

"The Irish Mother," April 19, 1849

The Irish Mother

"You will be obliged to dismiss that woman, she does her work so badly," said Capt. R. to the steward of the Sailor's Home, one day.

"I suppose I shall," answered the steward. "I took her in from pity."

"From pity? Who is she, and what is she?"

She is a poor Irish woman, just arrived in this county; her husband died a few months ago; and left her a widow, with six young children. She has left them in Ireland and come over here to find employment to earn enough, if possible, to bring them over; such is her story, and she seems honest enough.

"Well, show her how to do her work, and keep her awhile, till we know more about her."
She was modest, diffident, and retiring; little disposed to be communicative, and with little appearance of energy of character.

"You have left your children in Ireland, I understand?" said the Captain, approaching her.

"I *have*, all of them, the dear ones."

"How old are they?"

"The oldest little girl was thirteen and a half when I left her in care of them all, and the youngest, sweet one, was little more than two."

"How long since your husband died? and how have you supported them since?"

"My husband died about four months before I left Ireland, poor man, and left us in a little cottage and not half of a quarter acre of land; and the rent was twenty-five shillings a year. I put the land into potatoes and garden vegetables for the support of the children; but that was little, you see, sir, after paying the rent. I thought I should be obliged to take them to the poor house; so I says what I thought to the children; but Johnny says to me – that is the second one, dear boy – "Oh, dear mother, do not send us to the poor house, for ye see they will not let you come with us, and we shall be separated from you; and the white swelling is there, and many of the children dies; but do, dear mother, leave us here and to get along as well as we can, while you go to America; and it may be able to fetch us all over at last, if it be but only one at a time." And so the children were teasing (sic) me day and night to come to America; so I wrote a letter to my two sisters in New York, the one at service, the other married, for the loan of a few pounds to fetch me over; and they sent me six pounds; and I left the younger children asleep when I came away, for I knew, sir, if I parted from them awake, they would cry so after me, it would break my poor heart."

The Irish mother toiled on, after this conversation, for weeks and even months, doing her work better and remitting every cent of her wages, often in advance, to her children and receiving in return from them letters, from which we give a few extracts.

* * *“Dear Mother,— Soon after you left this, the landlord, seeing we could not pay the rent, took the best bed, and the bedstead, and the table, and the chairs, and left us only the blankets, and the straw on the ground: but I hope you will return him thanks; and his family in your next letter, for giving the house gratis to us, this present year.”

* * * Dear Mother,— The price of meal here is one shilling and sixpence, the worst of flour the same; in regard of the prices being so high, that we deferred to pay their demands, for rent, &c., which you had mentioned in your letter, until the next time you write. Catharine bought no shoes since you left home; in like manner she would want to buy some clothes for the children. Dear Mother we must buy the firing, too, for if we do be seen in the mountains, or in any other place, gathering sticks, we will be summoned. — Dear mother, I hope you will send for myself, that is Johnny, as soon as you can, if you think I would be of any benefit to you there.”

The mother, with her Irish heart, almost crushed with the thought, that although nearly a year had passed, not enough had been saved to pay the passage money of the first child; was about resolving to go back and starve with her children in Ireland. But by a good Providence, she was in the *Sailor's Home* — her case reached the ears of the Sailors. The distance from a sailor's ear to his heart is short; from his heart to his pocket, shorter. A subscription was started among the boarders, and raised at once sixty dollars; increased a few days afterwards, by another set of boarders, to one hundred and forty dollars; sufficient to provision and pay the passage of the whole six.

The 2d Sabbath in November, in the morning, one of the runners of the house made his appearance before the door with six thinly-clad, bare-headed and bare-footed Irish children. The meeting of mother and children was a meeting of Irish hearts; they laughed and cried all at once and all together. The first burst of joy over, Croton water, hair brush and comb, did all that a mother's love and ingenuity could do to improve the condition and appearance of the young voyagers. At evening she might be seen in her little room, by a cheerful light, and with a more cheerful heart, gazing into the face of one and then another of her sleeping children as they lay in pairs in different beds about the room.

“This is the first place I came to in America,” said she, “and this is the best place I have found yet, and this is the happiest hour I have seen. By the blessing of God and the kindness of the sailors, God bless them all their days, we are all here in America. The children want shoes and clothes, and the older ones employment. If we can get the latter we will soon have all the rest.”