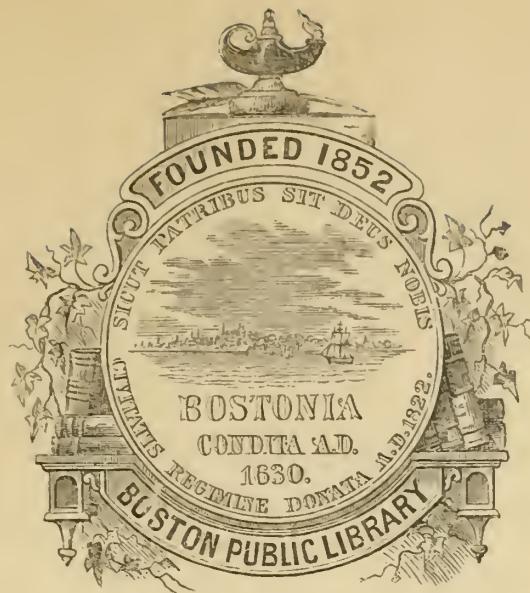


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LETTER
ON
IRISH IMMIGRANTS.

LETTER IV.

ADDRESSED TO THE RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP HUGHES.

RIGHT REV. SIR,

This letter has been long delayed in the expectation of procuring, from two gentlemen, in writing, information of the operations of the Irish Labourers on the Wilmington and Baltimore Rail Road, which they communicated orally some months since, and which I wished to present in the form of an authentic document; but having been disappointed, and being unwilling to wait any longer, I have resolved to depend on my memory.

The important facts of the case are, that this road was contracted for by two Irishmen; of whom each had about 500 labourers employed, who were, with few exceptions, Irishmen; that it was in progress for two years; and that during that time there was no riot, nor outrage, nor disorder. The business was managed with as much order and regularity as ever prevailed among such a number of men in any country.

I believe, but am not certain, that there were no alcoholic liquors allowed on the line. This, if true, may account for the order, regularity, and subordination that prevailed.

The disorders that occasionally occur among the labourers on canals and rail-roads, and other public works, arise in many, perhaps I might say, in most cases, from two disgraceful practices, which cannot be too severely reprobated, and to which remedies ought to be applied as far and as promptly as practicable.

The first is the vile, debauching custom, by which some of the contractors dole out to the labourers, a deleterious liquor, which they denominate whiskey. Even were it genuine whiskey it would be highly pernicious, and the practice would be deserving of severe reprehension; but the evil is greatly aggravated by the pernicious quality of the liquor they give—a vile compound, of which, we are assured, some of the ingredients actually, in a greater or less degree, endanger human life. It is said that in many cases this liquid poison is carried round five or six times a day in buckets among the labourers, each of whom has a small measure, which he fills, and pours the poisonous draught down his throat, thus burning his entrails. The labourers, being most of them among the most excitable of the human species, are thus maddened, and their early prejudices, as Orangemen, Defenders, Terry Alts, &c., which would otherwise have continued in peaceful slumbers in their breasts, are revived, breaking out into riots and disorder. The cost of this deleterious drug makes a serious inroad on their wages.

It would be highly laudable if the trustees or managers of rail-roads and other public works, were to introduce clauses into their engagements with the contractors, prohibiting the distribution of ardent spirits to the labourers. He that would set the example would deserve the grateful thanks of the community.

There is another circumstance which causes manifold oppression on the labourers, and excites them, occasionally, to riot and outrage. The competition among contractors frequently produces, by underbidding, the effect of reducing the prices to such a degree that the successful competitor is often not only not compensated for his labour, time, and talents, but hardly indemnified for his actual expenditures. In such cases he sometimes absconds in debt to his labourers, who are thus rendered desperate by being bereft of the reward of their hard labour and honest industry.

These abscondings are said, in some cases, not to arise from lowness of price, but from sinister intentions, and that now and then contracts are made by persons not intending to complete their engagements, who calculate on absconding with the wages of their labourers in their pockets. It is to be hoped that this is a calumny, or, if at all correct, that it is but of rare occurrence.

I now resume the consideration of the extraordinary and almost incredible sacrifices made in the shape of remittances, on the altars of parental, filial, and sisterly affection,—three times out of four, probably by persons in needy circumstances and depending upon scanty wages for support.

Cases have fallen under my observation, of Irish female domestics, earning a dollar and a quarter per week, yet saving enough to pay the passages of brothers and sisters, one after another, in succession.

Of the sums remitted to Ireland through four houses, to parents, children, husbands, wives, and other relations, in 1835 and 1836, I have given an account in a former letter; but now repeat the particulars in order to show the total:

Already	Messrs. Bell & Co.,*	\$114,000
stated.	Friends of Bell & Co.,	94,375
	John A. Brown & Co., Philadelphia,	33,000
	Robert Taylor,	43,600
		————— \$284,975

To which are to be added,

Roach, Brothers & Co., New York,	\$281,245
Alexander Brown & Sons, Baltimore,	30,000†
	————— \$311,245

————— \$596,220

This large sum has been remitted thro' six houses; and there are probably a dozen others in different parts of the United States, some of them doing an equal amount of this business. Assuming only one-third as much for all the others, it amounts to the enormous sum of \$800,000 in two years, remitted by poor people, in sums

* This house alone remitted in this way, in eight years, from 1830 to 1837 inclusive, no less than \$354,933.

† Extract of a Letter from Alexander Brown and Sons.

"BALTIMORE, June 11, 1838.

"DEAR SIR,

"Your favour of the 5th inst. was duly received, and in answer thereto, on looking over our books, we estimate the amount of bills of 50*l.* and under, on England and Ireland, in favour of the poorer class of Irishmen, during the years 1835 and 1836, at about 3,000*l.* per annum. Last year the amount was not so large, as we were not drawing a part of the time.

"Yours, &c.

"ALEXANDER BROWN & SONS."

varying from three dollars to 50 or 100, and in some few cases to 150.

Let us here pause for a moment to reflect on this glorious display of the sweetest and most ennobling of the charities of life. Let us ask, if a nation, the poorer and least-cultivated classes of which make such a highly honourable exhibit of some of the most exalted virtues of our nature, be not entitled to the esteem and respect of the fair and candid of every description? And will not those who have lavished vituperation on the Irish generally, blush crimson red for this vituperation, when, laying aside their prejudices, they duly appreciate this exalted feature of the Irish character?

How immeasurably are these considerations enhanced, when (*consideratis considerandis*,) we reflect on the oppressions, the degradations and the prostration of its industry, under which this people has writhed for centuries, and which might have been supposed likely to stifle in their bosoms the germs of the social virtues? Can any Irishman, not destitute of feeling for the honour of his country, ponder on these statements without a laudable pride?

I am assured by gentlemen who have taken no small pains to investigate the subject, that a very considerable portion of the depositories in the saving fund institutions in our cities, probably one-half or two-thirds, belong to poor labouring Irishmen, who are often stigmatized as reckless and improvident. I have tried to ascertain the fact, but have been unable to procure the necessary data.*

There is another point of view in which the Irish character may be regarded, which redounds greatly to the credit of the parties concerned; I mean the continence of poor females, exposed as they are, to so many and such strong temptations to aberration. One of our most eminent physicians, who for sixteen or seventeen years had the superintendence of the syphilitic wards in the almshouse during winter, declares that during that long period, he had not met with more than eight Irish females in that department!†

This feature of character, so highly honourable, they brought from their own country, as may be seen in the Report of the Commissioners of Investigation, appointed by the Melbourne Administration to investigate the situation of the poorer classes in Ireland.‡

* *Extract of a letter from one of the Directors of the New York Savings Bank to Jacob Harvey, Esq.*

“A most important step in the course of improvement among the poor Irish, is the formation of a habit of economy; and I have looked with great satisfaction at seeing such multitudes of them have recourse to the Savings Bank to lay up their humble earnings, often growing into depositories of several hundred dollars.

“You ask what my estimate of the deposits would be? This is a matter in which there cannot be great accuracy, as there is no registry to distinguish the origin of the depositors; but from my own observation from often attending at the Savings’ Bank, my conjecture would be, that *out of the twenty-three thousand persons holding about three millions of deposits, more than one-half, and perhaps two-thirds, are natives of Ireland, male and female.*”

† *Extract of a Letter from W. Gibson, M. D.*

“MY DEAR SIR,

“In reply to your note, I state that during my attendance on the Almshouse (three months every winter,) for the last sixteen or seventeen years, I only remember to have met with eight Irishwomen as syphilitic patients.

“Yours, &c.

“W. GIBSON.

“Philadelphia, December 18, 1837.”

‡ There is scarcely a county in Ireland, in which the Commissioners did not

The subject of Irish Immigrants is susceptible of being placed in various other important points of light, on which I cannot at present touch. One, however, forces itself on my attention, which I offer to the consideration of the candid. Among the thousands and tens of thousands of Irishmen who reach our shores, a great proportion go back to labour on turnpikes, canals, &c. Of those that remain behind—probably not five per cent. of the whole—some are dissipated. These are constantly in the public eye, and draw attention from the myriads who are promoting the national prosperity by the exercise of their brawny arms in the advancement of internal improvements; labours which few Americans undertake. Thousands and tens of thousands also go back to cultivate the soil, and thus in an equal degree advance the public prosperity. The merits of these are overlooked; while Prejudice, with jaundiced eye, applies the microscope to the follies and vices of the ill-fated few who become victims of their sociable dispositions and the facility with which liquid poison is to be procured here.

There ought to be an association in New York and one in Philadelphia, to protect immigrants of all nations from the horrible frauds and seductions to which they are exposed, and to which so many of them fall victims. As this is an affair which more immediately concerns the Irish than any other nation—the Irish immigrants being probably equal to all the rest in number—they ought to take the lead in it; but as it regards the morals and happiness of immigrants of all nations, the natives of other countries ought to combine in the undertaking.

It would be a useful portion of the business of such associations to publish an address to persons disposed to immigrate into this country from the different nations of Europe, pointing out the real inducements the country holds out to particular descriptions of persons—and the extreme disadvantage to others, so as to disabuse them of the fraudulent *el dorado* expectations excited by the pompous and deceptive advertisements of the agents of the passenger vessels. This would be a signal act of charity to hundreds, who are annually seduced to dispose of the little property whereon they live, and might continue to live, in tolerable comfort, and who, when they arrive in this country, find themselves unexpectedly reduced to penury and distress.

Yours, very respectfully,

M. CAREY.

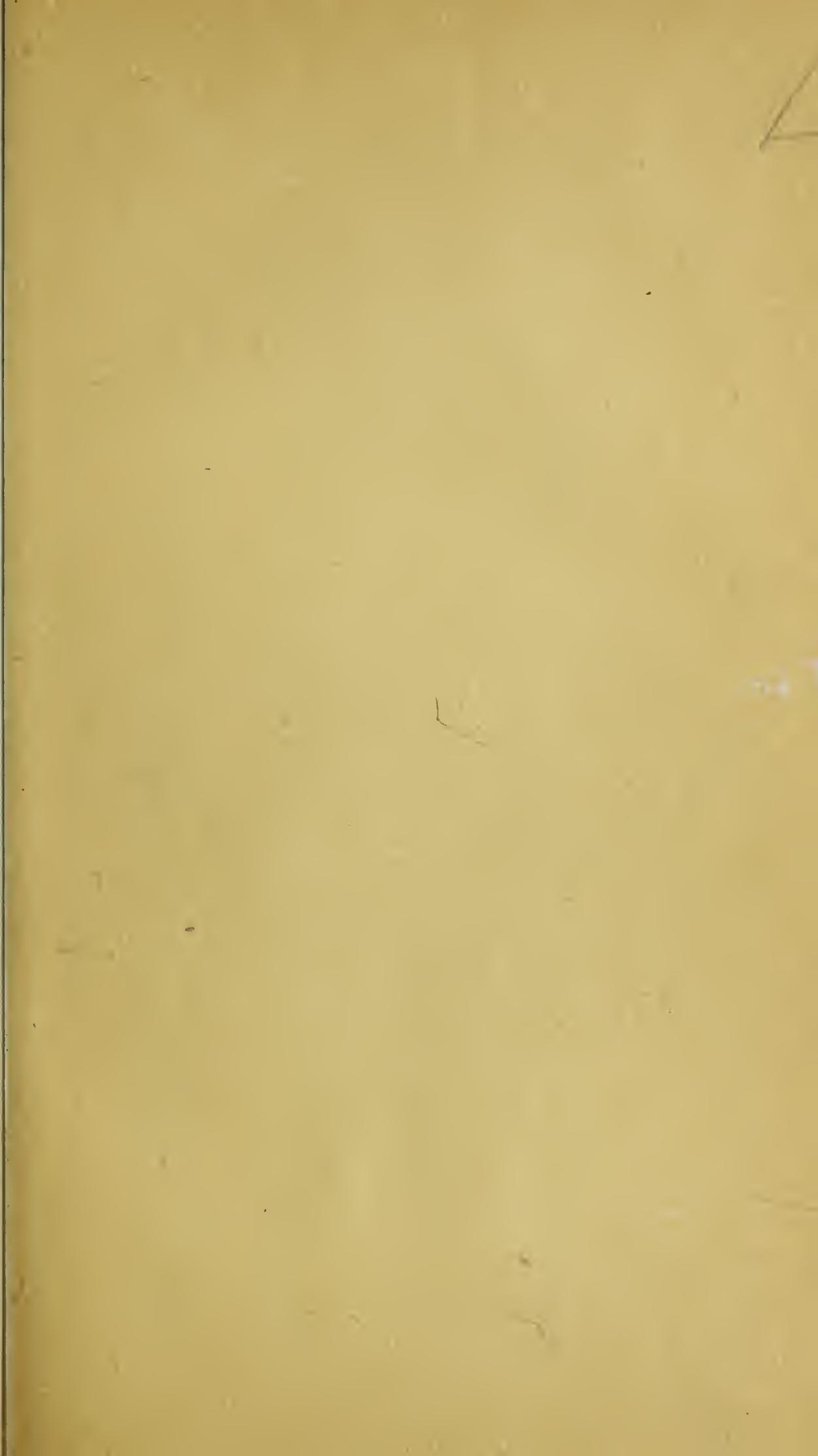
Philadelphia, August 20, 1838.

find strong evidence of this beautiful feature of the character of poor females. I annex three statements, of which similar ones are to be found throughout the Report of the Commissioners.

County Antrim. "Girls who have had illegitimate children, find most difficulty in procuring husbands on that account. It is not known that individuals of the poorer classes are influenced by persons in higher stations to marry such women, who are degraded in the opinion of their own sex. And, unless educated and well conducted, *a bastard would be objected to by a small farmer as a match for his daughter.*"—Report, p. 94.

County Clare. "The Rev. N. Donan said he knew several instances where small farmers' sons have refused considerable sums held out to marry a gentleman's illegitimate sister or daughter."—p. 80.

County Westmeath. "Such women are looked upon with contempt, especially by their own sex."—p. 77.



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