

FREE THOUGHTS

ON THE

MISCONCEPTION

OF THE

SUPERIORITY OF NATURAL ADVANTAGES

POSSESSED BY

This Country over England.

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Houses of the Oireachtas

FREE THOUGHTS,

IF there are any political axioms which will not admit of a doubt in this sceptical age, the following are of the number :

First, that the wealth of every free, well-governed country, depends on the amount of its natural and acquired advantages.

Secondly, that it is necessary to have a perfect knowledge of both, before it is possible to know what burdens any country can bear.

Woe to the Nation that loses sight of the Golden Rule so absolutely necessary to observe in every transaction of life! *Est modus in rebus.* All history confirms this truth, that the neglect of it has brought ruin on the greatest and most flourishing Empires.

I love

I love my Country, I hope, as well as most men in it, but I do not look on her with the same prejudiced eye that many of my countrymen do. National pride, when mis-placed, often does great mischief, as it renders us blind to her wants and defects, and makes us over-rate her ability, whilst pride of *the manhood and virtue* of native character, must ever be productive of the happiest effects. This it is which excites the brave Grisons, happy in their snowy mountains and their independance, to make a glorious stand against the mighty, all-grasping power of the French tyrants. “A freehold,” says Addison, “though it be but in the snow, will make the owner pleased with the possession, and stout in the defence of it.”

How often have I heard it asserted, that Ireland is possessed of far more natural advantages than her Sister Kingdom;—but that unfortunately, she did not know how to make a proper use of them. This, if I mistake not, has been already productive of bad consequences, and will, I fear, be attended with worse if we remain under the same unfortunate delusion. It is from a wish to prevent this, and to rescue my

Country

Country from an imputation of Boeotian stupidity, that I shall endeavour to shew shortly, but fairly and impartially, to the best of my judgment, the mis-conception on this matter :

First, as to climate, that the Irish climate is more temperate than the English, is universally acknowledged, as it is that the English climate is much drier and warmer than ours; and it is owing to those causes, that their wheat and pulse of every kind are better in general than what we raise. Even in England the Eastern part of it, owing to the same causes, produces better wheat than the Western part*.

Similar causes ever produce similar effects. The wheat raised in the South-west parts of Ireland, it is well known, is of an inferior quality to that which is produced in the dryer parts. Can there be a stronger proof, that even in our estimation, English wheat is better than our own, than that we get it at a considerable ex-

* Brownrig in his treatise on Salt says, that about thirty inches of water fall annually in the neighbourhood of Plymouth, and about twenty in the eastern part of England.

pence for seed? nor can this be attributed to any other cause than difference of climate; for there are several farms in different parts of Ireland, and some very near the Capital, as highly cultivated as any in England. Have we not been for above sixty years endeavouring in vain to raise Hops, an article which drains us annually of so large a sum? and to what other cause than the wetness of our climate can our failure be attributed? How unsuccessful have all the attempts made here not to depend on foreign seed for our Staple, in fact, our only manufacture, proved?—Are we not obliged to import, not only our garden-seeds, but most part of the artificial grass-seeds we use, from the wetness of our climate?

With respect to the Soil of the two countries, it is more difficult to speak with precision. Most of the low flat grounds in each, produce as rich herbage probably as any in Europe, but from England's containing in proportion more vale ground than Ireland, it has here an advantage in my opinion. With respect to the high grounds in each, there is no comparison, as every one must be sensible who has seen the hills in various parts

parts of England covered with rich crops of Sainfoin raised without the assistance of manure. Why it should not answer here I will not pretend to say, but that it has not in more than twenty places, and a variety of soils in which I have known it to be sown, I am certain. This beautiful grass has a vast advantage over broad clover, not only because it continues in the ground five or six times as long, but because it flourishes on ground that would not produce quarter of a crop of clover.

OF TURNIPS.

THE immense benefit which England derives from this most valuable root is incalculable, and no person who has paid the least attention to their growth in the sandy soils of England, will pretend that the few turnips raised here are any way comparable to them: Indeed we have very little of that ground in Ireland, and the root, (as has been justly observed by Mr. Young) is in most places very near the surface. This root would alone give a decided advantage to England over any country where it could not be cultivated with equal success from the nature of the soil.

From

From what has been said it by no means follows, that because the filter kingdom has been in some respects more favoured by nature, therefore agriculture should not flourish in Ireland; fortunately, we know from experience the contrary, and that no country in Europe has made so rapid a progress in it within these few years as Ireland—thanks to our corn laws and to the enlightened framers of them.

The remarks of Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations*, are surely very just, and are highly deserving our attention;—“*That in agriculture*
 “*the labour of the rich country is not always much*
 “*more productive than the labour of the poor, or*
 “*at least it is never so much more productive as it*
 “*commonly is in manufactures.*” And again,
 “*that in proportion as a greater share of the capital*
 “*of any country is employed in agriculture, the*
 “*greater would be the quantity of productive labour*
 “*which it puts into motion within the country, as*
 “*will likewise be the value which its employment*
 “*adds to the annual produce of the land and labour*
 “*of the society.*”

Notwithstanding

Notwithstanding the progress we have made, a great deal yet remains to be done ; for example : the Oats we export, particularly from our southern ports, is considered in general in England to be of a very indifferent quality, and inferior even to that which they get from the Baltic. Now, that cannot be owing to the wetness of our climate, for it is a grain little affected, if at all, as the more tender grains wheat and barley are, by the humidity of the air ; the remedy, therefore, is probably in our own power.

OF FISHERIES.

ABOUT twenty years ago we were made to believe that we had an inexhaustible mine of wealth in the different fisheries on our sea-coast, and large sums of the public money were applied to the encouragement of them, but, alas ! all our sanguine hopes turned out visionary, and the single pilchard fishery on the coast of Cornwall brings more money into England in one year than all our coast fisheries bring into this kingdom in ten years ; nay, we are obliged to import Swedish and Scotch herrings for the consumption of our poor.

That the south-west coast of this kingdom was frequented for a great part of last century, and the beginning of this, by immense shoals of pilchards and herrings is certain ; the remains of the edifices erected for curing them and extracting the oil are still extant, which shews, that at all times a plenty of fish on the coast has established fisheries, and must continue so to do whilst mankind are governed by a regard

regard to their own interest. The money laid out lately to encourage our fisheries was productive of the worst of consequences, by holding out premiums for perjury, and unfortunately for the morals of mankind, this is too often practised in other countries as well as in this.

OF THE COMMON FUEL OF IRELAND.

Next to food, fuel is the most essential article in every country in a northern climate, for without it food is of little use; but this is more particularly the case in Ireland, on account of potatoes being the principal food of our people, which compels them to make three fires every day—very different from the labouring poor of England, who live on bread. Turf, which formerly abounded in every part of Ireland, must now in several places be brought from a very considerable distance, many of the turf bogs having been worn out, and where that is the case, the poor cottager has nothing to depend upon to boil his potatoes but furze, which too frequently he cannot get to purchase, except at a very remote distance from his cabin. The consequence of this is, that his young children are in their early infancy taught to steal small bundles of furze from off the hedges, or wherever else they can get them, to boil their daily food, and it is much to be feared that those trifling and in some measure pardonable thefts often lay the foundation of their afterwards committing crimes which subject them to capital punishment, for every person must be sensible of the easy transition from small
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to great crimes. Even in those parts where turf bogs still abound, turf is a much more precarious fuel than coals, as we know from fatal experience, that in wet summers it cannot be properly saved; besides, it does not answer the purpose of coals for most of the different manufactures to which the latter are applied. That we have a few collieries is true, but how little the kingdom in general benefit by them I need not mention. On the other hand, the numerous coal mines in every part of England constitute the principal source of its astonishing wealth, by putting in motion the various and extensive manufactures of every kind which depend entirely on coals.

To contrast the metallic mines of the two countries would be too ridiculous, unless I was to bring into the account the idle tales with which the public were so long amused of our wonderful gold mine:—Are we then to repine, that a sister Kingdom, with which this Country is so closely connected, and I trust will ever remain so by the strongest bond that can unite two nations, that of mutual interest, enjoys far greater natural advantages, not only than Ireland, but than
any

any other country of the same extent on the face of the globe ; which I am convinced is the case, and that her acquired advantages are in proportion greater than those of any other country, as they must ever be, under a free Constitution, where property is held sacred ? Surely not. We have abundant reason to be thankful to Providence for the great blessings we enjoy ; the first and greatest which can be conferred on man is a temperate, wholesome climate, exempt from the extremes of heat and cold. No country in Europe can rival Ireland in this ; and but few in the fertility of her soil, which produces in great abundance all the necessaries of life. If it be true, that we have not made the most of our advantages, let it not be entirely attributed to the sloth or indolence of the natives. The Scotch have never been charged with either ; and it would be unjust if they were. Yet it is allowed in Scotland, that more country labour would be performed in several parts of England, for a given sum of money, though the price of day labour was dearer there than in Scotland. Whatever be the cause of this, it shews clearly, that the incorporation of countries is not always productive of the good consequences expected

pected from it. In fact, there is another cause which operated powerfully to the disadvantage of this kingdom ; and, when I mention the authority on which I found my opinion, I believe it cannot be questioned. *Mr. Pitt*, in his Speech in support of the Union, on the twenty-fourth of last month, *said that his country followed, for one hundred years, a very narrow policy with regard to Ireland, and that it manifested a very absurd jealousy, concerning the growth, produce and manufacture of this country ;* but he did not choose to mention that Ireland has been treated in a very different manner since 1782, the consequences of which we all know and feel.

God forbid that Irishmen should envy the inhabitants of the sister Kingdom the numerous superior advantages which they enjoy ! nor can they conceive that the very few they possess should be an object of envy to them. We are not, we cannot be, their rivals in trade, even if we had capitals sufficient for it. Nature has denied Ireland the principal raw materials ; and no art, no money can remedy this—even our fine cloathing wool is much inferior to the English ; and that it is likely to continue so, I could give strong reasons,

reasons, but that they would lead me too far. As to importing the raw materials from England, and working them up here by means of English capitals, that indeed would be a very extraordinary speculation, and which I suppose no English manufacturer ever thought of.

It is true, that there are some manufactures which are supplied with the raw material brought from a considerable distance, and a heavy expence of carriage, owing to particular circumstances. The silk of Italy is manufactured at Lyons. The wool of Scotland is worked up in Yorkshire; and, by the way, this is a pretty strong proof that Englishmen are not fond of quitting their own country, to engage in speculations in an adjoining country, though governed by the same Legislature.

The following remark of Adam Smith, was sent to the Printer's too late for insertion in the first Edition :

Compare, says he, the cultivation of the lands in the neighbourhood of any considerable town with that of those which lie at some distance from it, and you will easily satisfy yourself how much
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the country is benefitted by the commerce of the town. Vol. 2, page 156, *Dublin Edit.*

What comparison is there between the number of considerable towns in the sister Kingdom? No capital, however large, could make an adequate compensation for this great difference, as no capital could produce the materials which created the difference. The various rich manures peculiar to considerable towns, foot, soap ashes, bones, street dung, &c. This alone gives an incalculable advantage to the agriculture of the sister country.

FINIS.

Houses of the Oireachtas