

THE FAMINE

Striding nearer every day,
Like a wolf in search of prey,
Comes the Famine on his way --

Through the dark hill, through the glen,
Over lawn, and moor, and fen,
Questing out the homes of men.

And a Voice cries overhead --
"Rend your hair -- the hot tears shed --
Ye shall starve for want of bread.

"Though your wail be long and loud,
Hope for nothing from the proud;
Dig the grave, and weave the shroud;

"Seek a place where ye may die --
Clench the teeth, and check the sigh --
Hope, but only hope on High.

"When the last hope fades in air,
To your hearts of grief and care,
Thus shall speak the fiend Despair:

'Cord and knife, and river deep,
Open paths for those who weep,
To a sweet and dreamless sleep.

'Though ye shun such thoughts at first,
When each hope you long have nurs'd,
Like a bubble shall have burst,

'Ye shall run to death, though He
Armed with double-terrors be;
Better death than misery.'"

'Tis a fearful sight to see,
Man, the equal and the free,
Kneeling at a Brother's knee;

When he knows a People's might,
Trained, directed, made unite,
Can do all things for their right.

Why then does he wail and weep?
Why does he supinely sleep,
And nor food nor vengeance reap?

'Tis not base and slavish fear
Makes him shun the sword and spear -
'Tis the Faith he holds so dear;

Faith, that turns a trustful eye
To the God that dwells on high,
In the bright and blessed sky.

But when thousands, day by day,
With the Famine pine away,
Will they own religion's sway?

Ah! ye mighty, ponder well;
Who its fearful flight can tell?

Men of wealth, in time be wise,
Lest they gather, with loud cries,
Round your well-fill'd granaries,

As the ravens, hunger hoarse,
Troop around the lifeless corpse
Of a fever-stricken horse.

Give the wretched who complain,
And their rage you will restrain
With your love, as with a chain.

Brother, life is but a span --
See thou dost what one man can --
Help a fainting fellow-man;

While the magnates of the land
On their gilded titles stand,
Be thou called the "Open Hand."

And, when life is ended here,
In another, higher sphere,
Voices thus shall greet your ear:

"Without fear to judgment wend --
Here, the wretched toiler's friend,
Tastes the joy that has no end."

Heremon
The Nation, Dublin, 7 March 1846