

Charlotte Grace O'Brien ;

selections from her writings and correspondence with a memoir

By Stephen Gwynn

This book has inevitably been put together in haste. My project was simply to furnish the necessary setting for a selection from Charlotte O'Brien's correspondence, from her writings, nearly all of which have a biographical or autobiographical significance, and from the printed accounts of her public work. With more time at command, I might have condensed and arranged better what I had to say. It is not willingly that I have sent out in such imperfect form what has been in the fullest sense a labour of love.

S. G.

Nov. 1st, 1909

A Jog, Jog Journey from Dublin to Limerick.

WE started, with nothing arranged, as I intended to slip into the train at Kingsbridge in the morning, and let Dan go home alone, but fate meant otherwise. It was late, it was dark, it was raining ; our destination was an unknown house, and I was dead tired and burdened with odds and ends innumerable, but when I found the phaeton so snug, my dear Gem on the tramp, and the Liffey Valley revealing its beauty from step to step, the tramp spirit took hold, and I felt I must go on. As compared with America, Ireland is so wonderfully varied. Look at that lovely Liffey Valley hidden away so that till one is fairly into it one cannot imagine it.

Compare it with Malahide, Bray, Foxrock—all so near, all so lovely, all so individual ; and it is the same all over Ireland, every five miles shows a different country, except in the mountainous highlands. In America the train passes through hundreds of miles of scenery all of the same type—that is, one type prevails for so long. People who rush through Ireland to the show places imagine, as some very foolish person said, that it is “ an ugly picture set in a beautiful frame.” No ! it is a true artist's picture—every simple thing bewitched into loveliness by its exquisite atmospheric effects. The “ frame”—the seaboard—is lovely, certainly, but really I think Queen's County is as lovely as anything I have ever seen.

I must return to our night's lodging. Just as we were beginning to wonder where our house had hidden itself, a cyclist saluted. Here was our host ; here was our gate. A deep hidden avenue, an old house, an old orchard, and the river close by—one of those charming old Dublin houses which, with its low ceilings, nice cornices, large rounded bowed rooms rather than windows, are so delightfully graceful in their proportions. A house such as my soul loveth, this was indeed—Boss seized his opportunity to assault a dog three times his size with great uproar.

Well, in the morning I had to go up that Liffey Valley and see the rest of it—a new tract of country to me. We twisted along till we came to Lucan, but pony had been giving very clear indications that we were over-weighted, and why not ? For we had cart-irons and knives and forks and boots, and house linen, &c., &c Now, Gem does not object to a tramp, but does to over loading, and turns round and looks at us at the bottom of every hill. Lucan station saw her delivered from most of her burden, and on we went, on, on, on, not knowing clearly where we were going, but vaguely that it was south-west, and towards Sallins. A very pretty

road with trees and greenery it would have been, but that it was intensely cold. First of June, but like November, with cutting rain off and on. I laughed to see the poultry during a shower, about a dozen of them, standing in a row with their heads against the wall to shelter, and envied them !

Boss kept us cheered, however. There was not a bit of me he did not trample upon in frantic endeavours to get at everything he saw. “ O Dan, Dan ! that dog is scrambling up my shoulders, under my cloak, and I can’t pull him out !” “ Now, Boss, that’s not a big dog ! that’s a donkey. Don’t you know the difference between a dog and a donkey ?”

We crossed the railway and found a station. It was Straffan. That gave us a standing place. Hitherto we had not rightly known where we were, but from that on we struck one of the great old roads of the country, a road that took us right through the Bog of Allen and the great flat country of the Barrow, and the Grand Canal, by Robertstown and Rathangan. The road from this point (Straffan) to Rathdowney is almost flat, and a grand cycling road, and the country was strangely beautiful—long, flat, straight lines, broken here and there with small hills ; larger hills far off, but mainly before and around us to the horizon the ground was absolutely flat, flat as the sea—and a sea it must have been comparatively late in geological time, for close to the Hill of Allen is a raised sea-beach of pure sea sand. Standing there on that slight rise, rubbing the sea sand through my hands, and looking out over the June grass swaying to the keen wind, it needed little imagination to change the scene into an inland sea, the green meadows into waves, the bog-cotton to dancing foam, and the darkness of the bog to “ wine-dark” cloud shadows.

Strangely the view most like to this view that I have seen was from Minneapolis, out in Minnesota, looking over the prairie.

All our drive that day we seemed to be crossing unaccountable canals, for our map only showed one, but there were many more. These canals were bordered with bog-bean, with its graceful and beautiful white flower and fine leafage ; then golden water lilies and marsh marigold, and I doubt not, in their seasons, many more lovely plants. These are not single plants or patches, but rather a beautiful embroidered border to the shining, silent, straight water. I own I love a canal. It has something of the charm that George Sand so beautifully ascribes to the road. It has that purified. It has its own secret peacefulness, its subdued wildness. Man has conquered nature to use, and nature has reconquered man’s work to beauty.

Much of the ground we passed through that day must have been under water in the winter ; the sign of the grey mud was still on the grass. Sad to think this great fertilising possibility is still untamed, doing harm where it might do good. The whole drive was beautiful and interesting ; but from Lucan to Rathangan is a long, long stretch, and there did not seem a house one could shelter in all that way.

I thought we should have to make Portarlinton, and I was very, very tired. (Of course on these long tramps we camp, feed horse and ourselves by the road-side in mid-day.) On reaching Rathangan we found it a village town, with something calling itself an hotel.

“ Dan,” said I, “ I’m tired, and so is pony. We have come a long way from Chapehzod, let us see if we can get a cup of tea and a rest here, and then go on.” In we went and found a very clean sitting-room and bedroom. So, after all, we stayed the night. A very friendly, kindly little place. My experience is that one often finds the cleanest hotels in quite tiny places. Of

course accommodation is often rather primitive, but one might go further and fare worse, and 10s. was my night's bill.

Next morning I had a curious reminder of last century's wild Ireland. I noticed at breakfast a charming quaint egg-cup, and asked the maid about it. She told me it was her grandmother's, and then she brought out a number of old bits of china and some very old-fashioned stemless wine glasses. In those days, to escape drinking was almost impossible, for the custom was to break the wine glass stems, so that a man had to empty his glass, like it or no!—hence stemless, flat-bottomed wine glasses were made for careful people. I had heard of but not seen them before; such quaint little things they looked, like a man on stumps, that I wished I could carry off a pair, but they were evidently family treasures. To show you how kindly these country inns often are, I like to tell that before I left the house the girl brought me a pair of little vases as a present to “remember Rathangan by.” It was not the first time in my wanderings that this has happened. In this neighbourhood also I found another charming remembrance—the Irish wall toad-flax (*Linaria cymbalaria*) in a snow-white variety just touched with pale yellow in the centre. A sweet little plant, like fairy carving in ivory, leaf and growth and flower all so perfect.

About half-way to Portarlington you still pass through much bog, but after that the country is fertile and pretty with trees. We met here a drover with cattle, so very unimproved, so lean, so small, that I wondered what hidden away part of Ireland had gone to the making of them. Perhaps some recesses of the Slieve Bloom Mountains to which we were drawing near. Portarlington we passed through, on our way, as we supposed, to Maryborough; but where we arrive on these tramps is always uncertain, and this was what happened to us. A cross roads—Dan to passing man: “Please, which is the way to Maryborough?” “There's two roads here and you can go either.” “Which is the best of them,?” said I. “That's the best, ma'am, but it's the longest.” “We'll go that road, Dan, Those hills near Maryborough are no joke.” I had had much experience of the road between Maryborough and Monasterevan. A very pretty road it is, with charming old Scotch firs, but it goes quite straight up hill and down dale like a curragh over the Atlantic billows! Well, we drove on, mind you, to Maryborough. After about five miles—“Dan! what's that town before us? Surely it can't be Maryborough yet?” “No, Miss, that's not Maryborough, I think.” The map comes out. “It must be Maryborough, Dan! It can't possibly be Monasterevan, and there's no other big town anywhere around here.” Dan: “Well, I don't think it can be Maryborough; it don't look like it.” “Shout at that man, Dan, and ask him the name of that big town, and how it comes here?” “He says it's Mountmellick, Miss!” “Oh! bravo! That's what has happened us! That's grand! I was afraid of going for Mountmellick. I thought it was quite up in the hills. We'll go straight through now to Mountrath; it's much our best way,” So poor Maryborough never saw the dear Boss! and we trotted through a flourishing looking town that was quite unconscious of its accidental appearance on our scenes.

From this on, our road was very pretty. If the mind is attuned to beauty of a quiet nature, as much pleasure can be drawn from it as from more exciting scenes, and it does not fag the attention and weary one. The Alps (especially in Spring) are a wonderful revelation, but I have been so absolutely tired by the excitement of their beauty that I could no longer enjoy. This never happens in Ireland. I have driven through the country near Mountrath several times, and always found it lovely. The atmospheric effects are peculiarly beautiful. The neighbouring ranges—Slieve Bloom and Devil's Bit—probably clear the air, and the heather over Slieve Bloom is wonderful. The mountains in autumn are purple and rose from base to tip, and most lovely; but the spring dress was almost as beautiful, green and blue lighted slopes embroidered with golden furze. There are trees, too, in sufficient numbers to relieve the bare mountain side. As you look back also towards Kildare the country is curiously

picturesque—flats with grey clumps of trees and poplars, and sudden small island-like hills, rather France-like views. I love the country east of Mountrath, but Mountrath is impossible as regards accommodation. This time we came in there for a fair, and could get no attendance at all at either of the hotels. We had to push on to the nearest town—Rathdowney. Mountrath is not a small town, and seems to have business ; it is a pity the hotels are so poor, as it would be a nice centre for cyclists. That is how it is in Ireland. You will find comfortable, cleanly inns in tiny places, and in good towns miserable, dirty hotels.

Well, we had to go on, like it or no ; we could not even get pony shod, and Dan was shaking his head. “ Well, Dan ! we’ve got a splendid evening and plenty of time, and we’ll go very easy. Perhaps we’ll get a forge on the road.” And sure enough we did. Womenkind don’t see that process of shoeing or removing often, and it struck me much—the picturesque grey-headed smith, so quick and handy, and the perfect restful confidence of the pony, her leg and foot lying on his knee as a dog might lay its head on mine. (What a wonder the first training of the wild horse to that process must have been when you come to think of it !) The shoe is off with a few deft strokes, the foot is pared all round and underneath (then a little dog runs in and eats the parings. Boss and he make friends), and on goes the shoe before you know where you are ! And then elaborate filings of odd nail ends. It was a most pleasant interlude in the beautiful evening lights, for our day had been perfection and most thoroughly enjoyed.

I own before I visited Rathdowney I did not know of its existence, but it is quite a smart little town, stirring and neat, with a large brewery, a reservoir, swans and a swan island, and, I believe, two really good hotels. Near my hotel is an old bridge with the motto, if I remember rightly—“ This bridge was erected in 1813 by the spirited and independent inhabitants of Rathdowney.” A bit of “ highfaluting” that amused me, all the more as from Davies’ old dictionary of Ireland Rathdowney seems to have been rather a poor little place at that time. The go-ahead spirit was there, you see, and still at the end of near a century the words appear true. There is an appearance of energy in the place usually sadly wanting. I bought here a pair of phaeton reins, home-made, for 6s. 6d., good and strong. Too seldom one can find anything home-made for sale in Ireland. Hotel bill here cost 10s. 6d. Total cost from Dublin—man, horse, dog, self, carriage, and oats (but with mid-day dinners in basket from home)—came to £1 5s. 10d. to Limerick. Train fares would be about—man, 10s. ; self (2nd), 19s. ; dog, 2s. 6d. ; horse, £2 ; carriage, about £3. People do not realise the saving of going by road when having to move horses, &c. Railway fares for horses are far too high.

Rathdowney is, I think, fifty-eight miles from Limerick, as far as I can make out on map, but pony was fresh and new shod, and I had all my Dublin weariness blown away by the splendid fresh air all day, these drives are so life-giving. So with a good courage, not knowing what was before us, we started on a rather chill morning. Wisdom was in me, but it had not fair play ! “ Dan,” said I, “ the day is not too good ; we’ll keep the low country and go by Dundrum. At the worst there is a good room there.” Ah ! yes, I was wise ! We drove to Templemore, then along a fine road. An evil prompting made me ask : “ Where does this fine road lead to ?” “ To Borrisoleigh.” It was a word of temptation. I had been there years before, and wished to return. So all my wisdom flew away, and we with it, into the heart of the wild, cold hills. These big old roads, the old coaching roads throughout Ireland, are a real fine sight ; of great width, finely kept, bordered on either side with ten feet or more of “ the long farm,” [1] shaded often with really fine trees. They were a great surprise and joy to me when I first began my tramps. Now I reckon on them and their park-avenue-like distances as a more ambitious soul reckons on Mount Blanc ; but surely I did not expect one leading to Borris-oleigh, a little village in a gap through which the road winds that leads from South Tipperary to Nenagh. Borrisoleigh Castle, however, must have been an outpost of civilisation long ago, for behind it lies the stretch of country between Devil’s Bit and Keeper Mountains,

that is even now wild and desolate to a degree. In Davies' very good Atlas, published 1837, no road is shown through this mountain district we went through ; it must then have been utter wild-erness. It has now a thoroughly good road, but is still one of the dreariest districts I have ever been through. My perverse desire to see everything made us attempt a road " direct to Newport through the hills." Weary on us ! Hour after hour, hour after hour from Borrisoleigh, on we drove, twisting round one black-capped and round-headed hill after another ; no trees, nor ruins, no views, no villages, and yet a share of population, and a creamery ! See how insidious is this agent of civilisation ! It has invaded even that desolate country.

It was a fearful drive. It was blowing cold, wet rain in our faces (we all know the difference between wet rain and dry !) Every hill we twisted round only opened up new and interminable vistas of black valley and black round hills. I could have sat down on a fence and cried, but it would have been no good, so instead I quoted Horatius Cocles to cheer up Dan — " And the strong heart within him bare bravely up his chin." As for Boss, he subsided altogether under my rug. For me, I took refuge behind my aged umbrella, but as I still wanted to see, I poked long slits in the old silk till I got a fine view of the pony's ears. This is a real practical use for an old umbrella ; stick it before your nose, poke holes into it, and you have then a tent and a window, and a window frame !

Oh ! the longing for some incident ! Such an incident as (here I show it) I came in for a few days ago—a grand cock fight. I was strolling home one fine evening and came on this pair, at it hammer and tongs, enjoying themselves amazingly, till their old mistress hustled them off ; but we had no such luck that cold wet evening. I have travelled on either side of those hills, yet, surely, I never realised the existence of that broad band of wilderness in the heart of those mountains about twenty-eight miles long by ten broad. What a fastness it must have been in Elizabethan times ! Then the Irish possessed immense herds, and one can fancy that even now thousands of cattle might be hidden away unknown in the folds of those hills. —The *Homestead* has letters off and on attributing the success of England to meat eating. In Elizabeth's time potatoes were not, corn was destroyed in the wars. The Irish lived almost exclusively on meat. English soldiers are reported as dying from excess of fresh meat and want of other food in Ireland. Meat eating is not the secret of success, for hunting tribes are proverbially indolent.

I said before there were no villages on this road—there are none in the usual sense, but as one may see in America in some wilderness, hundreds of miles from anywhere, four or five large frame-houses called " Liverpool," or " London," so here at a cross-road were four or five substantial houses fourteen miles or so from everywhere—and the name of that place is " Milestone." Does not the very name speak the featureless nature of the country ? Here was no crag or castle, wood or country house, lough, or lis or dun to name the place by ; only the long-watched for Milestone !

When at last, near 7 o'clock, we opened up the Limerick valley, the sun came out to greet us, or rather I suspect we came out of the mountain mist into a glory of grey and silver lights over the Shannon plain. Then out popped Boss to bark at everything, the weary pony pricked up her ears smelling familiar smells, and we rejoiced as those do who have seen and endured and escaped ! Well, we have seen it. This bit of Ireland so near home, of which I knew nothing, is now in my hands to put into its place as part of the country. Do my readers—do you who fly all over the world in trains—understand at all the pleasure of having a mental grip of your own country foot by foot ? For me, I like a jog, jog journey.

Erin ! thy children love, and love for ever.

*With that abiding love that cannot die,
Thy cloudland, thy mountains, thine ocean, and thy sky,
Thy meadowed valleys green, thy sea-like river ;
Can we tear them from our hearts ? can we sever
Those bonds ? Ah never—never—till we die.*

August, 1898.

Pastoral Memories

It remains throughout one's whole life a beautiful thing to have been born and reared in a rich pastoral country. Images of beauty lie hidden in the mind ; sweet scents and homely sounds return even to the dulled senses of after life. Deafness itself, even, does not wholly separate one from a consciousness of those simple sounds to which one has been, as it were, born. The imagination has so strong a hold it gives hearing to the brain even when the ear is useless. I am deaf, I know, but the great sweep of the scythe through falling grass repeats its rhythm of sound to me still. This is individual, but to all, I think, a richer and fuller enjoyment of the mere earth surface must accompany the familiarity of childhood with every sight and sound of the sweet brown clay and its produce. For one thing, we country-bred folk understand it all so much better than those to whom the multitudinous growth and leafage is all one in meaning, like the surface of a carpet.

I recall from the early days of my own life (I can remember just after the great famine) the farm life in the cottages round my home. I was then a very independent little fair-haired mortal, and was very much given to trotting off through the fields quite alone to my farm friends. Well, they did welcome me ! The bowls of cream and solid sour milk, which I liked so well, that I got through were surprising. There was the dark but clean dairy, the large, dark, thatched kitchen, with the old palsied mother in the corner, and two or three fine, handsome, buxom girls. There was a big spinning wheel, and many a time I tangled and broke the woollen thread. But they had patience. Everything I might do they had patience to suffer. Time was no great value, and the skein was easily joined by the skilled hand of the spinner. But even to my child eyes a tragedy was wrought into the spinning and the bending of that woman's hands about the wool. Her daughter had run away with a soldier. Though, I think, they married, the prejudice against soldiers was then very strong, and it simply broke her mother's heart. Her face has remained with me throughout life a revelation of the pain of a mother's love ; a thing beautiful and terrible.

But the shadow of the flowering limes was all over, and hanging in the branches thereof I seem to see a dainty snow-white cloth full of cream slowly dripping away its superfluous moisture, slowly hardening into the delicious solidified happiness called a cream cheese. Why do we not have such cream cheeses now ? Ivory white, exquisite in texture, delicately suggestive of all green fresh things—beautiful to look at and perfect to the taste. It seems to me we lived on cream cheese in old times ; now they are unheard of.

What is worthy to be spoken of now after them ? One little tender remembrance of a long, thin young man called Dan, holding whose hand I used to toddle round after the cows and learn to milk. I loved him sincerely, and respected him deeply, for why ? Because a rumour was afloat—true or false, I know not—that Dan was *in with the White Boys* ! What more was wanted to make him a hero, when he was so kind and affable as to teach me to milk ? Farewell, Dan ; farewell, the heaps and mountains of blazing hot potatoes, butter and eggs, and sour milk ! How despicable were beef and mutton, and the civilised table cloth after ye !

*Have you seen, have you seen in the grey and misty morning'
 When the golden sun is up and peeping o'er the lea,
 When the thrushes and the larks without a note of warning
 Break into a rush of singing, fresh and wild and free—
 Have you seen the farmer treading through the nodding
 grasses,
 Or seen him with his cattle when the girls have come
 to milk—
 Patting their moist heaving sides, and joking with the lasses,
 While pressing to his heart of hearts his daughter's
 head of silk ?
 And oh ! hut there is joy in the brightness of the earth.
 Oh, but God has blessed its goodness and its mirth !*

June. 1898.

The River Shannon

“ The spacious Shenan spreading like a sea.”
 — *Edmund Spenser.*

WHEN I walk here along by the river in the midst of this glory of May, I say to myself—
 “ What infinite beauty must this world show to those who have entered the ‘ Beatific vision’
 and can embrace its varied loveliness in one human consciousness.” It is a splendid con-
 ception at the least to imagine that through perfect and intimate union with God the know-
 ledge and the vision of God may be shared by the human spirit. Blanco White, in a very fine
 sonnet on the revelation darkness brings us of the infinite abyss of stars, says :—

“ If light can thus conceal, wherefore not life ?”

The daily aspect of things is, in a sense, also a concealment. Men come and go by this great
 river (too few of them indeed), and the revelation of its beauty is not made to them fully,
 often not at all ; but let one live by it and it is “ the most beautiful place in the world.” A
 friend quoted to me the other day—“ Ad ogni uccello suo nido è bello.” Even so, to each
 of us comes the realisation of the hidden beauty that lies all round.

But to-night it was no hidden beauty. I went down by the river in the evening. It was full,
 the tide just past the turn, and sweeping down the great mass of water at an extraordinary
 pace, and yet, though the whole river was swinging along at many miles an hour, the surface
 was a marvellous mirror. The glowing masses of furze on the island, a quarter mile away,
 were so near and distinct in the wave one could almost stretch out a hand to gather them.
 Every cloud and every shade of light and colour in the sky were again in the river, but far
 more intense. At my feet, and twenty yards down and across the channel, was a dense black
 cloud reflected ; this formed an unbroken mass of shadow in front. Its crenelated edge cut
 sharp against the reflection of silver, blue, grey and intense white light stretching far away
 westward. I stood, as the old books used to say, “ entranced.” And still the river swept down,
 and still the furze and the wonderful green and the dark cloud bar were, as it were, under my
 hand, and the glorious “ gates of the Shannon,” as the Elizabethans called this Foynes, were
 opened to heaven’s light beyond my touch.

*We, thy children, love thee, noble river ;
 For us thy tides flow ever ;*

*For us o'er all thy solitudes
Eternal beauty broods.
For us thy faint, pale distances extend—
With the far heavens to blend.*

*Oh, river ! river ! Home of the wild cloudland,
Home of the restful woodland ;
We ask not beauty from thee—being ever
Our own eternal river.*

*We know the secret of thy tides, we know
The swell, the fall, the pantings of thy bosom ;
Thy passions and thy restings and thy strife—
Even as the weed tossed idly on the flow ;
Even as the flowers that on thy margins blossom,
We are fed from thee and nourished from thy life.*

May, 1898.

Dromoland

Across the wastes of long-drawn years I gaze
On one bright hour when eve's bright sunshine
glowed
On thine high-towered beautiful abode,
Dromoland ! There I see thy pleasant ways.
Thy terraced walks, and above all a blaze
Of light-stemmed double poppies thickly sowed.
On which old Mother Nature had bestowed
A very wealth of white and rosy rays.
My little skirt I held before me straight
To catch those dainty flowers as they were
thrown
To me in handfuls by a dame of state.
Who, when their lovely petals were full-blown.
Drew from their juices the Lethean stream
To hide harsh pain in some bewitching dream.

A Shannon Picture

Long rose red arrows, flung athwart a sky
Left by the sun's decline of gold and green ;
A lake-like river stilled by frosty air,
Giving again those hues vidth opal sheen.

Such was the distance ; on a neighbouring slope
Stood grouped together gentle, patient cows,
Yielding sweet milk unto deft-handed maids
The while their clouded breaths toward heaven
arose. 1869.

•

A Shannon Sabbath Evening

A cloud land on its bosom
Of grey and gold and rose,
The silent river dreaming
Lies in a deep repose.

But ever, ever filling,
Comes in the flowing tide,
And near at hand the ripples
Across the pictures glide.

And far away an inlet.
More perfect than before.
Reflects in tender shining
The green indented shore.

Then slowly, slowly bending.
The tints fade one by one.
For the calm day at ending
Bids farewell to the sun.

Yet o'er the silent river
The dusk, the red dusk glows—
And see ! its mirrored stillness
Is grey and gold and rose.

Keen of The Shannon

Dead ! He is dead ! and no more
Shall he hear the curlew whistle along the windy shore,
When the yellow, swirling tides their weight of waters pour
On the seaweed and the stones by the shore.

Ululu ! O my son ! ululu !

Dead ! he is dead ! and no more
Shall he see the river gleaming along the moonpath white.
Where the silver, swirling tides rush from darkness into
light.

While they ripple and they roll on to night.

Ululu ! O my son ! ululu !

Dead ! he is dead ! and no more
Shall he watch the sunset glowing flush the vault of
heaven around.
When the crimson, swirling tides give a low, rejoicing sound,
By the stillness and the light they are bound.

Ululu ! O my son ! ululu !

Dead ! he is dead ! and no more
Shall the star of morning flame above him o'er the wave,
While the cruel, swirling tides flash again the light it gave,
And the river is all black as the grave.

Ululu ! O my son ! ululu !

Dead ! he is dead ! and no more
The dead, white light of winter gleams for him upon the
shore.
The dead, grey, swirling tides beating, beating o'er and o'er,
On the seaweed and the stones by the shore.

Ululu ! O my son ! ululu !

1879.

A Commonplace Ballad

Poor Mick was trotting on to the town.
The side-car under him going ,
He looked on the water swollen and brown.
He looked on the river flowing.

The day was drear and heavy and dank»
A sleety wind was blowing,
And the river creeping up over the bank
Was into the roadside going.

Now, all that day till the night drew near—
For the wind was bitterly blowing—
Poor Mick sat gossiping here and there.
While the river was steadily flowing.

“ And why should ye lave ? ’tis a cruel night.
Oh, why should ye be going ?
Bide ye here till the morning light,
For the blackest wind is blowing !”

“ The wife will be wanting her bread and tay,
And oil for to light her sewing ;
Myself never minded the roughest day
Or the blackest black wind blowing.

“ Gi-alang, old mare ! get up out of that !
For sure ’tis home we’re going !”
He buttoned his coat and settled his hat,
Nor thought of the river flowing.

But cold and drear and dark was the night,
The sleety wind was blowing ;
And where the road that morning was right
The river’s edge was flowing !

1904.

The Assisted Emigrants

The first set of emigrants sent by the Government to my care consisted of twenty-seven souls. Of these, only one man knew English, one woman was an idiot, some were old, and most were young children.

Speechless ! ay, speechless, for their Gaelic tongue
Is dead ; as wanderers from some far-off age
They strike the shores of human life, to wage
A too unequal fight with toil and wrong.

This ‘ innocent ! ’ are her steps also bound
To thee, O great New World of passionate strife ?
Are hearts there loving enough to guard her life
'Mid thine harsh din, 'mid thine unresting round ?

These innocents, these babes—ay, babes and men
Alike, for men all dim with age are here.
Driven from their hillside homes, so bare, so dear—
Would they had died before that bitter ‘ then ’ !

Ah, Christ ! behold Thy lambs ! behold Thy sheep !
Within my hands one moment they may rest,
Feed, and be satisfied, laugh light and jest,
Then forth upon their way to toil and weep—

To sin perchance. These maidens, all untried.
In womanhood so childlike—strong, yet so weak.
So guardless and so guileless—wolves that reek
With scent of blood against their coming bide.

Forth fare ye, wanderers, o'er the misty deep—
Farewell, farewell ! Dumb, exiled, and oppressed,
Will ye look back to this one hour of rest ?
Ah, Christ ! behold Thy lambs ! behold Thy sheep !

1883.

[1] Poor people in Donegal have their beasts “ out on the long farm ”—that is, grazing by the roadside.—S. G.

Charlotte Grace O'Brien ; selections from her writings and correspondence (1909)

Author : O'Brien, Charlotte Grace ; Gwynn, Stephen Lucius, 1864-1950

Subject : O'Brien, Charlotte Grace

Publisher : Dublin : Maunsell

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : University of California Libraries

Collection : cdl ; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/charlottegraceob00obriiala>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

November 1 2013