

REAFFORESTATION AND DRAINAGE.

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Ages ago, ere the hamadryades died, the woods of Erin sang their joy for the kisses of the wanderers from the Aeolides. The winds were gentle with us then, for we loved our trees and ours was a fair and pleasant land to dwell in. Then to the hardy mariners who sailed stout-hearted out 'twixt the Pillars of Hercules our isle was known as the Isle of Woods. With pleasure to their eyes they gazed across the weary waters at our wooded hills and forested plains—shining green with the golden sun-rays playing round them—as these children of the sea-god steered their vessels into our noble and profitable havens. Green and gold was then our flag and our days were not harsh.

Where are our woods and forests—where are the kindly sprites who guarded them? Gone. The hill wears a bald brow; the plain stretches, often, a waste. The plunderers of Ireland disliked these forests. Pious Giraldus draws affecting pictures of the barbarous kernes rushing out from their shade and assailing the honest English soldiers who had crossed the waves to carry the light of the Gospel to the dark heathen and swap it with him for land and chattels. Poor vain it with him for land and chattels. Poor vain Richard of England—not the Lion-Heart, but the Weak—learned to hate these Irish forests, and in later times the loyal and peaceable thieves who represented the wealth, intelligence, and respectability of Ireland feared and disliked the forests, which afforded too often a refuge for cutthroat rapparees who had once possessed the wealth and a moiety of the intelligence and respectability. This fear and dislike had something to do with the destruction of our forests, but the demand for timber had more. What did the Cromwellian squire reckon of beauty or utility if he could turn the woods or forests his father had filched from the beaten Irishry into hard cash? What did the ignorant Celtic peasant know of or care about the harm he was doing when he laid his axe to the tree? Would he have held his hand had someone told him he was committing a national crime? I fear not. The sense of national responsibility—save

in politics—is weaker with us than with any other civilised people in the world.

However, our woods and forests have disappeared; they may have been turned into ships, or furniture, or matchwood and have added to the sum of human happiness in their day—which, I believe, is the object of all things in the philosophy of the Anglo-Saxon—but in our day we are suffering in body and soul for their loss. Our altered climate is wholly and our altered character partly the result of the denudation of the country of trees. That fell disease which carries off yearly young Irish men and women by thousands owes much of its strength to the fact that the country has been stripped naked. The anti-Irish landowner and the ignorant Irish peasant for a couple of centuries have made money at *our* expense. True, as Boyle Roche said, posterity never did anything for them.

But let us consider we owe a duty to our posterity—that we owe it to it to give it as noble and as free, as pleasant and as healthy a land as this can be made by us who are all by duty and most of us by necessity bound to Ireland. Our island, which nature dowered with a genial climate, has suffered by the hand of man. The chill easterly and northerly winds which make winter in Ireland a time of suffering and apprehension to the delicate are due, in great measure, to the tree-destroyer. We cannot undo the mischief he has already caused, but by reforestation of the country we can check and break these winds and restore our posterity something liker the climate of our ancestors than we have at present. What intelligent man would raise an objection to the reforestation of Ireland when he knows that it would benefit every inhabitant of the country in health, that it would materially benefit the farmer and the manufacturer, and improve the character of the people, which has suffered by the artificially-changed climate? The soil of this country can never get fair play, the farmer, no matter how hard he toils, can never make his land as fertile as its nature, will allow, until this island is an Isle of Woods again—until our hills and waste lands are planted with trees.

The drainage of the bogs is as necessary as reforestation. Their existence in the country is a continued source of injury to the nation. Had the Young Irelanders or the Fenians succeeded in separating our

country from England a National Government would, as one of its first acts, have directed the drainage of the bogs and reafforestation. The County Councils now can do something in those directions, and the people should compel them to do so, for these matters are of much more importance to them than the personalities and performances of absurd Parliamentarians.

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