

Ireland MDCCCXXXVII

Charlotte Elizabeth

LETTER V.

COUNTY WESTMEATH.

Near Mullingar, July.

THIS almost central spot of Ireland, a centre of mournful attraction to me, was a principal object of my summer tour. After leaving Dublin, all that lay before me was unexplored ground, and every individual I could expect to meet, for some time, a stranger. With heartfelt regret I bade adieu to my hospitable friends in Dublin, and commenced the journey towards a beautifully retired spot in the heart of Westmeath, warmly invited where I was personally unknown. The canal was chosen, as offering a speedier and much more refreshing line of transit than the dusty roads. Accordingly, at nine in the morning, we English wanderers stepped into the boat, with a promise of being met, a stage short of Mullingar, and conveyed to the dwelling of our considerate entertainer. Many things concurred to render the moment of embarkation very depressing. You may judge whether my spirits received a cheering impulse when I discovered that, with the exception of the corner which I occupied, and one over against me, the long narrow cabin was entirely filled with priests, bound, as it appeared for Maynooth. Some especial work had called them to Dublin, I suppose ; and this goodly freight of eleven was returning to college. None of them had the appearance of students ; all were evidently men of some standing in their vocation ; and, prejudice of every kind apart, I regretted that habit of studying countenances which has from childhood made me a physiognomist, in spite of myself. Whether some untoward occurrence had called the darker passions into exercise, or whether an instinctive dislike of their company occasioned it, I know not ; but looks more ominous of ill I never encountered, than from under the slouched hats and bent brows of my fellow-voyagers, during the three hours that I was pent up in their society. W., preferring the pleasant look-out from the open boat, soon left me to enjoy alone my singular privilege singular in several respects, for I had in the portmanteau at my feet a great folio of Foxe's Acts and Monuments, in my pocket Dr. Newland's cutting exposé of the antisciptural Education Board, and on my lap the plants that I had brought from the top of Vinegar Hill.

Fancying myself in the Holy Inquisition, I could not but think how it would fare with me had all these silent witnesses been produced, and their testimony received ; nor did it require any great stretch of imagination to suppose such a juncture. Had I been a man, openly observing them and their country, asking information or taking notes, I can readily imagine how bland, how courteous, how frank and agreeable the gentlemen around me would have become ; but a female plainly attired, accompanied only by a school-boy, and giving no token of reverential homage to ' the clergy,' was not calculated to induce any disguise on their part. Glances of stern displeasure, quite unprovoked, frequently crossed my view, as I took a peep towards the opposite windows. The conversation was low, and much of it in Irish, as W., who knows a little of the language, informed me. I cannot say that, with the exception of one elderly man, who looked mild and thoughtful, and said very little, there was a face that I could have wished to see again. Yet some of them were very handsome men, and all had a most gentlemanly manner and demeanour. Each was habited in black—good broadcloth it appeared, with a fresh gloss on it ; each had the distinguishing badge of a Romish priest, the broad-hemmed collar of white lawn turned down, about two inches in depth, over the upper edge of his black stock ; two had clerical slouched hats, and one of these wore the habit of some monastic order, a coat rather loose, with exceedingly wide sleeves, the cuffs of which folded one over another as he sat with closed hands.

I felt as if under the influence of an uneasy dream : I strove to pray, and did pray for these destroyers of their own souls, and of the souls of the poor. I thought of our blessed Reformers, every one of whom had been as they, before the Holy Spirit enlightened their darkness ; I thought of Nolan and others, actually brought up among those very individuals, yet now preaching the faith which once they destroyed. These recollections encouraged the secret prayer, but no effort would dispel the gloom that overhung me as I realized the presence of the very priests of Rome ; contrasting, as I could not help doing, their expensive attire, and the look alike of high feeding and high-mindedness, with the penury, the privations, the deep depression, to which their wicked machinations had reduced the dear servants of Christ, the faithful, devoted ministers of the Irish Church. Had they assumed an aspect less dark and haughty, I might not have felt these impressions with equal force ; but the reality of the case could not have been affected by any externals ; and miserably uncomfortable as it made me, I rejoiced that it was not my lot to be imposed on by the lamb's face, so easily assumed at the dragon's will. Knowing as I do what Popery is, why should I desire to behold her masked ?

When the boat approached Maynooth, a general preparation for paying the fares was made. Each drew forth his money, to be in readiness for the expected demand. The silver counted out, and gathered together on the narrow table, was far from diverting my thoughts into a pleasanter channel : they sickened with two-fold pain, as I involuntarily reverted to the source of that income. Oh, what a tissue of abominations had been spread before those men in the confessional ! How slightly, how treacherously, had the desperate hurt of the daughter of their people been healed by the deceptive “ Go in peace.” [1] I thought of the poor, despised immortals, for whose soul no man cares of the poverty-stricken creature who, having with difficulty contrived to scrape together the stipulated sum, though but of a few pence, goes and barter it for a lie that leaves his former sins unatoned for, unrepented of, while it encourages him to the commission of more. I seemed more distinctly than ever to see that fearful item in the catalogue of great Babylon's merchandize, (Rev. xviii. 13,) “ *and souls of men ;* ” and yet again I prayed that I never might be permitted to fall into the snare of seeming to consent to, or to connive at, or to tolerate, any scheme whatever that would in its operation leave a single soul for a single day under the power of that mystery of iniquity whereof the men around me were the sworn, the active agents.

A smart jar, as we touched the pier, gave the welcome signal of release. I sat next the entrance, and as they severally brushed past me, and stooped to avail themselves of the low, narrow doorway, I did indeed breathe over each a prayer from my inmost heart, that God would convert him from the deadly error of his way. I felt a pang too of remorse for not having attempted to win them to converse on a subject that might have laid the foundation of an answer to that prayer ; but, all things considered, it was really not possible. At the same time the problem appeared more inexplicable than ever, how men of learning, both human and divine, and in other instances evidently desiring to advance the Redeemer's kingdom, could pass hours on the road, yea, within the very walls of that Maynooth, and carefully avoid saying a word that might tend to the salvation of its deluded guilty inmates ; and even bargain with a more zealous companion for a silence that was pain, grief, and conscious guilt to his spirit. From all false charity and expediency-loving unfaithfulness, good Lord deliver me !

Disburdened of our priestly freight, the boat sped lightly on. I just sent a parting glance after them, as they wound, a long black line, upon the innocent green sod towards the great curse of Ireland, the foul blot of England's unrighteous legislation—Maynooth : then, without being tempted even to look upon its outline, I turned to the opposite bank, and breathed freely. We were passing through a flat country, an extent of bog frequently enclosing us on either hand, no otherwise diversified than by the clamps, or as you would call them, stacks of black turf, carefully piled up to dry and harden in the sun ; and by the abodes of the turf-cutters, which being more of excavations than buildings, and roofed over with luxuriant

vegetation, presented the appearance of hillocks rather than of human habitations. I was not, however, travelling in search of the picturesque, though, had I been so, there was a charm in the novelty, the lonesomeness, the interminable extent, to reconcile me to that ocean of swarthy moor, whence, in the far distance, the peak of some lofty mountain seemed to rise, like a rock amid the waves. But other associations occupied my mind : to me, the dark desert was a field white unto the harvest. I knew that, unattractive as is its aspect, peat soil is one of the richest loams ; for the most luxuriant garden I had ever possessed was a reclaimed acre of that very bog. Yet had a stranger totally unacquainted with its properties been told that the dreary monotonous waste around him would afford a more promising field for agricultural enterprise than any other land that we had yet looked upon, he would probably have returned an incredulous smile. Even so, I thought, it is with regard to the forlorn, the squalid, the half-civilized objects now moving upon its surface. Prejudice, building on mere externals of character and condition, repels the plea that would encourage to a nobler experiment than that of reclaiming bog-land. Not only among the gentry of England, but among those of Ireland too, does this erroneous impression prevail. The attempt has never been fairly made ; therefore it is concluded to be hopeless. The person who, twenty years ago should have asserted that it was practicable to lay down an iron road from London to Liverpool, and to travel the distance in eight hours, without animal assistance, would not have been regarded as a more chimerical projector than he is who says that the turbulent Irish papist, employed in cutting turf from a bog, may himself be as effectually reclaimed, improved, and rendered fruitful in all good things as the bog itself frequently is. Yet the transit to Liverpool, under the circumstances mentioned, is no longer matter of conjecture or experiment, but will in a few months be an every-day occurrence. Alas, that such daring enterprise, such unwearied labour, such a prodigality of outlay should be eagerly brought to bear on a matter of commercial improvement and individual convenience, while all are withheld from the nobler essay of conferring present happiness and opening the gate of eternal life to the vast population of this distracted, guilty land ! To drain away the black stagnations of error and bigotry, to break up the stubborn spirit beneath the gospel plough, to sow the seed of divine truth, and lay down the enclosures of equitable restraint, and build the shelter that poverty and feebleness require is all this more impracticable than it was to bid yonder little village where they are waiting with fresh horses for our boat, rise and flourish on a tract of this extensive bog ? It is alike a libel on human nature and an insult to the Most High God to assert it.

Such were my imaginings, as I leaned upon the open window, and met the smiles of innumerable lovely flowers that overhung either edge of the canal. Occasionally a party of children whose bright merry looks contrasted strangely with the filthy tatters that scarcely veiled their light forms, would start off in a race along the side, encouraged by the halfpence that we flung in their path. One little fellow, apparently not five years old, exhibited a striking specimen of Irish energy and resolution, and reaped a proportionable reward. It was pleasant to think that the few pence so sportively earned by the poor children would help to eke out the wretched family meal. I longed to build a school on the bog, though it had been but by hollowing out a clamp of turf, and to gather these dear little lambs, and lead them to Jesus. My heart perhaps expanded more widely from the painful contraction that it had suffered during the earlier part of the day, retaining too the vivid impression of those hours. Certes, whatever else my plan of improvement might leave on the bog, Maynooth should be fairly drained out of it.

We were, of course, ascending from the level of the sea, and at every lock we had to rise. I was in the mood to take every thing in the way of an illustration, and the beautiful, imposing process by which the water obtains its level, under such circumstances furnished another type. The partition which separates the two classes in this country is altogether an artificial, an unnatural one. It raises the one too high, and depresses the other too low. Remove the foreign influence, by first breaking its compact force and then fairly turning it away, and though you may provoke a terrible splashing, with no small noise and commotion,

and a few thumps, perhaps, against the wall, you will soon be overpaid for your trouble and annoyance by the delightfully calm and united flow of the level stream. This, this is the true “ meeting of the waters.”

When the storms that we feel in this rude world should cease,
And our hearts like these waters flow mingled in peace.

God grant it ! I will never cease praying for it while I live ; nor ever cease hoping while I can pray. Take away Popery, and Ireland as she ought to be will stand out in all the beauty that is now shrouded in corruption ; all the capabilities that are now perverted to the very worst purposes. Bring to the Lord the offering of this rescued people : and see whether he would not open the windows of heaven and pour us out a blessing that there should not be room enough to receive it. [2]

The higher we advanced, the more striking was the aspect of the water. I looked down, and traced to their very roots the long green stalks of the aquatic plants that gave to its surface the appearance of a field rather than that of a stream, except where the constant passage of the boats kept a clear track open. The water was not merely transparent, it possessed a gleam resembling that of a brilliant topaz. The sunshine glanced back from its bed with a softened lustre ; and the tinge must have been from that reflection, since the liquid itself is colourless as the purest crystal. Do you know whence that water comes ? From Lough Ouel, the spot that I so long, yet dread, to visit ; the scene of the heaviest calamity that ever wrung my bosom ; where the sun that gladdened my early years, and brightened a darker period of existence, went down at noon. The hundred springs of Lough Ouel supply the waters that cover 1600 acres where they rise, forming the lake ; and from them alone is derived the fine stream that carries the traffic of Westmeath to Dublin.

The bridge of Downs, where we found the carriage waiting for us, is only a landing-place. Our way then lay across a tract of bog, sufficiently dreary, whence it issued on pretty cross roads ; and these led us to one of the finest demesnes possible. Lands reclaimed, planted, cultivated, and sprinkled with decent cabins, told well for the proprietor of the soil ; a yet fairer testimony was afforded when on approaching the park-gate a whole swarm of healthy, well-clad children issued from the grounds. The school-house I did not see ; but the happy intelligent looks of the little ones, among whom were mere infants, gave promise of a rich treat in store for me,—nor was I disappointed. The mansion is spacious ; a fine entrance hall always impresses me in favour of a house ; and this was further beautified by the inexpressible charm of an Irish welcome. Even just within the door I was met by the lady of this fine estate, who with all the buoyancy of manner that bespeaks the active energy of a mind for many years devoted to works of benevolent usefulness, and all the graceful cordiality that wins at once affection and respect, received me not with the formal courtesy due to a stranger guest, but with the warm embrace of maternal affection best calculated to soothe a spirit at that time unavoidably wounded. For I ought to tell you, as an instance of the feeling so honourable to the Irish character, that I was invited to make a stay in this house expressly because of its proximity to Mullingar, and the facilities enjoyed by its kind owner for gratifying my wish to explore the neighbourhood. If any person does not love the Irish as I do, it is simply and solely because he does not know the Irish as I do.

Mrs. S. has taken care to fortify her house, living as she does in the heart of a very disturbed country. If you ask for a sketch of her fortifications, it is soon given, without the aid of pencil or compasses. Her body guard is composed of a large number of those same turbulent Paddies, constantly engaged by day in various kinds of labour, on fair wages, whose cabins are often brightened and their hearts cheered by her benevolent attentions. Near the entrance by which an assailing party would probably approach, are three fortresses in the shape of exceedingly elegant little cottages, mantled with roses and honey-suckle, and

garrisoned with a formidable troop in three divisions, of which the most effective, I should think, comprises warriors and amazons between the ages of three and eight years. Nothing could exceed the spirit and celerity with which this respectable corps went through their exercises, under the command of their smiling captain, Miss S. and the war-song which they lustily chaunted at the pitch of their voices, from the pages of Watts, would at least have daunted their fathers and elder brothers from prosecuting any hostile design. The other detachments were formed of older boys and girls, most of them promoted in course of service from the light infantry battalion.

These schools were of many years standing ; seeing the Bible in general and evidently constant use, I asked Mrs. S. how the priest liked her plan. She replied, smiling, Not much, she believed ; but so long as the parents and children were agreed as to their coming, she made no further inquiry. In fact, the greater number of active young labourers on the property were educated by her ; and the bare idea of any advantage being taken of the lonely situation of the house, and the very small proportion of male inhabitants now occupying it, excites a laugh of playful derision. Mindful of my adventure at Temple-shanbo, I requested to be introduced to the watch dogs ; and was gratified by being allowed to pat a most venerable specimen of a superannuated Dane, toothless, and just able to obey the kind summons that called him to the hall door. “ But surely you have others,” said I, after duly noticing the good-tempered animal. “ No,” replied Miss S. “ Mamma is not fond of pet dogs.” “ But for protection”—“ Against what ? we have nothing to be afraid of here.” In fact, when crossing a long corridor late that night, to leave a message with W., I found the windows entirely unfastened, no shutters closed, nor even a sash bolted down, in a place where I could myself have scaled them, without the help of a ladder, by means of the portico. The circumstance brought home to my mind the peculiarities of my dear Wexford friends’ situation. As yet, open war is not declared against the landlords, but the Protestant clergy are doomed to destruction. No extent of benevolence, no claim on the gratitude of their priest-led neighbours, can obtain for them remission of that deadly sin, the preaching of the gospel of Christ. A restraining hand is indeed laid on the fierceness of man’s wrath, and the blessed work of giving scriptural instruction to the children is no doubt a powerful means, overruled for their defence : but the menace is perpetually conveyed, the sanguinary intimation given, and hostile demonstrations made, for the avowed purpose of silencing and expelling all preachers of righteousness.

I must not here say too much of what is exclusively personal. I have visited the two spots, the lake and the church-yard, and have gathered from many sources all the sad particulars that I was in quest of. I could not have believed that after a lapse of nine years, an event so unhappily common as a drowning on that most fatal, most lovely lake could be remembered, and spoken of with such vivid interest, by all classes. Yet so it is. I have, as an unconcerned stranger, introduced the subject while purchasing articles in the shops of the neat little town, and have invariably been told some touching incidents connected with the tale, or witnessed some burst of feeling, some simple but eloquent testimony to the love that he never failed to attract during his life, and the heart-felt sorrow excited by the sad spectacle, that in all the solemn pomp of military magnificence wound its way through these streets to yonder burying ground. It seems as though the parting shot still reverberated through their habitations ; so very distinct is their recollection of it all. And when the fact was betrayed, that no uninterested stranger was before them, the sympathy expressed assumed a character of tenderness that did not surprise, though it sweetly soothed me : for they are Irish.

Here I must give you an instance illustrative of the spontaneous expression of real, practical sympathy, which occurred at the time. When the event was witnessed from the shore, when the little boat upset, and the suffocating waters received their prey, a boy was dispatched for instant medical succour. On the road he was met by a gentleman driving a gig, who demanded the cause of his frantic haste, to expedite which he had thrown off his jacket.

“ Don’t stop me,” cried the lad, “ an officer is drowning in the lake, I am going for a doctor.” The gentleman sprang from his gig, released the horse in a moment from the heavier part of the harness, and seizing the boy, threw him across the animal, exclaiming, “ Mount, mount and gallop.” He was obeyed, and remained by his gig in the road until the return of the stranger to whom he had thus nobly entrusted a valuable horse, in the pure impulse of a benevolent and compassionate heart.

Lough Ouel is a lovely murderer. The golden gleam that struck me in the canal, is here in double beauty : and such is the exquisite purity of the water, such the pavement of pebbles beneath, that I was assured the depth of ten feet made no perceptible difference from that of two, where I stood. Even the disturbance of the conflict with the king of terrors did not obscure the crystal beauty of the element : the man who, alas too late ! drew him to the surface, told me this : and many a corroborative voice confirmed it. Strange, that from so many dreadful battlefields he should have come forth, a conqueror and unhurt, to fall at last under the destroying power of an element so soft and sweet as is the water of this lake, surrounded by all that can convey to the mind an image of perfect tranquillity and repose. Lough Ouel is three miles in length, and in breadth about one. Its gently undulating outline leads the eye to banks that rise with a gradual swell, slightly wooded. There are several little islands rising from the water of an emerald green, and crested with tall feathery young trees. I marked them well : for by their bearings I was directed to trace the precise spot. A young peasant, who as a boy had witnessed the event, most kindly offered to row me to it ; but I could not have borne that. It was enough to stand upon the very place where the dear lifeless body was landed, and to look out and to bless God for his restraining grace. I had always dreaded the prevalence of bitterly rebellious feelings, whenever I should be permitted to visit that scene ; but never was my spirit more completely bowed in resignation, submission, and a soothing conviction that it was well. The beautiful Lough, against which I had cherished so deep an enmity, looked like a friend that had gently conveyed him to his Father’s house : it reflected the face of heaven on its bosom, and spoke sweet peace to my mind. Before leaving it, I dipped my hand, and tasted its waters ; they were sweet and refreshing as the purest springs could make them. It was a token of reconciliation : I felt it so, and departed in peace.

The church-yard was a sorer trial ; and it was encountered first. Yet there, too, alleviations were found singularly chiming in with the peculiar trains of thought that belong to his memory.

He had been a soldier from his boyhood, and died in the midst of his routine of military duty. It happened that on the morning of my sorrowful visit, a soldier’s wedding occasioned the church to be opened, and while struggling with the first intolerable agony that almost prostrated me on the grave, I was joined by the good clergyman who buried him, and afterwards by the sexton. The latter told me that being himself an old soldier, he had taken care to lay all the military whom he had buried in a close file ; so that no others but officers and their families were there ; and what touched my feelings more nearly, the graves could not be broken up while the church stood where it does. Another circumstance you will understand, if you remember how peculiarly I have from infancy associated the sweet flower of May with him, who was born in the middle of that month. The church-yard of Mullingar is, in one part, a thicket of hawthorn trees ; and every summer gust during their show, must strew his resting-place with the blossoms. These are trifling matters, but they had their effect ; and I am not afraid to bless God for all that helped me to trace a drop of honey in that very bitter cup. I spoke long and earnestly to all who had any hand in the closing scenes, particularly to the old sexton, and to those whose fruitless efforts on the lake I could so well appreciate. God grant that none of those words may ever rise up in the judgment against them !

With the true delicacy that enhances every act of kindness here conferred, I was allowed to enjoy the sad satisfaction of this visit unaccompanied, save by one who had no difficulty in recalling and pointing out to me many things that had made a deeper impression on his then infant mind, from the awful close of his sojourn here, the sudden departure of the widow and the fatherless from a place where they had passed so many joyous hours, and anticipated many more. A carriage was placed at my command for the day, and it was with no small thankfulness that I had to acknowledge the refreshment afforded by visits to the families of a truly pious officer, and a devoted clergyman, both personally strangers until then : both eager to pour the sweetest balm of Christian sympathy into the re-opened wounds that will never fully close until the spirit be unclothed of its earthly tabernacle. How precious are such palm-trees and wells in the desert.

Returning to my dear kind friends at G——, I was told that the next morning must see us on an excursion to the banks of Lough Belvidere ; and thither we went in the phaeton, through shady little cross roads, terminating at length in a most noble demesne, through which we drove to one of those stately old-fashioned mansions, which, particularly when, as in this instance, they are in a disfurnished dilapidated state, irresistibly lead back the mind to the olden times, and throw around it a sort of spell dissimilar from every other charm. Ascending a wide flight of steps, we found ourselves in a spacious hall, with liberty to wander into the rooms that on all sides lay open to our view. The estate has recently been purchased by a wealthy and titled gentleman, who is about to do ample justice to its long-neglected beauties. A man of business-like appearance was taking a survey of the dwelling ; and at his elbow was a Romish priest of most rough and unprepossessing aspect. Go where we would, we were sure to find these two engaged in earnest conversation ; and there seemed some fatality in our continually blundering into whatever apartment they had taken possession of. It was as though I had been doomed never to enjoy any thing Irish, without having Ireland's evil genius perpetually before me, to throw a darkening shadow on what is so lovely and fair.

Our object in entering the house was to survey the beautiful prospect from the various windows. This is a splendid lake, much larger than Lough Ouel, and is remarkable for the constant swell, that even in the calmest weather appears upon its waters. The banks in most parts are steep, richly wooded, and in some places even presenting headlands and promontories of rock. It is indeed a magnificent piece of water, and the neglected state of the extensive grounds and house long uninhabited, adds a charm to what is in itself so lovely. The recommendation of wildness, however, will soon give place to that of improved culture, under the direction of its present proprietor ; leaving me to rejoice that I beheld it as it now is.

Quitting this enchanting spot, we proceeded to the adjoining territory. Here a noble gateway excluded instead of admitting us. We were obliged to leave the carriage outside, and to scramble over heaps of stones, the fragments of its original decorations, and to make our way through a thicket, overtopped by huge trees, until we reached a smaller, but more imposingly situated house. It stands perched on the crest of a hill, which, even from the hall door, sweeps down by a most rapid descent to the water's edge. This intervening declivity presents the appearance of a very fine lawn ; and on the right hand side lies a garden at a great depth below. If these two seats, Belvidere and Rochefort, lay open to each other's view, as naturally they would do, the prospect from either would rival any thing I have yet seen of picturesque and varied beauty ; but alas ! a barrier exists, not so displeasing to the eye as distressing to the mind. Two brothers, it seems, owned the estates, I know not how long since ; who in the unnatural warfare of a fierce litigious contest, became so hardened in enmity that each impaired the beauty of his own portion by endeavouring as much as possible to interrupt and mar the other's view. A range of stabling, so built as to present the aspect of a venerable ruin on the owner's side, formed a great eye-sore to the brother : and the various schemes of retaliation devised by these unhappy combatants, for mutual annoyance, have effected all that

man can do to impair the work of God. The property is now in other hands ; and we may hope to see these humiliating monuments of wrath and strife removed. Of all the strange things in this perplexing world nothing appears to me more unaccountable than that there should be a lack of love between brothers and sisters. My thoughts hovered more fondly than ever around the scene of yesterday's pilgrimage ; and once more I blessed the Lord that from the cradle to that grave no root of bitterness had sprung up to alloy the sweets of fraternal affection and confidence, or that oneness of interest and feeling that could enjoy no unshared prosperity, or allow any unanticipated grief.

Our homeward drive shewed me to greater advantage the fine grounds encompassing this mansion. Fifty-two acres of rich land are laid out in groves, gardens, lawns, and a miniature lake, fringed with stately trees. The most singular feature of the place, and to me perhaps the most attractive, is what they call the grass garden. It is a long slip of land, lying beside the pretty stream that supplies the aforesaid pretty lake, covered with that rich verdure in which the emerald isle proudly defies competition: saving that a multitude of little beds are cut out in various directions, and so arranged that the choicest, loveliest, most fragrant flowers seem to grow up from the very grass itself ; with a perfect grove of dark trees and aromatic shrubs overhanging it on one side, while on the other ripples the stream, beyond which rises another grove ; the grass garden is a bewitching spot. These Irish are sad voluptuaries ; give them but a plot of ground and time, they will make such a paradise of sweets, and that with so little of the artificial about it, that you are tempted, when once within its precincts, to forget your cares, your very duties in the bustling world, and to imagine you were invested with the privilege of our first father, ere his sin had changed the beauty of this world and his own into corruption. You are in a garden where the creature's hand has but followed the track of creative magnificence ; and you feel as though all your business with this earth was now only to dress and to keep it, and to enjoy its enchanting beauties.

LETTER VI.

Westmeath To Down.

Newry, July.

IN spite of all remonstrances, our dear hospitable entertainer *would* rise at an unconscionably early hour to dispense with her own kind hands the plentiful breakfast prepared ; and then, freighting her carriage with abundance of provision for our day's journey, dismissed us with a farewell even more tenderly affectionate than her first welcome had been, to Mullingar, whence I had resolved to cross the country by private roads, instead of retracing my way to Dublin, there to take a northern stage. Private travelling is infinitely more agreeable, particularly when you can choose both route and vehicle, and take your own time ; and my Westmeath friends heartily approving my contempt for the fears that beset some tourists in this country, commended the choice. Four days had so endeared to me the place and its inmates, that I left it with the reluctant regret of one who had long been attached to both. A more painful farewell, however, remained to be taken : had I known the excess of its bitterness, I should scarcely have allowed myself that second visit to the spot. To find him there was indeed a searching trial of feeling : but to leave him there seemed to rend every fibre of the heart. Rebellion did surely for some moments prevail ; but the two concluding lines of the inscription over which my eye wandered almost unconsciously, came at that moment with the effect that they feebly describe.

Hush, rising griefs : submit, rebellious will ;
Faith looks to JESUS, and the storm is still.

It was indeed His gentle voice that alone could calm the internal workings of a mind more excited than the tempestuous waves. I walked among the hawthorn trees until power was given to bid a quiet and almost a contented farewell. Little prospect there is of revisiting the scene : but no matter ! There was a word of promise hidden in my heart from which I had often drawn sweet solace : and now it spoke to me with an application as personal as ever it carried to the bosom of the mourner of Bethany—" Thy brother shall rise again."

At the hotel I had ordered an open car to Trim ; but a deluge of rain coming on obliged us to change it for a post-chaise. Once more, and for the last time, as I supposed, I reaped the fruit of the universal love and admiration in which he had been held, and the deep sympathy excited by his fate ; for when the master ascertained our relationship, the usual civility shewn by his class in Ireland became heightened into an assiduous kindness and respectful attention, the origin of which made them doubly welcome. Even here, I was constrained to smile at the deportment of a group of beggars. Knowing as I do how entirely this class of the poor Irish are driven to subsist on charity, I never like to refuse a trifle : however, to rid myself of much superfluous importunity, I addressed the eager applicants on my first alighting in the easy way that always takes with them. " Now mind, I am going to stay an hour or two in Mullingar : I shall start from this hotel : and if you will be quiet and not follow me about, I will give each of you something before I go." This assurance was received with a chorus of blessings pronounced in every imaginable variety of language ; and down they squatted on the ground, about the door, with looks so full of glee, that you who are accustomed to the aspect, real or assumed, of the same class in England, would never have guessed at their profession.

I had, or fancied that I had, numerous wants to be supplied at the various shops which stud the opposite side of the single, very lengthy street of Mullingar. On returning from the church-yard, I commenced this course of shopping, and my poor women watched every movement from their station. At last the most wheedling old creature you ever saw crossed over to me, and began with, " Darling lady, I have looked after your blessed steps all the morning : won't I get the halfpenny now ?" " No, for you know we agreed to wait till I should set off." Just then, the reason of her appeal became apparent ; a famished looking creature whom I had not seen before presented herself with two pale babes, and began—" *She* has no family to care for, and I"—" Oh," I interrupted, " you must not be jealous of each other ; you don't know my promise," which I repeated, including her in it. The poor woman fell back directly, with a still sad, but very thankful countenance. I went to two more shops, and finding the body of claimants likely to increase greatly, and also seeing the near approach of heavy rain, I supplied myself with change, beckoned to the party opposite, and immediately had the most motley assemblage pressing round me that could be conceived. I was resolved to put their subordination, that is to say, the civilization of *Irish savages*, still farther to the test ; so said, " You must not crowd me, you know : just stand out in a proper line." It was done immediately ; and none had reason to regret their good conduct ; on which, by the by, I complimented them greatly. Such a scene would not have done in a more public place ; but the hour was so early, and all around so quiet, that there was nothing to prevent it. One remark I must add when the long delay occasioned by the rain had fairly laid me open to a fresh application from another party, not a creature appeared to ask alms : the former group remained at a distance, others being with them ; all had their eyes fixed on us ; many raised their voices to send a blessing with us ; but some feeling appeared to withhold the approach of every individual. Now, have I not added one more to the many instances that I have in conversation related to you, justifying my assertion that the poorest, the most uncivilized of these despised Irish, are, under proper management, the most tractable people in the world ? The smile to which I alluded was not one of merriment, but that expression of affectionate good humour without which all the rest had been in vain : at least, though under different treatment a sense of their helpless dependence might have forced them to wait, like hungry but well-kicked dogs for a bone, the pleased and gratified feeling that gave such a peculiar

alacrity to their obedience would have been wanting. My first object was merely selfish—the anxiety of a harassed mind to escape a teasing annoyance at such a time. By degrees it assumed a better character, and ended in a train of thought well calculated to soften the agonizing severity of feelings and regrets purely my own. Some tourists jest with the beggars in Ireland ; others execrate, or bitterly complain of them. I don't know whether any are in the habit of trying how far a little relief and plenty of civility combined will go to neutralize their troubles. Five shillings will carry any one, on this plan, a hundred miles in good humour with himself, and in high favour with the objects of his bounty.

Of the scenery north-east of Mullingar, I can tell you very little. Sheets of water continued to descend, making the windows as opaque as though their material had been ground glass. Whenever a temporary cessation of the torrent allowed us to take a glimpse, pure unsophisticated bog was the sum-total of the amount on either side : but to me, who know somewhat of the mysteries of turf-buying, it appeared of a truly valuable kind, black, compact, and heavy. I believe the soil here is peculiarly rich. We struck at last into a very pretty road, well hung on both sides with foliage, and exhibiting some handsome plantations and gardens. By this time, too, the sun had broken forth with renovated splendour ; and the glorious bow of promise spanned the scene, so deliciously fresh after those abundant showers. Few things are more impressively typical of divine influence on the heart of man, softened by some afflictive dispensation, than the aspect of this earth when the sunshine falls upon foliage moist with summer rain. In this instance the glow was so vivid, that before we reached our halting-place, at the end of the first eight or nine miles, scarcely any dampness remained on the road ; and while our horses were refreshed, we indulged ourselves with a stroll into what appeared a singular church-yard ; for the sacred edifice was built in the very midst of an ornamental plantation, surrounded by a handsome fence of stone, which obliged us to commit somewhat of a trespass, in availing ourselves of a partial gap to scale the fortifications. We did, however, obtain entrance this way, and satisfied ourselves that the church was really built on a private and very handsome demesne.

And a mile or two beyond this I came in contact, for the first time, with what, I confess, roused something in my bosom not quite amicable to the viceregency of the land. The newspapers have no doubt informed you, that, in his zeal for the preservation of this country, Lord Mulgrave had dispatched an army, or something very much like it, to what Mr. O'Connell calls the “ black north.” The occasion of this military investment of the most devotedly loyal portion of her Majesty's dominions, was the recurrence of the 12th of July, the anniversary of the battle of the Boyne, in 1690. Fears were entertained, or, if not, they were pretended—which, you know, on state occasions, comes to the same thing—fears lest the loyalty of the northern men should issue in acts of treason. There was, indeed, ground for very serious apprehension, lest the Protestants of those notoriously disaffected counties, Armagh, Down, Londonderry, Donegal, &c., might arm themselves with orange lilies, to the great terror and annoyance of her Majesty's peaceable Ribbon-men. To avert this formidable display, and to coerce the incorrigible upholders of the principles that placed the house of Brunswick on the throne, his Excellency marched all the disposable military forces in that direction, and arranged such a concentration of the armed police as would suffice to mark the paternal solicitude that throbs in the viceregal bosom for the encouragement of loyal and constitutional predilections throughout the land. Proceeding towards Trim, I was surprised to meet so many straggling parties, by twos and threes, of the green-jackets, each with his bayonet, blunderbuss, and cartouch-box. The truth of the matter presently flashed on my mind ; and I must confess that indignation the most glowing took possession of me for a few moments. The poor policemen were, however, quite innocent ; and I was angry with myself for having felt angry with them. Towards the higher party, I acknowledge, my sentiments underwent little, if any, change. Presently, I found we were travelling beside a very narrow stream, playfully rippling along through an immense field of rushes. Again it appeared,

winding capriciously, expanding and narrowing, until it abruptly turned, and crossed our road in a wide sheet of water, over which a bridge was thrown. I then asked the postillion what river it was. He hesitated, looked rather dark, and finally answered in an under tone, "I don't know : I believe they call it the Boyne."

I shall not trouble you by recounting any of the long train of thoughts that marched successively through my mind, investing it more completely and effectually than the north had been invested a week before. Private feeling had absorbed what was more public, during several days ; but here I found the link again caught up, and rivetted alike to the past and the future. Some fragments of fine old edifices, occasionally appearing on the rising grounds, served as landmarks to direct my mental view to periods antecedent to that so irresistibly brought before me ; and in this state of feeling I entered perhaps the richest spot that Ireland boasts, in point of material ruins. Moral and spiritual ruins, alas ! abound in every inhabited corner of her noble territory.

Of Trim I had thought very little, except as a mid-way stage on the road to Drogheda, where I hoped to arrive that night. Judge then of my surprise and gratification, when I saw on either side, and particularly in advance of us, the most majestic remnants of splendid architecture, steeples, towers, walls, battlements—some mantled with ivy and gay with wild flowers, others frowning in sombre nakedness ; some looking down from an imposing elevation, others again embosomed in vallies, or reposing on plains of the richest verdure, while amid the magnificent relics of former greatness, the Boyne rolled a broad tranquil stream, in that depth of blue that only the reflection of such a summer sky as then over-arched us could impart to the bosom of a river, It was altogether a glorious scene : the more so for having been so little anticipated ; and when we alighted at the small neat posting-house, we agreed to brave the consequences of a little delay, and to allow ourselves an hour's investigation of some of these wonders of the olden time. The first few steps we took were along the broken wall of a very large monastic building, until we descried a notice that it was a trespass to intrude there : and the next turn placed us at the entrance of a Romish chapel, built as it seemed, upon a part of the ruin. From this of course I turned ; and the castle then looked so inviting, that we inquired how to obtain access to it. A respectable shop was named, where, on presenting our request, a person was directed to conduct us to the rear of the house, thence across several yards, and then through a pretty garden, which opened upon a very abrupt though not extensive ascent. Here the guide left us, with directions to return by the same path : we trod lightly up the steep to the enormous central mass of ruin, and looked with amazement on the surrounding scene. Imagine an area, comprising four acres of ground, finely situated on an eminence overhanging the river, enclosed by a massive curtain, large fragments of which remain, together with distinct frame work of the flanking towers that must have rendered it a most formidable fortress. The principal of these, the grand entrance, with the traces of its portcullis and drawbridge, is wonderfully perfect, although the date of this building is not much less than seven centuries back. A stronger position could not have been chosen, nor a finer specimen of durable architecture erected on it. We climbed in at some of the gaps, and mounting broken stairs, traced with delight the proportions of lofty rooms, the immense fire-places, and tiers of windows deeply cut in walls of prodigious thickness. The history of this noble ruin is also remarkable. Here Henry V., when very young, was detained in captivity, by order of Richard II. A royal mint was established here, and parliaments holden. Important events connected with the castle also occurred during the civil wars, when Cromwell became its master. A long summer's day would not have sufficed for a cursory examination of what is really worth exploring on this ground, and it was not possible to avoid dividing our attention between the castle and the scene that presented itself on every side from our elevated station. A wall, buried in ivy, an original outwork of the rampart, descended on one side to a meadow of the purest verdure, which, I am told, is at times overflowed by the Boyne, whose waters probably once washed the wall. On another side, the stones had fallen thickly, rolling down the slope, and forming a seeming, but quite

impracticable descent to the rows of cabins below. Turn where we would, vestiges of ancient buildings presented themselves ; and it was impossible to doubt that the extent of this town must once have been considerable, its importance very great. Indeed, few posts were more hotly contested during the wars of the pale, when De Lacy was its lord, and Roderic O'Conner, king of Connaught, led his forces against it, or the Earl of Pembroke laid close siege to harass his rival, De Lacy. With unspeakable reluctance, I finished this hasty glimpse of Trim Castle, and slowly descended the knoll by which we had entered, passing again the corner of that pretty garden which basks so contentedly at the foot of the old grey ruins. Here another instance of the national courtesy was displayed. A poor gardener, at work among the shrubs, had culled and bound a most lovely and fragrant bouquet during our stay in the regions above him ; and now, with a grace that enhanced the gift, he approached to present it. When I say a grace, I mean nothing studied ; but that inherent capability of performing kind things in the kindest manner that seems to engrave the *cead-mille failthe* on all their sayings and doings. The native Irishman, a fine, athletic, healthy, hardy-looking man, in very dilapidated habiliments, was so in keeping with the scene, with the ruined castle and the cheerful flowers, that I could not have dispensed with that little incident to crown the adventure. The trifling acknowledgment tendered in return was accompanied with a coin that never passes as valueless in the sight of these people : courteous words, and expressions of the warmest admiration at the beauties we had been viewing. He then told me that he had at home a little book with some particulars of the place, and readily ran to fetch it. I purchased the greasy pamphlet, which contained merely a plan of the grounds, and some chronological notes ; but it served to amuse me on the more monotonous part of the subsequent journey.

Time had slipped away so imperceptibly during our visit to these interesting ruins, that we found it would be impossible to enjoy even a passing glimpse of the yellow tower, or any of the rugged but noble fragments of former greatness that on every side invited our gaze. We took an open car, and after jaunting pleasantly through a rich country, arrived at Navan at five o'clock. This was the most disagreeable halt I had yet made, affording the only instance of an attempt at imposition. On ordering another car, one was brought to the door, which, to say nothing of its appearance, would not have held together under us and our luggage for an hour, I declined using it, and was told I could have no other ; but when the people heard me quietly ordering the driver from Trim to replace the things on his own, and take us to a different posting-house, the tone was changed, and a very decent vehicle made its appearance. During the delay, I was shocked and disgusted by the spectacles of intoxication presented on every side ; while the activity of a numerous party of policemen appeared to be the only means of preventing greater turbulence among some who assuredly did not belong to the ' Orange faction.' This prevented my going out to look at the place ; and when at last we were ready to start, the original demand was increased, with a protestation that the same sum had been named from the first. A boy of not more than fourteen years, who was to drive us, voluntarily corroborated my assurance to the contrary, and for this offence he was unseated, struck, and supplanted by a brother considerably older, whom I presently perceived to be in no fit state to manage either the horse or himself.

Here was an agreeable predicament to be placed in ! I had paid the overcharge, which made but two shillings difference, and which was persisted in with the most profound and courteous respect, accompanied by so many fine speeches, that it was impossible to be more politely robbed. I, on the other hand, was equally civil, while lecturing them for giving strangers any cause of complaint against the Irish people. We started off ; but the poor boy, whose veracity had deprived him of an expected perquisite, was not to be appeased ; he ran alongside the car, most bitterly lamenting, and reproaching his unkind brother, who, in return, repeatedly cut him with the whip. We were now at the head of a very steep little road, thickly strewn with large stones ; and the horse, perplexed by the random pulls at the rein given by his drunken driver, was running up against a broken wall. I began to be seriously alarmed,

and at a loss what plan to pursue, when a portion of the army of occupation already alluded to, came up, bestowed on the driver a severe reprimand, and hinting that he was a fitter subject for their superintendence than to conduct our car to Drogheda, they compelled him to dismount, giving the seat to his little brother, who, smiling through his tears, sprang into it, and drove off.

The country along which we now passed, was rich, fertile, and exceedingly pleasant. So long a level, shaded with fine trees, I think we had not traversed ; and the beauty of a summer evening, the mellow rays falling on verdure freshened by the morning rain, added a further charm to the scenery. The boy was not very communicative nor very well informed, so that we got but little help in ascertaining the names of several fine parks, dwellings, and ruins that lay in our route. All other interest, however, was soon absorbed in that of personal security ; for, long before approaching Drogheda we found ourselves on a road unequalled by the very worst I ever was doomed to cross even in the most rugged North American districts. The peculiarity of this most delectable, track consisted in its having, to all appearance, been scooped out at the distance of two or three yards, in every direction, and the soil carried away to the amount of some shovel-fulls in each place. Description cannot do justice to it, no perfection of springs would have rendered the motion of any carriage tolerable ; and you may picture to yourself the delights of a clumsy jaunting car, destitute of springs, drawn by a huge cart-horse, whose experience teaching him that the stage was about to terminate, induced a more sprightly progress towards the place of refreshment and repose. What between the imminent peril of being pitched forward sideways (the only method of falling from an Irish car) and the tremendous blows received from the wood and iron forming the frame-work behind and on either side, against which every jolt sent us with unerring effect, a less enviable situation cannot well be imagined. Certainly we had neither suffered so much nor laughed so much since commencing this tour. The latter was unavoidable through the ludicrous appearance that each presented in the other's sight, when baffled in some scheme for averting the consequences of an impending jolt ; while the boy, seated on the opposite side, and preserving a most praiseworthy steadiness of countenance, increased our mirth by his evident struggle to avoid betraying how greatly he enjoined our mishaps. It was very provoking to be engrossed in self, while passing so near the famous spot where William of Orange secured the civil and religious liberties of three kingdoms. The site of the battle, indeed, was at some distance to the left ; but I might have formed a tolerably accurate notion of the exact locality had it been possible to withdraw my attention from the broken road and its concomitants. The entrance to Drogheda, for a mile or so, is one of the last places I should select to give a stranger a favourable impression of Ireland. The town itself, as we advanced, astonished me by its evident size and importance ; but the lines of wretched hovels through which we had to pass, and the squalid appearance of their inmates, afforded a painful contrast to the massive buildings that rose obscurely against the sky, now again overcast with heavy clouds. Nothing looked thriving in this suburb except the pigs ; and it struck me that I had never in any other place, seen them so petted as here. A woman seated at a cabin door, was actually nursing one of the swinish multitude ; and in every direction the sagacious animals, conscious of supper time, were to be seen, each hastening with unerring precision to his own domicile. This spectacle wonderfully diverted my English companion, who had no idea to what privileges the granting race are admitted in some parts of Ireland. At length, after splashing through one of the dirtiest and narrowest lanes I had yet passed, we emerged into the town itself, and crossed the Boyne where it flows under a respectable bridge, and then widens into quite a spacious port. The farther we advanced, the greater was my surprise, to find Drogheda a city so extensive, and adorned with such buildings. A turn to the left led us round the court-house, a very handsome edifice ; and into a street which for extent and appearance would not have disgraced the capital. Here were several first-rate shops, and hotels of considerable size. I had directed our young driver to take us to the best in the place ; not, I confess, without secret misgivings, after the description afforded by a late honourable

and reverend traveller, of broken windows, and uncarpeted rooms. I was therefore agreeably disappointed, on ascending a handsome flight of stairs, to find the accommodations answerable to the exterior appearance of the house, which is the very same where Mr. Noel staid—the White Horse. From a spacious balcony, the street looked so inviting that we resolved to make a tour of inspection while our dinner, or rather supper, was in course of preparation ; and were rewarded by presently finding ourselves in front of a fine old gateway, the most perfect specimen remaining of the memorable fortifications of Drogheda. A heavy fall of rain sent us back, before we could gratify our curiosity with a full survey of this noble relic ; and instead of discomforts of any kind, I found in the hotel all that could render our short sojourn agreeable ; together with the unexpected incident of discovering that a dear English friend was resting, with her children, under the same roof, on their route from Dublin to Belfast. The surprise was mutual ; and not even the effects of that unmerciful jolting prevented my enjoying what is perhaps, one of the most agreeable surprises that can brighten a traveller’s way the conversation of an endeared friend, who, all unlocked for, crosses a path otherwise lying through a region of strange faces ; and when the place of meeting is, moreover, an inn. Mrs. W. finding I was bound to Lord Roden’s, kindly pressed me to avail myself of her carriage to within a few miles of Tollymore Park ; but she was to start at five in the morning, and as I wished to see a little of Drogheda, and had been most absurdly but unintentionally misled by the waiter as to the facilities for reaching my destination, of which more anon, I declined the proposal, and we parted.

The blunder above-mentioned consisted in the waiter’s positive assurance that they would post me from the hotel to Tollymore Park. In vain did I assure him that the distance was too great to admit of it : he still replied, “ We constantly post Lord Roden and Lord Powerscourt, both going and returning, and make it but one stage. We shall undertake to send you to his lordship’s house ; and if the distance is greater than we charge for, the loss will fall on us, not on you.” This was all very fair ; and as he satisfied me of the fact of that posting, I could not gainsay it. Had I but brought a road-book, or consulted any one else, or even properly recollected the probable direction we must take, all would have been explained. However, with very unpardonable heedlessness, I gave up the point, countermanded the order for securing places in the northern coach, which would arrive from Dublin at eleven in the forenoon, and resolved to take three hours longer for my Drogheda rambles. You will by this time have guessed that the waiter’s promised easy stage was to my noble friend’s house at Dundalk ; while my object was to reach that at Castlewellan. I give you leave to laugh ; but annoyed as I was on making the discovery, by cross-questioning the postillion when we had left Drogheda some miles behind us, I do not now regret the circumstance ; as it has opened another and an important field of observation to my view.

- [1] The words with which the Romish priest dismisses the so-called penitent, who has confessed his sins, paid his dues, and departs to commence a new score.
[2] Malachi iii. 10.

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