Ireland in Revolution.

II.

Having torn the Irish people from the soil which they had owned from time immemorial, the landlord exploiters of the United Kingdom were legally at liberty—they never had any *moral* compunctions conflicting with their class interests—to make what use they liked of "their own." They could raise their rents, replace their tenantry, use or abuse their lands as seemed to them most desirable. To add insult to injury, the Protestants in Parliament passed a series of ruthless penal laws against the Catholics, thus satisfying not only their religious prejudices, but also striking a wedge of perpetual legal uncertainty underneath the potential economic power of those whom they judged to be Counter-Revolutionaries and the enemies of their Church and State and Property. It was not so much the injury that Acts of Parliament could wreak as the ill-will which their enactment showed as existing amongst the rulers of the kingdom whom Irishmen have tended always to confuse wtih the mass of the British people. This unfortunate conclusion was natural, but to-day we may ask our Irish friends to realise that whilst the British governing class ruled them with the jack-boot it also provided, through its State Church and its private gift of livings to the shepherds of the Lord's flock, for the instruction of the British workers in the ideas and prejudices favourable to the continuance of its class-rule.

The jealousies and suspicions fostered and stimulated by centuries of wrongful treatment and wrongful instruction cannot be chased away in a few years even by the most logical presentation of facts. Yet we can hope, in time, if the conscious workers of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland will help to enlighten each other and each other's audiences. for the increasing solidarity so vital so the success of our common cause.

What, however, helped even more, perhaps, to sunder British from Irish than even the Irish land laws, was the deliberate pursuit of a policy aimed at destroying, *by legal enactment*, the industries of Ireland, into which the dispossessed peasantry might have made their way. For it was not till the 19th century that *natural* handicaps such as absence of coal and iron made it inevitable that Ireland's economic development should lag behind that of the sister isle. Immediately the government of England and of Scotland passed out of the control of the sovereign, to whom his whole realm was, if he was wise, an estate to be cultivated and developed to the uttermost, into the hands of the landlords and merchants, these people began to use political power to forward the interests of their estates and their trades and to pass laws to protect English and Scottish industries, commerce and shipping. The 22nd and 23rd Charles II., Ch. 26, prohibited direct importation into Ireland from the Colonies, of sugar, tobacco, cotton, wool, indigo, or other dyes. After the Revolution these restrictions were extended almost to debar trade between the Colonies and Ireland. Whilst permitting the export from Ireland to the Colonies of horses and foodstuffs, the effect of restrictions on imports, restrictions intended to collect Colonial trade in the ports of Glasgow, Bristol, Liverpool, Whitehaven, etc., was to destroy the exchange of commodities on which commerce depends. By 1698, Dublin had not a single ship. In 1783 Britain had 360,000 tons of the vessels in the Irish trade against 71,000 owned in Ireland.

Deprived of their traffic with the British Colonies or Plantations, the Irish had developed a considerable export of woollen cloths to the Continent. This export was likewise prohibited by an English Act of 1698. In the next reign Parliament forbade the import into Ireland of hops from any country but England, and even then only on unfavourable terms, so preventing the growth of a native brewing industry. By successive Acts from 12 Charles II. to 2 Ann prohibitive tariffs were placed on Irish manufactures of all kinds imported

into England (later, Britain). These restrictions remained in force until 1780, and had the intended effect of destroying all Irish industry except the linen manufacture of Ulster.

It might seem, at first sight, that these measures would have redounded to the advantage of English woollen workers by reason of diminished competition, but, on the contrary, they merely released hundreds of thousands of Irish who made their way not from the land to the looms of Irish towns, but from the land and looms of Ireland to the land and looms of England and Scotland. They came into Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow from the squalid misery of their degraded village and homestead life, the life of cabins, famished and blighted with the diseases of hunger, to snatch at any work, at any conditions of pay and treatment, to live in any hutches with which Lowthers, Hamiltons, and Londonderrys might provide them.

To walk through Port Glasgow and Greenock, to explore the rows of Lanarkshire, to peer into the courts of Whitehaven and to promenade Scotland Road, Liverpool, and the squalid streets of Bootle, is to see and to know the immeasurable curse which British rack-renters have brought, not merely on the distressed and dispossessed people of Ireland, but also upon the English and Scottish workers amongst whom they have flung this unassimilated and unwelcome by-product of their iniquity. To see these things is to fathom the depths of Irish resentment and to appreciate the curses hurled at the Saxon from across St. George's Channel. But it was not the Irishman's funeral alone. It was ours too. And one's shame turns to wrath when, studying the history of strikes and lockouts, of the ruin of that fine Mine Workers' Union which flourished in Lanarkshire a century ago, and of the black deeds of Powell of the Duffryn in the valleys of Monmouthshire and Aberdare, one discovers the smug capitalists sending into Ireland to persuade the labourers to come over to work in the mines of Scotland and South Wales, counting as they did so on the almost weekly affrays which would absorb the fighting energies and pugnacious qualities of both sections of their hapless wage-slaves.

Merthyr and Ebbw Vale, Coatbridge and Motherwell, present one long story, ever since the Potato Blight, of wrangling and murderous assault between natives and immigrants. One long agony has been the lot of the Irishman, robbed of his own soil and struggling to establish himself afresh, without experience, training or savings, in a hostile land and an industrial economy utterly at variance with the inherited traditions of sept and clan life. Reparation has certainly been done to him in part, but his lands have only been returned to him when the mischief has been done and when peasant proprietorship no longer offers hope of continued and progressive prosperity.

The Irishman knows that he has been robbed. What he needs to learn is that the Englishman and the Scotchman and the Welshman were robbed at the same time; the trouble being that their memories have been shorter, and that they have been led to believe that he is an aggravation of their problems. Gradually with the activities of W. Martin Murphy and others like him, with the rise of capitalist conditions in certain parts of Ireland and with the unity of front displayed by the ruling class in Glasgow Belfast and Limerick, we may expect a fuller understanding of their positions and an infinitely closer co-operation between the workers of Great Britain and of Ireland.

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