

ON

SCHOOLS OF DESIGN

IN IRELAND:

A PAPER READ BEFORE

THE DUBLIN STATISTICAL SOCIETY:

BY JAMES MAC ADAM, JUN.

SECRETARY TO THE ROYAL FLAX IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY OF IRELAND.

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THIS society was established in November, 1847, for the purpose of promoting the study of Statistical and Economical Science. The meetings are held on the third Monday in each month, from November till June, inclusive, at 8, P. M. The business is transacted by members reading written communications on subjects of Statistical and Economical Science. No communication is read unless two members of the council certify that they consider it accordant with the rules and objects of the society. The reading of each paper, unless by express permission of the council previously obtained, is limited to half an hour.

Applications for leave to read papers should be made to the secretaries at least a *week* previous to the meeting.

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The subscription to the society is one pound entrance, and *ten shillings* per annum.

On Schools of Design in Ireland. By James Mac Adam, Jun. Esq., Secretary to the Royal Flax Improvement Society of Ireland.

The government having decided on establishing Schools of Ornamental Design in Ireland, and parliament having accordingly voted the sum of £1500 for the organization of such schools in Belfast, Dublin, and Cork, I conceive it to be of interest and importance, in connexion with the objects of this society, to bring before its consideration the effects that are likely to arise from the action of these institutions, both with respect to the developement of certain existing manufactures and trades, the establishment of others, the employment of our population, and the manner in which the tastes created and the information disseminated through these schools are calculated to exert an influence on different sections of the Irish people. Having been for some time past engaged, in concert with other individuals, in preparing for the organization of the Belfast school, some facts have come within my knowledge which I think it desirable to communicate to the society, trusting that the attention already bestowed on the subject by some of its members may lead to suggestions for the guidance of the schools in the direction which it may appear most judicious to give to their labours.

If we except the operations of the Royal Dublin Society, the formation of these schools is the first step that has been taken to educate and develope Irish artistic talent, and to suggest its practical adaptation to industrial matters. It becomes, therefore, of importance to consider the nature of the material to be acted upon, and the capacity which exists in our countrymen for such pursuits. In analysing the national character, the imaginative and imitative turn of its idiosyncrasy has been frequently dwelt upon. The legends, songs, poetic compositions, and superstitions of the people are strongly characteristic of this peculiar bent. To it many of the faults of the national character owe their origin, in the tendency to exaggeration and fiction; and, from the absence of any means of utilising these faculties, their action has retarded moral improvement. It is probable that one cause of the superiority of English artisans in manufactures, which, by their constant and

monotonous routine, require the assimilation of men to machines, is the comparatively slow action of their imaginative faculties, which enables them to abstract their minds from all but the occupation in which they are engaged, and by this concentration to conduct it in the most perfect and systematic manner. It will be found that the French and Italians, whose mental characteristics present many points of resemblance with the Irish, have not succeeded in the same degree in the prosecution of certain descriptions of manufacture as the Germans and Flemings—who are more nearly allied to our English neighbours—while they excel them in departments of industry where the imagination is brought into more vivid action. A French economist lately observed to me, that it was hopeless to expect the same proficiency from the factory operatives of his country that the English had attained to, and he founded his opinion on similar facts. In Ulster, where the Celtic and Saxon races can be compared, with reference to their comparative efficiency in the same factories, the result has always been in favour of the population of our eastern counties, descended from the settlers of the sister island, whose superiority over the native Irish of the western districts is fully recognised, after long and repeated trials, where every attention has been given to their industrial education from an early age.

I would therefore argue that, in the direction of Irish labour to manufacturing pursuits, those occupations should be chiefly sought where the imaginative and imitative faculties can be made of practical utility. With this view, I conceive schools of design to be of the last importance, since the course of instruction embraces all the rudiments of artistic education, proceeding by degrees to the direct application of the knowledge so attained to those manufactures and trades which are directly or indirectly dependent on ornament for their success. Ample materials undoubtedly exist in the Irish character, in a capacity for the practice of art, which, though at present lying dormant, is capable of extensive development. In the absence of local means of instruction in high art, it is surprising that so many Irishmen have so highly distinguished themselves in its various departments. The names of Maclise, Hogan, Barry, &c. are sufficiently suggestive of this. In their cases, fortuitous circumstances have often led to the choice of a career which has conferred honour on their country, and lasting distinction and advantage on themselves. Is there not then reason to hope, that with a systematised instruction placed within the reach of all classes, varied and ample sources of profit and employment may be opened to our countrymen in the wide field of practical designing, as well as in the narrower, if more distinguished paths of high art?

I shall now proceed to consider the manufactures and trades at present existing, which will directly benefit by the establishment of Schools of Design, and afterwards refer to the important results which may be expected indirectly to arise from them.

It is to the manufactures of Ulster that I chiefly allude, not only from their superior relative importance, but from my personal acquaintance with their details.

Our great staple, the linen trade, which is a means of livelihood to nearly three hundred thousand souls, while it is much influenced in all its branches by the ornamental manner in which its fabrics are prepared for the markets of the world, possesses two departments directly dependent on ornamental design for their existence—I allude to the manufacture of damasks, and that of linen and cambric woven and printed in patterns. The damask manufacture was introduced from Saxony, and by degrees has attained to such perfection, that the Irish fabrics now vie with, and even surpass, the finest productions of the Saxon loom, in excellence of quality, evenness of texture, purity of bleach, and elegance of design. Our finest damasks are now found on the tables of the nobility, of the Queen herself, and even of several European sovereigns. Large quantities have been made for the Emperor of Russia, the Kings of Sweden and Denmark, the ex-King of the French, and even for the King of Saxony. The latter fact affords important evidence of our progress, that we have thus furnished damasks to the ruler of that people, who successfully prosecuted this branch of industry long previous to the mounting of the first Irish loom. In the finer qualities of damask the want of local facilities for obtaining designs is of little moment, since the high prices obtained by the manufacturers for these beautiful fabrics enable them to pay liberal sums to the foreign designer, while, in many cases, the patterns are furnished by those who order the goods. But the case is widely different as regards the great bulk of the manufacture for general consumption. Cheapness being the great desideratum, the manufacturer cannot pay such sums for patterns as would unduly enhance the cost of production. Hence the existing patterns are either copies of old Saxon designs, in some cases forty years in use, or are furnished by persons employed by the manufacturers, and chosen rather from their converseance with the mechanical adaptation of the patterns, than from any knowledge of the principles of art. The result is, that the sale of these fabrics is almost confined to the British Islands, where the education of the eye not being in a very advanced state, the consumers are contented to take such patterns, provided they can obtain, at a cheap rate, evenly-woven and finely-bleached fabrics. The only export is to the United States, where similar causes influence the sale; but the export trade to the Continent is literally a blank. There our goods, superior to the Saxon in cheapness, durability, texture, and bleach, being miserably inferior in design, are rejected by the foreign consumer, whose eye, accustomed to seek for beauty in the plainest and most familiar articles of use, is offended by the want of novelty and elegance in the Irish article. If we were able to compete in this particular, and to add tasteful designs to the other good qualities of our damasks, we should soon distance all

foreign competitors. The consumption of these fabrics would be much increased on the Continent if more cheaply supplied, as the high price of the foreign damask induces an extensive use of plain linen for table cloths, which would, undoubtedly, be replaced by the legitimate article.

Considerable improvement has been, of late years, effected in the mechanical appliances for the printing of linens and cambrics. A gradual increase has consequently taken place in their sale, chiefly for export to the West Indies, South America, and the Mediterranean. Cambric handkerchiefs are printed in borders, and the same material is used for ladies' dresses, the coolness of the fabric being a great luxury in hot climates. In the markets referred to, the Irish manufacturer meets with formidable competition from the French and Swiss. This does not derive its force from any superiority of fabric; in this, as well as in all other branches of the linen manufacture, Ireland maintains her superiority. The fault of our goods lies in the patterns. Our Continental rivals send out a constant and varied succession of graceful designs, and as these fabrics are chiefly sold to the richer classes, novelty and taste are the great requisites. Consequently the new patterns are most ready of sale, often to the exclusion of the older ones. On the appearance of a new set of foreign patterns, samples are sent to the Irish manufacturers by their correspondents, that they may be imitated, and that the Irish fac-similes may appear with the least possible delay; but in the time required for the transmission of the specimens, for cutting the dies and blocks, printing the linen, and forwarding it to the American market, nearly a year elapses before they can appear. A new set of patterns has then probably arrived, and replaced the others in popular favour, and the old ones are sold with difficulty at a reduction, or even returned to the Irish manufacturer, who sustains a heavy loss. Now as Ireland can produce linens cheaper than any other country—a fact proved by the complete displacement of the foreign article in all neutral markets—it is clear that had we the facilities that our rivals possess of obtaining a succession of patterns, we should soon be masters of the market in the ornamental as in the plain fabrics.

The greater proportion of the linens exported to foreign countries is profusely ornamented with gaily-coloured paper bands, figured and decorated in a great variety of ways, frequently with tasteful coloured engravings; and the cost of these ornaments often amount to 2d. per yard on the value of the linen. Every market has its fancy in the style of decoration. For the United States one kind is necessary, for Mexico another, for Cuba a third, for the south of Europe a fourth, while, unless the linens are got up with attention to the caprice of the consumer and the custom of the market, they will not sell to advantage. The style frequently varies, so that the manufacturer has to change his ornaments continually, and, at considerable outlay, to secure the most striking and elegant novelties. London and Paris chiefly furnish these

ornaments, and a great number of persons are employed in their fabrication. Attempts have been made in Belfast to produce the ornaments, but although the manufacturer would prefer to purchase them at home, they are so very inelegant that as yet the sale is small. Altogether it is estimated that no less a sum than £80,000 is annually sent out of Ireland for the decorations required in the different departments of the linen manufacture.

The manufacture of sewed muslins has gradually assumed a great importance in the North of Ireland. The first establishment of this kind was formed at Donaghadee, in 1829. The neatness with which the female peasantry can execute this work, and the low price of their labour, have gradually tended to increase the trade, which now employs a vast number of females throughout the north and east of Ulster. There are upwards of forty houses in Belfast, either native manufacturers or agents for Scotch firms, engaged in this trade. The muslin is given out through agents with the patterns sketched upon it, and from 2s. to 6s. are paid to the workers by whom the sewing is executed, according to the quality of the work and the description of the article. Their earnings, although individually small, are very important as adding to the means of families. The great majority of the manufacturers are resident in Glasgow. One firm in that city constantly employs 15,000 to 16,000 persons in this country in the flowering of muslins, and pays £40,000 annually of wages. The entire number of persons employed cannot be estimated at less than 150,000 to 180,000 individuals, and the aggregate earnings reach £400,000 annually. The finished muslins, in the form of collars, robes, capes, &c. are exported to all parts of the world, and find also an extensive sale at home.

This trade is peculiarly dependant on design, since the patterns are continually varied, being changed every few weeks. The designs are procured in Paris and London, and since the revolution of February, some French designers have settled in Glasgow. A case lately occurred at the county of Antrim assizes, which illustrates the importance attached to their patterns, and the large sums paid to designers by the manufacturers. Under the "Act for Protecting the Copyright of Designs," an action was brought against an individual who was in the habit of pirating the patterns of Messrs. Brown of Glasgow, by going into the Irish workers' cottages, and copying those on which they were employed. A London witness stated in evidence, that Messrs. Brown paid him £200 per annum for occasionally furnishing them with novelties.

Were these designs procurable at Belfast, the entire worked-muslin trade would probably be concentrated there, as the Irish houses would then be able to meet their Scotch competitors. Great additional employment would thus be afforded, as all the processes before and after the flowering could be executed at Belfast, and a new source of wealth arise to the community by the profits on export.

In ornamental iron-work much might be done with facilities for procuring designs. In Belfast, machinery of the most finished kind is turned out, including steam-engines, iron steam-boats, flax spinning machines, &c. both for Irish use and for export to England, the Continent, Egypt, and other parts of the world. As yet little ornamental work has been executed; but this arises chiefly from the want of local designing, and the difficulty of obtaining patterns. An extensive ironfounding firm lately executed an order for the Pacha of Egypt, of thirty-six metal windows, richly ornamented, for his new palace at Cairo. The workmanship was highly creditable to Irish skill, but the design was furnished from Paris.

Among the minor branches of employment in Ireland, on which the action of schools of design would exert a salutary effect, may be mentioned paper staining, glass staining, bookbinding, engraving and lithography, stone-cutting and stucco work, building, cabinet work, and carving on wood and metal, house painting and upholstery, working in the precious metals, &c. Among the causes of the loss of the cotton printing trade, and the falling off of poplin weaving, the want of local designing doubtless occupies a prominent place.

In connexion with the efforts lately making towards the employment of females in their own cottages, at various kinds of needlework, worsted work, and embroidery, schools of design are of the last importance. Experience has abundantly proved that Irishwomen are peculiarly capable of executing any work requiring neatness and elegance. I have already instanced the muslin trade. A still stronger proof is afforded by the success of the lace manufacture established at Currahchase, in the county of Limerick. This was introduced by a benevolent lady, to employ some of the young women on her property. Beginning with five or six, the number has increased with the demand for the work, until upwards of fifty are now occupied. The sale is chiefly in London, and the Queen of the Belgians lately selected some lace veils, for which she paid a high price, and expressed great estimation of their beauty.

During the famine and consequent distress, great exertions were made by Irish ladies to introduce cottage employment for the women. Of necessity, attention has been chiefly given to the coarser kinds of work, and it has been found that the consumption of it does not keep pace with the facility of production. Large quantities of it have accumulated on the hands of the Ladies' Committees throughout Ireland, with the single exception of the Committee of the Ladies' Relief Association for Ireland,* and it

* This Committee early last year "brought to a close that department of their labours, which consisted in keeping open a Repository for the sale of the articles purchased by them from their correspondents. They now retain only a depot for such manufactures, as they are in the habit of requiring for the temporary purpose of distributing clothes to the most destitute and industrious districts, and also for the purpose of receiving patterns, transmit-

is evident that but slight reliance can be placed on such work as a means of permanent employment. I am strongly of opinion that a wider field exists in the manufacture of articles requiring taste and neatness in their execution. With care in the selection of patterns, fine needle work, lace work, muslin work, &c. might be extensively adopted. Irishwomen may ultimately compete with the French and Belgians in lace fabrics, their natural capacity being fully equal, and their industrial education easily accomplished.

The employment of females in Ireland is a matter of the most serious importance. Out of a population of 4,155,000 women, fully 3,000,000 are unemployed, of which 2,000,000 are capable of work. By *unemployed*, I mean for the greater part of the year, as excepting field labour at certain seasons, the time of the females in rural districts is necessarily spent in idleness. In the manufacturing districts of Ulster, except in times of commercial depression, the means of a family of the lower classes are generally in proportion to the numbers of its members. Above the early age of seven years, factory labour, cotton weaving, linen and cambric weaving, muslin working, &c. absorb the great mass of the women and lads. Each contributes his or her proportion towards the general fund; and, when the parents are properly conducted, the family is well clothed, well housed, and well fed. How different is the aspect of the poorer districts of the island. Without reference to the dearth of employment at many periods of the year for able-bodied men, there is no occupation whatever for women or children. The household duties are so trifling, that much time is perforce absolutely unemployed, and the younger members of the family are a heavy burden on their parents. Even when arrived at maturity, nothing but a cheerless future of hardships and misery presents itself before their eyes.

How important then must it be to provide profitable occupation for the females. How desirable, both for their moral and their physical improvement, that they should be busied in adding to the means of their families, at the same time that their minds are benefited by the wholesome discipline of active industry. If, therefore, by attention to the selection of the occupation, industrial education, and the adaptation of taste and elegance to the work on which they may be employed, a step towards this end can be made, a great object is accomplished.

It is further to be observed, that cottage work implies a revolution in domestic arrangements. Delicate kinds of work cannot be carried on with success, where there are dirty persons, soiled

ting orders, and, in some instances, the goods which are the results of those orders, to their proper destination, in consideration of the expense and difficulty experienced by the inhabitants of the remoter districts in forwarding the orders they have executed."—*Fifth Report of the Ladies' Relief Association for Ireland*, p. 3.

dresses, and filthy cabins. It is already noticed that, in the cottages of muslin workers, neatness and cleanliness of arrangement in the habitation, and tidiness of dress and person have been insensibly adopted.

The paramount importance of the practical application of art to manufactures, as influencing the employment of the masses in Ireland, has led me to devote the greater part of my space to this, the main object of the establishment of schools of design. At the same time, I would not undervalue their probable effects in encouraging the manifestation of genius in the higher walks of art. The course of instruction afforded in the schools, the lectures on the history of art, and the opportunities of study that will be afforded by the accompanying galleries of casts and drawings, are likely to wake into life the germs of a peculiar talent, which might have lain dormant in the absence of these facilities. We may fully expect that in future a larger quota will be furnished by Ireland to swell the ranks of the phalanx of art, and that a career of honorable distinction and solid advantage may be opened to many of our countrymen.

The institution of schools of design, the formation of collections of casts, the periodical exhibition of the productions of pupils in patterns for all kinds of manufacture, the delivery of public courses of lectures, cannot fail to create or increase among the population of our towns an appreciation of the beautiful. Of late there are many evidences in Ireland of the progress of taste, such as the formation of Art-Unions, the increased sale of pictures, engravings, and various objects of art, and the augmented circulation of art publications. It will be a duty incumbent on the managers of the schools, to devise means for rendering the course of instruction as widely available as possible, and to encourage the visits of the artisan and mechanic, since the creation of refined taste has a powerful effect in improving the moral condition of these classes.

With those classes of society whose circumstances permit them to minister to their personal gratifications, the education and direction of taste will arouse a desire for elegance in the architecture of their houses, in their furniture—in fact, in all the appliances, even the most ordinary and simple, of their everyday life. And this again will lead to the employment of numbers of artizans, who will undertake the supply of the required objects. Thus will instruction in art create a desire in the wealthier classes to surround themselves with what will gratify a refined taste, and the same instruction will enable the manufacturer to supply them with such articles of native production; and as the production of articles of luxury is that which employs the greatest proportion of skilled labour, so will its benefit be most widely felt in the community, rousing the mind of the producer to energy, and prompting the consumer to return an adequate recompense to his industrial skill.

In conclusion, whether we look upon the establishment of

Schools of Design in Ireland as regards their probable influence on our export trade, our successful competition with foreigners in internal consumption, the employment of our working population, the refining of the taste of the community at large, or the amelioration of their condition, we must feel considerable satisfaction at the prospect which is afforded, and are led to hope that these institutions will play a conspicuous part in the developement of those various industrial capabilities, which can alone insure the future progress of Ireland and the prosperity and happiness of her population.