

LETTERS

ON

IRISH IMMIGRANTS

AND

IRISHMEN GENERALLY.

AN ATTEMPT TO PLACE BOTH ON MORE ESTIMABLE GROUND
THAN, IN THE OPINIONS OF SOME MEMBERS OF THIS
COMMUNITY, THEY OCCUPY AT PRESENT.

“HOMO SUM—NIL HUMANI ALIENUM A ME PUTO.”

ADDRESSED

TO THE

RIGHT REV. JOHN HUGHES, D. D.,
BISHOP OF NEW YORK.

“I am an Irishman. With the *canaille* in superfine cloths and silks, as well as with the *canaille* in rags and tatters, this is a subject of reproach. For every man, woman, or child, base enough to attach disgrace to any person on account of his country, I feel a most sovereign, an ineffable contempt. Let them move in what sphere they may, whether in coffee-houses, or ball rooms, or palaces; in hovels, or garrets, or cellars—they are groveling, sordid, and contemptible. To express the whole in two words—pity there were not words more forcible—they are MERE CANAILLE.”—*Olive Branch*, 10th edition, p. 318.

“I glory—I feel a pride in the name of an Irishman. There is not, under the canopy of Heaven, another nation which, ground to the earth as Ireland has been for six hundred years under so vile a pro-consular government,—there is not, I say, another nation, which, under such circumstances, would have preserved the slightest ray of respectability of character.”—*Ibidem*.

“Notwithstanding all the grinding and debasing circumstances that militate against Ireland and Irishmen, there is no country in Christendom which has not witnessed the *heroism, the generosity, the liberality of Irishmen*—none where, notwithstanding the atrocious calumnies propagated against them by their oppressors, *they have not forced their way, through the thorny and briery paths of prejudice and jealousy, to honour, to esteem, and to respect.*”—*Ibidem*.

BY M. CAREY,

AUTHOR OF THE OLIVE BRANCH; THE VINDICIÆ HIBERNICÆ; MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN
PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY; OF THE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY, &C. &C.

PHILADELPHIA:

March 12, 1838.

“I can truly say, that of all the papers I have blotted, which have been a good deal in my time, I have never written any thing for the public without the intention of some public good. Whether I have succeeded or not, is not my part to judge.”—SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE.

TO THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP HUGHES.

LETTER I.

RIGHT REV. SIR,

I have deemed it a species of duty to devote a few hours to the discussion of the character and conduct of the immigrants into this country from Ireland, and to place that character and conduct in a true point of light, in order to dispel prejudices against both, which are destitute of foundation. In this undertaking I shall be sacredly guided by the sound rules put by Shakspeare into the mouth of Othello. I shall “nought extenuate, nor aught set down in malice.” And I flatter myself, that if I be able to succeed in the attempt, as I hope to do, I shall render a service as well to the Americans as to the Irish—to the former by freeing their minds from unkind feelings towards fellow-citizens worthy of different regard—and the latter I hope to prove entitled to a higher degree of respect than has heretofore been, by many, accorded to them in this community.

“I will not beat thee, nor abuse thee, but I will give thee a bad name, and that will secure thy destruction,” said a cynical old man, who had taken offence at a harmless dog. “Suiting the action to the word,” he began to vociferate at the top of his voice, “mad dog—mad dog,” and the poor animal was in a few minutes stoned to death.

Thus it is, and thus it has always been, with bodies of men who have had the misfortune to attract the hostility of their fellow-men, with or without cause. They are traduced and vilified; the cry of “mad dog—mad dog,” is ardently and effectually raised against them; and every instance of vice, or folly, or crime, perpetrated by any individual of the class, attaches, with the base and the illiberal, odium or disgrace to the whole, and is regarded as symptomatic of the worthlessness of the body.

In proof of these positions, I might draw ample illustrations from the history of the Catholics and Huguenots in France; the Episcopalians and Cameronians in Scotland; the Arminians and Remonstrants in Holland; and the Christians and Jews in almost every part of Christendom.

However, passing over the embittered and antichristian hostility of the professors of a religion, preaching peace and good will among men, let us pause a moment on national and sectional hostility, and ponder on the deadly hatred that prevailed in days of yore, between the French and English; between the English and Scotch, in the early part of the reign of George III.; the vituperation of Yorkshire-men in various parts of England; of the Normans in France; and, may I not add, of Yankees in many parts of the Southern States?

These cases are introduced by way of parenthesis, to lead to my real object, which is to consider the unkind and ungenerous feelings that prevail with respect to the Irish, in many parts of this country, not merely among the vulgar, who are incapable of generous or liberal sentiments, but, alas! in some cases among persons of a higher calibre of mind. They are, I am free to confess, few in number; but few as they are, their influence is considerable, and has occasionally a pernicious effect on the standing and the feelings of the obnoxious caste.

I do not mean, except merely en passant, to touch on the fanatical and antichristian hostility to Irishmen on account of their religion; that hostility which imprinted an indelible stigma on the escutcheon of Massachusetts, by the atrocious destruction of the convent and desecration of the chapel in Charlestown; the cowardly and felonious attack at midnight on a party of highly-interesting and defenceless females, whose sex ought to have been an Ægis to protect them, and whose pursuits are an honour to human nature; the disgraceful mockery of the trial, and the acquittal of the ruffianly incendiaries; or the no-less-disgraceful result of the abortive attempt to procure the indemnification for their losses, which justice loudly demanded from the legislature of the state. And I shall pass over various minor outrages, resulting from the same spirit of persecution which are highly discreditable, and would amply justify severe castigation. My object is to consider and refute the prejudices, which in a greater or less degree attach to the Irish, merely as Irishmen, wholly independent of the ferocious rancour engendered by fanaticism, the base-begotten progeny of perverted religion.

That the Irish have high claims on the United States, will not admit of a moment's controversy. This nation owes a large portion of its wonderful internal improvements to their brawny arms and patient industry. But for them she would not have made as much progress in five years as she has done in one. And this leads me to the consideration of an important fact. Complaints are frequently made that an undue proportion of the tenants of our almshouses are Irish. Whence does this state of things proceed? They are often employed in marshy places, where

fever and ague are rife—they are worn out by hard labour, often maimed by explosions of rocks, and by avalanches of banks, and rendered wholly incapable of labour, or at least for weeks and months together. They and their families then become dependent, in a great measure, on the public aid; and who, I pray, have a better claim to public aid than those who have spent their strength and lost their health in labouring for the public?

But this is not all. During the whole progress of the revolutionary war, they adhered steadily and faithfully to the cause of the country. Will it be asserted, or can it be proved, that there was among them a single traitor? a single Arnold? May I not say, that among the most efficient defenders of the glorious cause, in the field and on the ocean, and in private life, were Irishmen?

*“One circumstance—were there no other on record—ought to endear to Americans the name, the country of an Irishman. It has a high claim, not cancelled, on the pen of the historian. It has not yet had justice done it. Let me grace my book with the narrative.

“During the American revolution, a band of Irishmen were embodied to avenge, in the country of their adoption, the injuries of the country of their birth. They formed the major part of the celebrated Pennsylvania line. They fought and they bled for the United States. Many of them sealed their attachment with their lives. Their adopted country was shamefully ungrateful. The wealthy, the independent, and the luxurious, for whom they fought, were rioting in all the comforts and superfluities of life. Their defenders were literally half starved, and half naked. Their shoeless feet marked with blood their tracks on the highway. They bore their grievances patiently. They at length murmured. They remonstrated. They implored a supply of the necessaries of life. But in vain. A deaf ear was turned to their complaints. They felt indignant at the cold neglect—at the ingratitude—of that country for which so many of their companions in arms had expired on the crimsoned field of battle. They held arms in their hands. They had reached the boundary line, beyond which forbearance and submission become meanness and pusillanimity. As all appeals to the gratitude, the justice, the generosity of the country had proved unavailing, they determined to try another course. They appealed to its fears. They mutinied. They demanded with energy that redress for which they had before supplicated. It was a noble deed. I hope in all similar cases, similar measures will be pursued.

“The intelligence was carried to the British camp. It there spread joy and gladness. Lord Howe hoped that a period had arrived to the “*rebellion*,” as it would have been termed. There was a glorious opportunity of crushing the half-formed embryo of the republic. He counted largely on the indignation, and on the resentment of the natives of the “*Emerald isle*.” He knew the irascibility of their tempers. He calculated on the diminution of the strength of “*the rebels*,” and the accession to the numbers of the royal army. Messengers were despatched to the mutineers. They had *carte blanche*. They were to allure the poor Hibernians to return, like prodigal children, from feeding on husks, to the plentiful fold of their royal master. Liberality herself presided over his offers. Abundant supplies of provisions—comfortable clothing to their hearts’ desire—all arrears of pay—bounties—and pardon for past offences, were offered. There was, however, no hesitation among those poor, neglected warriors. They refused to renounce poverty, nakedness, suffering, and ingratitude. The splendid temptations were held out in vain. There was no Judas, no Arnold there. They seized the tempters. They trampled on their shining ore. They sent them to their general’s tent. The miserable wretches paid their forfeited lives for attempting to seduce a band of ragged, forlorn and deserted, but illustrious heroes. We prate about Roman, about Grecian patriotism. One half of it is false. In the other half, there is nothing that exels this noble trait, which is worthy the pencil of a West or a Trumbull.”—*Olive Branch*, 10th edition.

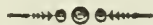
Was there in the field a nobler hero than Montgomery, or on the ocean than Barry?

Among the most conspicuous, active, and influential of the citizens of Philadelphia in private life during the revolution, "those times that tried men's souls," there were none to exceed the Irish. It is ~~that~~ believed there was not a single disaffected man among them. In all public meetings, and on all other occasions, where energy and efforts were necessary, Blair M'Clerachan and his associates were among the foremost of those who, by their fervid zeal and patriotism, kept up the spirit of the public. And it requires but a slender knowledge of history to be satisfied that the fate of nations as often depends on the foresight, the zeal, the energy, and the patriotism of private individuals as on the tactics of generals.

Yours, very respectfully,

M. CAREY.

Philadelphia, March 6, 1838.



LETTER II.

There are few traits in the human character more endearing, than affection for parents, children and relations; it is like charity, which, the divines tell us, covers a multitude of sins. And I hope to make it appear, that it shines so resplendently in the Irish, that if they had far more sins, true or false, to answer for, than are laid to their charge, it would go a great way to countervail them.

In this case, I fortunately have documents so irrefragable, as to frown down all cavil on the part of the most sceptical, and to excite the esteem and admiration of every candid man, even of those who have been hitherto prejudiced against the nation.

It is well known, and is a necessary result of the oppression under which the trade of Ireland has laboured for centuries, and the ruinous drain of the wealth of the country by absentees, that a very large portion of the immigrants into this country from Ireland, are extremely poor, and are generally employed in the hardest labour, with very moderate remuneration.* It is highly

*"If ever the will of the Creator was manifested in His works, it is in Ireland, where *the soil teems with natural fertility, only needing the labour of its ample and industriously-inclined population to produce abundance of every common comfort in life for all.* God's will, we say, is manifest. HE has filled the earth with plentifulness, that the people he has planted there might enjoy it in return for their labour. How has man perverted His obvious intention! *A third of the rich soil lies yet uncultivated; the rest but half-tilled by a dispirited, starved, naked, beggarly, and discontented people, the bulk of the produce of whose industry, such as it is, is swept off to other lands to be sold for the exclusive benefit of a handful of men, whom the law invests with the unconditional ownership of this fair portion of God's earth, and with the power, if they so choose, of absolutely starving all its inhabitants!*"—*London Quarterly Review*, December, 1835.

"There rests not so foul a blot, we fearlessly assert, on the character of any

probable, that of every hundred Irish labourers here, at least 50 have not for years, averaged more than $87\frac{1}{2}$ cents per day, (perhaps, making allowance for interruptions by bad weather and other casualties, 75 cents would be a fairer average), 25, not more than one dollar, and the remainder not more than \$1 $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents.

Compared with the wages which they received at home, it is true, these rates are to the last degree liberal. But the prices of their provisions and other articles, compared with what they paid at home, greatly reduce the apparent advantages which this country seems to afford to Irish immigrants. Let me not, however, be for a moment supposed to broach the idea, that this country does not afford important advantages to immigrants, Irish as well as others. But it will not be denied, that when we consider the expense of living and of supporting large families—a tail with which they are generally copiously supplied—it would not appear extraordinary, if their wages were found but little more than adequate to their support. Great, then, will be the reader's astonishment, and great his gratification, if he be an Irishman, when he reads a statement of the incredible amount of money remitted by the poor Irish, to support aged parents at home, and to pay the passage of parents, children, brothers and sisters, whom the immigrants yearned after.

Although the amounts I have been enabled to ascertain, are, I repeat, astonishing, all the circumstances of the case considered, yet my information does not, I am persuaded, reach to above a third or a fourth of the whole. There are several agencies, particularly in New York, which are largely engaged in the business of making arrangements for the passage of immigrants from Ireland, and which receive money for drafts on that country from those disposed to make remittances. There are similar establishments in Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore, probably twenty in the United States; but of the whole number, I have not been able to procure returns from more than four; two in Philadelphia and two in New York. In the former, of Messrs. John A. Brown & Co.,

other government! The wretchedness of the mass of the people of Ireland has no parallel on the face of the globe in any nation, savage or civilized! A population of eight millions, left to live or die as it may happen!"—*Ibidem*.

"The main cause of the misery of the Irish people, is the exaction of exorbitant rents as the condition of cultivating the land, the sole means of livelihood in that country, by those on whom the law has conferred its *unconditional* ownership, and who collect their rents from a famishing tenantry by help of an English army and an armed police. Nothing but the presence of this overwhelming force, and *the extraordinary patience of that long-suffering people*, could have admitted of their endurance up to this time, of a state of misery unparalleled in any other age or country. Even that patience, however, must have limits, and perhaps they are not far off. Mr. Potter says, 'I have heard many men declare, that unless something were done for them, it would come to this, that every man should seize whatever he could lay hands on.'"—*Ibidem*.

and Mr. Robert Taylor: in New York, of Messrs. Bell & Co., and one house, of which the amount has been given me by Jacob Harvey, Esq., without the names of the parties. The following are the letters from those gentlemen.

Philadelphia, January 9, 1838.

“DEAR SIR,

“During the years 1835 and 1836, we have sold, to the class of people you refer to, about 750 bills, amounting to £6600 pounds, or about £9 per bill. We could, no doubt, have sold a much larger amount, had we made an effort to do so; but finding it troublesome, we were very indifferent about the business.

We are, yours, &c.

Mr. M. Carey.

JOHN A. BROWN & Co.”

Philadelphia, January 9th, 1838.

“DEAR SIR,

“In reply to yours of this morning, I have to state, that in the years 1835 and 1836, the small bills which I drew on Ireland, amounted to \$43,375, say £8750. They were in sums of from one pound to ten pounds, with a very few of larger amount, say fifteen to twenty pounds; nearly the whole amount was the wages of hard labour, saved by young men and young women, and sent to their parents, brothers or sisters,

Yours, very respectfully,

Mr. M. Carey.

ROBERT TAYLOR.”

New York, Jan. 9, 1838.

“DEAR SIR,

“During the years 1835 and 1836, the house of Abraham Bell & Co., (of which I am a partner,) gave drafts to poor Irish men and women to send home to their relatives, in sums varying from three dollars to one hundred and fifty dollars, or thereabouts, £22,800 sterling, or \$114,000, equal to \$57,000 per annum. The *average* of *all* the drafts given was about \$28 for *each* draft, and the applicants were the poor but industrious working Irish.

“During the year 1837, as you may suppose, the remittances have fallen off, owing to the general want of employment, and the great advances in the rate of exchange, consequent on the suspension of specie payments.

“But within the last two months I can perceive an increase in the remittances, and I have no doubt but that *this* year they will again amount to a large sum.

Yours, &c.

JACOB HARVEY.

Mr. M. Carey.”

New York, March 3d, 1838.

“DEAR SIR,

“I have received from one of our most respectable cotemporaries, who gives small drafts on Ireland, and also engages to bring out passengers via Liverpool, the following statement of his receipts during 1835 and 36.

Amount received for passage money in	1835,	\$21,900
Do. ” do. ”	1836,	24,687
Do. ” Small drafts ”	1835,	19,116
Do. ” do. ”	1836,	28,543
		<hr/>
		\$94,246

“This amount will make a very handsome addition to ours; and will show to the world that in those two years, the poor despised Irish have paid upwards of two hundred thousand dollars to only *two* houses in New York, all for the assistance of their relatives and friends.
J. HARVEY.”

Thus it appears that four agencies received from Irishmen, in two years, no less a sum than \$284,975, viz:

Messrs. Bell & Co.	\$114,000
The friends of Bell & Co.	94,375
John A. Brown & Co.	33,000
Robert Taylor,	43,600

\$284,975

Supposing that all the others have only remitted the same amount, it appears that paternal, fraternal, and filial affection, withdrew, with the power of the loadstone on steel, from the purses of the poor Irish, above half a million of dollars in two years. Can any instance of a superior influence of those heaven-born affections be produced by any other nation?

If there live a man whose heart—that is, if he have a heart—does not glow with admiration, esteem, respect and astonishment at this display of the glorious operation of the finest and most exalted feelings of human nature, he has no moral “*music in his soul.*” I trust I do not too highly appreciate this trait of character when I venture to assert, that human nature in its proudest and most benignant aspect, hardly ever appears to more advantage.

On this interesting topic I have much more to say, but shall reserve it for another letter.

Yours, Right Reverend Sir, respectfully,

M. CAREY.

Philadelphia, March 9, 1838.