

FAMINE IN IRELAND

A few months ago it was rumored that the potato crop in some of the western districts of Ireland had failed to materialise in sufficient abundance to meet the needs of the people. The Irish papers, however, did not appear to regard the position as critical, as most of them did not refer to the matter at all. However, last week a cable appeared in the daily papers to the effect that the Free State Government had allocated £250,000 for relieving the conditions in the famine-stricken area. The people of Ireland are to be congratulated on the fact that they have now reached a stage of political and economic determinism when they have a Government that is able and willing to devote so large a sum to the relief of distress in the country. We are assured by those in a position to know the mind and heart of Ireland that the Irish people feel that Ireland's problems are their problems and theirs alone; and this statement is to a certain extent borne out by the action of the Free State Government in voting a large sum of money for famine relief purposes. If the problem becomes too great for the Irish people to handle by themselves those in authority will not be slow to communicate with the friends of Ireland overseas, when, no doubt, greater Ireland will respond as generously as it did in the past. We are deeply sorry for the Irish people in this their latest trial, coming as it does upon the heels of that terror from the effects of which the country will not recover for many years. But while expressing our sympathy with them we must also respect their feelings. Ireland feels that she is now a nation once again, and she wishes to enjoy the measure of independence for which she fought so strenuously. Just as she longed to be free from the tyranny of an outside Power because that Power usurped her functions and prevented her from exercising her rights and bearing her own responsibilities, so also does she now wish to be free from outside interference—even benevolent interference—in the settling of her internal social and economic problems. Ireland is not only a nation, she is a sensitive nation as well. There was a time when circumstances over which she had no control forced her to look to her wandering children for assistance, but that time is with her no longer. She now stands upon her own feet as a nation, independent and self-respecting. We believe that we can please her best by respecting her self-respect, and by refraining from throwing unsolicited aid into her lap. She was grateful for the assistance given in the old days, and still more grateful for the spirit in which it was given. But she asked assistance only that she might be placed in a position to help herself, and it would be a kindly act to permit her to try, now that an opportunity is given her to show what she can do. If she finds the task too difficult and urgent for her immediate resources she will surely not hesitate to tell us so, and then we can offer our help without hurting her feelings.

I feared not in all my necessities a more efficacious remedy than the wounds of Christ. —St. Augustine.

NOTES

An Irish Play

Many Irish plays are finding their way into this country. It is surprising that more dramatic societies are not formed here. In the country or the city, these plays with a little censoring perhaps could be performed. Dramatic talent is a curious thing. It lies hidden in unexpected persons. Only practice of a play will bring it out. If the first performance be disappointing the performers must not be discouraged. Perhaps in a different type of play they will succeed. Comedies are the safest beginning. Mistakes are hidden in the merciful laughter of indulgent audiences. If one had the time it would be worth while to start a crusade for the plays. At every concert there are songs, recitations, and dances. What a change it would be to hear as part of the programme the whole or a portion of a good play. For the children it is a far more exciting form of entertainment than the usual declamatory recitation that is mouthed time after time. But in most of the schools now plays are performed so that it is the grown-ups who are in need of the plays most.

If it is found to be impossible to stage the play, a reading of it is better than nothing. Usually there is the difficulty of equipment. Young people must be made to look like old people, a bare stage must blossom into a Louis Seize apartment. Reading is a poor substitute but it is the best in the circumstances. Reading excludes action, one of the most natural forms of human expression, but it trains the novice in voice-inflection, and so is a preparation for something better. There are plays of all nations that are worth the reading, and that, abridged, can be made to suit the most critical of audiences, and no audiences are more critical than those to which the performers are known in everyday life.

But the Irish plays come into one's mind partly from reasons of race, partly from pride in the wonderful burgeoning of Irish drama in the last few years. The Abbey Theatre has been much criticised. Synge is dead, but Yeats is still under fire. It is true he is no longer the Yeats of the pure and drowsy Innisfree; he has wandered into the occult, but as late as the Paris Conference, he was still Yeats enough to say that Padraic Pearce's "Wayfarer" was the best Anglo-Irish poem of modern years. Synge has been much criticised for "The Playboy." There were sore hearts and sore heads over that bewildering, whimsical production. In Ireland pride of race is a torment, a tumult, a passion. Eimar O'Duffy in an exceedingly clever, though bitter, book, *The Wasted Island*, comments on this soreness, this sensitiveness. No Englishman, he says, thinks of himself if he sees an unpleasing Englishman portrayed, but to an Irishman, one bad Irishman portrayed is an insult to Ireland from Ana Liffey to the Galtees. Well if it's a fault, it's a fair fault. It proves that Ireland is more than a State, it is a family State, and where one's family is concerned the lance

should not grow rusty in the sheath. So Ireland had a right to fling her rage on Synge when he wrote "The Playboy," but she had a right to forgive him forever when he wrote "The Riders to the Sea."

"Riders to the Sea"

It's a short thing after all, this play, that is one of the wonders of modern literature. So great is it in its stern, simple terror and grandeur that a prose description of it seems something very like presumption. Who could describe it? Some one who saw it played in Ireland by a wonderful band of Irish actors broke down during his description at the mere memory of it. Another who had no love for Ireland found it so piercing that he could scarcely bear to read the end. The characters briefly are Maurya, an old peasant woman of one of the bleak western islands, Bartley her son, Cathleen her daughter, and Nora the younger daughter.

The play opens with Cathleen spinning. The old woman is resting. One of the sons is missing. This is part of the conversation between the two girls . . . the priest has brought them clothes to identify.

Cathleen: "How would they be Michael's, Nora? How would he go the length of that way to the far north?"

Nora: "The young priest says he's known the like of it. 'If it's Michael's they are,' says he, 'you can tell herself he's got clean burial, by the grace of God, and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death,' he says, 'crying and lamenting!'"

The clothes were Michael's, and Bartley, the other son, has to go that very day on the water. Bartley comes in and old Maurya hobbles out, sad and querulous to beg him not to go. . .

"If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?"

In her anger she lets him go without a blessing, and then broken-hearted hobbles off to give it to him as he rounds the bend. She comes back keening, having had a sudden vision of his end. Very soon he is carried back to her from the sea. At the end we are left with the spectacle of the young women weeping, and the old woman with that sudden, deadly stillness of resignation that falls on the aged at the sight of death. When one expects them to kean and to cry they are calm with the windless calm that cores the hurricane.

"They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks in the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. . .

They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Shamus and Patch,