

Only in Ireland

*Rambles in the south of Ireland during the year 1838*

Lady Georgiana Chatterton

1839

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Journey to Miltown Malbay—Dromoland castle—Irish wit over a shop door—The old Countess of Desmond.

*Miltown Malbay.*—Tuesday Morning.—A change of place since I wrote last. I am sitting in a little whitewashed room, writing at a ricketty table ; a turf fire is burning in the grate behind me, and a large battered kettle is singing on it to make tea for our breakfast. All this sounds homely, and perhaps uncomfortable, but it is not so. Though the window is curtainless, and the room bare, it looks out upon the glorious Atlantic, the intensely blue sea ; and white breakers are foaming among the rocks, and the whole scene without is grand and beautiful. Even this homely room, with its scanty furniture, is amusing, by its extreme contrast to the magnificence we yesterday enjoyed at Dromoland castle. Since we left Vermont on Friday, we have seen so much that is interesting and pleasant, and beautiful and joyful,—three short days have been so crowded with impressions—that I feel it almost impossible to describe all I have felt, and thought. Besides, the present is delightful ; and it is so seldom that we actually enjoy the present moment, that I like to dwell upon it.

We live not in our moments or our years ;  
The present we fling from us like the rind  
Of some sweet future, which we after find.

Bitter to taste, or bind that in with tears—  
Vain tears for that which never may arrive :  
Meanwhile the joy whereby we ought to live  
Neglected or unheeded disappears.

With all their faults and follies, the Irish cannot be accused of not enjoying the present ; and though they carry this recklessness of the future to a fault, yet I think we English, who are too prone to do the reverse, ought to take a lesson from them. We are a blazé and fastidious people, always in search of excitement and novelty. I am sure that a tour in Ireland would do more good, both in body and mind, to all those dispeptic, hypochondriac invalids and pleasure-hunters who yearly leave their native land, than their excursions to the Rhine and the crowded German spas. For here a touching lesson of patient endurance, of cheerfulness, under great deprivations, of humble generosity, meet our gaze at every step ; and as for the body, plain food of the most wholesome kind is always to be had : we are not tempted by those greasy savouries of Germany, or made-up messes of France, to eat more than we ought.

This morning we had, oh ! such a pleasant walk on the sands, and scramble up the cliffs. Each wave that with soothing sound receded from the shore, left myriads of beautiful little things on the sand, which were quite new to my sight. These sparkling gem-like objects are called here “ Medusas,” or sea-anemonies ; they are a kind of fish, but resemble anemonies of amethyst, embedded in chrysal. I was also delighted with the variety of wild flowers which

grow here among the rocks and on the coast. Sea-pinks of the most vivid hue, and white stone-crop, and a delicate yellow flower whose name I do not know.

*Wednesday.*—A rainy day obliges us to postpone our intended expedition to the wondrous cliffs of Moher, and leaves me no excuse for delaying to put down some of the occurrences of our pleasant journey from Vermont. Yet I am lazy, for I am still full of happiness. Even seen through a veil of heavy rain, the ever-changing ocean looks splendid, and the giant waves are beating majestically against the rocks on which this hotel is built, and the musical sounds around me

“Lull the spirit, while they fill the mind.”

On Friday last we went to Cratloe woods, to pass a day with its young and interesting owner Mr. Augustus O'Brien. It is opposite to Vermont on the other side of the Shannon ; but we drove round by Limerick, and crossed the fine new bridge which has been lately built there. I was curious to see a place which has such attractions for its youthful proprietor, as to induce him to forego all the pleasures which have been inviting him to London during the season. Of neighbours, at least rich ones, he has few ; but he is surrounded by the interesting, intelligent, grateful Irish peasantry ; and for them, for the pleasure of doing them good, and receiving their adoring affection, he gives up all those amusements of the world, which are most attractive to youth, as well as the intoxication of shining in, and being admired by the most polished circles in Europe.

But after what we witnessed in the delightful walk we took with him when at Cratloe, I almost ceased to wonder so much at his choice. He has there a most original and unexplored field for benevolent exertions, and meets with innumerable instances of generous devotion, of warm-hearted gratitude, and all those traits which render the Irish peasantry so highly interesting. The real pleasure he finds in all this is a proof of what I have often said, that, to a person of good taste and good feeling, Ireland offers a more interesting field for benevolent exertions, and for speculation on character, than any European land. On our return from our walk in the Cratloe woods, we made a *détour*, and followed a little path by the side of the clear stream which flows from the “Squire's well.” It led us sometimes through fine forest trees, through dark glens and sunny slopes, to where openings had been cut in the woods, and where rustic seats were placed to enjoy the distinct prospect of the lordly Shannon, Carrig O'Gunniel Castle, and the far-off range of the Galtee Mountains. At last it emerged into some fields, and at the end of one we suddenly came upon the door of a little cabin, the abode of a poor widow, who received the young squire and his party with a thousand blessings showered upon the former, for restoring her son to health, whom it seemed he had himself attended, and prescribed for, during a dangerous illness.

The next cottage we visited was of a better class ; a well-dressed woman was ironing her husband's linen, and her old mother-in-law was sitting in a comfortable chair near the fire. She shewed us her inner room, where two pretty twin children were asleep in a nice cradle. Besides a china press and wardrobe, this room contained a book-stand filled with religious books. But it was the old grandmother's countenance which rivetted my attention more than all these refined wonders of an Irish cabin. She was deaf, and could not hear the musical voice of the young squire, but her eyes were fixed on him with a look of intense gratitude and delight ; as we went away, she said so touchingly, “God Almighty bless the young master, I can do nothing but pray for him,” that I almost envied him the feeling he had excited.

At the last election, one of the sons of this old woman came to his beloved young landlord, and was mortified beyond measure at not being allowed by him to subscribe the, to the poor man, large sum of three pounds towards the election expenses. The money not being accepted, his brother risked his life by going into Limerick, and haranguing in favour of his master an infuriated mob who would have scrupled little to tear him in pieces.

Our host at Cratloe met with several such traits of anxious generosity at the same election. We heard, among others, that one of his tenants, who had amassed a hundred pounds, the savings of his life, for his old age and large family, came forward and offered all to his beloved landlord.

On Saturday we proceeded to Dromoland. It is a splendid abode, now nearly finished, and offers that phenomenon in Ireland, or indeed in any country, a magnificent place erected without ruining the possessor. Sir Lucius O'Brien lives there in a style of hospitable splendour, which does credit to his good taste and kind heart : the rich are welcome, and the poor taken care of. In both these agreeable employments he has an able assistant in his interesting wife. The comfortable cottages which on all sides may be seen without the walls of the park, bear testimony to the goodness and liberality of their landlord. The castle contains some good pictures, and many interesting portraits of this ancient family.

In the entrance hall is one of their great ancestor, the celebrated king Brian Boroihme. The upper gallery is full of these interesting memorials of bygone days ; and the present possessor of Dromoland has placed them in richly carved frames, which accord admirably with the florid and beautiful architecture of the building. There are two by Sir Peter Lely, of Lord Clarendon, and his daughter, the Duchess of York.

In the dining-room is a large full-length portrait of Queen Anne. It was a present from her Majesty to the family here, whose cousin she was ; Sir Donat O'Brien having married the daughter of Mr. and Lady — Kitley, who was the daughter of the first Lord Clarendon. Mr. Kitley came into Ireland, as Lord Treasurer to the Earl of Clarendon, and his brother-in-law, who was Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. Thus the O'Briens, independent of their Irish descent from the Kings of Munster, are nobly connected. We had some delightful rambles among the woods and beautiful grounds which surround Dromoland.

There is a romantic traditionary story told of the manner in which the O'Brien property has been preserved amid the revolutions in Irish affairs. Connor O'Brien is said to have been the only gentleman in the County of Clare, who, after the Commonwealth party was triumphant, refused to make terms with Ireton : and Ireton is believed to have caused him to be assassinated, having despatched a party of five of his best marksmen, in the disguise of sportsmen, for the purpose.

Connor O'Brien's wife, Mary-ni-Mahon, informed her sons Teigue and Donough of the murder of their father, and at the same time, advised them to offer no further opposition to the dominion of the English regicides. The assassin, however, was taken and hanged ; and immediately after his execution, the widow of Connor O'Brien ordered her carriage to be prepared. Dressing herself in a superb suit of blue and silver, she travelled with six horses towards Limerick, which then was the head-quarters of Ireton, and where he soon after died.

It so happened that on the evening of her arrival, there was a large entertainment at the General's quarters. Upon demanding at the door to see Ireton, she was refused admission by the sentinel. A discussion followed, which it would appear was of so noisy a character that it

attracted the attention of Ireton, who coming to the door, enquired the cause of the sentinel's violent conduct, and why he refused admittance to a lady of noble appearance ; asking at the same time the name of his fair visiter. " I was," she replied, " the wife of Connor O'Brien, but I am now his widow."

Ireton hesitated to believe her ; but the disconsolate widow convinced him that she was free by offering to marry one of his officers. He assented to the proposal, and she was married to an officer named Cooper.

By this marriage the O'Brien property was saved from forfeiture. Her sons Teigue and Donough, finding that a political struggle was again likely to occur in Ireland, in the contest between James II. and William III., and that their property would be again endangered by their decidedly espousing either party ; they consulted together, and determined that one should take the Jacobite, and the other the Orange side of the question.

The first choice was made by Teigue as the eldest brother, who determined to follow the cause of James, his lawful king ; Donough became a partizan of William's, and the possessor of the property.

On Monday we came here, making a detour to visit the ruins of Quin Abbey. It stands in a green plain near the clear river. The cloisters resemble those of Askeaton, and are in as good preservation ; indeed the whole building, except the roof, is entire. Most of the chimney-pieces remain ; and a peasant woman, who came up to speak to me as I was examining an old monument, said that her and mother remembered when it was all perfect.

While we were in the abbey, the funeral procession of a young girl entered the ruined building, and, as is always the case in Ireland, several groups dispersed themselves in various directions, each to weep over the grave of their own friends. I remarked one girl particularly, who knelt at a tomb which, from its grass-grown appearance, seemed to have been there a long time ; she must have been quite young when she lost the friend or relative who reposed in it ; but the expression of solemn concern on her countenance showed how deeply she still revered the memory of that departed one. The prayer thus offered up at the grave of a long-lost friend, must have a beneficial effect on the character, and I cannot but feel a respect for a custom so calculated to do good.

I was struck with the extreme civility and kindly feeling towards us strangers, of the people who attended this funeral. They seemed highly flattered at our appearing to admire the ruins ; and one woman regretted, with tears in her eyes, that the pavement of the cloisters was so rugged for my " little feet ;" she looked as if she longed to carry me over the rough places, and watched with the greatest anxiety to see that I did not step on loose stones. When we talked of ascending the high tower of the chapel, some of the women seemed frightened at the idea of a lady's venturing up broken stairs and along the top of narrow walls, at that dizzy height ; but when they saw that I was resolved to proceed, my friend of the cloisters said she would go up with me, though she had never ventured before. This and other marks of interest and civility, which we met with then, could not proceed from desire of gain, for none of the poor people would take money. One tattered old man to whom we offered a trifle, said, when declining it for himself, that he would be glad if their honours would give something to the mother of the poor young girl who lay in the coffin, as she had in a few weeks lost a husband, a son, and this daughter, and was left with six young children to provide for, and another coming.

This young girl, owing to the deaths and illness in the family, had no relations at the funeral, yet many tears of genuine sorrow were shed over her grave by this warm-hearted people ; and though in this case there could not be the usual attraction of merriment and good cheer at the cottage of the deceased, the procession was crowded. And a beautiful and strange scene it was to see this crowd—the men in their sober attire, and the women in the brilliant coloured dresses they wear in this part of the country, scattered over the green sward before the venerable ruins of the old abbey. Not one bonnet was there ; all the women wore either their own dark hair dressed in the simple Grecian fashion, or the head covered with a sort of white linen veil, or bright coloured handkerchief, or the hood of the red or blue cloak, which forms an invariable part of their costume.

At a cottage, in the village of Quin, we were amused at seeing the following sign over the door.

“ Here lives a man who don’t refuse  
To make or mend both boots and shoes ;  
His leather’s good, his work is quick,  
His profits small—so can’t give tick.”

This sign, however, is not so concise and expressive as one I have seen at Limerick, over the door of an eating-house.

“ Fat and lean,  
Neat and clean,”

told the whole tale of what might be expected within.

The Irish are very fanciful in their signs. One made use of by a tailor at Cahirciveen, illustrates the truth of my favourite doctrine, that misfortunes, defects, and ignorances, may often be turned to good account by a mind determined to make the most of every circumstance. A tailor who lived in the little town, made once upon a time a long journey to see the world ; and on his return put up his name and trade over his shop, adding in large and triumphant letters, “ From London.” His business of course increased immensely ; and all the other tailors (for there were many in a place which furnished clothes to the dense population of the surrounding country) were in despair. At last the poorest and most miserable of them all resolved to make a desperate attempt to carry a way the custom from the usurping traveller. He lived opposite the tailor “ from London,” and one fine morning a large sign appeared over his door, bearing the words “ Thady O’Shaughnessy. Tailor,” and in gigantic letters “ Never was in London.” The sign created first a laugh, then perhaps a feeling of admiration for Thady’s honest audacity, and soon the custom was transferred from the illustrious traveller, to the honest man who “ never was in London.”

After visiting the lead mines of Mr. Singleton, where a great deal of work is going on, we continued our journey, passing through Ennis. At Ennistimon, a primitive little place in a mountain valley, we stopped to bait the horses, and took advantage of the delay to enjoy a pleasant walk to a gentleman’s place on the opposite side of the river. We went first under the bridge, which is thrown over a broad expanse of flat rock, now quite dry, except a narrow stream at one end ; but in winter a torrent descends from the mountains, and rushes over the flat rock with such precipitancy, that we were told, persons could walk under the fall, “ as they do at Niagara,” said our guide, without being wet. Under the first ledge is another not so broad, and so on are successive ledges of rocks to the plain below.

On the steep bank above, a country-house is situated ; it is well-wooded, and with a little care might be made a lovely residence ; but alas ! the walks are overgrown with weeds, and the trees have spread so luxuriantly as to block up all the view from the windows. If openings were cut in the plantations, the house would command beautiful prospects over the little winding valley, the river with its strange rocks, the waterfalls, and distant mountains. These indications of neglect, and the miserable cottages near the gate, tell of an absentee owner. We heard, however, the pleasing intelligence, that the master is coming home, and painters are now employed in the house.

On this spot there stood formerly a castle of the O'Briens, and the rooms still contain many pictures of that ancient family. When I viewed these expressive representations of noble minds, still living on the old canvas, I rejoiced to think that the same generous spirit survives in their descendants, as I had so lately witnessed both at Cratloe and Dromoland. There is also in this venerable house at Ennistimon, a portrait of the celebrated old Countess of Desmond, who is said to have lived to the age of 162. And truly hers was a face which seemed formed to survive the storms of a century—so stern, so firm and enduring, so devoid of all those susceptibilities which, though the sources of much joy, are great shorteners of life. Who this old countess was, the exact date of her birth and death, and to which of the Earls of Desmond she was married, are points which it seems have never been quite satisfactorily ascertained. That such a person lived, and lived through an apparently incredible number of reigns, is quite certain. That she lived so long as to be obliged to have her lease renewed, which had been granted under her marriage settlements for one hundred years, has been ascertained. It is said, that when this lease was renewed, the aged countess enquired with asperity—Why is it only given for another term of one hundred years ?—why am I not to have it for my life ?'

Lord Bacon, in his Natural History, says, “ They tell a tale of the old Countess of Desmond, who lived till she was seven-score years old, that she did dentire twice or thrice, casting her old teeth, and others coming in their place.” [1] Sir Walter Raleigh, in his History of the World, mentions, “ I myself knew the old Countess of Desmond, of Inchiquin in Munster, who lived in the year 1589, and many years since ; who was married in Edward IVth's time, and held her joynture from all the Earls of Desmond since then ; and that this is true, all the noblemen and gentlemen of Munster can witness.” [2]

Horace Walpole, in his Historic Doubts of the reign of Richard III., brings forward the old lady as evidence to Richard's personal appearance. He says, “ the old Countess of Desmond, who had danced with Richard III., declared he was the handsomest man in the room, except his brother Edward, and was very well made.”

Some say that she was deprived of her fortune by the attainder of the Desmonds, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, and was in great distress in her latter days. There is also a tradition, that at the advanced age of 140 she crossed the channel to Bristol, and travelled to London to solicit relief from James I.

It is said, that the petition of this venerable dame, the only surviving relic of a family so celebrated and formidable in former times, was granted. She returned home, and I believe purchased one of the ancient residences of the Desmonds, called Drumanna, on the river Blackwater. In this place she ended her strange and eventful life ; but not, however, it is said, from old age. Her death was caused by a fall, whilst this active old lady, whose limbs were not quite as supple as they might have been some 130 years before, was engaged in the youthful sport of climbing a tree to pick apples.

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Walk to the Puffing-hole at Miltown—Arrival at Kilkee—Irish good humour—Excursion to Loop-Head.

*Millown ; Thursday*,—We walked to-day to view a singular piece of sea-engineering, a regular canal—once probably a cavern worn by the sea, the roof of which had fallen in. It is about a mile from the hotel, near the headland of a small bay. The opposite headland is Spanish point, where two of the Armada were wrecked in 1688. Its creamy appearance shows how likely a spot it was for such a catastrophe to take place at.

The weather is so stormy and unpropitious, that we have been obliged to give up the great object of our coming here—a visit to the cliffs of Moher, and the tomb of Conan, on Mount Callan, where there is a stone inscribed with Ogham characters.

We ventured, however, to-day, as far as the Phoul-a-kirché ; and were tempted by the report of some boys, to try a visit to the puffing-hole, represented by them as a mile off ; but which turned out to be nearly three.

The puffing-hole is a cavity in the rocks, near the shore, through which the sea is forced up, so as to form a splendid jet-d'eau, which sometimes rises to a considerable height. This singular effect is caused by the compression of air in the cavern to which the puffing-hole is the mouth. As the wave retires, the air forces it out of the cavern with great violence, producing a roar like thunder ; but this takes place only at a certain period of the tide, when the two great contending powers are nearly balanced as to force.

The scenery at this spot is very grand. The extremity of the bay of Liscanor is formed by the bold termination of the cliffs of Moher, called the Hag's-head ; those splendid cliffs which, unfortunately, we are not destined to visit. The sight of the foaming surge was very grand ; but the state of the tide was such as not to admit of the puffing-hole exhibiting itself : we determined, therefore, to wait, and took shelter from the high wind under the lee of an old wall—the last remains of an ancient castle. I found a fisherman there, who was waiting until the tide had sufficiently fallen, to enable him to gather the sea-weed which has been detached from the rocks during the late storms ; a poor girl, content with some of an inferior description, was hard at work collecting it on the beach.

It is gratifying to know how sea-weed is now valued, when compared with its neglect until a comparatively late period. Formerly, the production of kelp was the only object for which it was collected—the introduction of barilla fortunately destroyed this trade, and sea-weed is now much more profitably made use of as manure.

My friend, the fisherman, told me that they often venture in their canoes ten miles to sea ; their fish is bought up by dealers for the Limerick market, and they sometimes get £2 for a boat of fish, turbot fetching from 2*s.* 6*d.* to 5*s.* In winter, they catch hake and haddock. The condition of the peasantry here, seems anything but miserable. Potatoes sell so low as 1*d.* a stone, (14lbs) ; milk from a penny to three-halfpence a quart ; turf is abundant ; and fishing sometimes affords a very profitable employment—but it is a dangerous occupation on this coast. The canoes are very frail. They consist of a slight frame-work, over which canvas is lightly stretched, and then saturated with tar, so as to become water-proof : their great lightness and buoyancy enable them to live in a very heavy sea, if properly and steadily managed ;

and therefore they are perhaps better adapted to this coast, than stronger boats would be. Accidents, however, frequently occur. Only two nights ago, a man and a boy lost their lives ; they imprudently crossed a sea, which struck the boat, and broke it in pieces. The poor man was one of the boldest and most expert seamen on the coast, and his death was probably caused by his intrepidity in attempting to reach the shore by a short cut. He had won the prize in a rowing match at the last regatta, and looked forward to be again the victor at the regatta of this year, which is to take place in a few days.

The wind this morning was so high, that we could hardly keep our footing on the rock above the puffing-hole. We however waited till it began to play, but not at all to the degree my companion described that he had witnessed ; and as the sun did not shine, we saw none of those rainbow effects which are said to be so beautiful.

*Kilkee, Friday.*—The high wind, so provokingly our enemy, still continued its persecution yesterday, so that we could not console ourselves for the loss of the cliffs of Moher, by visiting those of Baltard, on our road here. They are said to be but little inferior in height and boldness to Moher, and I was most anxious to proceed there, but our friends, who have often visited those wild regions, maintained that we should inevitably be blown into the sea if we endeavoured to mount on the exposed summit of Baltard. With great reluctance I gave up the attempt, and we drove direct here and took shelter from the storm and rain in the homely, but clean little Inn of this place.

After having travelled so much over the dusty and beaten track infested by the usual summer tourists abroad, I find infinite pleasure in exploring the grass-grown and interesting nooks of deserted Ireland—in arriving at Inns where they do not know by rote the whole list of one's wants ; where the landlady's face expresses a refreshing mixture of surprise, awe, and pleasure, in which cannot be detected that cold, confident, sum-total-of-a-bill sort of look, which is visible on the blazé countenances of foreign innkeepers.

Then how delightful the feeling that you have put a few rare shillings into the tattered pocket of a post-boy who has returned the touching answer to a reproof you gave him for having his harness in such bad order, “ Plaze yer honor, we haven't turned a wheel this six months, no wonder the harness should break ; faix 'tis broke we are ourselves for want o' work.” Then I delight in the blundering eagerness of the chamber-maid, whose kindness proceeds from her good nature, and not from the hope of reward. Good humour and good nature seem to me the great characteristics of Irish women of all ranks ; I never saw a people whom it is more difficult to put out of temper.

My ill health makes me often peevish and impatient at the sight of a bad bed, when travelling ; and the poor chamber-maid has much trouble to content me in the arrangement of it, which I generally superintend myself. In the midst of my fretfulness, I have often been amused with the impatient and contemptuous toss of the head, with which the French fille-de-chambre unwillingly assists my innovations on the established rules of bed making—so unreasonable in her eyes. I have smiled at the muttered “ Che seccatura, che donna capriziosa !” of a dark-eyed Italian ; and have observed the imperturbable air and plodding obedience of German mädchens ; and the half provoked half dull stare of the English chambermaid. But 'tis only in Ireland that my peculiarities have met with compassionate sympathy, from the eager and kindly sensitive, ragged maid-of-all-work, of a little unfrequented Inn. This is the more strange, as the girl has, perhaps, never slept on anything better than a “ lock of straw” herself, and therefore the most uncomfortable bed would appear in her eyes luxurious in the extreme.



But these people are so devoid of prejudices that they seem at once to enter into the feelings of those who are most unlike themselves. The poor woman at Quin Abbey, who regretted that my “little feet,” though encased in comfortable shoes and stockings, should have to walk upon the rough pavement she was treading bare-foot, was an instance of this.

The housemaid here is a very interesting-looking girl, though far from pretty. Dear M—— knows something of her history, and tells me that she divides her little gains with a poor invalid sister, who was severely burned last year. These gains are very precarious. This whole season she has received only one shilling, and out of her scanty profits she has to furnish soap and starch, to wash the linen of the establishment.

Kilkee is a place I have long wished to see, for those I love have been happy in it. Dear M—— has talked to me of it, with all the glowing enthusiasm of her poetic feelings ; she loves the place, and has made many, many people happy there. I expected, therefore, much pleasure from my visit, and have not been disappointed.

*Saturday.*—Just returned from a delightful walk, to see one of the lions of this place—a rocky indentation of the coast, called the Amphitheatre. Never have I beheld such splendid sea views : or rather, never have I seen such a variety of beautiful forms assumed by the watery element, or learnt that the common term of “waves mountains high,” could be so literally applicable to them.

I stopped several times to watch and enjoy the sight. Sometimes the waves moved forwards with a slow majestic glide, till they were dashed with a tremendous shock against some of those hidden rocks, which seem placed outside the bay, as if on purpose to embellish the scene. Now they uplift themselves in gigantic masses, while sheets of silvery spray, suddenly raised high in the air, over the bright green waves, descend in a thousand fantastic forms. There are a number of bold headlands along this coast, into which are worn deep caverns, where the sea rushes with wild fury, and then rapidly recedes with a thundering sound. The endless varieties of green, which so much embellish the scenery of Ireland, seem here transferred to the splendid ocean.

The Amphitheatre does not entirely answer to its name. It should rather be called the Theatre, having the sea as its stage. Rocks of an almost jetty blackness rise in a semi-circle, forming rows of gigantic steps one above another, as even and regular as if they had been shaped by art. Into this amphitheatre the sea enters ; and never could the wild beasts and gladiators of ancient times have burst into the arena with a more thundering roar.

In this particular spot the ocean is usually rough, and rushes up the giant seats with impetuous fury, forming as it recedes splendid waterfalls ; yet unlike any cascade I ever beheld. The water has scarcely time to run quite off, and disclose the dark glistening rocks, before up dashes again the bright green and foaming sea, and forms that most strange phenomenon, an immense body of water flowing up a steep height—in fact, an inverted cascade. But how foolish I am to try to describe in words, that which is indescribable—those movements combining such wild playfulness with such thundering fury—a scene which no painter, with all his colours, could delineate.

M—— told me that when the tide is out, the amphitheatre is equally interesting, though in a different way, as when the sea is boiling within its enclosure. There are caverns underneath, into which she has often rambled, and here are little rocky basins where the water remains,

forming miniature lakes. The rock underfoot is stained many bright colours, by various marine mosses and lichens, so that it looks, in those places which are still wet and slimy from the spray, as though it were inlaid with gems. The ocean-sounds are here more strange and varied, yet harmonious, than any I ever heard. Some are caused by gigantic shingles, or rather round polished rocks, which are rolled to and fro by the waves, with a rumbling sound like a stunning discharge of artillery, and the effect of this is grand beyond description. There is something most thrilling and solemn in the exquisite harmony which results from the confusion of those ocean-sounds—sounds which seem to rouse the soul, while they soothe the earthly care-worn spirit,—sounds all glorious, which lead our thoughts direct to that place, !

“ Where light no shadow has, and life no death.”

In the little bay where the town of Kilkee is situated, the sea ripples quietly over the smoothest sand imaginable, and seems to invite one to bathe in its calm waters.

On our return from the amphitheatre, we passed several groups of peasants, in the most picturesque undress, gathering sea-weed. This sea-weed was unlike any I ever saw before, and far more beautiful. Some was of a bright green, smooth and thick, like the leaves of the alloe or cactus ; some of a vivid glittering burnt-sienna colour, several yards in length, and resembling those deep furbelow trimmings, which used to decorate our grand-mother’s hooped court-dresses in days of yore.

As I looked on the joyous countenances of the bare-legged girls, who were gathering these beautiful marine plants, a portion of their light-heartedness seemed insensibly communicated to myself, and I felt that the buoyant gladness of their gestures and air, was an instinctive hymn of praise to the Almighty Creator of their own comely forms and the beautiful world around them. Nearer the little town were groups of women beetling linen, and fishermen drying their nets, all in good grouping. I could have stood for hours listening to their bursts of light-hearted mirth, and watching the little scenes where affection, kindness, and love—those main-springs of the Irish character—were visibly in play.

*Monday evening.*—We decided on a visit to Loop-head, which is said to be about eighteen or twenty miles from Kilkee, and is the point which with Kerry-head forms the mouth of the Shannon. The most striking circumstance of our drive, was the density of the population ; the country in every direction being covered with cottages. But when we consider the usual abundance and cheapness of the Irish “ staff of life,” potatoes—the occasional assistance which fishing affords, and the abundance of fuel,—it is not to be wondered at, that as a residence this coast should prove so attractive. All goes well, so long as the harvest is favourable ; but the consequences of a failure of the potatoe-crop are frightful. There is no intermediate step between plenty and starvation.

The road is excellent, being a part of the coast-road, constructed some years ago, during a season of scarcity, and still kept in order by the Board of Works. After having passed the village of Cross, we left the Ross-road to the right, and got to a miserable, but singular-looking place on the Shannon, near its mouth, called Kilbaka ; there we left our car, and proceeded on foot over a most rugged road, towards the light-house, the distance about four miles.

As we proceeded, we had a very fine view of the Shannon, and the noble outline of the Kerry mountains, with our old friend Brandon on the left, and the Atlantic on the right. The latter part of the walk was through cultivated fields, extending to the light-house, which is

very well kept, and we ascended to the top, to enjoy the extended prospect it commands. Its height is objected to, as from this circumstance it is said that the light is sometimes mistaken for a star.

The Head itself is a rock, separated by a perpendicular cleft, forty or fifty feet wide, from the main land. It is the abode of sea fowl, who by their screams expressed their disapprobation of our approach. This Head is not without its legend, and the chasm, like many similar, is a "lover's leap." But with an unusual variation, however, for the coy one in this instance, was of the male sex; though fortunately for the Irish character, he was a Dane. He jumped the chasm to avoid the fair one who pursued. She gallantly leaped after him. The gentleman, however, unmoved by this proof of activity and affection, jumped back again; a much more difficult undertaking, and which proved too much for the poor lady, who in attempting to follow him fell into the foaming surge below!

For some time after we left the light-house, we had a delightful walk on smooth turf, along the cliffs, whose ledges were covered with sea-fowl; in some places, drawn up in lines, in the most exact order. We saw the place where, three or four years ago, about two acres of the cliff had fallen in, with so tremendous a crash as to shake the light-house, though half a mile distant.

We passed a curious wild bay, where people were collecting sea-weed for kelp, a trade now almost abandoned on this coast; and about three miles from the light-house came to the celebrated natural bridges, the chief objects of our expedition, and which, without the other attractions of this interesting coast, would have amply repaid us. These bridges connect the sides of a long narrow chasm, from thirty to forty feet wide, originally in all probability a cave, the roof of which fell in, leaving, in a wild and beautiful freak of nature, these bridges standing.

The more inland one has all the appearance of a regularly turned arch; the other, which is at the extremity of the chasm, is nearly horizontal, and it is very curious to see how stones so placed, are supported. One single rock below, against which the sea continually chafes, supports the whole. This rock has a persevering enemy to contend with, and at perhaps no distant period, travellers will have to deplore the destruction of this curious structure.

The elliptical arch, which is very fine, and whose length of span is extraordinary, is fortunately not so precariously circumstanced as the other.

We crossed both bridges, and from a ledge of rocks outside the more horizontal one, had a noble view of both, and of the ruined pile which stands in the arm of the sea, between them. While sitting on this ledge, we had an opportunity of seeing the sudden violence with which, without any apparent cause, the sea sometimes breaks on this coast. The sea had been comparatively quiet, when suddenly it came bounding in, and covered with its angry waves what before had been dry, and to all appearance quite unexposed, and out of reach of such an attack.

In a quiet little bay, near Ross, is one of the spas which are of frequent occurrence on this coast, and which have performed wonderful cures on invalids.

After getting over a rugged road, now under repair, and having paid contribution to the work-men, who good humouredly intercepted us by drawing a line across the road, to make

us “ pay our footing” a common custom in the South of Ireland, we joined our car at the place appointed, having walked a distance of about nine miles.

Our return was by Carrigaholt, which has the appearance of a thriving village. It is situated in a pretty bay of the Shannon, into which a small river discharges itself. A tongue of land forms one side of this bay ; at its extremity is the ruin of a fine old castle, which belonged to the celebrated Lord Clare, who was at one time the proprietor of all this country. Unfortunately for him, however, he adhered with great fidelity to the cause of James II. ; and consequently, on the triumph of William’s party, his estates here were confiscated. It is said the King was adverse to this act of severity, observing that such devoted loyalty should be rather admired than condemned ; but so fine an estate was an irresistible temptation ; the opinion of the Council prevailed, and Lord Clare died an exile in France. William gave the estates to a London company, in payment of a demand for supplying his army ; and it was afterwards sold. The Westbys and Burtons still hold the portions purchased by their ancestors. The “ lone tower,” the proud remains of former grandeur, is still habitable, and the fine red-brick garden-wall yet in existence. A lodge in the grounds has lately been built, commanding a view of the Shannon, which is here of great breadth. This place, if well wooded, would be very pretty ; many plantations have been formed, but in the westerly winds of this coast, they have a formidable enemy to contend with.

The bay of Carrigaholt is well adapted for bathing, and it would probably be a place of resort, were it not for the greater attraction of Kilkee, whose ocean-bath is as much superior to the diluted water of this place, as, according to the reasoning of a countryman once arguing the point, a glass of whiskey is to a glass of grog. Carrigaholt holds constant intercourse with Limerick, in the transport of turf and corn. An excellent road leads to Kilkee, along which we dashed right merrily, beating hollow two cars which had the impertinence to contend with us. One of them, to our driver’s great delight, was put hors de combat by the loss of a wheel. We reached Kilkee exactly at seven, after a most gratifying excursion.

*Tuesday.*—I had to-day another ramble to see a cavern near the amphitheatre, which it was rather a nervous business to reach, as the tide was coming in.

Nothing can be finer than the scenery here ! The noble rocks, broken into an endless variety of forms, give at every turn a new combination ; and then the apparently monotonous, yet ever interesting ocean—how it fascinates the gaze, as each succeeding wave, “ curling its monstrous head,” dashes itself with giant, yet unavailing force against the opposing head-land ! Abroad and shelving ledge of rock forms an interesting walk, and leads to the point of “ Intrinsic” bay. A friend of ours once overheard a peasant sing, while seated on a projection of this cliff, “ On this cold flinty rock,” “ in a style, and with a voice which would not disgrace Drury Lane.” The man was so absorbed, that he seemed unconscious of the approach of strangers ! The Intrinsic Bay was so called after an unfortunate vessel, which was lost here about three years ago. It was a most heart-rending occurrence to those who witnessed it, as the danger of the ship was evident to all, without the means of affording relief. A few minutes before the ill-fated vessel went down, a lady appeared on deck—one wild look around seemed to satisfy her that there was no hope, and with a gesture of despair she sank back into the cabin. Soon after, a huge wave struck the ship, and all was over. Nothing was saved.

A sea-gull, fluttering above the billows that had just closed over the ship, was seen to stoop and pick up something that floated on the sea. The bird dropped it while flying towards the shore, and it proved to be a lady’s glove. [3]

[1] Century 8. Expert. 755.

[2] Book i. chap. 5. p. 45.

[3] This affecting incident is made the subject of some pretty verses in Mrs. Nott's "Two months at Kilkee," a useful and interesting little publication, in which the particulars of this melancholy event are given in detail.

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