In the decade before the Great Famine, the suffering caused by poverty in Ireland was far worse than anywhere else in Europe—unnecessarily so, it seemed to many. In this vivid contemporary account, the Hungarian statesman Baron József Eötvös described the horrific conditions that existed in Ireland of the 1830s, analysing why, under the same government, the life of the Irish poor should be so much harder and more perilous than the life of the English poor.

'…The Irish tenant does not know comfort. His home is a mud hut, with glassless window opening and no chimney. His children and wife cover their naked bodies in rags, and their clothes are so poor that in many places the priest holds two Masses on Sundays, so that one part of the household, after returning from Mass, can hand over their clothes to the others, so that they can go to church in them as well…'

Illustrated, with English and Hungarian on facing pages

Poverty in Ireland
Szegénység Irlandban
by Baron József Eötvös

Hardback

PHÆTON
PUBLISHING LTD.
Dublin

ISBN 978-1-908420-20-6

POVERTY IN IRELAND 1837

BY BARON JÓZSEF EÖTVÖS

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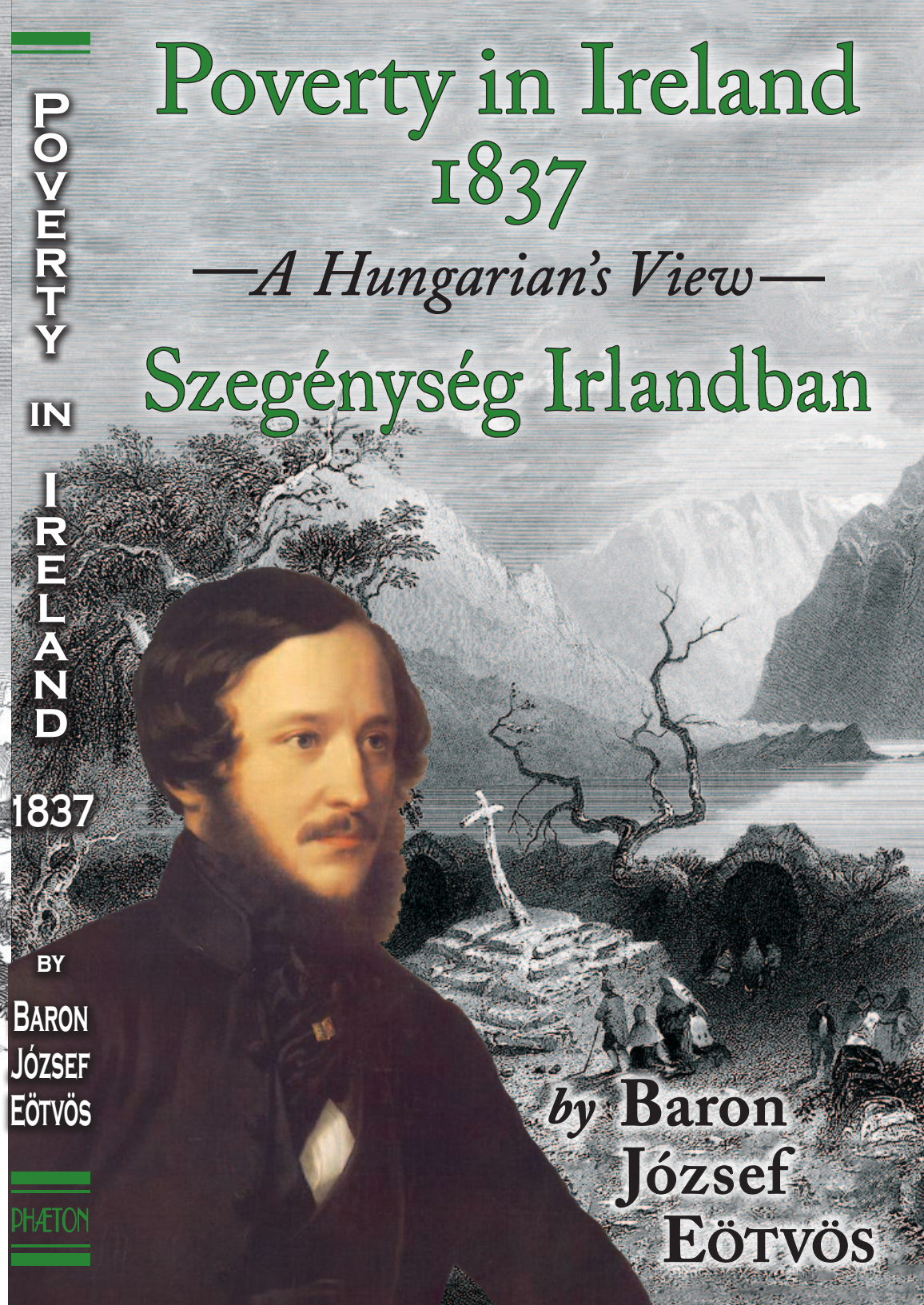
—*A Hungarian's View*—

Szegénység Irlandban



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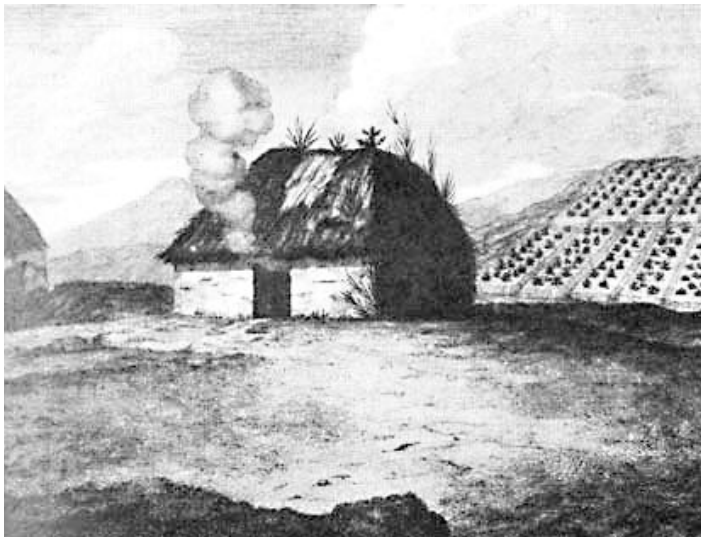

'The Irish tenant does not know comfort. His home is a hut made of earth with glassless window-opening and no chimney, while its poorly thatched roof cannot protect the residents from the challenges of the weather.' —Baron József Eötvös
[*Drawing by* Arthur Young *c.*1780]

Poverty in Ireland 1837

—*A Hungarian's View*—

Szegénység Irlandban

by

Baron József Eötvös

Translated from the Hungarian by
Paul Sohar *and* László Bakos

Foreword by
Dr Tamás Magyarics

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The Author

Baron József Eötvös – whose statue stands in Budapest in the square that bears his name – was one of the most interesting and appealing Hungarian public figures of the 19th century: a statesman driven by deep humanitarianism, a much-admired political thinker, and the first master of the Hungarian realist novel.

'Baron Eötvös was a thoroughly romantic character,' his friend and contemporary, Ferenc Pulszky, writer and politician, wrote of him in 1850.[1] 'He was more than the hero of a novel: his adventures and his fortunes made him a real hero.'

It is hard to disagree with Pulszky. There appears to be little that was prosaic in the Baron's life.

For instance, there is the incident that led to Eötvös's first novel, *A karthausi / The Carthusian* (1839) – the story of a young French aristocrat who, after a disappointment in love, decides to abandon the world and lead the silent, solitary life of a Carthusian monk. It was a romantic work, but hardly more than the events that inspired it.

The background to the story – as Eötvös wrote to a friend many years later – arose from an experience he had at a monastery in France in the mid-1830s, when he came across two Spanish women being denied admission. A relative of theirs was inside, and they were anxious to speak to him – a young man who, after suffering a disappointment in love, had

1. Preface to the English-language edition of József Eötvös's novel *The Village Notary* (London, 1850).

decided to become a monk. The women hoped to dissuade him from this plan, but as only men were allowed to go past the doors of the monastery, they were helpless. Eötvös offered his services as go-between; but finding the young man was determined to stay in the monastery, he was unable to do anything more than report back to the waiting relatives. On receiving his news, the women retired to a nearby village, and spent four days composing a long letter, while the gallant Eötvös patiently waited in the monastery. The young man would not be persuaded, but Eötvös had found a setting and a plot.[2]

1882 COMMEMORATIVE EDITION OF *A KARTHAUSI*

For a final touch of romance, *A karthausi* was made into a silent film in Budapest in 1916. The director of it was Mihály Kertész – Michael Curtiz – who would go on to direct *Casablanca*.

Baron Eötvös was born in Buda in 1813 to a noble family, at a time when Latin was the official State language and German was the language encouraged by the Habsburg monarchy (and the language Eötvös spoke as a child). He did not learn Hungarian until he was 13. The Kingdom of Hungary (which included Slovakia, Transylvania, Croatia, as well as modern Hungary and parts of modern Austria and Serbia) was a Crownland of the Habsburg Monarchy and of Austria. His father, Baron Ignacz Eötvös, a high-ranking official attached to the monarchy, was deeply unpopular with – even hated by – many nationalist-minded Hungarians for his loyalty to the Habsburgs and the uncompromising manner in which he expressed it. On one occasion, for instance, he was said to have ordered two lesser gentry, who were objecting to tax decrees of the Habsburg government, to be chained and arrested.[3]

2. Aladár Molnár, 'Eötvös "Karthauzi"-jának eredete' *Pesti Napló*, December 23 1871 [as quoted in Paul Bödy, *Joseph Eötvös and the Modernization of Hungary 1840-1870*, The American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia, 1972) p.20].

3. Zoltán Ferenczi, *Báro Eötvös József* (Budapest, 1903) p.5.

Szegénység Irlandban

Mióta a mozgalom nagy férfia, O'Connell, az angol parlamentben fellépve, ez ó falak körében, hol a pápista-gyűlölés s alkotmányosan gyakorlott zsarnokság szavai végre elveszték varázshatalmokat, a rokon angol nemzet előtt népének sorsát fedezé fel; mióta lángoló szavakban festé azon állapotot, melyre vallási elnyomás és egy mostoha kormány százados önkénye hozhaták nemzetét; mióta cselekedve lép fel ő, a fenséges koldus, évről évre igazságot kérve honának; mióta a büszke angol nép előtt ő, az egyes, fenyegetődzve léphete fel, s szavára, mint távol mennydörgés, milliónyi ajkakról ugyanazon szó visszhangozék az irlandi kanális túlpartjáról: Erin zöld szigete a hatalmas szavára mintegy a tenger mélyéből felmerülve, egész Európa figyelmét magára vonta. – Csudálva látta századunk Anglia harcait, melyekben e világ óriás zsarnoka egy szabad nemzet állhatatossága előtt porba dőlt; vágyteli tekintettel néztek a népek a tengerek királynéjára, reménnyel a nemzetre, hol szabadság s törvény századok óta frigyben él, s földrészünknek egyik éjszakaibb országát kertté, annyi nemzedékből álló lakóit egy nagy néppé alkoták: de Irland felszólal, s a nimbusz eloszlott.

– Nem a szabad nép, mely nemünk jogait mint egy közpalladiumot megtartá annyi harcok közt; nem a hatalmas, melynek milliónyi karait együtt éldelt szabadság erősíti s egyesíti köz-védelemre; nem a gazdag, melynek hajói földtekénk minden tengerét eltölték, éldeletet hozva s cserélve, minden partokon virágzó gyarmatokat alapítva, birodalmakat hódítva; most a zsarnok lép elénkbe, ki egy nemzetet hét századig elnyomva, miután nemzetiség, vallás s velök minden egyéb ürügy elhasználtatott, remegni kezd szolgája előtt; most látjuk ez oly nagynak vélt erő belső gyengeségeit; most hozzánk hatottak a koldus sóhajtati, kinek ínségét annyi fény

Poverty in Ireland

Ever since Daniel O'Connell's momentous arrival in the British Parliament, all of Europe has become aware of the state to which the Irish have been reduced by harsh government repression and religious despotism. Within the walls of Westminster, words of hatred for Catholicism and in praise of constitutional tyranny finally lost their magic power as O'Connell exposed the suffering of his people to their English kinsmen.

Following his fiery descriptions of how Ireland had been affected for centuries – both by religious persecution and by the arbitrary rule of a hostile government – almost alone he has posed a threat to the proud English nation.

This majestic advocate has been demanding justice for his people – demanding it without pause, year after year, until the word Ireland could be heard so often from millions of lips that it became like the sound of thunder from across the Channel; the green isle of Erin has emerged at last from the depths of the ocean and drawn the attention of all of Europe.

Earlier in this century, England was looked on with awe as she brought down in battle the world's great tyrant. She was seen as the queen of the sea, viewed with hope and desire as the country where freedom and law governed life for centuries, a garden of northern Europe, and a community of different peoples in one nation. But then Ireland spoke, and this vision vanished.

No longer seen as the Palladium, upholding in battle the rights of mankind; no longer the country of freedom and strength coming to the defence of other nations; no longer the rich country whose ships have filled all the seas of the planet, engaging in trade, founding prosperous colonies, and conquering empires. Now England appears

s arany csak évről évre nevelék; egyszóval, láttuk Irlandot, s szívünk csak szánakozást érez régi tisztelete helyett.

Mert ki maradhatna érzéketlen ennyi fájdalom előtt? ki láthatná e népet, mely az utast, mihelyt hajójából e szenvedések honába kilépett, mint egy nagy kolduscsapat, körülfogá, s mely őt rimánkodva kíséri fel a Giant's Causeway-ig, hol a sziget végsziklái emelkednek az atlantikum felett éjszak felől; le a Killarney-i tavakig, hol a sziget déli részén a természet oly nyájas köntöst ölte magára, mindenütt egyenlően szenvedve, mindenütt rongyokban, mindenütt éhség s betegség nyomát hordva halvány arcain;

"Irish Mendicants" (Alfred Fripp, 1845)

ki utazhatnék végig e tartományon anélkül, hogy látva zöld téreit, melyek vidám színekkel a smaragdsziget nevét szerezék neki, s látva a nyájas völgyeket s ékesen emelkedő hegyláncokat s annyi tavat, a Shannon folyóját – melyhez Angliában hasonló nincsen – s a nagy atlantikumot, mely véghetlen vízrónájával e földet körülfogá, s látva a nyomorult kunyhókat a természet nyájas csudái között, s a kőkerítések közé szorított kis szántóföldeket, rossz mívelésért silány terméssel fizetve gazdájuknak, látva egyszóval, mi szépnek teremté Isten e földjét, s mi nyomorultak lehetnek azok, kik rajta laknak, – el ne szomorodnék!

a tyrant, who has oppressed a nation for seven centuries, crushing its nationality, religion, and everything else of importance. Now she is trembling before the country she has enslaved, and we see the inner weakness of the foe that had seemed so mighty. Now the groans of the beggar have reached us – the beggar whose poverty got worse every year as England's gold and glory increased.

In other words, we saw Ireland, and our heart has felt only pity, driving out the respect for England it felt in the past.

Because who could fail to be distressed in the face of this much pain? Who would not feel sadness at the sight of the many beggars who encircle the traveller when he steps off the boat in this land of sufferings, and who accompany him everywhere: to the north, up to the Giant's Causeway, where the outermost rocks of the isle jut out above the Atlantic, and to the south, down to the lakes of Killarney, where nature wears an affable dress? But the suffering is equal everywhere. Everywhere people are in rags, and wearing the traces of hunger and disease on their pale faces.

Who could remain undisturbed travelling through this land, seeing on the one hand the green fields, whose bright colours gave the country the name Emerald Isle, and seeing the gentle valleys and the proudly rising mountain ranges, and so many lakes and the river Shannon – the likes of which cannot be found in England – and the great Atlantic, which surrounds this land with its infinity of water? But seeing also the wretched huts amidst the gentle wonders of nature, and the small plough lands that are squeezed between stone fences, and that pay their owners poor harvest for gruelling farming; seeing, in other words, how beautiful God has created this land, and how miserable can be those who inhabit it – who could see these things without feeling a great sadness?

England's poor have become proverbial. Those who only wish to find faults with the home of the constitution, who probe for her weaknesses, and seek to bring about her destruction, as they have been doing for half a century – these people keep

– De Anglia s Irland egy kormány alatt él. – Ez, mint amaz, képviselő alkotmánnyal bír; ez, mint amaz, arisztokratikus, Angliának négy törvényszéke van, Irlandnak ugyanannyi, s hasonló név alatt bíráskodó. Irland, mint Anglia, grófságokra osztatik, mind a két országban municipális testületek találtatnak, mind a kettőben a szociális hatalmak első foka az egyház. Mind e két országban a törvények végrehajtása, a kormány rendeleteinek eszközlése, hasonló nevű s hatáskörű tisztviselőkre bízatik. Sheriffet, hadnagyot, kormányzót s békebírát találni minden irlandi, mint minden angol grófságban. Honnan hát e különbség?

Minden szociális problémák között, melyeket korunk megfejtett, vagy legalább megfejteni iparkodik, nincs talán egy, mely figyelmünket inkább érdemlené, mint ez, s talán nem leend érdektelen a magyar közönség előtt is, ha ezen ország állapotjáról, s azon okokról, melyek véleményem szerint annak kútfejei, röviden értekezendem. Úgyis, valamint azért tanuljuk a múlt kor történeteit, hogy belőlök jelen állapotunkra találjunk oktatásokat: úgy néha jó határainknak körén is túl nézni, mert sok fekszik ott, mi talán reánk nézve jósolás. – Okaim s nézeteim helyességéről ítéljen mindenki önmaga, az adatok pontosságáról, amennyire emberileg lehet, jótállok; csak egy hiteles kútfőből, az irlandi szegények állapotjáról vizsgálódó küldöttség jelentéseiből merítvén azokat,† vagy egyesek munkáiból, de melyekre a közelismerés a hitelesség bélyegét rányomá.

Castle and Tenants' Cabins, County Cork, 1824

mountains, the sad silence of the Alps, and only here and there a home, which reminds our soul, as it admires the wonders of nature, of human wretchedness. But at least these are different empires before us. Different peoples border the two shores, with different institutions; and we do not doubt the huge influence of these institutions, even though we are amazed by it.

But England and Ireland live under the same government. Both share a parliamentary constitution, both have aristocracies, both England and Ireland have four law courts with similar names. Ireland, just like England, is divided into counties; in both countries there is municipal government, and in both countries, the greatest degree of social power is exercised by the church. In both countries the execution of laws, and the implementation of government regulations, are entrusted to officials with similar titles and authority. Sheriffs, lieutenants, governors, and magistrates can be found in every county both in Ireland and in England. So where is this difference coming from?

Of all the social problems our age has solved, or at least has endeavoured to solve, there is not one that more deserves our attention than the problem of Ireland, and perhaps it will not be uninteresting for even the Hungarian public, if I have a short discourse on the state of this country, and on the sources and causes, in my opinion, of its present condition.

As we study history, so as to learn from it about our present state, so it is sometimes worthwhile to see beyond our borders, because there we might see much that might be a pointer to our own future. Whether my reasons and views are correct or not is a matter of personal judgement. As far as is humanly possible, I stand by the exactness of the data, which is taken from credible sources: the reports of the Commission which investigated the state of the paupers of Ireland,† or from other works which the public has already accepted as reliable.

† The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the State of the Poor of Ireland, established in 1834; see pp. 168-177. —Ed.

római világot szétrontva, dúlásra s megfosztásokra alapult alkotmányainkat szerzé, mindenütt. – Szenvedett minden nemzet s vérezett s meggyógyult; mert miként az egyesnek erőt ada a természet, mely elgyengült idomait helyre pótolja, romlott nedveit kitisztítja, úgy erőt ada a társaságoknak is, mely által, bármily szenvedések után, bármiként fenyegetve végromlással, mindig egész erejökben visszaállnak; mint a fa, melynek sudarát a fejsze levágta, csak erősebb ágakat hajt, csak dúsabban virul ismét.

Mért nem gyógyulhattak hát be az elfoglalás sebei Irlandban is? vagy inkább azon elnyomás, mely a sebeket gyógyulni nem hagyá, mért nem szűnt meg itt, mint más országokban? s hogy ezt értsük, kettőre szükséges figyelnünk. Először arra, hogy az irlandi nép soha a rómaiak által elfoglalva s így a szolgaságra előkészülve nem lévén, szilárdabban védé szabadságát; másodszor, hogy az elfoglaló angol közelebb marada hazájához, mint hogy nemzetiségéről lemondani, vagy azt az elfoglalt népnek nemzetiségével asszimilálni akarná. – S innen van, hogy míg például a frankok Galliában egy meghódított s idegen uralkodáshoz századok által szokott nemzetet találva s csak mintegy a rómaiak helyét foglalva el, szilárd ellenszegülést nem találtak, míg a normannok honoktól oly távol szakadva, hogy segédre nem számolhatának, magokat Normandiában a meghódított néppel asszimilálták: Irlandban sem a meghódított szabadságáról, sem a hódító nemzetiségéről lemondani nem akart. – Az elsőt mutatják az irlandi nép szüntelen harcai, melyek miatt az angolok egész VIII. Henrikig hatalmokat a szigetnek egy kis részén, mely Palenak neveztetett, tovább nem terjeszthették, s csak I. Jakab alatt 1603-ban hozhaták tökéletességre; a másikat az: hogy az angol törvények szorgosan elhárítának mindent, miáltal az elfoglaló s elfoglalt közelebb érintésbe jöhetne, vagy végre öszveolvadhatna; sőt miután az egy század elforgása után megtörtént, hogy új törvények hozattak e békés állapot megszüntetésére, III. Eduárd alatt a híres kilkennyi statútum által hazaárulás büntetésével fenyegettetett minden angol, ki irlandival házasságra vagy bármi társaságba lépni vagy az

nature endows the body with the power of self-regeneration, in the same way it empowers nations to get back on their feet, no matter how great the devastation and degradation they had to suffer – just as when a tree has some or all of its branches cut off by the axe, and then sends out new shoots and eventually a more luxuriant foliage than it had before.

Why is it then that the wounds of subjugation to foreign rule have not healed in Ireland? Or, should we ask, why the subjugation that caused the wounds in the first place has not ceased or let up in Ireland as it has in other countries?

In order to understand the problem we have to focus on two issues.

First, the Roman Empire had never extended to Ireland, and the Irish people, never having experienced slavery, fought all the harder to retain their freedom; second, the English conquerors did not settle down and assimilate with the conquered people but held on to their own country close by.

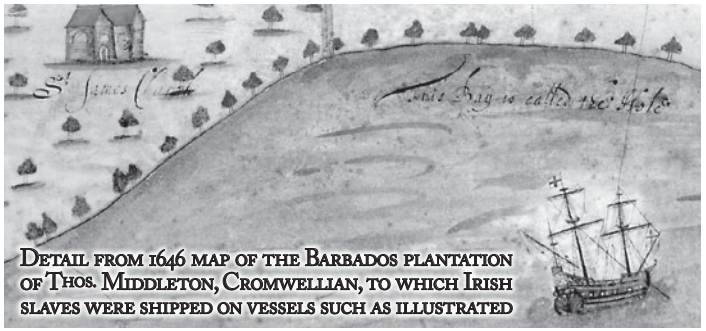
By contrast, the invading Franks in Gaul found a people accustomed to foreign domination who offered very little resistance to the change from Roman to Frankish rule. The Norman invaders, being far from home and without a base to rely on for help, had no other choice but assimilate with the subjugated nation.

In Ireland, however, the conquered refused to give up their freedom, just as the conquerors held on to their nationality. This is demonstrated by the constant battles that the Irish put up against the English who, until the reign of Henry VIII, could not advance further than a small portion of the island which they called 'the Pale'. It was only under James I that the conquest was complete.

A second factor was the English laws that prevented any interaction, any possibility of assimilation, between the conqueror and the conquered and instead brought about the opposite. A century after the conquest, when peace was almost in sight, new laws were promulgated to thwart reconciliation; under Edward III the infamous Statutes of Kilkenny threatened capital punishment for treason for any English person who married an Irish national or tried to live

kívánatjaikat. – De ha a bosszú szörnyű vala, még szörnyűbb vala büntetése, s ki az angol lordbírák által az Irlandba költöző hadaknak kiadott parancsolatot olvassa, melyben a pártütőknek, követőiknek s társaiknak megölése és megsemmisítése, minden birtoknak feldúlása, kirablása s felégetése, minden fegyvert fogható férfinak kiirtása rendeltetik; ki figyelembe veszi, hogy az irlandi birtok azok között, kik e szent !!! hadra pénzt kölcsönözének, már előre felosztatott; ki e háború egyes történeteit követve Philippaugh-nál, Carrick-Fergusban, Magee szigetén s Wexford városában százan- és ezerenként látja gyilkoltatni a védetlen pápistákat; vagy ki csak az egészet tekintve, például látja, hogy 1641. október 23-ától, hol a háború kitört, 1652-ig (William Petty szerint) 11 év alatt 500 000 irlandinál több halt meg, s magában Dublin városában, mint Plowden mondja, az 1651-i nyár alatt több 17 000 embernél – képzelheti ez országnak szerencsétlen állapotját.

De mind e vérengzések s mindamellett, hogy miután Cromwell úgynevezett gyilkoló törvényszéke által több 200 pápistánál gyilkoltatott meg törvényes formák szerint, miután minden nagyobb birtokosokra halálos büntetés, minden kisebbre számkivetés, vagy hacsak birtoka 10 ft-nál kevesebbet nem ére, javai egy vagy kétharmadának konfiskációja rendeltetett, sokan s főképp a nép birtokosabb osztályaiból önként kivándorlottak,[14] sokan a kormány által deportáltattak:[15] a nép száma még mindig nem kisebbedék a zsarnok kívánatjához képest, s az angol jól érezve, hogy



DETAIL FROM 1646 MAP OF THE BARBADOS PLANTATION OF THOS. MIDDLETON, CROMWELLIAN, TO WHICH IRISH SLAVES WERE SHIPPED ON VESSELS SUCH AS ILLUSTRATED

14. Lingard szerint 30 000, vagy 40 000 [John Lingard 1771-1851].
15. Csak egyszerre 1 000 leány raboltatott el, kik később Jamaikában mint rabszolgák vásáron eladattak.

to the armies sent to Ireland to put down the uprising makes enlightening reading: the foremost task of the military campaign was the killing of the ringleaders of the struggle and their followers, the destruction of their properties by pillage and fire, the extermination of every able-bodied man capable of bearing weapons. The Irish estates had already been divided up and distributed to those who invested money in this punitive holy !!! war even before it had got underway. To follow the details of the war is to count the defenceless Papist dead by the thousands in Philipstown, Carrickfergus, Islandmagee, the city of Wexford. Overall, in the 11 years from the beginning of the hostilities in October 23, 1641 till 1652 (according to William Petty) more than 500,000 people of Ireland died. Plowden states that in Dublin alone just in the summer of 1651 at least 17,000 fell victim to this reprisal. These figures speak louder than imagination when it comes to the description of the misery suffered by Ireland.

In addition to all this bloodletting, Cromwell had major Catholic landowners – 200 of them – judicially killed in his hanging courts, smaller landholders were exiled, and properties valued at ten pounds or less tended to be simply confiscated.

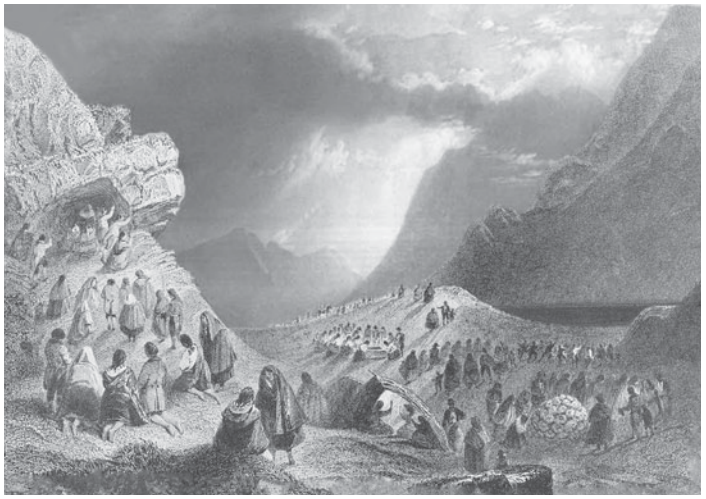
Many, especially those who could afford it, emigrated voluntarily,[14] while many others were transported as slaves[15] by the government. However, by the tyrant's estimation, the population had not decreased sufficiently; the English overlord sensed that patriotism or blood-thirst – everything that was good or vile in the hearts of the oppressed – was crying out

1649. *intending at the close of their Conquest (if they can effect the same as God forbid) to root out the Commons also, and plant this Land with Colonies to be brought hither out of* England, *as witness the number they have already sent hence for the Tobacco Island, and put Enemies in their places. And in effect this banishment, or other destructions of the common People, must follow the Resolution of extirpating the Catholick Religion, which is not to be effected, without the Massacring or Banishment of the Catholick Inhabitants.*

Declaration by the Catholic Ecclesiastical Congregation met at Clonmacnoise, December 1649, about shipping of Irish slaves to the 'Tobacco Island' (Barbados), with 'enemies' given their lands.

14. According to [John] Lingard, between 30,000 and 40,000.
15. On one occasion 1,000 Irish girls were abducted and sold in a slave market in Jamaica. ['I believe that some 60,000 Irish Catholics were sent in crowded ships to Barbados and the islands of America, such that those who did not die in the open remained in perpetual slavery.' – Thomas Quin s.j., *Archivium Hibernicum*, 1656. —Ed.]

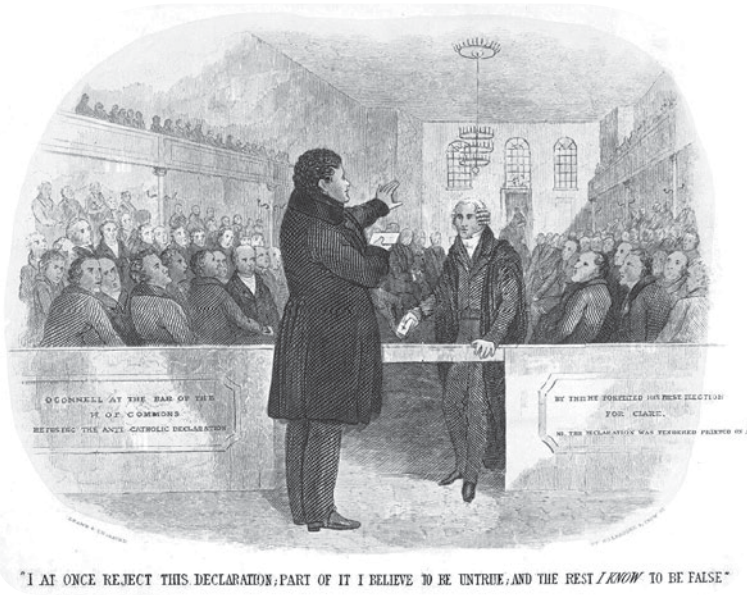
Sok volna még, mit állításaim bebizonyítására előhozhatnék, s miből talán még világosabban kitűnnék, hogy Irland rendkívüli szenvedései csak azon rendkívüli elnyomásnak tulajdoníthatók, mely alatt ezen ország századokig élt; de talán többet mondtam már, mint célomhoz szükséges vala, s mindenesetre eleget, hogy másokat e tárgyra figyelmessé tegyek: s berekesztésül még csak azon okokra kívánom figyelmeztetni olvasóimat, melyek miatt az angol kormány, minden iparkodásai mellett, e szerencsétlen állapoton még eddig nem segíthete, noha a törvények, melyek azt okozák, rég megszűntek; csak még egy tekintetet akarunk vetni a jövőbe: vajon nem derül-e egy szebb jövő e szerencsétlen hon felett?



A Pattern in Connemara, 1830s

There is much more I could bring up in support of my thesis – facts that would make it even clearer that the extraordinary misery this country is enduring lies in the astounding intensity of oppression it has suffered for centuries. However, I may have said more than was necessary to accomplish my objective and to make others aware of this subject. In closing, I want to remind the reader of the reasons why the English Government has failed to remedy the situation in spite of the efforts it has made, and even though the one-sided laws that had backed up the oppression are now long since obsolete. In effect, I want to join with the reader to look into the future and see if a better day may be dawning over the horizon.

Ancient Cross at Clonmacnoise, c. 1840



O'CONNELL REFUSING THE OATH OF SUPREMACY AFTER HIS ELECTION AS M.P. FOR CLARE IN 1828

PUBLISHER'S BACKGROUND NOTES

This first complete translation of *Poverty in Ireland* by Baron József Eötvös is intended as much for those who have no knowledge of Irish history as for those who have a deep knowledge of it. The following are publisher's notes, relying on (and containing extracts from) House of Commons documents and other contemporaneous publications, on historical matters referred to in Eötvös's text.

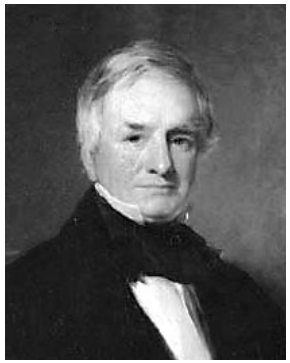
1829 Catholic Representation

The oratory of Daniel O'Connell in his campaign for Catholic emancipation had drawn the attention of continental Europeans, including József Eötvös, to conditions in Ireland. O'Connell had been elected as M.P. for County Clare in 1828, but could not take his seat in the Westminster Parliament as he refused to swear the Oath of Supremacy, which acknowledged the King as head of Church and State.

The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 allowed Catholics (notably O'Connell) to enter Parliament without swearing the Oath of Supremacy. This was a development of huge significance, but many Irish Catholics lost out by it. Previously, Irish Catholics had the right to vote if they were at least '40 shilling freeholders' – i.e. if they held a lease of land for a fixed period (the duration of one or more lives), and if the net production capability of this land (after rent etc. had been paid) was at least 40 shillings (or £2) per annum. Under the new law, a voter had to be a £10 freeholder, so the number of eligible voters (with a total Catholic population of 6,237,000 in 1831) was reduced from 191,666 to 19,264.[1] These newly disenfranchised Catholics were doubly affected by the change in law as they became less useful to landlords (and therefore less secure in their holdings) after they lost their vote. There was no secret ballot then, so

1. House of Commons figures, *Irish Reform Bill* debate, June 1832.

would facilitate the eviction and death of vast numbers of tenants.)


RICHARD GRIFFITH 1784-1878

By far the most interesting picture of Whiteboy activities, however, comes from an establishment Irish figure who would have had regular personal contact with the Whiteboy groups. This was Sir Richard Griffith who, as Boundary Commissioner in 1825, oversaw the precise fixing of the country's townland and parish boundaries. Later, from 1848 to 1864, as Commissioner for the General Survey and Valuation of Rateable Property in Ireland, he carried out the primary valuation of buildings and land of Ireland ('Griffith's Valuation') to determine Rate liability under the Poor Law Act. He was also responsible for the design and construction of roads in north-west Cork, in an area that had been a haven for Whiteboys. He had a residence in North Co. Cork at the time of the interview below, in which he answers questions put to him by the 1824 House of Commons Select Committee about his personal experience of Whiteboy activities:

'When you first went among them, had you any feelings of personal insecurity? —Never.

'Have you ever gone about armed amongst them? —Never.

'Is that the case with the middlemen of this district? —Some of the middle gentry go about armed, and some are attended by horse-police; I speak of the middle gentry; the higher order of gentry never go about armed; at least I have never met any who were.

'Do you think that altogether an imprudent precaution on the part of the middle gentry of whom you speak? —I think it may be very necessary for their protection; in general they are men who are obnoxious to the people, and they are more likely to be attacked than any other persons.

'Where is your residence in this district? —In the neighbourhood of Mallow.

'Is there any part of the district that has been more subject to disturbances than the spot in which your residence is fixed? —It is considered the most disturbed part of Ireland, and outrages took place within half a mile of my house.

'Is your house barred or bolted in the night in any particular manner? —No.

'Have you had your family there? —My family have resided there for upwards of a year.

'Have you had any fear of disturbance? —I have not.

…'Do you mean that you have a perfect sense of personal security in an open house?

—I have not the least fear; there was no system of robbery in the country; the apparent motives of attack were either political or revengeful, and consisted chiefly in burning corn-stacks and thatched houses, particularly those belonging to the better order of farmers or to the middle gentry who had committed some act obnoxious to the people; but I never considered myself in that light, and I have no apprehension in passing through that country in the middle of the night.

'Do you conceive that a stranger, for instance an English gentleman, travelling either from motives of curiosity or commercial speculation, would be in security or otherwise? —In perfect security.

…'You have drawn a great distinction between a person that has any thing to do with land and a person engaged in commerce and manufacture?

—A great one; a person engaged in commerce or manufacture is generally a favourite with the people.'

[*House of Commons report*, 1824, 230-233.]

Richard Griffith's house in Dublin (where he lived from 1835 until his death in 1878, and where Ireland's Valuation Office was first located) is at 2 Fitzwilliam Place. Today, it is the Embassy of Hungary in Ireland.