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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD

THE HARVEST FAILURE IN IRELAND.

FROM all parts of Ireland come the most alarming reports of the almost total failure of the potato and other crops, and notwithstanding the attempt of the Government to minimise the extent of the evil there can be no doubt whatever that the situation is most serious. Already the distress is most deep and widespread, and unless prompt steps are taken to avert the impending disaster, the unhappy people have nothing to look forward to but the dread certainty of an almost universal famine. So far the Government have made no move in the direction of giving any practical assistance, and the Dublin Castle authorities even go so far as to deny that there is any substantial distress at all. Earl Cadogan, the Viceroy of Ireland, directed that the following message be sent to one of the leading American journals:—"In reply to your telegram, the Lord Lieutenant desires me to say that the reports which you characterise as most alarming and the predictions of famine in Ireland you mention are, in his Excellency's opinion, unjustifiable.—DAVID HARREL, Under Secretary, Dublin Castle." Unfortunately for the suffering farmers the evidence on the other side is altogether too overwhelming. The Irish bishops, with one voice, declare that the situation is most grave. Archbishop Croke says:—"From all parts of the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly the harvest news is most disquieting. The crops had been everywhere abundant, and our hopes were high, but the terrible rains of last month have dashed those hopes. The potatoes are even now, to a very large extent, unfit for human food. They are rotting in the wet ground. The very early hay crop was saved fairly well, but in the later meadows, bearing most of the crop in this district, it was impossible to save the hay. The barley and oats are ruined by the wet. Much of this plentiful crop is unsaleable, and with a serious rise in the price of bread I have the gravest apprehensions for the coming winter." The Bishop of Galway says:—"The harvest prospects in this diocese are really disheartening. . . . On the whole I regard the outlook as very gloomy, and apprehend the advent of a famine in the diocese during the winter approaching." The Bishop of Clonfert declares:—"The prospects for the coming year are very bad. I have seen nothing worse in this diocese of Clonfert for the last thirteen years. Even the sound potatoes are small and soft. We are all very anxious about the winter months. We fear the worst may happen. I am unwilling to be an alarmist, but merely state what I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears from all the neighbours. Good weather even now would greatly help the crops, but much of the damage is irreparable." The Bishop of Ross thus tersely sums up the situation:—"The potato is worthless, the grain ruined, and the outlook dismal." Mr. William O'Brien, who lives in one of the most congested districts of Connaught, and whose knowledge of the country enables him to speak with certainty and authority, declares:—"It is impossible to exaggerate the danger of absolute famine in districts like this, already scourged by last year's potato failure, and sunk to the lips in debt to the shopkeepers and banks. If the landlords enforce full rents this winter the people's last resource for purchasing provisions will be gone. Nothing except immediate, widespread Government relief can avert starvation. The people are dazed with despair and disorganisation. The emergency is incontestably graver than in the Land League year of 1880, when it took the Land League revolution and a million and a half sterling of charitable funds to cope with the danger. This time nothing can save the people but a universal uprising against rack-rents and immediate measures for Government relief." So grave is the situation that the Irish leaders have felt themselves compelled to appeal to the Government for immediate assistance, and Messrs. T. Harrington and John Dillon are now obtaining signatures to the following memorial, which tells its own sad tale:—"To the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, M.P. We, the undersigned Members of the House of Commons, representing Irish constituencies, are

advised that, owing to the almost complete failure of the potato crop throughout the western half of Ireland, and the increasing price of other provisions, the small farmers and labourers of immense districts in the country will, in the coming winter, be visited with distress which will inevitably culminate in famine, if not met by prompt and adequate measures of relief by the Government. We are also aware that the injury to the grain crop caused by a season of almost incessant wet and cold, together with the depression of the cattle trade, and the unremunerative prices prevailing in almost all the other markets for Irish agricultural produce, have brought about a crisis in which the payment this winter of full rents in cases unaffected by the Land Act of 1886—comprising the enormous majority of Irish agricultural tenancies—would be followed by the ruin of large classes of the Irish tenantry and a renewed state of agitation and disturbance in the country. As a national emergency of so serious a character cannot be effectually dealt with without a timely resource to the authority of Parliament, we join in the urgent request that you, as leader of the House of Commons, will advise the immediate summoning of Parliament with a view of obtaining funds to institute relief works in the more impoverished districts, and passing such legislation as may be found necessary to alleviate the burdens of the general body of the Irish tenantry." According to the *Westminster Gazette* the Duchess of York intends to issue an appeal on behalf of the Irish peasantry on the lines of that issued by the Princess of Wales for the poor of London. This, however, is not what the Irish people want. What they want is justice from the British Government, not a private "charity fund," which will enable the Government to shirk its responsibility in the matter. If the English Government would do justice to Ireland and make restitution of a few of the millions of which they have been systematically robbing the country for the past twenty-five years, the people would not be subject to this dread of periodic famine, and there would be no need whatever for any "charity fund," Royal or otherwise.

A VETERAN MISSIONER GONE.

AMERICAN papers just to hand bring us news of the death of the Rev. Father Hennebery, the great missionary and apostle of temperance, whose name is a household word not only in the colonies but throughout the whole of the civilised world. The illness which led to Father Hennebery's death was brought on by overwork. Though nearly seventy years of age he was an untiring worker, and the heavy labours of a series of missions which he had been giving in Nevada State brought on hemorrhage of the brain which ultimately ended in his death. During the first week of his illness he was cared for at the home of the Rev. Father Tubman, of Virginia City, but was afterwards removed to the hospital where everything that affection could suggest and skill could achieve was done to minister to his relief, but in vain. The hemorrhage was followed by paralysis and after a month's illness the veteran missionary passed quietly away on Sunday, September 19. The story of his life reads almost like a religious romance. He was a native of Kilkenny County, Ireland, and went over to America when 17 years of age. He was ordained about the year 1850, and on his ordination became a member of the Order of the Most Precious Blood. During the whole fifty years of his priesthood he carried on the work of preaching missions, and nearly every country under the sun was at one time or another the scene of his devoted labours. In Australia alone he held 126 missions and ministered to the spiritual needs of 40,000 people. In India he held a great many missions, and in Africa he visited every settlement that was at all accessible to a priest. As might be expected he had many thrilling adventures in the wilds of the Dark Continent and many a hair-breadth escape from wild animals and from the scarcely less savage natives. Fortunately the Reverend Father kept a diary of his life-work, which is now in the possession of the Rev. Father Tubman, and which will certainly furnish the material for a most thrilling and fascinating biography. As we have said Father Hennebery was one of the great pioneers in the work of temperance reform, and his earnest and eloquent appeals will be