate panic-terror. In the course of two weeks during the present month of October the number of operatives working full time in Manchester has been reduced just one-fourth; from 24,317 on October 5, to 18,516 on October 19; or a reduction of 5,801 hands.

Within the same fortnight the hands working short time have increased from 7,956 to 12,198; and those altogether out of employ have increased, by a less ratio, from 8,736 to 10,341. Thus, within a fortnight, 1,605 hands have been thrown out of employ altogether, and 4,242 have been cut down to short time.

As might be expected, the evil is neither diminishing in intensity, nor is it confined to Manchester. Of the 5,801 hands reduced from full time, 4,684 have been struck off during the second week of the fortnight; of the 1,605 hands thrown altogether out of employ, 1,233

belong to the second week; and of the 4,242 reduced to short time, 3,497 also belong to the second week:—so that affairs in Manchester seem galloping to some worse and undiscernible result. Out of Manchester similar phenomena are extensively visible, and to add to the gloom there is a portentous whisper of probable outbreaks on the part of the operatives who, with very doubtful prospects for the next few months, are thus thrown out of immediate employment.

The nature of the American cotton crop is not yet ascertained; and even if this should be sufficient and the supplies of corn from abroad most abundant, yet the pressure felt in every other trade cannot but re-act upon the cotton market, and present a black prospect both to the manufacturer and the operative.

The railway market is, of course, in a not less rotten condition. Railways which have had, and have, so large a share in the creation of the present distress, cannot be unaffected by the disturbance they have produced. Having levied, suddenly and rashly, on all the other trades and callings of life a tax which in the aggregate amounts to the rate of about a million a week all the year round, and having thus 'contracted' the means of every other trade and calling, the capacity to pay so much of this tax as remains unpaid, suffers, of course, along with all other pecuniary capacities whatever. The shares not yet paid up are found very difficult to pay; and the shareholders of some of the most important uncompleted lines are beginning to inflict on the directors a 'pressure from without,' to compel them to make no further calls, discontinue works, renounce their Acts of Parliament, and even to return money in hand. In this matter the country is on the horns of a very unfortunate dilemma. If the railway works continue, if fresh calls are made, and capital is expended to the full amount of what was contemplated last spring, the pressure on the money market, and all branches of commerce, must also continue and increase to an indefinite and frightful extent. If, on the other hand, the railway works are suddenly stopped, and bands of railway labourers are thrown out of employment, this will make a fearful addition to whatever trouble may be occasioned during the winter by unemployed and perhaps not very peaceable cotton operatives.

All this in England being very much as we have described it, the condition and prospects of Ireland are even worse. Our commercial crisis, of course, re-acts upon Ireland just as Ireland's last year's famine is a powerful and principal cause of that very crisis. But besides and beyond this the distress in Ireland is very much greater, the prospect of famine much more tangible and certain, the danger of outbreak, almost of insurrection, much more threatening, and the whole aspect of affairs awful beyond the power of language to describe.

Meanwhile, what is the duty of England, or rather of the Empire, towards Ireland in this crisis? There are two theories on the subject, which, if not equally admissible, are at least equally consistent with themselves. The first is, that Great Britain and Ireland being united under one Legislature and by the power of England being made emphatically one country, are to be treated as one country. The other is, that though united under one Legislature, this union is illegal and ought not to be, and that they are really two countries, and ought to have two Legislatures. Which of these two theories is to be put in practice? One of them we should like to see enforced, and either of them may be enforced without an absurdity. But what shall we say of an attempt to enforce the recognition of one theory and of the opposite practice? of a deliberate attempt to compel the countries to be one, and yet in time of distress to treat the weaker as if they were two? It would be difficult to characterise such a proceeding in decent language.

Almost every large parish in London has an Ireland, or even many Irelands; blocks of buildings in which poor Irish families are crammed at the rate of many

families to one floor; in which there is always abundance of poverty, and sometimes a close approximation to famine. These districts—these Irelands—form parts of wealthy parishes, and are included within the same territorial circumscription as the happier regions of Mayfair, Belgravia, Portman-square, Russell-square, Palace-gardens, and others of the like stamp. Each of these parishes—made up of sufficiently discordant elements—is yet one by law, and one in fact. When its Irish quarter is oppressed with famine, Marylebone bleeds through the pockets of all her palaces. The extremity of the distress furnishes her wealthier Saxon inhabitants with no exemption. Every poor man has an absolute claim to subsistence which he can enforce; this claim must be made good by a rate; this rate the Saxon, whether wealthy or only just above the condition of a pauper must pay. The greatness of the distress, as we have said, creates no exemption. The claim must be honoured and discharged, and down to the last parochial shilling the poor man can be allowed to perish only by accident or by breach of law.

For all practical purposes, therefore, such parishes are one; are really united; are members of one community; and the individuals who compose them really have their interests indissolubly bound up one with another. If any parish cannot support its own poor; if its means become exhausted and a rate cannot be raised; there is still the provision of a *rate in aid* from some neighbouring and more highly favoured district. So that not merely each parish is united, but all England is united; and in practice, under one form or another, the whole property of England is made responsible for the whole poverty of England.

England and Ireland, say our Unionists, are one country. A common legislature enacts laws for them. The style of her Majesty recognises the important social fact. If so, then, we ask, are they united within themselves as England is united in itself? When Ireland is oppressed with famine so that she is officially recognised to be 'unable' to maintain herself, does England consider herself as a neighbouring parish bound to come to the rescue with a rate in aid?

We ask not whether she does this now and then out of charity; what we ask is, whether she recognises this as an imperative duty, and is prepared to act on this principle, whatever may be the amount of the burden, whatever the nature of her own distresses, down to the last shilling of her poverty? If she is, we understand, so far, the meaning of the word Union and United Kingdom. If she is not, then it must be confessed the Union is a farce and a lie.

Look how the case stands at present. The Government, through two of its gravest officials most competent to speak in the matter, pronounces that Ireland 'is quite unable to relieve herself' from the distress that still hangs over her, and especially from 'the absolute famine' with which whole districts are threatened. Unquestionably, on any theory of union, if Ireland could relieve herself, she must be bound to do so. Her poverty has the first claim upon her own property, and the duty of her property corresponds to this claim. But the present is officially announced to be a case of total incapacity. 'Absolute famine,' 'quite unable to relieve herself'—this is the deliberate official language. This language, too, is used in acknowledgment not merely of Ireland's need, but of her claims upon England. It is used to enforce the voluntary collection of last Sunday, which the Government has prominently thrust forward as a necessary collection.

And now comes the pinch of the matter. The need being so great, the claim so undeniable, what will the Ministers do if Sunday's collection prove, as it will prove, wholly inadequate to the crisis? Whatever its amount; whether it be given with liberality, as were the collections of last year, or grudgingly, as there seems too much reason to fear,—it is at least sure to be frightfully