

Next Day's Journey 1842

The Irish Sketchbook

William Makepeace Thackeray

I was so lucky as to have an introduction to the Vicar of Dundalk, which that gentleman's kind and generous nature interpreted into a claim for unlimited hospitality ; and he was good enough to consider himself bound not only to receive me, but to give up previous engagements abroad in order to do so. I need not say that it afforded me sincere pleasure to witness, for a couple of days, his labours among his people ; and indeed it was a delightful occupation to watch both flock and pastor. The world is a wicked, selfish, abominable place, as the parson tells us ; but his reverence comes out of his pulpit and gives the flattest contradiction to his doctrine : busying himself with kind actions from morning till night, denying to himself, generous to others, preaching the truth to young and old, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, consoling the wretched, and giving hope to the sick ;—and I do not mean to say that this sort of life is led by the Vicar of Dundalk merely, but do firmly believe that it is the life of the great majority of the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy of the country. There will be no breach of confidence, I hope, in publishing here the journal of a couple of days spent with one of these reverend gentlemen, and telling some readers, as idle and profitless as the writer, what the clergyman's peaceful labours are.

In the first place, we set out to visit the church...It stands in a green churchyard of its own, very neat and trimly kept, with an old row of trees that were dropping their red leaves upon a flock of vaults and tombstones below. The building being much injured by flame and time, some hundred years back was repaired, enlarged, and ornamented—as churches in those days were ornamented—and has consequently lost a good deal of its Gothic character. There is a great mixture, therefore, of old style and new style and no style : but, with all this, the church is one of the most commodious and best appointed I have seen in Ireland. The vicar held a council with a builder regarding some ornaments for the roof of the church, which is, as it should be, a great object of his care and architectural taste, and on which he has spent a very large sum of money. To these expenses he is in a manner bound, for the living is a considerable one, its income being no less than two hundred and fifty pounds a year ; out of which he has merely to maintain a couple of curates and a clerk and sexton, to contribute largely towards schools and hospitals, and relieve a few scores of pensioners of his own, who are fitting objects of private bounty.

We went from the church to a school, which has been long a favourite resort of the good vicar's : indeed, to judge from the schoolmaster's books, his attendance there is almost daily, and the number of the scholars some two hundred. The number was considerably greater until the schools of the Educational Board were established, when the Roman Catholic clergymen withdrew many of their young people from Mr. Thackeray's establishment.

We found a large room with sixty or seventy boys at work ; in an upper chamber were a considerable number of girls, with their teachers, two modest and pretty young women ; but the favourite resort of the vicar was evidently the Infant-School,—and no wonder : it is impossible to witness a more beautiful or touching sight.

Eighty of these little people, healthy, clean, and rosy—some in smart gowns and shoes and stockings, some with patched pinafores and little bare pink feet—sate upon a half-dozen low benches, and were singing, at the top of their fourscore fresh voices, a song when we entered. All the voices were hushed as the vicar came in, and a great bobbing and curtseying took

place ; whilst a hundred and sixty innocent eyes turned awfully towards the clergyman, who tried to look as unconcerned as possible, and began to make his little ones a speech. “ I have brought,” says he, “ a gentleman from England, who has heard of my little children and their school, and hopes he will carry away a good account of it. Now, you know, we must all do our best to be kind and civil to strangers : what can we do here for this gentleman that he would like ?— do you think he would like a song ?”

(*All the children.*)—“ We’ll sing to him !”

Then the schoolmistress, coming forward, sang the first words of a hymn, which at once eighty little voices took up, or near eighty—for some of the little things were too young to sing yet, and all they could do was to beat the measure with little red hands as the others sang. It was a hymn about heaven, with a chorus of “ Oh that will be joyful, joyful,” and one of the verses beginning, “ Little children will be there.” Some of my fair readers (if I have the honour to find such) who have been present at similar tender, charming concerts, know the hymn, no doubt. It was the first time I had ever heard it ; and I do not care to own that it brought tears to my eyes, though it is ill to parade such kind of sentiment in print. But I think I will never, while I live, forget that little chorus, nor would any man who has ever loved a child or lost one. God bless you, O little happy singers ! What a-noble and useful life is his, who, in place of seeking wealth or honour, devotes his life to such a service as this ! And all through our country, thank God ! in quiet humble corners, that busy citizens and men of the world never hear of, there are thousands of such men employed in such holy pursuits, with no reward beyond that which the fulfilment of duty brings them. Most of these children were Roman Catholics. At this tender age the priests do not care to separate them from their little Protestant brethren : and no wonder. He must be a child-murdering Herod who would find the heart to do so.

After the hymn, the children went through a little Scripture catechism, answering very correctly, and all in a breath, as the mistress put the questions. Some of them were, of course, too young to understand the words they uttered ; but the answers are so simple that they cannot fail to understand them before long ; and they learn in spite of themselves.

The catechism being ended, another song was sung ; and now the vicar (who had been humming the chorus along with his young singers, and, in spite of an awful and grave countenance, could not help showing his extreme happiness) made another oration, in which he stated that the gentleman from England was perfectly satisfied ; that he would have a good report of the Dundalk children to carry home with him ; that the day was very fine, and the schoolmistress would probably like to take a walk ; and, finally, would the young people give her a holiday ? “ As many,” concluded he, “ as will give the schoolmistress a holiday, hold up their hands !” This question was carried unanimously.

But I am bound to say, when the little people were told that as many as *wouldn't like* a holiday were to hold up *their* hands, all the little hands went up again exactly as before : by which it may be concluded either that the infants did not understand his reverence's speech, or that they were just as happy to stay at school as to go and play ; and the reader may adopt whichever of the reasons he inclines to. It is probable that both are correct.

The little things are so fond of the school, the vicar told me as we walked away from it, that on returning home they like nothing better than to get a number of their companions who don't go to school, and to play at infant-school.

They may be heard singing their hymns in the narrow alleys and humble houses in which they dwell : and I was told of one dying who sang his song of “ Oh that will be joyful, joy-

ful," to his poor mother weeping at his bedside, and promising her that they should meet where no parting should be.

"There was a child in the school," said the vicar, "whose father, a Roman Catholic, was a carpenter by trade, a good workman, and earning a considerable weekly sum, but neglecting his wife and children and spending his earnings in drink. We have a song against drunkenness that the infants sing ; and one evening, going home, the child found her father excited with liquor and ill-treating his wife. The little thing forthwith interposed between them, told her father what she had heard at school regarding the criminality of drunkenness and quarrelling, and finished her little sermon with the hymn. The father was first amused, then touched ; and the end of it was that he kissed his wife and asked her to forgive him, hugged his child, and from that day would always have her in his bed, made her sing to him morning and night, and forsook his old haunts for the sake of his little companion."

He was quite sober and prosperous for eight months ; but the vicar at the end of that time began to remark that the child looked ragged at school, and passing by her mother's house, saw the poor woman with a black eye. "If it was any one but your husband, Mrs. C——, who gave you that black eye," says the vicar, "tell me ; but if he did it, don't say a word." The woman was silent, and soon after, meeting her husband, the vicar took him to task. "You were sober for eight months. Now tell me fairly, C——," says he, "were you happier when you lived at home with your wife and child, or are you more happy now ?" The man owned that he was much happier formerly, and the end of the conversation was that he promised to go home once more and try the sober life again, and he went home and succeeded.

The vicar continued to hear good accounts of him ; but passing one day by his house he saw the wife there looking very sad. "Had her husband relapsed ?"—"No, he was dead," she said—"dead of the cholera ; but he had been sober ever since his last conversation with the clergyman, and had done his duty to his family up to the time of his death." "I said to the woman," said the good old clergyman, in a grave low voice, "'Your husband is gone now to the place where, according to his conduct here, his eternal reward will be assigned him ; and let us be thankful to think what a different position he occupies now to that which he must have held had not his little girl been the means under God of converting him.'"

Our next walk was to the County Hospital, the handsome edifice which ornaments the Drogheda entrance of the town, and which I had remarked on my arrival. Concerning this hospital, the governors were, when I passed through Dundalk, in a state of no small agitation : for a gentleman by the name of ——, who, from being an apothecary's assistant in the place, had gone forth as a sort of amateur inspector of hospitals throughout Ireland, had thought fit to censure their extravagance in erecting the new building, stating that the old one was fully sufficient to hold fifty patients, and that the public money might consequently have been spared. Mr. ——'s plan for the better maintenance of them in general is, that commissioners should be appointed to direct them, and not county gentlemen as heretofore ; the discussion of which question does not need to be carried on in this humble work.

My guide, who is one of the governors of the new hospital, conducted me in the first place to the old one—a small dirty house in a damp and low situation, with but three rooms to accommodate patients, and these evidently not fit to hold fifty, or even fifteen patients. The new hospital is one of the handsomest buildings of the size and kind in Ireland—an ornament to the town, as the angry commissioner stated, but not after all a building of undue cost, for the expense of its erection was but 3,000*l.* ; and the sick of the county are far better accommodated in it than in the damp and unwholesome tenement regretted by the eccentric commissioner.

An English architect, Mr. Smith of Hertford, designed and completed the edifice ; strange to say, only exceeding his estimates by the sum of three-and-sixpence, as the worthy governor of the hospital with great triumph told me. The building is certainly a wonder of cheapness, and, what is more, so complete for the purpose for which it was intended, and so handsome in appearance, that the architect's name deserves to be published by all who hear it ; and if any country-newspaper editors should notice this volume, they are requested to make the fact known. The house is provided with every convenience for men and women, with all the appurtenances of baths, water, gas, airy wards, and a garden for convalescents ; and, below, a dispensary, a handsome board-room, kitchen, and matron's apartments, &c. Indeed, a noble requiring a house for a large establishment need not desire a handsomer one than this, at its moderate price of 3,000*l*. The beauty of this building has, as is almost always the case, created emulation, and a terrace in the same taste has been raised in the neighbourhood of the hospital.

From the hospital we bent our steps to the Institution ; of which place I give below the rules, and a copy of the course of study, and the dietary : leaving English parents to consider the fact, that their children can be educated at this place for *thirteen pounds a year*. Nor is there anything in the establishment savouring of the Dotheboys Hall. [1] I never saw, in any public school in England, sixty cleaner, smarter, more gentlemanlike boys than were here at work. The upper class had been at work on Euclid as we came in, and were set, by way of amusing the stranger, to perform a sum of compound interest of diabolical complication, which, with its algebraic and arithmetic solution, was handed up to me by three or four of the pupils ; and I strove to look as wise as I possibly could. Then they went through questions of mental arithmetic with astonishing correctness and facility ; and finding from the master that classics were not taught in the school, I took occasion to lament this circumstance, saying, with a knowing air, that I would like to have examined the lads in a Greek play.

Classics, then, these young fellows do not get. Meat they get but twice a week. Let English parents bear this fact in mind ; but that the lads are healthy and happy, anybody who sees them can have no question ; furthermore, they are well instructed in a sound practical education—history, geography, mathematics, religion. What a place to know of would this be for many a poor half-pay officer, where he may put his children in all confidence that they will be well cared for and soundly educated ! Why have we not State-schools in England, where, for the prime cost—for a sum which never need exceed for a young boy's maintenance 25*l*. a year—our children might be brought up ? We are establishing national-schools for the labourer : why not give education to the sons of the poor gentry—the clergyman whose pittance is small, and would still give his son the benefit of a public education ; the artist, the officer, the merchant's office-clerk, the literary man ? What a benefit might be conferred upon all of us if honest charter-schools could be established for our children, and where it would be impossible for Squeers to make a profit ! [2]

The sciences of Navigation and practical Surveying are taught in the Establishment, also a selection of the Pupils, who have a taste for it, are instructed in the art of Drawing.

Dietary.

Breakfast.—Stirabout and Milk, every Morning.

Dinner.—On Sunday and Wednesday, Potatoes and Beef ; 10 ounces of the latter to each boy. On Monday and Thursday, Bread and Broth ; ½lb. of the former to each boy. On Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday, Potatoes and Milk ; 2lbs. of the former to each boy.

Supper.—½lb. of Bread with Milk, uniformly, except on Monday and Thursday : on these days, Potatoes and Milk.

Our next day's journey led us, by half-past ten o'clock, to the ancient town of Louth, a little poor village now, but a great seat of learning and piety, it is said, formerly, where there stood a university and abbeys, and where Saint Patrick worked wonders. Here my kind friend the rector was called upon to marry a smart sergeant of police to a pretty lass, one of the few Protestants who attend his church ; and, the ceremony over, we were invited to the house of the bride's father hard by, where the clergyman was bound to cut the cake and drink a glass of wine to the health of the new-married couple. There was evidently to be a dance and some merriment in the course of the evening ; for the good mother of the bride (oh, blessed is he who has a good mother-in-law !) was busy at a huge fire in the little kitchen, and along the road we met various parties of neatly-dressed people, and several of the sergeant's comrades, who were hastening to the wedding. The mistress of the rector's darling Infant-School was one of the bridesmaids : consequently the little ones had a holiday.

But he was not to be disappointed of his Infant-School in this manner : so, mounting the car again, with a fresh horse, we went a very pretty drive of three miles to the snug lone school-house of Glyde Farm—near a handsome park, I believe of the same name, where the proprietor is building a mansion of the Tudor order.

The pretty scene of Dundalk was here played over again : the children sang their little hymns, the good old clergyman joined delighted in the chorus, the holiday was given, and the little hands held up, and I looked at more clean bright faces and little rosy feet. The scene need not be repeated in print, but I can understand what pleasure a man must take in the daily witnessing of it, and in the growth of these little plants, which are set and tended by his care. As we returned to Louth, a woman met us with a curtsy and expressed her sorrow that she had been obliged to withdraw her daughter from one of the rector's schools, which the child was vexed at leaving too. But the orders of the priest were peremptory ; and who can say they were unjust ? The priest, on his side, was only enforcing the rule which the parson maintains as his :—the latter will not permit his young flock to be educated except upon certain principles and by certain teachers ; the former has his own scruples unfortunately also—and so that noble and brotherly scheme of National Education falls to the ground. In Louth, the national-school was standing by the side of the priest's chapel : it is so almost everywhere throughout Ireland : the Protestants have rejected, on very good motives doubtless, the chance of union which the Education Board gave them. Be it so ! if the children of either sect be educated apart, so that they *be* educated, the education scheme will have produced its good, and the union will come afterwards.

The church at Louth stands boldly upon a hill looking down on the village, and has nothing remarkable in it but neatness, except the monument of a former rector, Dr. Little, which attracts the spectator's attention from the extreme inappropriateness of the motto on the coat-of-arms of the reverend defunct. It looks rather unorthodox to read in a Christian temple, where a man's bones have the honour to lie—and where, if anywhere, humility is requisite—that there is *multum in Parvo* : “ a great deal in Little.” O Little, in life you were not much, and lo ! you are less now ; why should filial piety engrave that pert pun upon your monument, to cause people to laugh in a place where they ought to be grave ? The defunct doctor built a very handsome rectory-house, with a set of stables that would be useful to a nobleman, but are rather too commodious for a peaceful rector who does not ride to hounds ; and it was in Little's time, I believe, that the church was removed from the old abbey, where it formerly stood, to its present proud position on the hill.

The abbey is a fine ruin, the windows of a good style, the tracings of carvings on many of them ; but a great number of stones and ornaments were removed formerly to build farm-buildings withal, and the place is now as rank and ruinous as the generality of Irish burying-

places seem to be. Skulls lie in clusters amongst nettle-beds by the abbey-walls ; graves are only partially covered with rude stones ; a fresh coffin was lying broken in pieces within the abbey ; and the surgeon of the dispensary hard by might procure subjects here almost without grave-breaking.

The legend in the country goes that the place was built for the accommodation of “ Saint Murtoogh,” who lying down to sleep here in the open fields, not having any place to house under, found to his surprise, on waking in the morning, the above edifice, which the angels had built. The angelic architecture, it will be seen, is of rather a rude kind ; and the village antiquary, who takes a pride in showing the place, says that the building was erected *two thousand years ago*. In the handsome grounds of the rectory is another spot visited by popular tradition—a fairy’s ring : a regular mound of some thirty feet in height, flat and even on the top, and provided with a winding path for the foot-passengers to ascend. Some trees grew on the mound, one of which was removed in order to make the walk. But the country-people cried out loudly at this desecration, and vowed that the “ little people” had quitted the countryside for ever in consequence.

While walking in the town, a woman meets the rector with a number of curtsies and compliments, and vows that “ ’tis your reverence is the friend of the poor, and may the Lord preserve you to us and lady ;” and having poured out blessings innumerable, concludes by producing a paper for her son that’s in throuble in England. The paper ran to the effect that “ We, the undersigned, inhabitants of the parish of Louth, have known Daniel Horgan ever since his youth, and can speak confidently as to his integrity, piety, and good conduct.” In fact, the paper stated that Daniel Horgan was an honour to his country, and consequently quite incapable of the crime of—sack-stealing I think—with which at present he was charged, and lay in prison in Durham Castle. The paper had, I should think, come down to the poor mother from Durham, with a direction ready written to despatch it back again when signed, and was evidently the work of one of those benevolent individuals in assize-towns, who, following the profession of the law, delight to extricate unhappy young men of whose innocence (from various six-and-eightpenny motives) they feel convinced. There stood the poor mother, as the rector examined the document, with a huge wafer in her hand, ready to forward it so soon as it was signed : for the truth is that “ We, the undersigned,” were as yet merely imaginary.

“ You don’t come to church,” says the rector. “ I know nothing of you or your son : why don’t you go to the priest ?”

“ Oh, your reverence, my son’s to be tried next Tuesday,” whimpered the woman. She then said the priest was not in the way, but, as we had seen him a few minutes before, recalled the assertion, and confessed that she had been to the priest and that he would not sign ; and fell to prayers, tears, and unbounded supplications to induce the rector to give his signature. But that hard-hearted divine, stating that he had not known Daniel Horgan from his youth upwards, that he could not certify as to his honesty or dishonesty, enjoined the woman to make an attempt upon the R. C. curate, to whose hand-writing he would certify if need were.

The upshot of the matter was that the woman returned with a certificate from the R. C. curate as to her son’s good behaviour while in the village, and the rector certified that the hand-writing was that of the R. C. clergyman in question, and the woman popped her big red wafer into the letter and went her way.

Tuesday is passed long ere this : Mr. Horgan's guilt or innocence is long since clearly proved, and he celebrates the latter in freedom, or expiates the former at the mill. Indeed, I don't know that there was any call to introduce his adventures to the public, except perhaps it may be good to see how in this little distant Irish village the blood of life is running. Here goes a happy party to a marriage, and the parson prays a " God bless you !" upon them, and the world begins for them. Yonder lies a stall-fed rector in his tomb, flaunting over his nothingness his pompous heraldic motto : and yonder lie the fresh fragments of a nameless deal coffin, which any foot may kick over. Presently you hear the clear voices of little children praising God ; and here comes a mother wringing her hands and asking for succour for her lad, who was a child but the other day. Such *motus animorum atque hæc certamina tanta* are going on in an hour of an October day in a little pinch of clay in the county Louth.

Perhaps, being in the moralizing strain, the honest surgeon at the dispensary might come in as an illustration. He inhabits a neat humble house, a storey higher than his neighbours', but with a thatched roof. He relieves a thousand patients yearly at the dispensary, he visits seven hundred in the parish, he supplies the medicines gratis ; and receiving for these services the sum of about one hundred pounds yearly, some county economists and calculators are loud against the extravagance of his salary, and threaten his removal. All these individuals and their histories we presently turn our backs upon, for, after all, dinner is at five o'clock, and we have to see the new road to Dundalk, which the county has lately been making.

Of this undertaking, which shows some skilful engineering—some gallant cutting of rocks and hills, and filling of valleys, with a tall and handsome stone bridge thrown across the river, and connecting the high embankments on which the new road at that place is formed—I can say little, except that it is a vast convenience to the county, and a great credit to the surveyor and contractor too ; for the latter, though a poor man, and losing heavily by his bargain, has yet refused to mulct his labourers of their wages ; and, as cheerfully as he can, still pays them their shilling a day.

Newry, Armagh, Belfast—From Dundalk To Newry.

My kind host gave orders to the small ragged boy that drove the car to take " particular care of the little gentleman ;" and the car-boy, grinning in appreciation of the joke, drove off at his best pace, and landed his cargo at Newry after a pleasant two hours' drive. The country for the most part is wild, but not gloomy ; the mountains round about are adorned with woods and gentlemen's seats ; and the car-boy pointed out one hill—that of Slievegullion, which kept us company all the way—as the highest hill in Ireland. Ignorant or deceiving car-boy ! I have seen a dozen hills, each the highest in Ireland, in my way through the country, of which the inexorable Guide-book gives the measurement and destroys the claim. Well, it was the tallest hill, in the estimation of the car-boy ; and in this respect the world is full of car-boys. Has not every mother of a family a Slievegullion of a son, who, according to her measurement, towers above all other sons ? Is not the patriot, who believes himself equal to three Frenchmen, a car-boy in heart ? There was a kind young creature, with a child in her lap, that evidently held this notion. She paid the child a series of compliments, which would have led one to fancy he was an angel from heaven at the least ; and her husband sat gravely by, very silent, with his arms round a barometer.

Beyond these there were no incidents or characters of note, except an old ostler that they said was ninety years old, and watered the horse at a lone inn on the road. " Stop !" cries this wonder of years and rags, as the car, after considerable parley, got under weigh. The car-boy pulled up, thinking a fresh passenger was coming out of the inn.

“ *Stop, till one of the gentlemen gives me something,* ” says the old man, coming slowly up with us : which speech created a laugh, and got him a penny : he received it without the least thankfulness, and went away grumbling to his pail.

Newry is remarkable as being the only town I have seen which had no cabin suburb : strange to say, the houses begin all at once, handsomely coated and hatted with stone and slate ; and if Dundalk was prosperous, Newry is better still. Such a sight of neatness and comfort is exceedingly welcome to an English traveller, who, moreover, finds himself, after driving through a plain bustling clean street, landed at a large plain comfortable inn, where business seems to be done, where there are smart waiters to receive him, and a comfortable warm coffee-room that bears no traces of dilapidation.

What the merits of the *cuisine* may be I can't say for the information of travellers ; a gentleman to whom I had brought a letter from Dundalk taking care to provide me at his own table, accompanying me previously to visit the lions of the town. A river divides it, and the counties of Armagh and Down : the river runs into the sea at Carlingford Bay, and is connected by a canal with Lough Neagh, and thus with the North of Ireland. Steamers to Liverpool and Glasgow sail continually. There are mills, foundries, and manufactories, of which the Guide-book will give particulars ; and the town of 13,000 inhabitants is the busiest and most thriving that I have yet seen in Ireland.

Our first walk was to the church : a large and handsome building, although built in the unlucky period when the Gothic style was coming into vogue. Hence one must question the propriety of many of the ornaments, though the whole is massive, well-finished, and stately. Near the church stands the Roman Catholic chapel, a very fine building, the work of the same architect, Mr. Duff, who erected the chapel at Dundalk ; but, like almost all other edifices of the kind in Ireland that I have seen, the interior is quite unfinished, and already so dirty and ruinous, that one would think a sort of genius for dilapidation must have been exercised in order to bring it to its present condition. There are tattered green-baize doors to enter at, a dirty clay floor, and cracked plaster walls, with an injunction to the public not to spit on the floor. Maynooth itself is scarcely more dreary. The architect's work, however, does him the highest credit : the interior of the church is noble and simple in style ; and one can't but grieve to see a fine work of art, that might have done good to the country, so defaced and ruined as this is.

The Newry poor-house is as neatly ordered and comfortable as any house, public or private, in Ireland : the same look of health which was so pleasant to see among the Naas children of the union-house was to be remarked here : the same care and comfort for the old people. Of able-bodied there were but few in the house : it is in winter that there are most applicants for this kind of relief ; the sunshine attracts the women out of the place, and the harvest relieves it of the men. Cleanliness, the matron said, is more intolerable to most of the inmates than any other regulation of the house ; and instantly on quitting the house they relapse into their darling dirt, and of course at their periodical return are -subject to the unavoidable initiatory lustration.

Newry has many comfortable and handsome public buildings : the streets have a business-like look, the shops and people are not too poor, and the southern grandiloquence is not shown here in the shape of fine words for small wares. Even the beggars are not so numerous, I fancy, or so coaxing and wheedling in their talk. Perhaps, too, among the gentry, the same moral change may be remarked, and they seem more downright and plain in their manner ; but one must not pretend to speak of national characteristics from such a small experience as a couple of evenings' intercourse may give.

Although not equal in natural beauty to a hundred other routes which the traveller takes in the South, the ride from Newry to Armagh is an extremely pleasant one, on account of the undeniable increase of prosperity which is visible through the country. Well-tilled fields, neat farm-houses, well-dressed people, meet one everywhere, and people and landscape alike have a plain, hearty, flourishing look.

The greater part of Armagh has the aspect of a good stout old English town, although round about the steep on which the cathedral stands (the Roman Catholics have taken possession of another hill, and are building an opposition cathedral on this eminence) there are some decidedly Irish streets, and that dismal combination of house and pigsty which is so common in Munster and Connaught.

But the main streets, though not fine, are bustling, substantial, and prosperous ; and a fine green has some old trees and some good houses, and even handsome stately public buildings, round about it, that remind one of a comfortable cathedral city across the water.

The cathedral service is more completely performed here than in any English town, I think. The church is small, but extremely neat, fresh and handsome—almost too handsome ; covered with spick-and-span gilding and carved-work in the style of the thirteenth century : every pew as smart and well-cushioned as my lord's own seat in the country church ; and for the clergy and their chief, stalls and thrones quite curious for their ornament and splendour. The Primate with his blue riband and badge (to whom the two clergymen bow reverently as, passing between them, he enters at the gate of the altar rail) looks like a noble Prince of the Church ; and I had heard enough of his magnificent charity and kindness to look with reverence at his lofty handsome features.

Will it be believed that the sermon lasted only for twenty minutes ? Can this be Ireland ? I think this wonderful circumstance impressed me more than any other with the difference between North and South, and, having the Primate's own countenance for the opinion, may confess a great admiration for orthodoxy in this particular.

A beautiful monument to Archbishop Stuart, by Chantrey ; a magnificent stained window, containing the arms of the clergy of the diocese (in the very midst of which I was glad to recognize the sober old family coat of the kind and venerable rector of Louth), and numberless carvings and decorations, will please the lover of church architecture here. I must confess, however, that in my idea the cathedral is quite too complete. It is of the twelfth century, but not the least venerable. It is as neat and trim as a lady's drawing-room. It wants a hundred years at least to cool the raw colours of the stones, and to dull the brightness of the gilding : all which benefits, no doubt, time will bring to pass, and future Cockneys setting off from London Bridge after breakfast in an aerial machine may come to hear the morning service here, and not remark the faults which have struck a too susceptible tourist, of the nineteenth century.

Strolling round the town after service, I saw more decided signs that Protestantism was there in the ascendant. I saw no less than three different ladies on the prowl, dropping religious tracts at various doors ; and felt not a little ashamed to be seen by one of them getting into a car with bag and baggage, being bound for Belfast.

The ride of ten miles from Armagh to Portadown was not the prettiest, but one of the pleasantest drives I have had in Ireland, for the country is well cultivated along the whole of the road, the trees in plenty, and villages and neat houses always in sight. The little farms, with their orchards and comfortable buildings, were as clean and trim as could be wished :

they are mostly of one storey, with long thatched roofs and shining windows, such as those that may be seen in Normandy and Picardy. As it was Sunday evening, all the people seemed to be abroad, some sauntering quietly down the roads, a pair of girls here and there pacing leisurely in a field, a little group seated under the trees of an orchard, which pretty adjunct to the farm, is very common in this district ; and the crop of apples seemed this year to be extremely plenty. The physiognomy of the people too has quite changed : the girls have their hair neatly braided up, not loose over their faces as in the south ; and not only are bare feet very rare, and stockings extremely neat and white, but I am sure I saw at least a dozen good silk gowns upon the women along the road, and scarcely one which was not clean and in good order. The men for the most part figured in jackets, caps, and trousers, eschewing the old well of a hat which covers the popular head at the other end of the island, the breeches, and the long ill-made tail-coat. The people's faces are sharp and neat, not broad, lazy, knowing-looking, like that of many a shambling Diogenes who may be seen lounging before his cabin in Cork or Kerry. As for the cabins, they have disappeared ; and the houses of the people may rank decidedly as cottages. The accent, too, is quite different ; but this is hard to describe in print. The people speak with a Scotch twang, and, as I fancied, much more simply and to the point. A man gives you a downright answer, without any grin or joke, or attempt at flattery. To be sure, these are rather early days to begin to judge of national characteristics ; and very likely the above distinctions have been drawn after profoundly studying a Northern and a Southern waiter at the inn at Armagh.

At any rate, it is clear that the towns are vastly improved, the cottages and villages no less so ; the people look active and well-dressed ; a sort of weight seems all at once to be taken from the Englishman's mind on entering the province, when he finds himself once more looking upon comfort and activity, and resolution. What is the cause of this improvement ? *Protestantism* is, more than one Church-of-England man said to me ; but, for Protestantism, would it not be as well to read Scotchism ?—meaning thrift, prudence, perseverance, boldness, and common sense : with which qualities any body of men, of any Christian denomination, would no doubt prosper.

The little brisk town of Portadown, with its comfortable unpretending houses, its squares and market-place, its pretty quay, with craft along the river,—a steamer building on the dock, close to mills and warehouses that look in a full state of prosperity,—was a pleasant conclusion to this ten miles' drive, that ended at the newly opened railway-station. The distance hence to Belfast is twenty-five miles ; Lough Neagh may be seen at one point of the line, and the Guide-book says that the station-towns of Lurgan and Lisburn are extremely picturesque ; but it was night when I passed by them, and after a journey of an hour and a quarter reached Belfast.

That city has been discovered by another eminent Cockney traveller (for though born in America, the dear old Bow-bell blood must run in the veins of Mr. N. P. Willis), and I have met, in the periodical works of the country, with repeated angry allusions to his description of Belfast, the pink heels of the chamber-maid who conducted him to bed (what business had he to be looking at the young woman's legs at all ?) and his wrath at the beggary of the town and the laziness of the inhabitants, as marked by a line of dirt running along the walls, and showing where they were in the habit of lolling.

These observations struck me as rather hard when applied to Belfast, though possibly pink heels and beggary might be remarked in other cities of the kingdom ; but the town of Belfast seemed to me really to be as neat, prosperous, and handsome a city as need be seen ; and, with respect to the inn, that in which I stayed, "Kearn's," was as comfortable and well-ordered an establishment as the most fastidious Cockney can desire, and with an advantage

which Home people perhaps do not care for, that the dinners which cost seven shillings at London taverns are here served for half-a-crown ; but, I must repeat here, in justice to the public, what I stated to Mr. William the waiter, viz. that half a pint of port-wine does contain more than two glasses—at least it does in happy, happy England. . . Only, to be sure, here the wine is good, whereas the port-wine in England is not port, but for the most part an abominable drink of which it would be a mercy only to give us two glasses : which, however, is clearly wandering from the subject in hand.

They call Belfast the Irish Liverpool. If people are for calling names, it would be better to call it the Irish London at once—the chief city of the kingdom at any rate. It looks hearty, thriving, and prosperous, as if it had money in its pockets and roast-beef for dinner : it has no pretensions to fashion, but looks mayhap better in its honest broad-cloth than *some people* in their shabby brocade. The houses are as handsome as at Dublin, with this advantage, that the people seem to live in them. They have no attempt at ornament for the most part, but are grave, stout, red-brick edifices, laid out at four angles in orderly streets and squares.

The stranger cannot fail to be struck (and haply a little frightened) by the great number of meeting-houses that decorate the town, and give evidence of great sermonizing on Sundays. These buildings do not affect the Gothic, like many of the meagre edifices of the Established and the Roman Catholic churches, but have a physiognomy of their own—a thick-set citizen look. Porticoes have they, to be sure, and ornaments Doric, Ionic, and what not ? but the meeting-house peeps through all these classical friezes and entablatures ; and though one reads of “ Imitations of the Ionic Temple of Ilissus, near Athens,” the classic temple is made to assume a bluff, downright, Presbyterian air, which would astonish the original builder, doubtless. The churches of the Establishment are handsome and stately. The Catholics are building a brick cathedral, no doubt of the Tudor style :—the present chapel, flanked by the national-schools, is an exceedingly unprepossessing building of the Strawberry Hill or Castle of Otranto Gothic : the keys and mitre figuring in the centre—“ The cross-keys and night-cap,” as a hard-hearted Presbyterian called them to me, with his blunt humour.

The three churches are here pretty equally balanced : Presbyterians 25,000, Catholics 20,000, Episcopalians 17,000. Each party has two or more newspaper organs ; and the wars between them are dire and unceasing, as the reader may imagine. For whereas in other parts of Ireland where Catholics and Episcopalians prevail, and the Presbyterian body is too small, each party has but one opponent to belabour : here the Ulster politician, whatever may be his way of thinking, has the great advantage of possessing two enemies on whom he may exercise his eloquence ; and in this triangular duel all do their duty nobly. Then there are subdivisions of hostility. For the Church there is a High Church and a Low Church journal ; for the Liberals there is a “ Repeal” journal and a “ No-repeal” journal ; for the Presbyterians there are yet more varieties of journalistic opinion, on which it does not become a stranger to pass a judgment. If the *Northern Whig* says that the *Banner of Ulster* “ is a polluted rag, which has hoisted the red banner of falsehood” (which elegant words may be found in the first-named journal of the 13th October), let us be sure the *Banner* has a compliment for the *Northern Whig* in return ; if the “ Repeal” *Vindicator* and the priests attack the Presbyterian journals and the “ home missions,” the reverend gentlemen of Geneva are quite as ready with the pen as their brethren of Rome, and not much more scrupulous in their language than the laity. When I was in Belfast, violent disputes were raging between Presbyterian and Episcopalian Conservatives with regard to the Marriage Bill ; between Presbyterians and Catholics on the subject of the “ home missions ;” between the Liberals and Conservatives, of course. “ Thank God,” for instance, writes a “ Repeal” journal, “ that the honour and power of *Ireland* are not involved in the disgraceful Afghan war !”—a sentiment insinuating Repeal and something more ; disowning, not merely this or that Ministry, but the sovereign and her

jurisdiction altogether. But details of these quarrels, religious or political, can tend to edify but few readers out of the country. Even in it, as there are some nine shades of politico-religious differences, an observer pretending to impartiality must necessarily displease eight parties, and almost certainly the whole nine ; and the reader who desires to judge the politics of Belfast must study for himself. Nine journals, publishing four hundred numbers in a year, each number containing about as much as an octavo volume : these, and the back numbers of former years, sedulously read, will give the student a notion of the subject in question. And then, after having read the statements on either side, he must ascertain the truth of them, by which time more labour of the same kind will have grown upon him, and he will have attained a good old age.

Amongst the poor, the Catholics and Presbyterians are said to go in a pretty friendly manner to the national-schools ; but among the Presbyterians themselves it appears there are great differences and quarrels, by which a fine institution, the Belfast Academy, seems to have suffered considerably. It is almost the only building in this large and substantial place that bears, to the stranger's eye, an unprosperous air. A vast building, standing fairly in the midst of a handsome green and place, and with snug, comfortable red-brick streets stretching away at neat right angles all around, the Presbyterian College looks handsome enough at a short distance, but on a nearer view is found in a woful state of dilapidation. It does not possess the supreme dirt and filth of Maynooth—*that* can but belong to one place, even in Ireland ; but the building is in a dismal state of unrepair, steps and windows broken, doors and stairs battered. Of scholars I saw but a few, and these were in the drawing academy. The fine arts do not appear as yet to flourish in Belfast. The models from which the lads were copying were not good : one was copying a bad copy of a drawing by Prout ; one was colouring a print. The ragged children in a German national-school have better models before them, and are made acquainted with truer principles of art and beauty.

Hard by is the Belfast Museum, where an exhibition of pictures was in preparation, under the patronage of the Belfast Art Union. Artists in all parts of the kingdom had been invited to send their works, of which the Union pays the carriage ; and the porters and secretary were busy unpacking cases, in which I recognized some of the works which had before figured on the walls of the London Exhibition rooms.

The book-shops which I saw in this thriving town said much for the religious disposition of the Belfast public : there were numerous portraits of reverend gentlemen, and their works of every variety :—" The Sinner's Friend," " The Watchman on the Tower," " The Peep of Day," " Sermons delivered at Bethesda Chapel," by so-and so ; with hundreds of the neat little gilt books with bad prints, scriptural titles, and gilt edges, that come from one or two serious publishing houses in London, and in considerable numbers from the neighbouring Scotch shores. As for the theatre, with such a public the drama can be expected to find but little favour ; and the gentleman who accompanied me in my walk, and to whom I am indebted for many kindnesses during my stay, said not only that he had never been in the playhouse, but that he never heard of any one going thither. I found out the place where the poor neglected Dramatic Muse of Ulster hid herself ; and was of a party of six in the boxes, the benches of the pit being dotted over with about a score more.

Well, it was a comfort to see that the gallery was quite full, and exceedingly happy and noisy : they stamped, and stormed, and shouted, and clapped in a way that was pleasant to hear. One young god, between the acts, favoured the public with a song—extremely ill sung certainly, but the intention was everything ; and his brethren above stamped in chorus with roars of delight.

As for the piece performed, it was a good old melodrama of the British sort, inculcating a thorough detestation of vice and a warm sympathy with suffering virtue. The serious are surely too hard upon poor play-goers. We never for a moment allow rascality to triumph beyond a certain part of the third act : we sympathize with the woes of young lovers—her in ringlets and a Polish cap, him in tights and a Vandyke collar ; we abhor avarice or tyranny in the person of “ the first old man ” with the white wig and red stockings, or of the villain with the roaring voice and black whiskers ; we applaud the honest wag (he is a good fellow in spite of his cowardice) in his hearty jests at the tyrant before mentioned ; and feel a kindly sympathy with all mankind as the curtain falls over all the characters in a group, of which successful love is the happy centre. Reverend gentlemen in meeting-house and church, who shout against the immoralities of this poor stage, and threaten all play-goers with the fate which is awarded to unsuccessful plays, should try and bear less hardly upon us.

An artist—who, in spite of the Art Union, can scarcely, I should think, flourish in a place that seems devoted to preaching, politics, and trade—has somehow found his way to this humble little theatre, and decorated it with some exceedingly pretty scenery—almost the only indication of a taste for the fine arts which I have found as yet in the country.

A fine night-exhibition in the town is that of the huge spinning-mills which surround it, and of which the thousand windows are lighted up at nightfall, and may be seen from almost all quarters of the city.

A gentleman to whom I had brought an introduction good-naturedly left his work to walk with me to one of these mills, and stated by whom he had been introduced to me to the mill-proprietor, Mr. Mulholland. “ *That* recommendation,” said Mr. Mulholland gallantly, “ is welcome anywhere.” It was from my kind friend Mr. Lever. What a privilege some men have, who can sit quietly in their studies and make friends all the world over !

Here is the figure of a girl sketched in the place : there are nearly five hundred girls employed in it. They work in huge long chambers, lighted by numbers of windows, hot with steam, buzzing and humming with hundreds of thousands of whirling wheels, that all take their motion from a steam-engine which lives apart in a hot cast-iron temple of its own, from which it communicates with the innumerable machines that the five hundred girls preside over. They have seemingly but to take away the work when done—the enormous monster in the cast-iron room does it all. He cards the flax, and combs it, and spins it, and beats it, and twists it : the five hundred girls stand by to feed him, or take the material from him, when he has had his will of it. There is something frightful in the vastness as in the minuteness of this power. Every thread writhes and twirls as the steam-fate orders it,—every thread, of which it would take a hundred to make the thickness of a hair.

I have seldom, I think, seen more good looks than amongst the young women employed in this place. They work for twelve hours daily, in rooms of which the heat is intolerable to a stranger ; but in spite of it they looked gay, stout, and healthy ; nor were their forms much concealed by the very simple clothes they wear while in the mill.

The stranger will be struck by the good looks not only of these spinsters, but of almost all the young women in the streets. I never saw a town where so many women are to be met—so many and so pretty—with and without bonnets, with good figures, in neat homely shawls and dresses. The grisettes of Belfast are among the handsomest ornaments of it ; and as good, no doubt, and irreproachable in morals as their sisters in the rest of Ireland.

Many of the merchants' counting-houses are crowded in little old-fashioned "entries," or courts, such as one sees about the Bank in London. In and about these, and in the principal streets in the daytime, is a great activity, and homely unpretending bustle. The men have a business look, too ; and one sees very few flaunting dandies, as in Dublin. The shopkeepers do not brag upon their signboards, or keep "emporiums," as elsewhere,—their places of business being for the most part homely ; though one may see some splendid shops, which are not to be surpassed by London. The docks and quays are busy with their craft and shipping, upon the beautiful borders of the Lough ;—the large red warehouses stretching along the shores, with ships loading, or unloading, or building, hammers clanging, pitch pots flaming and boiling, seamen cheering in the ships, or lolling lazily on the shore. The life and movement of a port here give the stranger plenty to admire and observe. And nature has likewise done everything for the place—surrounding it with picturesque hills and water—for which latter I must confess I was not very sorry to leave the town behind me, and its mills, and its meeting-houses, and its commerce, and its theologians, and its politicians.

[1] " Boarders are received from the age of eight to fourteen at 12*l.* per annum, and 1*l.* for washing, paid quarterly in advance.

" Day scholars are received from the age of ten to twelve at 2*l.*, paid quarterly in advance.

" The Incorporated Society have abundant cause for believing that the introduction of Boarders into their Establishments has produced far more advantageous results to the public than they could, at so early a period, have anticipated ; and that the election of boys to their Foundations only after a fair competition with others of a given district, has had the effect of stimulating masters and scholars to exertion and study, and promises to operate most beneficially for the advancement of religious and general knowledge.

" The districts for eligible Candidates are as follow :

" Dundalk Institution embraces the counties of Louth and Down, because the properties which support it lie in this district.

" The Pocke Institution, Kilkenny, embraces the counties of Kilkenny and Waterford, for the same cause.

" The Ranelagh Institution, the towns of Athlone and Roscommon, and three districts in the counties of Galway and Roscommon, which the Incorporated Society hold in fee, or from which they receive impropriate tithes.

(Signed) " CÆSAR OTWAY, *Secretary.*"

[2] The Proprietary Schools of late established have gone far to protect the interests of parents and children ; but the masters of these schools take boarders, and of course draw profits from them. Why make the learned man a beef-and-mutton contractor ? It would be easy to arrange the economy of a school so that there should be no possibility of a want of confidence, or of peculation, to the detriment of the pupil.

The Irish sketch book : and Notes of a journey from Cornhill to grand Cairo (1872)

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