

Sydney Lady Morgan

1809

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WHATEVER hardships the Irish peasant submits to during the week, it can never be said that “*Sunday shines no sabbath-day to him.*” Apparently endowed with the singular faculty of being periodically happy, the hallowed day brings with it to him, a temporary oblivion of every care, and the transient possession of every enjoyment, which his fancy, little schooled in pleasurable speculation, can devise. Early on a Sunday morning a cabin, cleaner than usual, exhibits at its door a groupe very different in appearance from that it sheltered the preceding day. The lower Irish, passionately fond of dress, and without the means of gratifying their dominant passion, confine their wishes to the hard-earned suit which the mass-house, or dance on Sunday, or the fair of their market-town, affords an opportunity of displaying. Thus the scanty drapery of wretchedness is exchanged, not only for the garb of comfort, but of ostentation ; and it is not unusual to behold even ornamental finery on those on Sunday, who during the rest of the week were worse clothed than the poorest mendicant in England. It is remarked by Buffon, that “ a man’s character passes in some degree into his dress ; and that we are led to suppose what kind a man he is, by the kind of dress he wears.” This is in some degree illustrated by the weekly metamorphosis of the Irish peasant ; for he seems to throw off, with his wretched “ customary suit,” the gloom of countenance which accompanied it, and the national cheeriness of his character then shines in every lineament of his face.

On a Sunday the young women go in troupes to the mass-house, generally dressed in white gowns and coloured petticoats ; with their rug cloaks hanging on one arm, and their shoes and stockings on the other. When they approach the chapel they bathe their feet in the first stream, and assume those articles of luxury which are never drawn on but for shew, and the public gaze of the parish. After prayers both sexes, and of all ages, generally adjourn to the fields, to witness a hurling [1] match, or some of those manly sports to which the lower Irish are so passionately addicted. One of them, the *catlu-clogh*, or “ flinging of the stone ” is precisely the same with the ancient Greek pastime of the *discus*. The candidate who pants for the fame of those

“ Virtues that are placed in nerve and bone,”

takes a stone of immense weight in his right hand, inclines his body a little forward, advances one leg, poises his arm, and after two or three balancing motions, flings it from him to a considerable distance. These national amusements are not confined to the peasantry, the young gentlemen of the adjoining counties frequently engage in them. As in the gymnastic festivals of ancient Greece, men of the highest rank, and most refined education, appear as candidates for the prize of personal strength or personal activity. Thus even the amusements among the lower Irish are calculated to strengthen their frames, and to inure them in supporting the greatest burthens and the greatest fatigue. While the English peasant employs the hour succeeding to his attendance at church, in the perusal of some religious tract, the Irish peasant devotes himself to an exercise which may render him a less pious, but certainly forms him to be a more serviceable member of the community.

Although the fare of Sunday seldom rises beyond the accustomed potatoes and milk of the rest of the week ; some few halfpence are always spared from the household purse to purchase the pleasures which the Sunday cake bestows.—In the centre of a field near some *petit auberge*, a distaff is fixed in the earth, on which is placed a large flat cake : this cake is the

signal of pleasure, and becomes the reward of talent. The young and old of both sexes, for miles round the neighbourhood, hasten to enjoy the pleasures of the cake, which is sometimes carried off by the best dancer, and sometimes by the archest wag of the company. At a little distance from this standard of revelry, is placed its chief agent the piper, who is always seated on the ground with a hole dug near him, into which the contributions of the assembly are dropt : the manner of bestowing these donations is attended with a little gallantry not to be passed over in silence. At the end of every jig, the piper is paid by the young man who dances it, and who endeavours to enhance the value of the gift, by first bestowing it on his fair partner, and though a penny a jig is esteemed very good pay, yet the gallantry or ostentation of the contributor, anxious at once to appear generous in the eyes of his mistress, or to outstep the liberality of his rivals, sometimes trebles the sum which the piper usually receives. I have been at some of these cakes, and have invariably observed the inordinate passion for dancing, so prevalent among the Irish peasants. It is indeed very rare to find an individual among them who was not for some time under the tuition of a dancing master. [2] Thus passes away the Sabbath of an Irish peasant, the first hours of the day are devoted to religion, the rest to the enjoyment of such pleasures as lie within the limited scope of his acquisition. Som-times led by the light of nature, sometimes restrained by the shades of prejudice, alternately governed by truth and error, his conduct is only to be judged by the circumstances under which he is reared. The rigid principles of Calvinistical faith, the strict observances of Lutheran piety, may condemn his festal mode of passing that day peculiarly devoted to the Being who made it the sacred season of his own repose ; but whether the happy overflowings of a cheerful humble heart, blest and blessing in the short sweet season of its transient felicity, or the sombre meditation of systematic piety, periodically indulged, according to the letter of the law, is the incense that “ smells sweetest to heaven,” it is for him alone to judge “ to whom all hearts are known.”

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To those who are Epicureans in weather, whose pleasures are in some degree subject to “ every skiey influence,” the refreshing sweetness of the air after a transient shower is the first of atmospherical enjoyments ; and in the confidence of a promise offered to us by a brilliant rainbow, we set out on one of the pleasantest rambles we had hitherto enjoyed. Directing our steps to the foot of the *ox-mountains*, we crossed a dismantled arch rudely thrown over a stream which flowed from their summit, and whose source became the object of our pursuit. As we descended the mountain’s brow, a little vally gradually opened between its steep acclivities, which still ascending with the elevation of the mountains, was still embosomed by its irregular and overhanging projections, while the streams which serpented through it, seemed to expand as we proceeded along its banks, sometimes dashing wildly over those pieces of rock it had torn away in its steep descent, sometimes stealing its thin pellucid wave over broad flags of marble which shone brightly to the transient sunbeam, and sometimes falling unimpeded from a lofty and perpendicular steep, while from the white foam beneath arose a feathery spray which dropt in dewy showers on the aquatic plants with which its shores were enriched. We frequently paused in the course of our ramble from the weariness of the continued ascent ; but more frequently to contemplate such scenes as included within a coup-d’œil, much of the beautiful and sublime of picturesque creation. The boundless ocean, the Alpine rock, the dreary heath, the luxurious vale, and many landscape traits incongruous to each other, seemed here happily united in one harmonious combination ; while many a ruin which time had “ mouldered into beauty,” many a hut which necessity had hung upon the virid point of some tall cliff, charmed the fairy gaze of fancy, and awakened in the musing mind a train of associated ideas which shed an extraneous interest over every object on which the eye reposed. While I beheld these beautiful scenes, so numerous in my native country, so frequently concealed in those remote places which national observation has never visited, and to which foreign curiosity has never been pointed ; imagination eagerly glided over those times of anarchy and warfare, when the waste and desolated land smoked with the vital stream of her sons, to that felicitous period, when the candid Bede describes it

as another Canaan, flowing with milk and honey ; and when even Cambreus, borne away by the beauty and fertility of its aspect, describes it as a country whose verdant hills were covered with innumerable flocks, whose plains waved with golden corn, and whose ancient forests were filled with wild beasts. Such it was when the Cambrian topographer landed on its green and smiling shores among the first of its British invaders [3].

Notwithstanding the rough acclivities of which these mountains are composed, we found them cultivated to their summits, in detached places ; and as we were climbing up an almost inaccessible steep, we overtook a poor peasant who was literally not driving but pushing a poor lean horse up before him, laden with panniers filled with manure, with which he was going to enrich a future potatoe

[] Even Morryson, the most prejudiced and abject of the many scribblers, who in the Elizabethian day, endeavoured to write themselves into the favour of the English government by calumniating the natural as well as the moral state of Ireland, even while he upbraids the natives for their negligence of agriculture, is inadvertently led into a description of the beauty and fertility of a part of the country and involuntarily extols the disposition of the Irish to tillage and their large exportation of corn.

ridge, obtained for a low rent on the summit of the mountain ; thus, by unexampled industry and unwaried labour, endeavouring to
“ Force a churlish soil for scanty bread.”

Before we lost sight of him, he had actually taken one of the panniers off the wretched animal’s back, and was carrying it on his own.*

[] A cultivation so constantly formed on the summits of the highest mountains in Ireland, proves that native taste for agriculture, which to the modern Irish has been so unjustly denied, and of which the ancient left such irrefragable proofs. Mr. Mollineux in his letter to the archbishop of Dublin, supposes Ireland to have been more populous in former times, merely from the remains which it still exhibits of agriculture : “ momitains, says, he, that are now covered with bogs, have been formerly ploughed, for when dug five or six feet high a proper soil for vegetation is discovered, and an appearance of furrows and ridges is still visible :

“^While necessitous industry, without the cheering stimulus of a competent reward, thus toils laboriously up the “ heights precipitous” and steals a scan-

he adds, that a plough and a hedge-rov/ were found under a bog six feet deep in the county of Donegal, and that he had himself seen the stump of a large tree in a bog ten feet deep at Castie Forbes. It is well known that in the wildest and most uncultivated parts of the county of Cork, the vestages of high roads cut-through the mountains are still visible, and that while modern Ireland is reproached for the scantiness of her plantations, her luxurious woods in former times supplied England with the timber of which many of the noblest of her religious edifices are constructed : the churches of Gloucester, Westminster, and several others, are covered luith Irish oak. All that remained of the Irish woods were cut down during the reigns of William and Anne, and sent to Holland for the purpose of ship-building, Irish oak being even then deemed the best in Europe. I believe it was some time antecedent to that period, that the famous wood of shilelah in the county of Wicklow lost its growth of timber.
“ Countries,” says Montesquieu, “ are not cul-

iy subsistence from that rugged soil least favoured by the genial eye of nature, indolence, as a national defect, cannot be attributed to the Irish character.* Perhaps indeed the same cheeriness of exertion is not to be found in the Irish labourer as animates the efforts of the English husbandman. But surely the eagerness with which the English farmer seizes on

the poor peasant emigrant of Ireland, is rivaled in proportion to their fertility, but to their liberty ; and the vestiges of ancient agriculture which are still discoverable in Ireland, give no faint proof of the civil liberty she enjoyed.”

[] I have been repeatedly assured by persons of undoubted veracity, that it is usual to let the least fertile parts of the mountains to the peasantry, at a low rent ; from whom, after they have by the greatest labour improved their soil, it is reclaimed, and relet at a higher rent to some more wealthy tenant : mean time the original cultivator takes another barren tract, and continues to use the same exertions to the same effect

a correlative proof of that superiority of manual strength*, that wondrous capability of exertion, and that ready inclination for employment, which characterize the poor adventurer, whose merit in this instance is seldom justly estimated in his own country, and never adequately rewarded. ^ Nature is just to all mankind^ and repays them for their industry : she renders them industrious by annexing rewards in proportion to their labour ; but if an arbitrary prince should attempt to deprive people of nature's bounty, they would fall into a disrelish of industry, and then indolence and inaction must be their only happiness :” and by whatever means the bounteous intentions of nature are counteracted, the efforts must be the same.

The character of a nation, so far as it is uninfluenced by climate, must in a great degree be the result of the policy

. * “ Both the body and mind of the Irish,” says Davis, “ are indued with extraordinary abilities of nature.”

by which it is governed. “ La science de la morale, says Helvetius, n'est autre chose que la science meme de legislation.”—Admitting, therefore, that the indolence of the Irish has become a national vice, it certainly cannot be traced to a national source ; the liberal minister of Elizabeth^ reluctantly acceding to the fact, endeavours, and with success, to trace it to the extortion of com and live- r//, an extortion under which the Irish smarted for centuries, ^^ and which,” says Davis, “ produced two notorious effects for it made the lands waste, and the people idle ; for when the husbandman had laboured all the year, the soldier consumed in one night all the fruits of that labour.” Among a people who for more than four centuries suffered the most galling hardships that warfare and civil dissention could inflict, who, as an English minister expresses it, “ were beaten as in a mortar by pestilence and famine,” many bad habits must have insinuated themselves, which thne, good policy, and undeniable causes of popular contentment, could alone undermine or destroy ;* and indeed a knowledge of Irish history is sufficient to convince the most prejudiced mind, that most of the vices which have been attributed to the character of the lower Irish, are to be traced to an early political cause. Thus the same injustice that operated as a check on the ardour of Irish industry, broke

* “ Qu’ont produit, jusqu'aujourd'hui les plus belles maximes de morales ? Elles ont corrige quelques particuliers des defauts que peu-^tre ils se reprochaint d’ailleurs : elles n’ont produit aucun changement dans les moeurs des nations. Quelle en est la cause ? C’est que les vices d’un peuple sant, si j’ose le dire, toujours caches au fond de sa legislation ; c’est la qu’il fut fouiller, pour arracher la racine productrice de ses vices.” Helvetius.—“ What has ever been accomplished by all the fine maxims of morality ? They may have corrected some faults, of which individuals were conscious in their conduct ; but they have produced no amendment in the characters of nations. And the cause of this is, that the vices of a people are always rooted in its legislative code, where w:^ must search in order to eradicate them/”

the tie of national love, and drove the suffering native of Ireland a mendicant into foreign lands*, awakened in those who preferred a struggling penury at home, to confident indigence

abroad, that vigilant quickness of apprehension, which prejudiced aversion construed into craft.

As we had now reached the spring of the mountain-torrent, whose devious course had already seduced us far beyond the general limits of our rambles, we began to descend by a winding path, which led to a little village on the skirts of the mountain's brow. The intelligence of our approach had preceded our arrival by some minutes, and two of the villagers who had been in dispute about a stream of water, which the one had diverted

* "So, says Sir J. Davis, that the lower Irish chose to be beggars in foreign countries rather than labour in their own fruitful land at home." "And a brave people, asserts Burke, "will prefer liberty accompanied by virtuous poverty, to a depraved and wealthy servitude." Re/lections on the Revolution in France.

from supplying the mill of the other, came to submit their dispute to Mr. ***, and to abide by his arbitration. A people who are always thus ready to apply to magisterial influence, cannot so much be supposed a litigious people, as to act from a sense of equity that renders them ever alive to the least appearance of imposition.

An Irish peasant who thinks himself aggrieved or injured, will go any distance, and encounter every obstacle, to obtain retribution, or, as he expresses it, to get law ; but whatever may be the destiny of his suit, or whatever verdict the magistrate pronounces, even though destructive to his hopes, and inimical to his interest, if he can at all reconcile it to his understanding, he submits without a murmur. []*

[] Being on a visit a few weeks back at the house of a leading magistrate, and rising earlier one morning than usual, I beheld from my window two groupes of peasants leaning at a little distance from each other and though it Fierce in their native hardihood of soul, True to imagined ri^ht, above controul, While thus the peasant boasts his right to scan. He learns to venerate himself as man.

The Irish have probably borrowed this keen sense of justice and profound submission to judicial authority, from the rigid severity of their ancient Brehon laws. "When Sir E. Pelham and Sir J. Davis went as the first justices of assize into the counties of Tyrconnel and Tyrone, they observed, that though their corn-

was excessively cold and rained heavily, they remained in this exposed and comfortless situation from seven till ten. When my host descended from his bed-room and gave audience to his shivering clients, who had come for law, the question to be decided was of a very equivocal nature, and I imagine it required all the subtlety of the law to ascertain to an exactitude which was the party aggrieved ; an immediate judgment was however pronounced, and the litigants departed amicably together, equally submissive to the decree of magisterial umpire, though certainly not with equal cause for satisfaction.

mission was somewhat distasteful to the Irish lords, ** yet that it was most sweet and welcome to the common people : for they quickly apprehended the difference between the tyranny and oppression under which they lived before, and the first government and protection which was promised them in time to come : " and surely this amenability to magisterial influence, this subordination to the voice of superior rank and official power, ar^ gue little of that lawless and intractable disposition so generally ascribed to the character of the Irish peasantry.

They indeed not only entertain a strong and almost intuitive idea of jurisprudence, but are warmly attached to the formulae of such little laws as their sense of right and wrong, and wish of mutual preservation, have induced them to establish among themselves. []*

[] To borrow salt and not to repay it, even to the last grain, is deemed a fatal infringement of this social code ; and I understadd that even the first organization of the Thrashers was

marked by the promulgation of certain sumptuary laws, by which they endeavoured to restrain the licentious innovations admitted into the costume of their compatriots, by the influence of rustic vanity, or the contagion of superior example. One of their manifestoes fixed on the door of a chapel, interdicted the use of shoes in favour of brogues^ except to such as did not speak Irish, they being considered equally unworthy the national character and national dress. The Irish kerchiff and binogiie were also to be worn, on the penalty of having any more modern covering taken from the we^r
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MY rambles and frequent conversations with the peasantry in the neighbourhood of L*** house have obtained me a degree of rustic notoriety, to which I stand indebted for a visit from Mr. Thady O'Conolan, a schoolmaster in the neighbourhood, and a personage not on \y highly esteemed by his rural disciples, but looked up to by his less intelligent neighbours, as a prodigy of learning, e rudition, and genius. He introduce himself, by saying : '^ he had heard I was fond of Irish composition, and that he had waited on me to mention he had some of the poems of Ossian, which were much at my service. The Irish,^^ he added with a brogue that beggars all conception, " the Irish is the finest and loftiest tongue in the world : the English can never come near it, and the Greek alone is worthy of being compared to it." He then with great enthusiasm repeated the description of Fion's shield in Irish, and Homer's description of that of Achilles, giving, with great exultation, the preference to the former ; as he did to Ossian's account of his father's hounds, over the dogs of Ovid : and then with the utmost gravity declared his intention of translating the Eneid, and some of Terence's plays, into Irish. " The latter, he continued, I will teach to my scholars, who may play it yet upon one of the great London stages to admiration."

When I complimented him on the extent of his erudition, and expressed my astonishment at his having acquired it in so remote a situation, he replied : " Young lady, I went far and near for it, as many a poor scholar did before me : for I could construe Homer before I ever put on shoe or stocking, aye, or a hat either, which to be sure I never did till I was twenty years of age." He then at my request gave me a sketch of his peripatetic studies. When he was a young man, he said, there were but few schools in Connaught, and those few but bad : and that it was not unusual for eight or ten boys " who had the love of learning strong up on them," to set off bare-footed and bare-headed to Munster, where the best schools were then held ; that they commenced their philosophic pilgrimage poor and friendless ; but that they begged their way, and that the name of poor scholar procured them every where friends and subsistence ; that having heard much of the celebrity of a school-master in the county of Clare, he and his adventurous companions directed their steps towards his seminary; -^ but, '^ added Thady '^ it being a grazing country, and of course no hospitality to be found there, meaning that it was thinly inhabited, we could not get a spot to shelter our heads in the neighbourhood of the school ; so being a tight set of Connaught boys, able and strong, we carried off the school-master one fine night, and never stopped till we landed him on the other side of the Shannon, when a priest gave us a chapel-house, and so we got learning and hospitality to boot, and the school-master made a great fortune in time, all Connaught flocking to him, and now here I am at the head of a fme seminary myself He then informed me that he had Mty pupils; that the head class were in Homer, and did not pay for their tuition, as they assisted him to teach the rest ; that all boys of the name ot' O'Conolan were also taught gFatis, and the rest paid according to the means of their parents, from one shilling to four a quarter : he added that he had then five female eleves, '^ to whom, said he, I am teaching philosophy, the humanities and mathematics, to give them a genteel idea of

becoming tutoresses in gentlemen's families." After some further conversation, Mr. Thady O'Conolan departed, but not without a promise of our visiting his academy the following day.

The lyceum of this Connaught sage, IS a miserable cabin on the side of a very desolate wood. The sound of our horses' feet brought a number of his young disciples to the door, clad in a drapery light and frugal as philosophy herself could dictate ; for neither the Greek sandal, the Roman perones, nor the I- rish brogue, secured their naked feet from the damp earthen floor of the academy. The next moment Thady himself appeared in all the majesty of pedagogue power : his hair, dress, and manner, were all admirable, and left the Lingo and O'Sullivan of O'Keefe far behind ; his low clumsy figure, clerical tonsure, rubicund face ; his wrapping coat, according to the old Irish costume, fastened with a skewer, the sleeves uncupied, and the collar of his shirt thrown open; combined with his Greek and Latin quotations, his rich brogue, and affected dignity, to render him a finished character. Having reprimanded his pupils for their want of good manners, he welcomed us with a look and air that seemed to convince us, as well as them, that their dereliction from decorum proceeded not from any deficiency of precept or example on the part of their master. He then apologized for the absence of his first class, who, he said, he intended should have construed some of Homer for us ; but that they had gone to cut turf for a poor distressed family in the neighbourhood, and that for that day the Trojan plains were resigned for the bog. *^ It was but the other day, said he, they built up that cabin yonder, for a poor old widow, and I gave them a holiday for it and my blessing into the bargain."

The interior of Thady's cabin perfectly corresponded with its external aspect. It was divided into two apartments, which boasted no other furniture than an old deal table covered with copy-books and slates, and a few boards placed on stone« which served as seats to the young students, some of whom were poring over the " Seven wise Masters of Greece : " Others, vainly held a Cordery, while their eyes were fixed on the visitors ; and three tall fellows were endeavoring to read all at the same time out of an old tattered volume of Virgil. " There," said Thady pointing to the inward room, " there is my sanctum sanctorum : there I teach Homer, philosophy and the mathematics : " and taking down an old book, which had sympathized in the destiny of Virgil, he exclaimed : " This is the only Homer I have ; and though seven boys read out of it daily, it never causes a moment's dispute : whereas, if I had two young gentlemen studying in it, my Homer would be a bone of contention to them from morning till night." Indeed Thady endeavoured continually to impress us with an idea of the subordination and civilized manners of his scholars, and we saw nothing that in the least degree contradicted his assertions ; he assured us that the labourer who earned but sixpence a day, would sooner live upon potatoes and salt, than refuse a little learning to his child. " I have," said he, " above twenty boys who are come from distant parts to me^ who begged their way, and are now maintained among the poor of the neighbourhood, who, far from considering them a bm'- then, were so eager to have them, that to avoid jealousy, I was obliged to have lots drawn for them; the boys indeed are grateful, and make the best returns they can by working early and late for their patrons when not engaged with me."—Having procured a holiday for his pupils, we now took leave of Thady ; and if to be a school-master, it is " requisite to be more or less than man," as Le Sage declares, Thady certainly conceived himself the former, as he detailed the merits of his seminary, and the classic progress of his disciples.

The passionate love of letters discovered by the native Irish in all ages, it would indeed be obstinate scepticism to deny ; since even the host of enemies which Ireland has had to contend with, never dare deny her supremacy in learning ; and how so ardent a love for all that softens and humanizes the natural state of man can be reconciled with a ferocious and savage barbarity of national character, is a paradox not easily comprehended. Sir John Davis, who was attorney general in Ireland, when a series of civil wars had reduced it to an almost barbarous state, compared to that in which it was found by the English barons in the re'^,^ of

Henry the Second, declares, “ that the Irish were even then, amidst an unceasing anxiety for their lives and property, which were always threatened and never secure, still lovers of music, poetry, and all kind of learning ;” and indeed no stronger testimony^{”^} of their ancient civilization could be pro-

*Allemande, in his *Histoire d’Irlande*, asserts that it was enough to be an Irishman, or even to have studied in Ireland, to become the founder of a religious seminary in any part of Europe. “ When Gothic ignorance expelled all learning and science from the continent,” says an elegant writer, “ they fell into the protection of the Hynialls until a war with strangers altered the face of things in Ireland,”

duced than that which still exists in the love of learning discoverable among the most neglected and despised of their posterity. Doctor Johnson, in lamenting that doctor Leland began his *History* from too late a date, adds : “ the ages w[^]hich deserve a strict inquiry, are those times, for such there have been, when Ireland was the school of the West.” Learning in Ireland has in/[<].ed had much to encounter both from foreign and domestic enemies. The first blow it received was during the first Danish invasion, when the savage Turgicus with a political barbarity burnt all the books he could discover, and razed the colleges to the ground ; while the bard, resigning his charming art with that liberty which had been his inspiration and his theme, fled from the usurped castle of his patron, or escaped from the ruins of the hallowed sanctuary of his order, and with his harp unstrung and his voice broken and tremulous, sought a refuge in the labyrinth of the cavern or the gloom of the wood, refusing like the en: laved Israelite to breathe on the ear of his country’s foe a “ melody in heaviness.” Yet how few are there now to be found, who, like the bard of Erin or of Israel, exclaim :

“ when I forget thee, my country, may my right hand forget her cunning !”

On our return from Thady’s, a tall well-looking young man with a satchel on his back, ran for a considerable way beside the carriage, until perceiving that we observed him, he said he had taken the liberty to follow us, to beg we would give him an old Cicero ; as we had distributed several old books among Thady’s pupils, not one of which had fallen to his lot. W[^]e asked him what profession he was intended for : he said he had been studying for Apothecaries’ Hall, but that of late he had taken to Philosophy. The philosopher was bare-footed, and though it was raining, ran beside the carriage with an uncovered head.

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THE incessant rain of a morning, sultry for the advanced season, was the precursor of one of the finest evenings I ever beheld. The clouds discharged of their heaviness rose in fleecy columns from the sides of the surrounding mountains. The setting sun unobscured by a single vapour, with all his blushing honours thick about him, sunk in the waves of the “ steep Atlantic ;” and the large lingering drops of the recent showers hung like brilliant gems on the foliage of the trees, whose leaves were imbued with the mellow colouring of autumn’s last tints. The air, calm and still, breathed odours ; and a shot fired from an American vessel as it cleared the bar, was the only sound that disturbed the soft solemnity of the hour. Such was the evening in which my last ramble amidst the romantic wilds of Tyreragh was taken

I had not wandered far from L*** house, when I was overtaken by a young peasant who was driving a mule laden with two panniers. As soon as he had approached us, I received the usual benediction and salute ; and the voluntary information that he was going to Sligo, for some grains for a sick cow, not being able, he said, to procure any at Ballina, whence had just come, as Ballina and its neighbourhood had been the headquarters of the Thrashers. I made some inquiries relative to their operations. “ Why,” replied he, “ they are busy enough at present with the tythe proctors ; and they have barred a priest out of his chapel, in the hope of making him lower his dues, threatening to go to church if he does not, not being able to pay

both priest and minister, since the proctors have raised the tythe's and the priest his dues. For my own part^ church or mass is all the same to me.”—After some further conversation, my eleemosynary companion passed on.

The apparent indifference of this young peasant, who was probably the oracle of his countrymen, to any peculiar form of worship, confirmed me in an opinion, which from reiterated experience I had long entertained ; that the peasantry of Ireland were not naturally so bigoted a people as was generally supposed ; and that they were rather coalesced in opinion and sentiment, and attached to a certain class in political establishment, than jealously united as the professors of any particular sect in religion.

Does the unfortunate whom necessity leads, or the traveller whom mischance^ conducts, to their huts, find his religion a subject of inquiry before he receives the rites of hospitality, so cordially, so indiscriminately bestowed ? Does the protestant gentleman find himself less faithfully, less actively served than the catholic, or does a difference of faith influence the social affections of their hearts, or chill the ardour of their attachment to those who treat them with justice and his manity ? Oh ! no ; the line of demarcation which severs the lower from the higher orders of the Irish nation has not been traced by the finger of bigotry : it is drawn by poverty and discontent ; it is to be defaced by benevolence and good policy.

However principles of patriotism may be influenced by a romantic ardour of imagination ; however the amor patriae. of youthful feelings may revel in the speculation of a native Utopia ; however the enthusiasm of national affection may ideally overleap the rational boundary of reason and possibility ; it is not easy to believe that even the most visionary mind animated by the most patriotic sentiments, would be so chimerical in its hopes or so wild in its desires, as to anticipate or suppose the revival of those original rights forfeited by the influence of the (now far distant) events to which all nations are subject, and lost in the sweep of ages gone by '^ with those beyond the Flood ;" or speculate on the annihilation of those existing establishments, sanctioned by time, by succession, by all that guards the privileges and claims of society, and all that secures the property and possessions of the individual. But though I would not assert, and do not believe, that "the succession of those who cultivate the soil is the true pedigree of property ;" yet while in those who do cultivate it I behold the rude traces of the happiest nature, struggling against the hardships of the severest destiny ; while local oppression and hopeless indigence impel them to desperate revolt, or lure them to daring innovation; it is surely to be wished that those causes, which through a series of ages have produced such fatal, such invariable effects, were at least softened, if not effectually eradicated,*

It is indeed asserted by some Irishmen, that there is no excuse for the errors of their unhappy countrymen, because there is no cause for that murmuring spirit of discontent so long apparent in their conduct ; and though this doctrine of effect without causes may be supported by some logicians, who assert that their actual separation implies neither absurdity nor and whose head is little skilled in logical subtilities, it implies both. contradiction, yet to one whose heart has long sorrowed over national affliction,

[1] “ If civil society be made for the advantage of man, all the advantages for which it is made become his right : it is an institution of beneficence ; and law itself is but beneficence acting by rule. Men have a right to live by that rule : they have a right to justice as between their fellows, whether their fellows are in politic functions, or in ordinary occupation ; they have a right to the fruits of their industry, and to the means of making their industry fruitful ; they have a right to the acquisition of their parents, to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring, to instruction in life, and to consolation in death.”—Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France.

The light of truth guides us by the simplest path to the source of national misery or national vice ; it is with her we trace them to natural or to moral causes, to the fatality of climate or to the errors of legislation. It is by her pure beam we discover whether the distractions in which nations are so frequently involved, are the physical results of feverish constitutions and maniac brains ; or the moral effects of that impulsive principle in human nature, which sooner or later inevitably opposes itself to the infringements of those rights which hold their sacred charter from the voice of nature^ God

THE END.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE publishers of Miss Owenson's Patriotic Sketches would remark, that the price of the English copy of this work is four dollars. They flatter themselves, it will be a source of pleasure to local readers to learn, that the type was cast expressly for this volume at the Baltimore Foundry, owned by Samuel Sower & Co.—the paper manufactured by Conrad, Lucas & Co.—and the relative excellence of each has not often been surpassed by any publications which have been issued from the American press.

Miss Owenson has been long celebrated, as an eminent proof of the vast extent of the powers of the imagination ; and her ardent attachment to the “ Emerald Isle,” elicits patriotic fire in every page of her writings, when the “ green fields of Erin” are the subject. They who have read and admired the Wild Irish Girl, will recognise in the Patriotic Sketches the same pen, animated by a similar spirit ; and this last effusion of her mind will be perused with the strongest emotions of sympathy and philanthropy, by all those who weep over the degradation, or rejoice in the melioration of the condition of man.

Baltimore, June 2d, 1809.

[1] A barony, and even sometimes a county, will *hurl* against another. The respective parties are drawn up like two little armies, and distinguished from each other by their colours.— Their goals are generally placed about 200 yards distant : they are guarded by two sentinels called in Irish *coolbara*, while the active parties are termed *tridak*, which I believe means on the alert. “ The might that slumbers in a peasant's arm” is by them roused to an incredible exertion ; and the address, spirit, and dexterity, displayed during the game, are truly wonderful. Wrestling-matches are also extremely frequent, and generally performed with singular skill and adroitness.

[2] It is however necessary to observe that the profession of this elegant art, by no means prohibits the adoption of any other : a friend of mine having sent for a carman a few days back to convey some furniture to a neighbouring town, he excused himself, saying that he was a dancing-master by trade, as well as a car-man, and that his pupils were so numerous just then, he could not possibly absent himself from them.

Patriotic sketches of Ireland, written in Connaught (1809)

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