INTRODUCTION.

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WHEN I fell in with the wish of the Council of the Cork Chamber of Commerce that I should write an introductory note to this book, I accepted the task fully realising that it would not be an easy one. The nearer that I came to it the more I recognised that I was right in that view, and especially when I read over again, as I had not done for some years, the remarkable summary of the industrial possibilities of the South which was published by a very distinguished predecessor of mine, Dr. W. K. Sullivan, in a Report of the Cork Industrial Exhibition of 1883. I cannot hope to rival the knowledge shown in that summary, and fortunately I have not to face such a problem, for Dr. Sullivan dealt with the entire question of the industries of the district, whilst my task is confined to a summary of the numerous articles prepared by specialists which the tireless labour of Mr. Coakley has secured for this volume.

As in other places the history of Commerce in Cork is best approached from the geographical point of view. Some probably mythological person is said to have remarked how good it was of Providence to cause great rivers to run through cities, and our river and its estuary form the first point of geographical importance in connection with our City. As to the lower harbour little need here be said, since it is fully dealt with in the body of the book. This pre-eminent claim it must always possess that it is the last important harbour on the West of Europe, that is to say, the first to be reached from the New World. There are Western harbours, no doubt, but these are what sailors, I understand, describe as "point-blank" harbours, and are, therefore, less favoured by them than ours which does not belong to that class. It is not so long ago, in fact, only thirty-four years, since the harbour practically ceased at Passage, and all ships of any size had to unload into lighters at that place before proceeding up the river. Under the persistent labours of successive Boards of Harbour Commissioners all this has been changed. Continuous dredging and other measures have so improved the condition of the river that ships drawing 20 feet of water and carrying cargoes of 10,000 tons can come up to the City wharves where their freights can be delivered to railways on either side of the river, and thus distributed all over the island. In order to appreciate the merits of Cork as a harbour one has only to compare it with some of the great ports on the other side of the Channel. Many other persons must, as the present writer has, in times of peace, have steamed up or down the harbour in one of the boats of the City of Cork Steam Packet Company, and in one or other of the same boats have entered or left the ports of London, Liverpool and Bristol. Those who have done so will scarcely require to be reminded how much the facilities which we possess, exceed those of at least the two latter of the ports mentioned above. In addition our harbour is admirably adapted for the subsidiary industries of ship and launch building and the like. Thus as a collecting and distributing centre for imports and exports, and as a centre for ship-building, Cork has natural advantages which must be obvious to all who visit it.

The second geographical point which we may take into consideration is the country around Cork. It is an essentially agricultural district, and the fact that
it is such must necessarily influence the character of the exports. Under the pressure of war necessities the land under tillage has considerably increased, and there is a possibility that the increase will continue after the war, but our county does not appear at any time to have been one of the greatest Irish centres for the growing of corn. Mr. Chart (an old student of the Queen's College, Cork), in his very admirable book "Ireland from the Union to Catholic Emancipation," tells us, "For the triennial period, 1797-1800, the average yearly export [of corn from Ireland] was 276,000 quarters; for that from 1827 to 1830 it reached the enormous total of 2,200,000 quarters. Even when the great war was over, the heavy duties on imported corn excluded the foreign product from British markets almost as effectually as if the seas had still been infested with predatory craft. Ireland, for the first time perhaps in her history, had turned to tillage on a large scale. The great corn-growing counties were Kildare, Carlow, Kilkenny, Queen's County, Tipperary and Limerick, and these produced such a quantity of grain that it was possible without palpable exaggeration to describe them as the 'granary of England.' This phrase occurs in a memorandum of 1812 on the possible improvement of inland navigation." He also informs us that "the best proof that the Irish corn trade was not solely the product of the bounties, is that it continued to increase long after they had been repealed, and did not receive its death-blow until the repeal of the Corn Laws flung open the British market to foreign corn." In the future, England, if she has learnt her lesson, will not neglect her "granary," and corn-growing may very probably again become a leading industry.

But grazing and the allied operations have been and still are the strong point of agriculture in the neighbourhood. Hence butter, milk, fowls, eggs, and above all other things cattle, are the exports of Cork, and these are dealt with in detail in the body of the book. In relation with these are the Preserved Food Industry, now carried on by Messrs. Crosse & Blackwell in Cork; the manufacture of condensed milk, margarine, and the like. With respect to the Cattle Trade I again turn to the pages of Mr. Chart's book. In the earlier part of the last century Ireland had an enormous cattle trade, but it was a Dead Meat trade. As Mr. Chart says, speaking of the time in question, "There is as yet little or no movement of live cattle. Indeed, except for districts close to the sea, this was out of the question, for cattle could not be driven many miles to and from a port without suffering great deterioration; and again, the ships of that day were not adapted to carrying beasts. The railway and the steamer are the great factors in the modern live cattle trade. But if the ox and the pig did not go out 'on the hoof,' they were exported in another form, being salted down and sent out in barrels to the amount of about 400,000 cwt. of salt beef and pork, and about 180,000 cwt. of bacon annually. As steamers came more and more into general use, the trade in preserved meat gradually dwindled away, and was replaced by that in live cattle." As we are well aware, all this is now changed, and again, to quote Mr. Chart, "There is the important difference that Irish cattle now leave the country alive, thus preventing the establishment of the numerous subsidiary industries which take their raw material from the by-products of the provision business. For instance when Cork was the centre of the salt-meat trade, tanners and glue manufacturers found it convenient to set up their works in a town where hides and hooves could be so easily and cheaply obtained. The Irish bullock, as he leaves the quay to-day is, as a rule, the rawest of raw material; he does not even represent the highest value attainable by living animals of his type. He is usually lean and 'unfinished,' and is frequently sent to grass for some months and fattened up for the table after his arrival in England. The cattle trade is conducted in the form which is least profitable to Ireland, but its immense volume more than makes up for its shortcomings in other respects. Still it is regrettable that
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this great national asset should not be developed to the highest advantage." As a matter of fact in the end of the 18th century over 100,000 cattle were slaughtered annually between August and December. Arthur Young estimates the annual value of the export of beef between 1755 and 1773 at £291,970. This trade continued right through the century. As late as 1833-5 Cork sent annually over 22,000 barrels of beef and pork to Newfoundland. Up to 1837 the city merchants held the Government contracts for the supply of beef to the Navy. After the famine however, the trade in provisions, especially in beef, began to decline, and in its place grew up the modern trade in live cattle.

If I may venture to make a suggestion, it seems to me that the most important question to those connected with agriculture, to traders, to financiers, to all of us in this district, is that of a Dead Meat Trade. Mr. Wibberley advises the system of continuous cropping to enable the Irish farmer to produce the bulk of his feeding stuffs during the entire year, and thus cope with the continuous demand at home, and with the supply of home-killed cattle. Should this Dead Meat Trade be thoroughly instituted and carried out, there must necessarily follow industries associated thereto, such as Tanning, Glue-making and the manufacture of many articles such as buttons and the like from horn. In association with them many subsidiary trades should spring up. In a word, as Mr. Chart points out, the Live Meat Trade is wasteful, unprogressive and fatal to subsidiary industries. It should be done away with and a Dead Meat Trade substituted for it as soon as possible, and if the present writer may make the suggestion, the arrangements for this alteration should not be postponed until the period "after the war," but should be tackled at once, so that when that period arrives everything may be ready for the change.

There is another matter germane to this question, namely food, which may here be mentioned, and that is the harvest of the sea. That there are absolutely unlimited possibilities of obtaining food from the rivers and sea may be learnt from the expert statement of Mr. Moreton Frewen. This is a direction in which we have done hardly anything, yet anyone who has, as I have had, the opportunity of studying the operations of fish hatcheries, cannot but realise the vast importance of the subject and the immense and profitable returns which follow from trifling expenditure. Here again is a matter which should be tackled now, and which should not be postponed till after the war.

To turn now from agricultural to industrial matters properly so called. No one wants to see the South of Ireland become a purely industrial district after the manner of the English Black Country, nor does it seem likely that it will do so, but a greater supply of industries we certainly require, for industry and agriculture are essential to one another. Operatives require sufficient food and at reasonable prices; this is offered to them by the proximity of agricultural districts, and, in return, the farmer is provided with a near and never-failing market. I neither propose to discuss minutely the character of the industries which we have nor those which are at present arising in our City: the importance of the former has been habitually underestimated in the North of Ireland and on the other side of the Channel, whilst the importance of the latter can hardly be over-estimated. To some extent these industries no doubt depend upon the raw materials supplied by the district; I mean such things as Preserved Foods, Tanned Leather, Down Quilts, and the like. So far as other objects of manufacture are concerned, Cork in large measure must depend on imports for its raw materials, as the Shipbuilding industry in Belfast depends, for there seems little likelihood of any considerable discoveries of a mineral character in our neighbourhood.

Whatever our industries may be, power is essential, and that question I propose now to deal with. This subject was somewhat fully discussed by the late President Sullivan in the Report already alluded to, but of course he wrote before
the time of electricity. That agent has altered many, though not all, the considerations contained in his Report. It is possible, but not probable, that before some future President sits down to write a similar introduction in time to come, other scientific discoveries may have equally upset the ideas of to-day. From the stand-point of our present knowledge there can be little doubt that the most economical thing for a city like Cork would be a Central Station supplying manufacturers with power and everyone with heat and light. Nothing could be more convenient nor even more economical than to have one's house warmed and one's cooking done by electricity, and I cannot but think that this great change will come, and come with considerable rapidity. But of course this station will require its power, and this brings us back to the position which was occupied at the time of the Report to which I have alluded. Electricity must be generated. How is the power for this purpose to be obtained? No one yet has solved the problem of harnessing the tides. I believe that it will be done some day, but we must set that aside. Had all the money which has been expended in destroying human life during this miserable war been collected and used for that purpose, it is possible that the scheme for supplying power, heat and light to the entire continent of Europe from the solar radiation in the Sahara might have been realised. But it is an idle dream at present, and we must come back to the old-time factors of water and coal. As regards the former, there is some exaggeration as to the amount of water power running to waste in this country. I believe that there is a certain amount of natural and unaltering water power which is running to waste, but it is far less than most people imagine. People go to Switzerland and see the streams there actuating turbines which run dynamos, and think that the same thing might happen in Ireland. Now the streams in Switzerland emanate from glaciers; their flow is at its highest when the weather is hottest, and, that being the tourist season, when the demand for electricity is at its highest. Practically our water supply in Ireland is too variable and intermittent to be made use of without artificial power. Anyone who looks every day at the condition of the River Lee near Wellington Bridge must be aware of that fact. There is, I imagine, an ample supply of water, if it were stored, for providing all the power necessary for Cork, but a large reservoir and piping arrangements would be required. I once visited the site and works of the Birmingham water supply, which comes from some 80 miles distance in Wales. The problem there was not so much how to supply Birmingham with the water, but how to prevent the River Wye, from the head-waters of which the Birmingham supply was taken, from running dry in the Summer. A large valley was turned into a reservoir, the village which it contained having previously been removed with its church, and even the bodies of the dead, and from this reservoir water is allowed to flow in sufficient quantities into the river Wye which now has a regular flow of estimated and invariable extent, instead of the variable one possessed by all rivers in their natural condition. If we desire to make use of our water supply we must deal with it on somewhat similar lines. It is not for one who is not a man of business to offer advice to those who are, but a proposition of this kind would seem to be one worthy of at least the consideration of financiers. Failing this we come back to coal. Now with regard to coal, I ask that the following may be noted. Dr. Sullivan wrote his report in 1883. He then called attention to the coal-fields of Ireland and their undeveloped condition. After thirty-five years they are still in precisely the same state; officials are still enquiring as to what can be done about them; can anything more clearly illustrate the neglect of such natural riches as we possess? In any case coal is not likely to become less costly than it was before the war, and the period of exhaustion of the coal-fields must arrive some day. Those who look ahead will therefore conclude that the idea of an invariable water supply such as might be constructed by engineers is a more lasting and
no doubt a more economical method of settling the question as to how the power required is to be obtained.

One last remark, and that in connection with the College over which I have the honour to preside. The business men of the South of Ireland will never make the fullest use of their advantages until they grasp the fact that the College is, amongst other things, intended to help them and able to do so. May I illustrate this by a personal experience? It is, I suppose, some five and twenty years, perhaps more, since I was talking to the Secretary of the Birmingham Gas Department on the subject of Producer Gas, at that time a new thing. He told me that he had never been able to secure satisfactory information on the subject until one day an American, connected with vast industries in his own country, came into the Gas office. In reply to the question as to Producer Gas, which my friend, in the hope of getting some information, put to everyone who came in, he drew from his pocket a pamphlet containing all the information that was then to be had on the subject. My friend asked him how he had obtained it. I desire to call special attention to his reply. He said, “I went to my local University and called on the Professor of Chemistry, and told him that a book was wanted on Producer Gas, and asked him what he considered would be the cost of such a book. When he had informed me, I told him that he should have a cheque for that amount as soon as the book was written. This is the book, and it is my book, and has never been put on the market.” This is the true path to success.

There are very few subjects, commercial or industrial, on which the business men of Cork require information which could not be got at the College, or got for them by the College. There is no one connected with the institution who would not feel glad and proud to obtain this information, but so far this fact does not seem to have been realised by the business men of the South of Ireland. There is one thing, however, to which the business men and others must see if they wish the College to be of the greatest possible advantage to them. They must see that their College is no longer hampered by connection with others in a Federal University. They must see that it is placed in an independent position as a distinct University. They at least can realise the difficulty of carrying on business in the midst of constant distractions, and can fully understand that the present writer, anxious though he is to do everything in his power for the district in which he lives, cannot but be greatly hampered in his work by having to spend some 30 days all in term time, in travelling to Dublin, for meetings of the National University.

I commend these observations to the business men, who will look at it from a business point of view, and will, I feel sure, see that from that point of view, the present position of things is intolerable and must be remedied.

Cork has gone through many vicissitudes; she is an ancient City; she has been harassed by foreign foes; she has in the past seen some of her most prosperous industries taxed to death; she has suffered at the hands of her own children; let us hope that better times are arising for her.

“Limerick was, Dublin is, Cork will be,
The greatest City of the three.”

So runs the old rhyme.

Let us make no comparisons between cities. Cork, I believe, has a great future before her. All that is necessary in order that she may realise it is that we should sink our differences and all pull together for the benefit of the City which we all love.