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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

AN ENGLISH
JESUIT
ON IRELAND.

THE murder of a landlord in Mayo has been reported here among the news of the week—and the report will serve to maintain and heighten, if possible, the anti-Irish feeling.—The statements, on the other hand, that might serve, not to excuse

murder indeed, but to explain the terrible provocation given to the people among many thousands of whom one murderer is occasionally found, are not thought worthy to be reported, and if they were so it is doubtful as to whether they would be read, for among the enlightened public of the day, there is unfortunately a large majority who refuse to read anything by which their prejudices might be removed or a knowledge of the truth impressed upon them. In this very county Mayo, for example, from which we now receive the report of a landlord's murder, there has been for many years a system of wholesale eviction carried on, and by means of which many people have been murdered in the fullest sense of the word, and cruelly murdered.—It is not long, for example, since we published in these columns a list of families driven from their homes on the borders of Mayo and Sligo, and who, for the most part, were found under the open sky in sandpits, or trying vainly to shelter themselves in ditches.—The report of these cases was made in May last to the Board of Guardians at Tubbercurry by Mr. Devine, one of their number who had been deputed by them to enquire into the cases in question.—The evictions having taken place on the estate of the Messrs. Knox.—We are happy to find, moreover, that the cases in question have been brought before the English Catholic world by the Rev. R. F. Clarke, S.J., the editor of the *Month*, who, in a second paper on his visit to Ireland, describes them and speaks of them with a feeling that does him credit—and that is doubly welcome to his Irish readers at least since it contrasts very remarkably with the attitude of many English Catholics towards the Irish people from whom they seem to withhold their sympathy in a manner that is as perplexing as it is distressing.—That Father Clarke, nevertheless, has failed to gain the sympathy of some of these inconsistent Catholics for the sufferers spoken of by him we learn from the columns of the *London Tablet* where the good Jesuit is sharply, and we admit with much consistency, taken to task for his advocacy of the Irish cause.—Father Clarke, then, gives us some additional details concerning the families so cruelly dealt with, and they are such as bring the cruelty into very bold relief indeed. Two families, he says, "consist of the widow and the fatherless, one of orphan children, two or three others of women, with their children, whose husbands are away in England. Several of the women are mentioned as weak and sickly. In all, there are some thirteen men, eighteen women, and between ninety and one hundred poor helpless children, all evicted at one fell swoop." "Several of the men," he goes on to say, "were away in England working as labourers on English farms. . . in order to get together the arrears of rent due to their landlord."—The badness of the two past seasons, he adds, had prevented them from raising a sufficiency of crops to pay their rent.—But as to the weather in which the poor people were thus exposed we find it described thus.—"The beginning of the month of May was bitterly cold. Mayo is one of the bleakest countries in Ireland, and I shall always have a piercing recollection of the bitter north-east wind which for some two or three weeks continuously swept over the country. If it seemed to freeze to the bone one who was well housed, well warmed, and well fed, what must have been the cruel sufferings of those delicate women and tender children without food, without clothes, without fire, without a home, and without hope, some without even a shelter by the side of the ditch, whither the cruel edict had driven them forth?"—And the edict had been wanton as well as cruel, for the Very Rev. T. Conlon, the parish priest, had offered in every case a year's rent, with the payment of costs so that the landlord might get the benefit of the Arrears Act. "Such are the plain facts," says Father Clarke. "They speak sufficiently for themselves. From their hearths and homes, from the land which they regard as in part

their own, from the land which during these two unfruitful seasons, has, through no fault of their own, refused to yield its wonted crop more than one hundred persons—men, women, and children, widows and orphans, tender maidens and sucklings at the breast—are thrust forth by bailiff and constable. Thrust forth to starve in that cold east wind! Thrust forth to die like dogs by the road side or in the ditch hard by! The scene would move our hearts and rouse our indignation if it had taken place in some African Kraal, or in some barbarian village in far off Asia. But these are no barbarians, bred in some distant land amid superstition and ignorance. They are no aliens or foreigners who are left to perish. They are dying uncared for within a few hours' journey of our own wealthy and prosperous homes. They are no heathen or heretics. They are our fellow Christians. They are the household of faith. They are our brothers and sisters in the faith of Jesus Christ. They are united to us by a tie closer than that of country or blood or any earthly relationship. They have a claim upon us far surpassing the claim of common parentage or common kindred. They are signed with the sign of Him who is the Lover of the poor. They are the members of the communion of Saints. They are children of our common mother the Church of God. What Catholic, what Christian, what man of ordinary kind feeling, can restrain his tears of compassion when he reads of the scene, the cruel heart-breaking scene—cruel and heart-breaking even when told in the cold unimpassioned language of the official visitor? Men wax warm in their just indignation at the deliberate murder even of one who has been guilty of a long course of oppression and cruelty, but is no indignation due at the sight of the famished faces of those poor little ones of Jesus Christ, pining away of famine and cold by the side of the unsheltered ditch." Yet, as we learn from the *Tablet* there are Christians and Catholics who are indignant that Father Clarke has made his appeal on behalf of those famished little ones.—There are Christians, and Catholics, too, who are willing to express pity for them, but who are also ready and anxious to brand with infamy the men who are trying to free them once for all from the bondage in which such sufferings are possible and even probable.—Catholics and Christians who warn us to have nothing to do with leaders whom they declare to be infidels and bad Catholics, but whom we still may see not so much worse off on the day of judgment than those who condemn them and whose charity may well be called in question—whose justice cannot be called in question because it does not exist. Father Clarke continues: "Let us look forward for a moment to the time when the men who are absent in England shall return. They carry with them the hard-earned money which is to satisfy the Messrs. Knox on the approaching rent day. Joyfully they approach the little group of cottages, full of hope and courage in the prospect of a happy meeting. But when they draw near, alas! Their cottage is empty: nought remains of it but the bare walls. But where are its inmates? Eagerly they go from house to house but all are deserted. At last they find a neighbour more favoured than the rest, left as caretaker of his cottage, who tells them the sad story how for long days and nights the wife and little ones turned out from their home, starved by the side of the hospitable ditch; how, perhaps, first one and then another of the little children was unable to withstand the want of food and raiment, the piercing cold, the damp and the exposure, and changed that dreary scene for a land where they shall hunger no more, where cold and sickness are unknown. Now when the poor desolate father hears the news, and finds at length all that remains of his little family in the shelter of some hospitable neighbour, when he sees the wife broken down with grief, when he misses, it may be, some of those little faces he left in smiling health, what wonder if, in the bitterness of his sorrow, the words which rise to his lips are not blessings on Messrs. Knox, and the thoughts in his heart are not thoughts of loyalty and love for landlords and landlordism? And when the survivors of those ninety children grow up to manhood, and in the great Republic of the West some of them rise, perchance, to wealth and influence, can we wonder if we find in their speech and writing the result of the ineffaceable impressions of childhood! Can we wonder if their words teem with an inextinguishable hostility which seems quite unaccountable to us as we sit quietly at home, ignorant of its cause, and if they indulge in a wild denunciation which seems to the Englishman, who know