

Letters From The West

*Letters From The West of Ireland.*

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Buncrana, Northern Donegal

*August 21.*

LETTERS from the West of Ireland may fairly begin with a bull, and accordingly I make no apology for dating the first from Buncrana, Buncrana being nearly the central point of the northern coast, and situated some twenty miles to the southward of Malin Head, the most northerly headland in the country. I had arranged a tour to embrace some of the most picturesque districts in the wilds of the West, but I had been told that in the outlying peninsula of Inishowen there is coast scenery almost as stern as any in the kingdom, while it is certain that it is seldom visited by tourists. In Ireland, in fact, even more than elsewhere, the tourist traffic has settled down into regular grooves. English visitors, and great numbers of Americans who are dropped or picked up at Queenstown by the Atlantic liners, hurry off on flying trips to Kerry or Connemara, or they rash northward to the neighbourhood of the Giant's Causeway. What proves, by the way, the cockneyfied popularity of the Causeway is the recent establishment of an electrical tramway which promises to pay handsomely. The beauties of Killarney, and the grandeurs of the coastline near Dunluce, are well worth seeing, no doubt, but the rest of Ireland has been strangely neglected. The few strangers who come to the town of Derry, where they may find comfortable quarters at Jury's Hotel, are generally attracted by the memories of the famous siege, and turn southward or eastward without going farther. Yet Derry is the beautiful entrance to a wonderfully romantic district, which has the great advantage of being very accessible. The limited mail leaving Dublin at 8.15 A. M. delivers you at Derry at 2 ; and from Derry there are frequent trains to Buncrana on Lough Swilly, and daily steamers to Moville on Lough Foyle. Thence there are roads to the remoter villages in Inishowen, and cars are of course to be chartered everywhere.

A more romantic situation than that of Derry it is not easy to conceive, and it gives the visitor a magnificent view of the land of promise before him. Standing on a bastion of the ancient wall beneath the column crowned by the statue of the heroic Parson Walker, we follow his fixed gaze down the channel of the Foyle, where the relieving squadron so long lay at anchor while the garrison went through agonies of hope and despair. Around is the bustle of a thriving town ; below are the busy wharves where lines of steamers are loading and discharging ; and in the distance is the bleak coast-line to the north-east, and the swelling grey hills of the Inishowen peninsula. But it is the landscape in the middle distance that is most perfect of its sort, as I saw it lighted up by brilliant sunshine. The richly wooded banks on either shore of the Foyle are studded with villas and bright country seats. The woods, embracing lawns and sloping corn-fields, come feathering down to the edge of the water ; and what with the green trees and the emerald lawns, the golden corn and the grey spits of sand, there is rich variety in a colouring in which, nevertheless, nothing is out of harmony. Nor do the bright red buoys and beacons which mark out the mid-channel in any degree detract from the effect. The charms of the Inishowen peninsula are chiefly in the sea scenery. Tapering towards the point where we enter it from Derry, it is clasped in the sea-arms of Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle. The day of my arrival I embarked on a steamer carrying

excursionists on an afternoon trip to Moville. The distance to Moville and back is thirty-eight miles, and the cost of the excursion was a shilling. I may safely say that seldom has a shilling been invested to better purpose. The day was beautiful, and the sail was delightful. The river Foyle rather reminds one of a Windermere at the narrowest, only that the woods being more continuous, the scenery is softer. Leaving the Foyle for the widening expanse of its Lough, we hug the shore of eastern Donegal, while looking across to the rocks and the sands of Antrim. And everywhere to the left are to be seen the signs of prosperity, where industry has been triumphing over natural difficulties. The climate is ungenial and the soil unkindly ; but the barren hills are encircled by a broad belt of cultivation, carried apparently almost beyond the limits of the practicable. There are root-crops which seem wonderfully heavy after an experience of the effects of the English drought ; there are waving fields and patches of oats, yellowing already for the scythe ; and here and there are singularly green fields grazed by sleek herds of shorthorns. One fine lot of cattle I remarked in particular, and I was told it belonged to Mr Robert Hamilton, a wholesale grocer in Derry, and an enterprising grazier and agriculturist to boot. But here the farms are often of considerable extent, and the tenants are anything but chary of expenditure, judging by the persistent advertising of artificial manures, and the omnipresent depots of the Ulster Manure Company. It is a very different thing with the crofters in the interior of the peninsula, who struggle for the most part on their small hill holdings, with some three or four acres of stony arable land, and rights of grazing thrown in, in the way of commonty. The population in the interior is almost entirely Catholic, while that along the coast is of all denominations, the Presbyterians greatly predominating. And were it not for the differences of creed and communion, one should have said that the district was considerably over-churched, for sacred edifices are to be seen at frequent intervals.

A very conspicuous object is the spire of the handsome Episcopal church of Moville, topping the grassy spur of the mountains, up which the bright little watering-place is scrambling. The approach by the Lough is simply enchanting, at least on such a fortunate afternoon as I am describing. The white houses, sparkling in the sunshine, stood out against the dark background of woods ; the hanging shores of the curving bay were broken back in sharp angles ; garden walls that looked like low battlements run out into salient angles of grey rock ; while at the back of all, and breaking the sea-line, were the towers of the Castle of Greencastle. The place struck me as being something between our English Dartmouth and many a quiet nook in the Eastern Riviera. But I am bound to say that these rosy impressions were decidedly toned down on closer inspection. The steep streets that had struck one as so picturesque from afar, resolved themselves into bald and uneven blocks of buildings, with whitewashed fronts and flat roofs of slate. Happily nothing can seriously injure the natural beauty. The little quay is sadly dilapidated, and the rocky slopes that overlook the tiny harbour were encumbered with empty salmon-boxes and strewed with a queer variety of refuse. But there is a splendid stretch of turf, shelving down from a natural esplanade and overhanging the deep blue water of the Lough. It was studded with clumps of thorn-bushes, cut down by the sharp northern winds into fantastic shapes of settees and footstools. It was studded with comfortable seats as well ; it was covered with groups of gaily-dressed people, and by troops of the ragged village children at play ; and pastured promiscuously by sheep, and fowls, and geese,—though I must add that the pigs were conspicuous by their absence. Altogether it was a most exhilarating scene, and the briny air was as invigorating as the broad sea-ward views were inspiring. The village faces full to the south, and is consequently protected from the cold quarter. In one of the back gardens, or rather back yards, I remarked a glorious fuchsia hedge, at least nine feet in height, and luxuriant in proportion. No wonder the place is much frequented by the Derry folks, and, moreover, the steamers of the Anchor and other Transatlantic lines touch there on their way to and from the Clyde and the Mersey. I am informed that the municipality, however it may be composed, is backward in profiting by its natural privileges, and from all I saw I can well believe it. But, on the other hand, a great deal of money must be spent there

by well-to-do private residents. The handsome and picturesquely situated church to which I have alluded would do credit to any place. Along the road leading to Greencastle and the Point of Inishowen are houses, singly or in pairs, standing in their own little woods and gardens, covered with creepers and masses of purple clematis that you might turn to admire at Ventnor or Bournemouth ; the thick thorn hedges are carefully kept and trimmed ; while the seats of the Hon. Mr Cochrane and Colonel Lyle, to the eastward of the highroad, and hanging over the sea, are residences that any gentleman might envy. It is true that I chanced to see everything *en couleur de rose*, for such a day as I had for my visit must be almost unprecedented. The aspect of the melodiously named place must be very different in drifting sea-fogs or drenching rain. We were belated on our return voyage to Derry. The sunset faded slowly out of a cloudless sky behind the hills to the west ; the stars came twinkling out one by one ; each tree and stone on the shore was mirrored in the glassy surface of the Lough ; each beacon-light darted down its ruddy reflection through the pools in a flickering arrow of fire ; and the air was so soft and the atmosphere so transparent, that we might have been steaming through the Bosphorus or the Straits of Messina ; so that, though it was drawing on towards nine o'clock and dinner had been waiting, I regretted our arrival at the wharves of Derry.

There was little to remind one of Southern Europe next morning. The skies were grim and the wind chilly when I started by train for Buncrana. After a time the railway strikes the eastern shore of Lough Swilly, and even under those gloomy skies the Lough seemed exceedingly beautiful. The people fondly call it the Lake of the Shadows ; and it well deserves the more poetical name. A wide expanse of water, it winds about among the mountains, forming a succession of hill-locked lakes which set our sense of topography at defiance. There are green "inches" and greener promontories, surmounted by the shattered fortresses of the old chiefs of the tribes, or by modern fortifications of the time of Napoleon. The castle at Buncrana, for example, was a seat of the O'Dohertys, and it was taken from Sir Cahir of the name by one of the ancestors of the Verners. But an object of more immediate interest was the inn, and I can only say that its accommodation was a most agreeable surprise. The Lough Swilly Hotel stands, like the ruined keeps, on a grassy headland jutting out into the lake and looking down on the little harbour. There are a charming coffee-room and public sitting-room, with enormous windows and glorious views. There are bright bedrooms, comfortably furnished. The cooking, though simple, is unexceptionable ; although there is no wine *carte*, the claret is capital ; while the bread and the butter are even better. There is a paternal old waiter, who takes a personal interest in the guests, with a couple of good-humoured female *aides-de-camp*. How I may fare in the further west I do not know, but I mention these agreeable details to show that the tourist in Ireland need not necessarily rough it. In any similar place in the Scotch Highlands there would be three or four great hotels, each and all of them overflowing, with their supercilious landlords spoiled by prosperity. Here half-a-dozen of us have the house to ourselves ; we may pick and choose among the bedrooms ; and we have only to express a wish to send the establishment scurrying to satisfy it, Nor can anything prove more conclusively how the tourist in Ireland will persistently stick to the beaten tracks. I had to plan for next day an expedition to the coast scenery. It was said to be a dull and dreary drive to the northernmost headland of Malin ; it was certainly a very long one ; so I decided in preference for Dunree and Dunaff Heads. The decision was wise ; for Malin is barely a third of the height of Dunaff, and you may see it from Dunaff without the trouble of going there. As it was, and by changing the route in coming back, I travelled at least thirty Irish miles. But the hog-maned, crop-tailed little Kerry nag did his work well ; and the lad who drove was as gentlemanly and intelligent a companion as one could desire to find. To be sure he had a slight dash of superstition. He said the herrings had almost deserted the lough of late years, and I inquired the reason. His explanation was simple if not satisfactory : " Well, sir, some thirty years back they used to be in great plenty, and the people took to fighting over them, so the herrings got disgusted and left the lough."

The morning was heavenly. Each hill and each fishing-boat, each floating cloud and each skimming seagull, cast its shadow on “ the Lake of Shadows.” As we drove to Dunree we passed an abandoned linen mill, and some busy quarries, with a steam stone-breaker, whence Derry draws its principal supplies. Mr Mitchell, who contracts for the quarries, delivers the stone by cart at Buncrana station. There is stone enough in the country. Stones cleared from actual peat-bogs are piled out of the way into broad fences ; and stone enclosures checker the sides of the hills, where the grazings are separated into small allotments. Generally speaking, however, the people send their sheep on to the hills in common, each of the many owners having his particular brand. Rocks crop up everywhere through the hill pastures ; and at the fort of Dunree, which crossed fire with another fort on the opposite shore, the rocky scenery becomes exceedingly fine. Approaching the heathery fringe of a sheer and lofty precipice, you look along a jagged and rugged shore, where justing promontories enclose shingly creeks and sandy coves thickly strewn with rounded boulders and sea-weed. It is a regular trade here, the cutting the sea-weed or “ leigh” (phonetically spelt) from rocks in the deep water. The crofters keep boats for the purpose ; and the weed is fetched away by water, by the farmers whose holdings lie along the shores of the Lough. After turning back from Dunree promontory to the road we had left, we drove forward to the famous Gap of Mamore. The Gap is really a *col* or depression between the hills, to which you climb by an exceedingly sharp ascent. Its beauties, in my opinion, are overrated by the guide-books, though there is a fine scene halfway down the northern dip, where an amphitheatre of steep and stony hills sinks down to a stagnant pool scarcely rising to the dignity of a tarn. But the day being extraordinarily fine and clear, I climbed the highest of the hills hanging over the Gap to the east, and was richly repaid by the magnificent circular panorama. To the westward I had a bird’s-eye view of the geography and hydrography of northern Donegal, with its inland loughs and the intricacies of its sea-arms, with rounded mountain rising behind rounded hill, over the intervening ridges of serrated cliff, each more distant mountain growing dimmer in the faint fine-weather haze. Behind was Lough Swilly winding round to Letterkenny, with a thickly populated belt of cultivation in the foreground ; to the south-east lay a wide extent of almost uninhabited moorland ; while to the east was the low rocky spit of Malin Head with its lighthouse, running out beyond one of the biggest of the conical hills. After that glorious view, there was something of bathos in the ascent of the round rocky mass of Dunaff, rising to the seaward of the little hamlet of that name, although the rocky mass is 600 feet high. On the top of the rock is a thick layer of peat, and crossing that peaty plateau we look down on the rocks beneath—black buttresses and bastions, with chasms behind them, and the sea churning within these in white-crested surf. To-day everything is so calm that the murmur of the long curving lines of breakers sounds no louder than the rush of a train in the distance. Even against the distant rocks of Malin—a natural break-water which breaks the full swell of the Atlantic—there is nothing to be seen but an undulating line of white. But one can imagine what the scene and the sounds may be when a tempest has been lashing the Atlantic into fury.

Retuning homewards by an inland and more circuitous road, the drive is dull so far as scenery is concerned. The most striking object is a precipitously rocky island in Malin Bay, apparently impracticable and unapproachable, but which, nevertheless, pastures some forty sheep, which are pitched ashore on a shelf of stone when the weather chances to be propitious. But if the scenery be dull, the people and their habits are interesting—at all events to any one to whom Ireland is unfamiliar. On the whole they seem to be fairly well off, and most of the children are rosy and apparently well fed. There are plenty of roads, and very tolerable roads ; plenty of schools and plenty of churches. Certain things in the mode of farming strike a stranger. There are numerous patches of magnificent cabbages, which, with turnips, straw, and occasionally potatoes, feed the cattle through winter. Some of the finest cabbage crops were raised in pure peat, dressed over with natural manure. Elsewhere seedling cabbages are grown in broad borders of peat, divided, like asparagus-beds, by cuttings for drainage, and the seedlings are planted out in the spring. As we drove outward in the morning, few cattle

were to be seen. Those which are herded near the houses are turned out early, fetched home at ten, when the cows are milked, and sent out again late in the afternoon with dogs and children in charge ; and looking after these light-limbed cows can be no sinecure, seeing that tempting oats and roots are always within a few yards of the scanty herbage they graze upon. They seemed chiefly a small cross between shorthorn and longhorn, with a strong infusion of an original native breed. They are said to give milk freely, considering their size and their feeding. As for the sheep, the fleeces are sent to the local fairs, where they are bought very much for home spinning and knitting. Here, however, as elsewhere, prices have been falling off sadly : now the average rate is 8d. or 9d. per lb., and the best cleaned fleeces seldom exceed 1s. Hardly a pig was to be seen on the peninsula. I was told that strict police regulations forbid them going at large. *Un revanche* there are countless flocks of extremely fine geese, which are bought up by dealers from Glasgow and Liverpool. The butter is generally consigned to Derry. There is a strange absence of wild-animal life. I flushed but a single grouse, though I walked through a great deal of heather. Strange to say, there were no hawks ; and I saw nothing in the way of small birds but a few robins and linnets. Magpies were common, and most audaciously tame ; while rooks swarm everywhere,—in fact the rooks are an intolerable scourge to the farmer. You may see a band of these gentlemen in black, solemn as so many sextons, digging up a row of potatoes as if they were the legitimate owners. Then they fly away with the tubers to the nearest bare field, where they feast on them at leisure without fear of surprise.

There have been few changes of property of late in Inishowen. In fact, as I shall have frequently occasion to remark, for the last four or five years—since the beginning of the land agitation—the land market has been absolutely paralysed. But just before that agitation a large property, extending from the Minchies Lakes to the market-town of Cardonagh, had been bought by the Hon. Captain Cochrane, whom I mentioned as residing near Moville. For hill land and fairly fertile strath representing a rental of £2000, he paid about fifteen years' purchase, and, it is to be feared, made a very unfortunate bargain.

With its many attractions, Inishowen can in the meantime hardly be recommended as a sporting district. I have talked to more than one gentleman who had been shooting here, and all had the same tale of disappointment to tell. The shooting has greatly deteriorated in the last few years, chiefly perhaps because the local landowners have been retrenching and getting rid of their keepers. At the best of times it can never have been satisfactory, for the system of small hill farms must be most injurious to it. Each crofter has his dog and a couple of cats or so ; and as the cats are kept on the shortest commons, they naturally become indefatigable poachers. Their masters poach too on occasion. One of my informants who knows Scotland well, told me he had never shot over more tempting ground than the moors within a few miles of Bunrana. On the first day's beat he saw one brace of barren birds, with three hares, and he bagged nothing. The second day, under the guidance of a farmer who knew something of sport, he came on a couple of coveys and secured five birds. The proprietor, who was shooting with him, has let some of his land on lease—as he well may—at a merely nominal rent for the next couple of years, the lessees taking it with the idea of preserving and endeavouring to get up the game. It is very certain that with the multitude of squatters and crofters they will have their work cut out for them, more especially as it is impossible to keep down the vermin when so many wastes and moors in the neighbourhood are unreserved. And even the sea-fishing in the loughs in the last few years has deteriorated like the grouse-shooting. Whether it be owing to the trawling or not, the numbers of the flat-fish—turbot, soles, and plaice—have greatly fallen off. The destruction of the oyster-beds, for which Lough Swilly was once celebrated, dates from a far earlier period. Forty years ago there were beds of “ natives ” off the Inch Island, whence they used to be literally sent landward by cart-loads, and they sold in the markets of Derry for fourpence per hundred. Now not a native is to be had for love or money. The cause of the destruction is said to have been the

reclamation of some 1400 acres of foreshore by a Mr Longstaff and the late Mr Brassey. It is supposed that the encroachment of land on sea may have changed the set of the tides and currents. Subsequently an enterprising local speculator spent upwards of £1000 in an unsuccessful attempt at forming artificial deposits.

I have left the most romantic associations with Inishowen to the last ; but it would be impossible to conclude any sketch of the peninsula without a glance at the manufacture of potheen, for which it has always been famous. The illicit business of the hill stills has been decaying like the grouse-shooting and the sea-fishing ; but it is still, perhaps, the most important industry north of the linen manufactures of Londonderry. Here, as in northern Donegal and in Antrim, not a few of the peasants have made a hereditary profession of it. With the wild coast-lines, and the innumerable creeks, they can easily land the raw material and ship the manufactured article. The clergymen set their faces against it, but they are said still to supply the farmers and the large tradesmen largely. Certain districts come to have a monopoly, because families are born and bred to the business. The children lounging on the hillsides form a *cordon* of keen-eyed watchers round the still, which is set up in some secluded ravine where the smoke is most likely to escape observation. The cost of the apparatus is considerable—some £20 at the lowest—so the profits must be large, since there is always the risk of a surprise and a capture. Formerly the spirit was made entirely of malt. A sack one-third filled was sunk in a stream until the grain had swelled to the size of the sack, then the contents were spread out on the mud-floor of a turf hut till they had sprouted ready for the operation, and the spirit was generally passed three times through the still, till it came out limpid as filtered spring-water. That old-fashioned potheen, though terribly potent, was marvellously pure. Then molasses came to be used in place of the grain ; and now, since it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, the fall in the price of sugar has caused it to be successfully substituted for the molasses. The spirit is apparently as pure as before, but the quality is infinitely more deleterious. Such as it is, it fetches good prices at second-hand ; the illicit distillers may sell for 8s. or 9s. per gallon, but the retailers demand 14s. or 15s. It is the business of the police in the first place to hunt up the stills ; when necessary they may call in the assistance of the coastguard. Cases of detection are comparatively rare ; when they do occur they are generally due to information given, presumably out of personal malice. What is remarkable is that some of the most notorious places of manufacture seem to be an open secret ; men in the coastguard will profess to point towards the localities. The difficulty, they say, is to catch the smuggler in the act ; the mystery is where and how the distillers conceal their apparatus between times.

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Dunfanaghy, North Donegal

*August 22*

I RETRACT nothing I said as to the Lough Swilly Hotel. It is admirable both for civility and comfort. But there were things there that struck me as curiously Irish. The people of the house congratulated themselves on the quiet and the scarcity of company as I congratulated myself. There was never any fish at table, all being despatched to contractors in Derry and none retained. And perhaps most characteristic of all was the behaviour of the zealous boots who had undertaken to awaken me at 7 o'clock sharp. A few minutes after his boisterous entrance, on looking at my watch I found it was 7.45. Expostulating on his not informing me as to a piece of carelessness by which I very nearly missed my steamer, he scratched his head and hesitatingly made answer, " Well, sir, I did not like to say anything, because I thought it might possibly be unpleasant for you. But I was wrong, and I beg you will look over it this

time." As if I were in the habit of leaving Lough Swilly every morning ! and his manner was so ludicrously insinuating, that it was difficult to be angry. Everybody, by the way, tags on " Sir" to each sentence as punctiliously as Johnson or Boswell. I crossed the lough by a steam-ferry from Fahan Point to Rathmullet, whence I took a car to Dunfanaghy. There were two or three yachts in the roads at Rathmullet, and three of the vessels of the Channel fleet had just come to an anchor off Buncrana. For a mile or two the road follows the shore of the lough, before turning inland to the market-town of Milford. There are dense woods of ash and of beech on the one hand, on the other were the sands, the shingle, and the seaweed left bare by the ebbing of the tide. There is fair duck and wild-fowl shooting along this side of Lough Swilly. Some of the people make a regular business of it, and I saw one or two small punts hauled up before the cottages.

We drive nearly all the way to Dunfanaghy, across the great Leitrim estates, which extend from north to south, from far beyond his lordship's residence on the Mulroy river, nearly to Letterkenny at the upper end of the lough. The late earl was murdered, as will be remembered, while driving into Milford from his own house. The murderers have never been brought to justice, though a man charged with the crime died while confined in prison. The present peer is one of the most spirited and philanthropical landlords in the north of Ireland. He has done much to improve the breed of sheep ; he has been cutting sheep-drains after the Scotch fashion, and has enclosed great stretches of hill pasture with leagues of wire-fencing. What is still more likely to be productive of good, he has established a regular steam service from his pier at Mulroy to Liverpool and Glasgow ; and there is a smaller steamer which makes irregular trips with produce to various ports along the coast. Driving onwards to Milford, we met many troops of harvestmen from the Dunfanaghy and Gweedore neighbourhoods on their way to Derry to embark for England and Scotland. All of them seemed cheery and in good condition. They had no overcoats, they had no shillelahs ; but each man carried under his arm a bundle of his belongings in a red cotton handkerchief. We met, besides, a flock of 200 or 300 geese, likewise on their way to take shipping at Derry. The old gentleman in charge relieved his mind by running back alongside the car to remark that they were " a most conthrairy flock." And, indeed, even the proverbial pig-driving can hardly be such a trial to the temper. The geese waddled aside by the dozen through each gateway and gap ; and two or three ragged " gossoons" were galloping on the flanks of the flock like so many collie dogs, hounding them on and heading them back. But even the boys are baffled when the birds take to their wings. Milford is a neat and thriving little town, and I daresay passable quarters might be found there for fishing Lough Fern, which lies a couple of short miles beyond. The boats are kept at the further end of the lough ; but the trout are said to be numerous and strong, running as heavy as four or five pounds. Beyond this lough—from Kilmacrenan to Creeslough—the country is singularly bleak, although not altogether devoid of grandeur. There is a rather fine bit in the Gap of Barness, where there is a police hut of wood, with corrugated zinc roof, put up about two years ago. The country was unsettled then, and may any day be unsettled again ; in the meantime it is tolerably peaceable. It is regularly patrolled at night along the different roads and at uncertain intervals—the police from one station meeting those in another by previous arrangement. Their position at the Gap may be excellent from a strategical point of view, but a drearier quarter in the winter it would be difficult to conceive. And from Barness the black mass of Muckish—*Anglicè*, the Hog's Back—is conspicuous,—a very different object from the green Hog's Back near Guildford. Sweeping round a sharp descent from Creeslough towards the sea, the suddenness of the transformation scene is very striking. A streams runs brawling under a picturesque bridge into a widening estuary, whose swelling banks are beautifully wooded ; and through the vistas in the hills formed by the estuary there are magnificent views of distant mountains. What is yet more remarkable is an exceedingly extensive model farm-steading, with extremely graceful architectural elevations. Such an oasis in the desert—such lavish expenditure of capital—

seems in strange contradiction to the police hut a few miles away, and to the ordinarily unsettled condition of the district. We are on the estate of Mr Stewart of Ards,—a deservedly popular landlord, whose lands “march” with those of Lord Leitrim. Like his lordship, he has done much for the sheep and cattle ; he has led an ample supply of water into Dunfanaghy ; he has gifted it with a small Court-house ; and his outlay for many years must have been enormous. It may suffice to say that for miles along the road runs a solid wall of massive masonry, ranging from six feet to eight feet in height. Now the expenditure has been stopped ; the property has passed into the hands of trustees, and a sad loss it must be to the neighbourhood.

Dunfanaghy is a large village or small town, consisting of a single long, wide, steep street. The inn is homely, but clean and comfortable, and the people are civility itself. So far as my short experiences go, the Irish at first distrust the English stranger, and their greeting is cautious if not forbidding. Let them once understand that you are willing to be pleased, and they will spare no trouble to satisfy you. As for the dinner to-day, I should be sorry to swear that the chicken had not been foraging in the street this morning; but the bacon and beans would have been a feature at a Greenwich banquet, and they were backed up by a capital pudding ; while, again, I was agreeably surprised in the claret I recklessly ordered. The attraction of Dunfanaghy is the stupendous rock scenery. It is three long Irish miles to Horn Head, but a car may be taken for two-thirds of the way. From the end of the driving road is a rough walk over heather and peat-bog to a modern ruin on the verge of the headland. Doubtless a boat from below would be the best way of seeing the cliffs ; yet, as seen from above, in my opinion, they surpass anything I have admired either in Cornwall or Brittany. Standing under the dilapidated tower, you look across to a sheer precipice of grey splintered rock, some 630 feet in depth. The sea-gulls circling over the sea seemed dwarfed to white swallows ; and the view immediately beneath one’s feet was as fine, though, owing to the slight slope of the slippery turf, it was rather giddy work looking over. The description of such panoramic sea views becomes monotonous ; but this one was more impressive than anything in Inishowen, because there were no adjacent eminences to intercept the distant prospects. It was towards sunset ; again the day was beautifully clear and the ocean calm as glass, and to seaward the eye ranged over the promontories and sea-lochs from Malin Head to the Bloody Foreland, the north-westerly point of Ireland. Except in the remote distance, there was not a habitation to be seen, and the sense of solitude must have been oppressive had the weather been more gloomy. Here and there rose mountains of magnificently striking shapes, the most remarkable being the snow-white peak, or rather pyramid, of Errigal, which rears his head high above all the rest in the district of Gweedore. I did not visit M’Sweeny’s Gun, a monster piece of ordnance, with touch-hole opening on the cliff above, where the rush of the ocean is said to make a report which is to be heard in the storm as far as Derry. *Credat Judæus !* In other words, the “ Gun” is a great cavern ending beneath a circular perforation, like the Bullers of Buchan on the coast of Aberdeen, where the billows of the Atlantic, when pent up in rough weather, toss blocks and boulders to an inconceivable height.

The population of Ireland is, perhaps, the most mixed in the world. Dane, Norman, Welshman, Englishman, German, and Frenchman, have successively intermingled their blood with that of the aboriginal Celt. But in eastern Donegal the Scot appears to predominate, till he shades away into the hereditary seats of the natives in the wild bogs to the westward of Dunfanaghy. Judging by the names, the well-to-do farmers who own the carts you meet are of pure Scottish descent ; the landowners beyond such great properties as that of the Leitrim estates are chiefly Stewarts and Hamiltons. Even at Dunfanaghy, which is literally almost at the back of the world, I was astonished to find that the Episcopalian clergyman had upwards of 600 parishioners. What is still more surprising is, that since the disestablishment of the Irish Church, a handsome church and rectory house have been erected. Formerly the Dun-



fanaghy Episcopalians had to walk five or six miles to service—now the service has been brought to their doors. Some of the money was raised in England by their pastor, the Rev. Mr Brodie, who is himself an Englishman ; and Mr Stewart of Ards contributed liberally, giving a site and £300, with £1000 towards the endowment of the living. But even the poorest people gave according to their means, though the life-blood of the Irish Episcopalian Church in these parts is being steadily drained away. Emigration has been going briskly forward of late years, and the emigrants have been of two classes. There were the absolutely destitute, who of course received free passages ; and there were those who are decidedly better off, and sufficiently intelligent to see that emigration would improve their condition. Most of these last were either Episcopalians or Presbyterians, and so the clergymen lose the most affluent members of their congregations, if it be not an absurdity to speak of affluence in West Donegal. The 5s. and the 10s. they contributed are much missed when it comes to making up the £104 for which the parish is rated by the Church Commissioners. And should arrears accumulate to a certain point, the defaulting parish is merged in another. On the one hand, it is sincerely to be hoped that the emigration will go on ; but, on the other, it must have a serious effect on those local sustentation funds, as to which, in any case, much must depend on the presence of a rich and liberal landowner. Talking of emigration, I am told that a year or two ago nearly a hundred of the inhabitants of Dunfanaghy left in one day. I need hardly say that they could well be spared, and those who remain in the dead-alive little place appear to take life very easily. There was one small sloop unloading in the little harbour ; there were policemen off duty lounging about or sitting and sunning themselves on the window-sills ; there were people with their hands in their pockets, lounging and looking on at the policemen ; while others who had strolled as far as the bluffs behind the houses were lounging and looking out to sea. If they seemed listless and idle, they are hardly to be blamed. Most of them live, or rather starve, by fishing, having neither crofts nor hill grazing,—strange to say, because their fishing appliances are miserable, and they have no market for any fish they do take. There are plenty of fish, as is proved by the hauls of a gentleman who occasionally trawls off the shore in his steam yacht. There is no interference, as further to the south, by foreigners in the shape of either Englishmen or Frenchmen. But the Dunfanaghy men have only their primitive coracles, shaped something like small salmon cobbles, and made of tarred canvas stretched over hoops of wood. The oars in size and shape resemble the long narrow-bladed halberds carried by medieval men-at-arms, the blades having generally been broken, and lashed together again with twine. In such frail fabrics the fishermen, though daring enough, cannot possibly venture any distance from the land, especially on that storm-beaten coast. Accordingly they catch little, and what they do catch they can only sell to a few residents in the neighbourhood—the clergymen or the small landowners. Any touching little attempt at speculation is a pitiful failure. Only a few weeks ago, for example, some of the poor fellows made up a consignment of magnificent lobsters, and clubbed to send them over to Liverpool. Every one of the lobsters died *en route*, and the men, to whom each penny is of consequence, were out of pocket for the freight they paid in advance. Anything more discouraging to enterprise can hardly be conceived. And here, in this forgotten corner of the kingdom, nature seems to set herself against helping the people. It would be much to improve the harbour so as to facilitate occasional steam communication ; but there is an ugly and very dangerous sand-bar, over which the sea tumbles in the calmest weather in an unpleasantly suggestive fashion ; while any vessel lying in the open roadstead would find it hard to hold her moorings in a strong north-westerly gale. The force of these north-westerly gales must be tremendous ; and it struck me that before the low doorway of the meanest hovel in the district, a tall broad slab of stone is set up by way of shelter. Where all the land that is not bog is stone, such slabs are, perhaps, the only luxury the poorest can indulge in. A Mr Stewart—not the proprietor of Ards—works a valuable salmon-fishery at the back of Horn Head. As the fishing only begins in the spring, the stake-nets can usually be visited in comparative safety, though, naturally, in wild weather no boat dare venture round the Head. The fish, when not consigned to some chance steamer, are driven in carts over the twenty miles to

Rathmullet There has been a rough preliminary survey of a proposed railway from Letterkenny to Dunfanaghy. The line would present no great difficulties, the land is worth little, and would be given by the landowners for less. The fatal objection is, that it could not pay by any possibility. By way of postscript, I may mention an example of the injurious effect of the want of communications on markets. I saw half-a-dozen fine sheep which had been bought the other day for 15s. a-head. At any English fair they must certainly have fetched twice the money. And as an exceptional instance of the energy which might be more generally lucrative, I was told of a very young man who had invested some years' savings in a score or so of sheep, which he had sold for nearly cent per cent in Scotland. It is an unfortunate thing for Ireland that such instances of energy are phenomenal

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Gweedore, North Donegal.

*August 25.*

THE Gweedore Hotel had a high reputation during the lifetime of the late Lord George Hill, who built it and looked after it personally. It is still extremely popular, and a tolerably comfortable place of sojourn, considering the outlandish situation. But one must be prepared to put up with certain drawbacks which we should grumble at in a house of similar pretensions in England. For it is a spacious mansion of a couple of storeys, with an ample coffee-room, sundry private sitting-rooms, and a great number of bedrooms. Unlike the hotel at Buncrana, it is always full to overflowing, most visitors making a sojourn of some days at the least ; and though the accommodation is made wonderfully elastic, people are perpetually being turned away from the door, which means a drive of twelve miles to Dunglow in the one direction, or of half as many more to Dunfanaghy in the other. It is a thorough fishing and shooting establishment. Everything except the table, where there never were any fish, is suggestive of fishing, from the salmon that surmounts the weathercock to the rods by the half-dozen hung on hooks beneath the leaden gutters, and landing-nets by the armful leaning against the corners of the verandah. At this moment half the rooms are appropriated to an overgrown shooting-party, numbering fifteen with ladies and children; and "the balance," as the Americans would say, are in possession of various anglers. We live in good fellowship, but in happy-go-lucky fashion. We racket along the passages till all hours of the night. Our watches differ widely as to hours, and we lose all notion of the value of time. The fare, when it comes, is good and plentiful ; but we have to practise patience in waiting for it. Exciting one's self does not facilitate matters, and only injures the digestion. The shooting here would be thought miserably poor in Scotland, but it is far better than what I described in Inishowen. Four guns, for example, had twenty-five brace of birds on their best day, and a few days after the beginning of the season they brought home a mixed bag of forty-five head, including eight brace of grouse, the rest being hares, duck, teal, plover, and curlew. As for the fishing, it has been poor also ; but this, owing to the unusual drought, has been a singularly unsatisfactory fishing season. Here, as elsewhere in western Ireland, the best water is let and strictly preserved. To show what may be done in these parts, I may mention that Mr Lee, who has the best two miles' of the Clada, which flows in front of the hotel, some years ago killed sixty-five salmon in five days. Since that time the fishing has fallen off, although now it begins to improve again. In the height of the land agitation the hotel and the lessee of the water were boycotted. No gillies or watchers could be procured for love or money, and the peasants could poach at their goodwill and pleasure. But the Clada, with its alternations of pools and swift rushes, ought naturally to be a beautiful stretch of salmon water. There are small lakes above, free to anglers from the hotel, boat and boat-man being charged 4s. 6d., where a fair lot of small trout, averaging half a pound, but giving good sport, may be killed ; while within the last week or two the sea-trout have been beginning to run here, finding their

way, as is their habit, from the sea to the upper loughs. Dunglow, twelve miles to the southward, is said to be excellent quarters for the “white trout” fishing, as the river connects a chain of loughs which are favourite resorts of the fish.

I have been somewhat disappointed in the situation of the Gweedore Hotel, having perhaps heard too much of it beforehand. The bogs and low hills about it are tame, and the only walks in the immediate neighbourhood are up or down a car-road ; for these Irish bogs, unlike the elastic Scotch heather, are fatiguing and most untempting walking. But the isolated peak of Errigal is always a magnificent object ; there are grand precipices at the back of the Bloody Foreland, and the nearest coast, which is four miles distant, is a scene of most impressive desolation. But scenery apart, Gweedore is well deserving of a visit by any one interested in the Irish land question ; for it was here that Lord George Hill, chivalrously attempting the impossible, tried to turn a desert in the direction of a paradise, and to spread the comforts of civilised life among a population phenomenally wretched and overcrowded. His lordship, no doubt, did much good ; but though the experiment promised fairly for a time, it can hardly be said to have succeeded, seeing the present state of the district. But its history is none the less curious and interesting. Briefly, in 1835 he bought 23,000 acres from various small proprietors. The parish then contained 9000 souls ; their condition was abject in the extreme. A memorial, sent about that time by the schoolmaster to the Lord-Lieutenant, describes the people as “naked and needy” beyond anything within the memorialist’s knowledge. He says that among the whole of them there were but one plough, twenty shovels, thirty-two rakes, and two feather-beds ; and he offers to give any visitor ocular demonstration of the facts. Many of the children went naked through the winter ; the adults wore the filthiest rags. Lord George bought the land with his eyes open and from motives purely philanthropic. He said himself that he knew things were the result of the vicious system which had prevailed for ages, and he set himself to grapple with it patiently and resolutely. The initial difficulty was to persuade the people that he meant well by them. They distrusted a landlord and all he did. The next thing was to overcome their prejudices as to cultivation, to change the miserable system of “rundale,” and to redistribute the tiny crofts. With great outlay and by incredible efforts he gradually taught the peasants to believe in him, to accept his wages, and undertake his work. When they saw the superiority of the crops he raised they began gradually to imitate him. He opened a shop and meal-stores at Gweedore Station. He offered premiums for cottages ; he actually established flower-shows and exhibitions of work. And undoubtedly his enterprising benevolence has had lasting effects, and he must have done much to improve the tone of the district.

Under Captain Hill, the present proprietor, the tenants, as I have every reason to believe, were fairly and even liberally treated. But when the land agitation seized on the weakest points of the Irish land system, north-western Donegal was naturally pitched upon. Hopelessly overcrowded still, after very considerable emigration, it is simply unfit for human habitation, unless on wages regularly paid. Driving from Dunfanaghy, or even from Creeslough to Gweedore, I have no hesitation in saying that, in the real interests of humanity, a clean sweep should be made of the crofters, and the land given over, as in the Scotch Highlands, to sheep and game. Then a certain number of shepherds and gillies could bring up their families in comfort ; while there might be fishermen along the coast, if markets could be opened up to them. Look at the present situation of this great parish of Gweedore. It extends for ten Irish miles from the Bloody Foreland southward—I ought to have said that four Irish miles are equal to five English—and for nearly the same distance from Errigal to the sea. Besides, there are one or two thickly populated islands off Gweedore Bay, the only land, except the reefs called the Stags of Arranmore, between Gweedore and the State of New York. The general aspect is that of barren bog, checkered by patches of oats and potatoes. Within the limits of the dreary waste are still 3000 souls. Captain Hill owns the lion’s share ; there are two or three smaller proprietors ; and Lord Leitrim has a patch of land below

Errigal. On Captain Hill's estate there are not half-a-dozen tenants who pay the £4 of rent which renders them liable to rating. All the rest are practically paupers, their average rents being under £1, many being as low as 10s. Most of them have a cow or two, and some sheep ; but not a few nowadays do not even own the pig which the cottier used always to look to for his rent. The land, which it is irony to call arable, is either stone or bog. The stony soil carries a stragglng crop ; but the reclaimed bog is hungry beyond all conception. The spongy peat, which must be freely manured at first, sucks down the manure, and sooner or later ceases to repay cultivation. The labour that should be economised is still wasted by the absurd practice of "rundale," which seems to have survived Lord G. Hill's reforms. Thanks to the congestion and the perpetual land-hunger, each tenant bought the tenant-right of a patch at outrageous prices where he could get it. There are no fences ; the extents of the holdings are roughly defined as a "cow's grass" or a "sheep's grass" ; so people must be continually told off to herd the beasts, and the quarrels and the feuds between neighbours are incessant. That there are no markets is of the less consequence here, since the people consume the produce, which is far from sufficing for them. They still live chiefly on potatoes ; and the potatoes, being planted late, are dug before they come to maturity. They are either soft and spongy, or small and waxy. The oats may ripen or they may not. The people who have cows use their milk ; when they have attempted to make butter it was so bad that no one would buy it. But a good many have no cows, or the cows go off milk for a time, and then they must be content to drink water. Here, as in Scotland, they have fallen back a good deal on Indian meal, and I shall explain presently how they come by it.

It is clear, therefore, that the people must starve under the most favourable circumstances if they depend solely on their crops, and they must supplement their poor resources by labour. But practically there is no labour to be had near their homes. All the proprietors are non-resident : there is no middle class, there are no wealthy farmers. The men must raise money as they may to go in search of labour to Scotland. One third of the able-bodied males in Gweedore start each summer to reap the Scotch fields. Happily for them, emigration has been thinning their ranks ; for the demand for their scythes has been steadily diminishing, owing to the introduction of machinery. As yet, however, it is the harvesting—which must fail them in time—that they count upon to pay their way. The stock of potatoes and oats does not suffice to nourish their families during their absence, so they buy Indian meal on credit. Among his other works of beneficence, Lord George Hill built a mill and grain stores at Gweedore harbour ; and the miller now has regular deliveries by steamer of meal, which he retails to his customers. I do not understand that his charges are excessive ; but as he sells on trust, and though his debtors usually deal honestly by him, he occasionally makes bad debts, and is justified in calculating for a considerable profit ;—so that the harvest wages are nearly half anticipated, while what remains is more than exhausted for winter food and for clothes. Where the rent comes from is a mystery ; and, indeed, every one to whom I have spoken agrees that it would be difficult to get a living in Gweedore if the land were given the people for nothing.

In other words, they live at the best of times from hand to mouth, trusting to the chapter of accidents to save them from tumbling into the gulf—the brink of which they are perpetually treading. Of late, with the exception of the famine year, things have been comparatively in their favour—the seasons here having been tolerably good, and there having been no potato disease to speak of. Reports vary as to "the famine" of 1879, though it seems certain that the distress was exaggerated. But at any time a failure of the potato crop might create a veritable dearth ; and there are few men in the district who have a shilling of savings to fall back upon. Rents may be cut down in the Land Courts ; but when it is as hard to screw out a shilling as a pound, neither tenant nor landlord gains by the reduction. Arrears will accumulate just as before. I repeat that the only radical remedy would be to sweep such a country clear of paupers, and turn the ground to its natural uses. I admit that the remedy is a cruel one ; but it

is like the sharp surgical operation which will save the sufferer. No people are more attached to their homes and holdings than the Irish ; no people more heartily detest the idea of going into the poorhouse ; and it is very natural. Brought up from babyhood in the freedom of their open bogs, cherishing their domestic affections even in a hovel, the confinement and separation of the workhouse are intolerable to them. Hence the fervour with which the question of outdoor relief was pressed and resisted. Once admitted, its extension would have been unlimited, and the landowners and small ratepayers would have been crushed under the burden of the rates, which has to be borne at best by a handful of contributories. So sad is the state of things that famines may be blessings in disguise, since they force the starving poor to choose between the poorhouse and emigration. When they elect for the latter, they not only benefit themselves, but are the cause of substantial benefits to those they leave behind. Many of the recent emigrants from Gweedore to America have assisted young relations to follow them, and many more are most creditably regular in their remittances to the poor old parents they have left struggling behind.

Yet, though the improvement depends chiefly on circumstances beyond their control, during the last eight years there has been decided improvement. The hovels have been white-washed, the open cesspools and the dunghills before the doors have been disappearing ; and above all, the priest—no less a person than the Rev. Mr M'Fadden, whose name has been so widely associated with the local land agitation—has been assiduously preaching temperance with very visible results. The illicit stills which did so much formerly to demoralise the district are said to have vanished altogether, and the people have taken to drinking bad tea, when they can afford it, instead of fiery, whisky. They dress somewhat better than they used to do ; and I was struck on Sunday by seeing so many of the women wearing clean and gaudy tartan shawls. After all, however, it must be remembered that the improvement is only relative. The interiors of the hovels, which have been brightened outside by whitewash, are miserable in the extreme. There is nothing that can be called furniture ; the bed-clothing is wretched ; the animals, where any are kept, live in one end of the cabin. I may mention, by the way, that in a decent-looking two-storeyed inn halfway between this place and Dunfauaghy, with a bar well stocked with bottles of Bass and Guinness, I found a couple of fine broods of chickens pecking about the floor of “ the parlour ” ; while there, too, the pig resided in the mansion, though, the day being fine and the doors open, at the time of my visit he had gone out for a stroll. The people weave frieze or flannel for their own use, but the only industry in the parish may be said to be the knitting of stockings. There are quarries of granite understood to be valuable—once worked for a short time and since abandoned ; but there are no facilities in the harbour for shipping the stones. There are only two *bonâ fide* fishermen along the long coast and on the islands ; and one of these men, who had a boat and nets given him, has beached the boat and left his nets to rot. For, in fact, nothing is more difficult than to help those people who will insist on being helped in their own way.

The district suffered severely in the famine of 1879, receiving, however, no less than £2000 from the charitable funds. And, as will be remembered, there were serious disturbances during the land agitation. The priest organised the tenantry, who had formerly hesitated to press their grievances, in a regular strike for the reduction of rents. Some of them, but not many, went the length of demanding free land. The landlord declined the terms the majority would have dictated ; and indeed, unless he was prepared to resign his rights altogether, it seems to me that he had no option but to resist. In point of fact, from a pecuniary point of view, he might have done better had he compounded and given up the 4s. in the pound that was asked. The tenants went in two lots into the Land Courts, which granted two sweeping reductions of from 25 to 35 per cent. Against the first of these decisions the landlord has appealed, on the understanding that till the appeal is disposed of no disturbance shall take place. They tell me that should the Land Court decisions be made the standard of reduction all over the estate, it is probable that the rents due in November will be fairly met. During the

agitation there were some awkward encounters between the people and the police. The assistance of the military was called in, and a company of the 16th Regiment was quartered in the Union of Dunfanaghy. A gentleman gave me a vivid description of a body of fifteen police he had seen retiring in deplorable plight from one of these “scrimmages.” The Land-Leaguers had been pelting them with stones from behind a movable bulwark of women, and the policemen gallantly withdrew rather than send a volley of ball among the ladies. Although there have been no evictions on Captain Hill’s estates, there were many during last month on the estates of the smaller proprietors. Eighty families were turned out. Opinions vary as to the wisdom or justice of the measure, and I am not prepared to pronounce on it. I am informed that Captain Peel, the stipendiary magistrate, an Englishman, and likely to be an impartial judge, gave it as his opinion, that the poorest of the evicted people had actually nothing to pay with. Had the people been left in the workhouse they must have been supported by the rates. Probably the landlords really desired to get rid of them ; and it may be gathered from what I have said that I am inclined to believe that such apparent harshness, whatever be its motive, may sometimes be veritable kindness. In these cases, however, about £150 was collected through the efforts of the priest. Compositions were made ; the landlords did get a little money, and many of the tenants came back as caretakers. The case may form an awkward precedent for the people if it induces other landlords to evict. That I may not be misunderstood, I repeat that I by no means underrate the suffering caused by eviction, nor do I deny that it is a hard and painful remedy, only to be justified by a desperate state of things. The actual suffering is often very great ; the wrench to the domestic and local affections must always be intensely painful. As the Irish detest the workhouse, so they dread the sea. If evictions are to be made, everything should be done to alleviate the inevitable hardships. In Gweedore, I am informed that the aged, the infirm, and the children of these eighty families passed a whole week shelterless in the open air before carts were provided to convey them to Dunfanaghy. Pending further emigration or clearances, humanely conducted, the only thing to be done is to apply palliatives. It would be much to save the harvesters from the necessity of supporting their families on credit during their long absences; though it would obviously be difficult to prevent any system of advances from being abused. Something might be arranged, however, through the agency of the priest and Mr Clason, the Episcopalian clergyman, who nowadays seem to work amicably together ; while small public works might be undertaken, in the way of providing a pier, or at least a slip, which might make it possible to develop the quarries and perhaps the fishing.

Letters from the west of Ireland 1884

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