

‘WANTED A FEW WORKMEN.’

By Charles Gavan Duffy.

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Ireland has urgent need of workmen able and willing to work. Of men who will gradually create about them, each in his own city, hamlet, or narrow corner, a circle of light and vital warmth, where there is now ignorance and lethargy.

It is singular to remark how the obscurest and the most ostentatious offices of public service have become vacant together. The panorama of history nowhere presents a great stage so nearly deserted; or on which the prizes of generous ambition were so feebly contested.

But competitors, high and low, must be called forth again, and the ardour of a noble rivalry reawakened or the hope of rebuilding Ireland from her ruins is a dream. Unless there are labourers sufficient for the labour the very attempt becomes a cheat or a jest.

The generous young men who last bore the heat of the contest have received the wages that oftenest pays heroic toil. They stood in the front rank, nearest the danger, and they have been struck down. They are now pining in exile or seething in prison-ships, and Ireland it is said is slavishly indifferent to their fate. This is the very hour when we demand with most confidence new recruits to fill up their places. For it is in the hour of her moral eclipse that our country moves the profoundest pity and devotion; and the men capable of helping her in this extremity are plainly men not to be enlisted by cockades or bounty—by promises of easy triumph or visions of personal distinction. If there be not many candidates who will undertake her service knowing the wages—men ready to work in obscure toil, willingly embraced and patiently persisted in without the encouragement of applauding hands or glorification of any sort for the present, we have seen the latter end of Celtic Ireland.

If there be practical capacity anywhere in this country it never had a more favourable field in the world. No class or interest is so adequately represented as to shut its ears to intelligible counsel, if it

could hear it. Few offices under popular control are so satisfactorily occupied that men do not desire and speculate upon a change for the better. The very offices of Government are vacant—nearly as vacant as if a Revolution had given up Dublin Castle to the people. Whoever is able to perform the duties of Chancellor of the Exchequer in Ireland efficiently, or Minister of Public Works and Industrial Progress, or Minister of Public Instruction will find the place vacant, waiting for his coming. Not the official uniform and the salary indeed; but the power to create and guide operations and get work done—the true essence of authority.

The places are vacant, but the list of candidates who have hitherto appeared with claims worth considering is very scanty. The difficulty in ejecting usurpers is exactly the want of successors worthy of succeeding; and nothing more.

Spouting, speaking, and operations of that sort can be performed by a large proportion of the adult population of this island. The faculty of writing sonorous and swelling sentences is nearly as common. O'CONNELL made a guerrilla of ruthless speechifiers who disturbed the peace of private society with the thunder of their afternoon eloquence; and Young Ireland must plead guilty to having created 'a mob of gentlemen who write with ease.' But there is no country in Europe where there is so little *practical* genius, practical skill, or fruitful practical knowledge as in Ireland. The smallest official trained in the petty routine of public business, the dullest intermittent commissioner who does 'jobs' for the Executive, has generally more administrative capacity than some of the best of our public men. The grand, romantic, and picturesque, fire the Irish imagination; but it plunges restlessly in the harness of practical work. And mark the result on our popular institutions—we have Irish members who originate nothing, Irish corporations bankrupt in funds, character and influence—Irish boards of guardians replaced by paid officials who do the work immeasurably better, to the deep discredit and permanent injury of the country.

Whoever knows anything of the administration of public institutions or political societies amongst us knows that however large the body may be the actual labour falls on half a dozen men. It does

not seem possible to get a larger number together in Ireland who will do habitual work. Yet a country is framed, and shaped, lost or won not by institutions but by the individual labours of men. Better a dozen men like THOMAS DAVIS than an Irish Parliament; for a dozen THOMAS DAVISES would imply that conquest, and many others more impossible to ordinary capacity. Such men working together cordially for an honest purpose multiply their mutual strength in a ratio too subtle for arithmetic. Twice five is often equal not to ten but to ten hundred. It is precisely workmen who will work in this spirit Ireland has need of.

Our soil, climate, sea, situation—the capacious harbours so much more familiar to eloquence than at LLOYDS', the mill sites, the water powers, the immultiplicable treasures that lie locked up in Irish soil, of which we have sung and said so much,—what are they but the tools of men. The tools with which they may glorify races, and build up States if they will. And here are the tools awaiting the young men of Ireland,—plentiful as they ever were in any country on the earth; and obedient to the hands that will learn to wield them. The devil and all his angels could not keep them from possessing and ruling this country if they were worthy of it. Even now thinned and scattered as they are by exile and emigration they have immeasurably a stronger hold upon Ireland than the Queen, Lords and Commons of Great Britain—if they had virtue to make a noble use of their capacity and opportunity.

The waste land, waste resources, waste powers, even the waste labour of Ireland, (built up in workhouse) is not so strange a violation of National Economy as these waste opportunities—waste simply for want of that individual enterprise and action so common in other countries. In America the forest is scarcely cleared by the Irish pioneer till a city springs up, and mill wheels are whirling and engines panting, and soon a hundred miles of iron railway links the city of yesterday with the great marts of the Republic and the distant centres of commerce in the Old World. In Australia, where the kangaroo and the cannibal shared the silent shores a few years ago, when Ireland was fighting for religious liberty, cities have grown up which already vie in riches and even in social organisation with many of the old

fountain-heads of civilisation in Europe. It is true these countries have wide territory, and are not pressed upon by old domineering institutions—but the essential difference does not lie here, but in the hopefulnes and irrepressible energy with which men work in these new, growing countries. Ireland is new, Ireland is unexhausted and untried; and if we set deliberately to work filling up the details of a great design day by day, we would see similar results accomplished. To-day clearing away the old rubbish, to-morrow laying a foundation-stone—quarrying materials here, training workmen there, till the design of which the ignorant could discern little or nothing in the rude details, stood revealed at last a perfect and eternal work.

If it be possible to get together a small number of men who understand these deficiencies, and will conscientiously endeavour to amend them, in themselves and others, it will be a good beginning. Such a brotherhood like the modern giant of steam would find no work too heavy or too light for it. They might preach the rights of the poor with the burning zeal of a Howard or a Vincent de Paul, and teach the ignorant with the patient humble assiduity of Gerald Griffin. At lowest they would take care to master with anxious study the principles of all weighty measures prescribed to the people, and refuse to cry out that this or that was a remedy without making sure as life and death that it was. And having made sure of the right, refuse to sit still while any thing remained to be done to advance and accomplish it. Ireland is falling to ruin for want of workmen like these.

Let such young men as feel honestly called to help us in this design, send us their names, and they will be enrolled in a company from which we predict substantial and permanent services to Ireland. But it is **WORKMEN** we want. With idle politicians, amateur politicians, trading politicians we propose to transact no business. One hour from the man who gives ten to his own proper pursuits will be precious. Ten hours from the student who is feeding his spirit with heroic, generous purposes, and training his intellect in the school of public affairs, will be welcome. But no magic can turn the jaded hacks of politics, or the fops of literature into men fit for this company. The fitness of candidates will be tested by the work they can accomplish; and this is a barometer that takes no account of any quantity of blatant

commonplace, or of 'eloquent sentiments,' if they mean nothing, or nothing worth meaning. All candidates shall have a fair trial. For the successful a great prize is reserved—the re-creation and government of Ireland. A prize surely among the divinest that man ever aspired to win. Many will aim for it.

'Time shews who *will* and *can*.'

Altogether we begin to work in the midst of social disorganisation, our main task is not to combat and resist, but to found and to create. There is work of a tangible, practical kind for all who are ready to undertake it. Vague incentives to self-reliance, and the minor morals in general, are like sowing chaff, no harvest grows from the kind of toil; but we purpose to demand *precise* and *specific* results from all who are prepared to help us in taking possession of our country. Results that will enrich the country and ennoble the workers. The drill, the jacket, and the discipline, transform an Irish peasant into a sub-constable with as military a carriage, and as expert an eye and hand as a veteran of the Peninsula. A few years in a National School and the boy who emerged out of a smoky and squalid cabin, shared with the pig, is turned into a clean and shapely youth, fit to wrestle with the world, and to win the match. Look at a railway porter or a railway policeman—the decent uniform, and the punctual system, soon makes a new man of the peasant. And this physical training is a small thing compared with the result of discipline on the *intellect* and *practical power* of cultivated, aspiring men! The one multiplies iron, the other multiplies rarest gold of Ophir. A Poor House, or a Lunatic Asylum is scarcely a sadder spectacle to us than the Hall of the Four Courts, with its multitude of keenest faculties wasting in endless barrenness—waiting for work to do, which to many will never come, while nobler work ready to be done is waiting for them, if they would learn to do it. There will be many gloomy discontented hearts in Ireland while idleness is accounted a social distinction—and until it become the point of honour to be usefully employed. And that is a gospel which we must preach by work done.

When NAPOLEON turned administrator he proclaimed as the issue of his task that not one pauper should remain in all France; and

that gigantic Worker was striding towards this result when the clash of arms called him away from his nobler war against social disorganisation. In the enormous lazar-house of Ireland it is not out of the range of rational ambition to attain the same goal. If the young men of Ireland do their duty we shall see in a few years a happy people sit on our soil—and the pauper workhouses become houses of work for free prosperous labour. We shall see reared on this solid basis that glorious temple in which TONE and DAVIS, O'BRIEN and MEAGHER aspired to worship, and devoted their lives to consecrate. The new nation which shall gather back beneath her wings the scattered children of our race, and bid them fulfil her promised destiny. We shall see our free, developed, purified Ireland at last become what foreign genius has predicted—and native genius may accomplish—'the new and better Carthage of the West.'

This is the work of one generation. In one generation the Electorate of Brandenburg grew into the powerful populous kingdom of Prussia. In the life of one man the loose, boundless disjointed tracts of the two Russias condensed into a firm and coherent empire. The trampled provinces of Spain in the low countries—a bog of Allen, a gigantic public work—arose and expanded into the Empire of the Sea in less time than our young men may still hope to live and work.

And no generation of men born into the world had nobler work to do if they be worthy of their destiny.

If they prefer sloth and apathy great results are of course impossible. If they prefer bellowing inane noise and nonsense they are more hopelessly impossible. But if they will be wise and resolute, a great thinker has foretold their victory. 'Even the casualties of life,' he says, 'seem to bow to the spirit that will *not* bow to them; and yield to subserve a design which in their first apparent tendency they threatened to frustrate.'

Ireland wants a few workmen of this calibre.