

Paradisial Sublimity

The wild Irish girl

Lady Morgan

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LETTER I.

TO J. D.ESQ., M.P.

Dublin, March, — , 17 —

I REMEMBER, When I was a boy, meeting somewhere with the quaintly written travels of *Moryson* through Ireland, and being particularly struck with his assertion, that so late as the days of Elizabeth, an Irish chieftain and his family were frequently seen seated round their domestic fire in a state of perfect nudity. This singular anecdote (so illustrative of the barbarity of the Irish, at a period when civilization had made such a wonderful progress even in its sister countries,) fastened so strongly on my boyish imagination, that whenever the *Irish* were mentioned in my presence, an *Esquimaux* group circling round the fire which was to dress a dinner, or broil an enemy, was the image which presented itself to my mind ; and in this trivial source, I believe, originated that early formed opinion of Irish ferocity, which has since been nurtured into a *confirmed prejudice*. So true it is, that almost all the erroneous principles which influence our maturer being, are to be traced to some fatal association of ideas received and formed in early life. But whatever may be the *cause*, I feel the strongest objection to becoming a resident in the remote part of a country which is still shaken by the convulsions of an anarchical spirit ; where for a series of ages the olive of peace has not been suffered to shoot forth *one* sweet blossom of national concord, which the sword of civil dissension has not cropt almost in the germ ; and the natural character of whose factious sons, as we are still taught to believe, is turbulent, faithless, intemperate, and cruel ; formerly destitute of arts, letters, or civilization, and still but slowly submitting to their salutary and ennobling influence.

To confess the truth, I had so far suffered prejudice to get the start of unbiassed liberality, that I had almost assigned to these rude people scenes appropriately barbarous ; and never was more pleasantly astonished, than when the morning's dawn gave to my view one of the most splendid spectacles in the scene of picturesque creation I had ever beheld, or indeed ever conceived—the bay of Dublin.

A foreigner on board the packet compared the view to that which the bay of Naples affords : I cannot judge of the justness of the comparison, though I am told one very general and common-place ; but if the scenic beauties of the Irish bay are exceeded by those of the Neapolitan, my fancy falls short in a just conception of its charms. The springing up of a contrary wind kept us for a considerable time beating about this enchanting coast ; the weather suddenly changed, the rain poured in torrents, a storm arose, and the beautiful prospect which had fascinated our gaze, vanished in the mists of impenetrable obscurity.

As we had the mail on board, a boat was sent out to receive it, the oars of which were plied by six men, whose statures, limbs, and features declared them the lingering progeny of the once formidable race of Irish giants. Bare headed, they “ bided the pelting of the pitiless storm,” with no other barrier to its fury, than what tattered check trousers, and shirts open at neck, and tucked above the elbows afforded ; and which thus disposed, betrayed the sinewy

contexture of forms, which might have individually afforded a model to sculpture, for the colossal statue of an Hercules, under all the different aspects of strength and exertion. [1]

A few of the passengers proposing to venture in the boat, I listlessly followed, and found myself seated by one of these sea monsters, who, in an accent that made me startle, addressed me in English at least as pure and correct as a Thames' boatman would use ; and with so much courtesy, cheerfulness, and respect, that I was at a loss to reconcile such civilization of manner to such ferocity of appearance ; while his companions as they stemmed the mountainous waves, or plied their heavy oars, displayed such a vein of low humour and quaint drollery, and in a language so curiously expressive and original, that no longer able to suppress my surprise, I betrayed it to a gentleman who sat near me, and by whom I was assured that this species of colloquial wit was peculiar to the lower class of the Irish, who borrowed much of their curious phraseology from the peculiar idiom of their, own tongue, and the cheeriness of manner from the native exility of their temperament ; “ and as for their courteousness,” he continued, “ you will find them on a further intercourse, civil even to *adulation*, as long as you treat them with apparent kindness, but an opposite conduct will prove their manner proportionably uncivilized.”

“ It is very excusable,” said I, “ they are of a class in society to which the modification of the feelings are unknown, and to be sensibly alive to *kindness or to unkindness*, is, in my opinion, a noble trait in the national character of an unsophisticated people.”

While we spoke, we landed, and for the something like pleasurable emotion, which the first on my list of Irish acquaintance produced in my mind, I distributed among these “ sons of the waves,” more silver than I believe they expected. Had I bestowed a principality on an Englishman of the same rank, he would have been less lavish of the *eloquence* of gratitude on his benefactor, though he might equally have felt the *sentiment*.—So much for my voyage *across the Channel !*

This city is to London like a small temple of the Ionic order, whose proportions are delicate, whose character is elegance, compared to a vast palace, whose Corinthian pillars at once denote strength and magnificence.

The wondrous extent of London excites our amazement ; the compact uniformity of Dublin our admiration. But a dispersion is less within the *coup-d'œil* of observance, than aggregation, the small, but harmonious features of Dublin sieze at once on the eye, while the scattered but splendid traits of London, excite a less immediate and more progressive admiration, which is often lost in the intervals that occur between those objects which are calculated to excite it.

In London, the miserable shop of a gin seller, and the magnificent palace of a Duke, alternately create disgust, or awaken approbation.

In Dublin the buildings are not arranged upon such democratic principles. The plebian hut offers no foil to the patrician edifice, while their splendid and beautiful public structures are so closely connected, as with *some* degree of policy to Strike *at once* upon the eye in the happiest combination. [2]

In other respects this city appears to me to be the miniature copy of our imperial original, though minutely imitative in show and glare. Something less observant of life's prime luxuries, order and cleanliness, there are a certain class of wretches who haunt the streets of Dublin, so emblematic of vice, poverty, idleness, and filth, that disgust and pity frequently succeed in the minds of the stranger to sentiments of pleasure, surprise, and admiration. For

the origin of this evil, I must refer you to the supreme police of the city ; but whatever may be the cause, the effects (to an Englishman especially) are dreadful and disgusting beyond all expression.

Although my father has a large connexion here, yet he only gave me a letter to his banker, who has forced me to make his house my home for the few days I shall remain in Dublin, and whose cordiality and kindness sanctions all that has ever been circulated of Irish hospitality.

In the present state of my feelings, however, a party on the banks of the *Ohio*, with a tribe of Indian hunters, would be more consonant to my inclinations than the refined pleasures of the most polished circles in the world. Yet these warm-hearted people, who find in the name of stranger an irresistible lure to every kind attention, will force me to be happy in despite of myself, and overwhelm me with invitations, some of which it is impossible to resist. My prejudices have received some mortal strokes, when I perceived that the natives of this barbarous country have got goal for goal with us, in every elegant refinement of life and manners ; the only difference I can perceive between a London and a Dublin rout is, that here, amongst the first class, there is a warmth and cordiality of address, which, though perhaps not more sincere than the cold formality of British ceremony, is certainly more fascinating. [3]

It is not, however, in Dublin I shall expect to find the tone of national character and manner ; in the first circles of all great cities (as in courts) the native features of national character are softened into general uniformity, and the genuine feelings of nature are suppressed or exchanged for a political compliance with the reigning modes and customs, which hold their tenure from the sanction and example of the seat of government. Before I close this, I must make one observation, which I think will speak more than volumes for the refinement of these people.

During my short residence here, I have been forced, in true spirit of Irish dissipation, into three parties of a night ; and I have upon these occasions observed that the most courted objects of popular attention, were those whose talents alone endowed them with distinction. Besides amateurs, I have met with many professional persons, whom I knew in London as public characters, and who are here incorporated in the first and most brilliant circles, appearing to feel no other inequality, than what their own superiority of genius confers.

I leave Dublin to-morrow for M—— house. It is situated in the county of ——, on the north-west coast of Connaught, which I am told is the classic ground of Ireland. The native Irish, pursued by religious and political bigotry, made it the asylum of their sufferings, and were separated by a provincial barrier from an intercourse with the rest of Ireland, until after the Restoration ; so I shall have a fair opportunity of beholding the Irish character in all its *primeval* ferocity.

Direct your next to Bally——, which I find is the nearest post town to my *Kamskatkan palace* ; where with no other society than that of Black stone and Co. I shall lead such a life of animal existence, as Prior gives to his Contented Couple—

“ They ate, and drank, and slept—what then ?
Why, slept, and drank, and ate again.” —

Adieu. H. M.

LETTER II.

TO J. D. ESQ., M. P.

M— House.

In the various modes of penance invented by the various *penance mongers* of pious austerity, did you ever hear the travelling in an *Irish post-chaise* enumerated as a punishment, which by far exceeds horse-hair shirts and voluntary flagellation ? My first day's journey from Dublin being as wet a one as this moist climate and capricious season ever produced, my berlin answered all the purposes of a *shower bath*, while the ventillating principles on which the windows were constructed, gave me all the benefit to be derived from the breathy influence of the four cardinal points.

Unable any longer to sit tamely enduring the “ *penalty of Adam, the season's change*” or to sustain any longer the “ hair-breadth 'scapes,” which the most dismantled of vehicles afforded me, together with delays and stoppages of every species to be found in the catalogue of procrastination and mischance, I took my seat in a mail coach which I met at my third stage, and which was going to a town within twenty miles of Bally——. These twenty miles, by far the most agreeable of my journey, I performed as we once (in days of boyish errantry) accomplished a tour to Wales—on foot.

I had previously sent my baggage, and was happily unincumbered with a servant, for the fastidious delicacy of Monsieur Laval would never have been adequate to the fatigues of a pedestrian tour through a country wild and mountainous as his own native *Savoy*. But to me every difficulty was an effort of some good *genius* chasing the demon of lethargy from the usurpations of my mind's empire. Every obstacle that called for exertion was a temporary revival of latent energy ; and every unforced effort worth an age of indolent indulgence.

To him who derives gratification from the embellished labours of art, rather than the simple but sublime operation of nature, *Irish* scenery will afford little interest ; but the bold features of its varying landscape, the stupendous attitude of its “ cloud capt” mountains, the impervious gloom of its deep embosomed glens, the savage desolation of its uncultivated heaths, and boundless bogs, with those rich veins of a picturesque champaigne, thrown at intervals into gay expansion by the hand of nature, awaken in the mind of the poetic or pictorial traveller, all the pleasures of tasteful enjoyment, all the sublime emotions of a rapt imagination. And if the glowing fancy of Claude Lorraine would have dwelt enraptured on the paradisial charms of English landscape, the superior genius of Salvator Rosa would have reposed its eagle wing amidst those scenes of mysterious sublimity, with which the wildly magnificent landscape of Ireland abounds. But the liberality of nature appears to me to be here but frugally assisted by the donations of art. Here *agriculture* appears in the least felicitous of her aspects. The rich treasures of Ceres seldom wave their golden heads over the earth's fertile bosom ; the verdant drapery of young plantations rarely skreens out the coarser features of a rigid soil, the cheerless aspect of a gloomy bog ; while the unvaried surface of the perpetual pasturage which satisfies the eye of the interested grazier, disappoints the glance of the tasteful spectator.

Within twenty miles of Bally—— I was literally dropt by the stage at the foot of a mountain, to which your native *Wrekin* is but a hillock. The dawn was just risen, and flung its gray and reserved tints on a scene of which the mountainous region of Capel Cerig will give you the most adequate idea.

Mountain rising over mountain, swelled like an amphitheatre to those clouds which, faintly tinged with the sun's prelusive beams, and rising from the earthly summits where they had reposed, incorporated with the kindling æther of a purer atmosphere.

All was silent and solitary—a tranquility tinged with terror, a sort of “delightful horror,” breathed on every side.—I was alone, and felt like the presiding genius of desolation !

As I had previously learned my route, after a minute's contemplation of the scene before me, I pursued my solitary ramble along a steep and trackless path, which wound gradually down towards a great lake, an almost miniature sea, that lay embosomed amidst those stupendous heights whose rugged forms, now bare, desolate, and barren, now clothed with yellow furze and creeping underwood, or crowned with misnic forests, appeared towering above my head in endless variety. The progress of the sun convinced me that *mine* must have been slow, as it was perpetually interrupted by pauses of curiosity and admiration, and by long and many lapses of thoughtful reverie ; and fearing that I had lost my way (as I had not yet caught a view of the village, in which, seven miles distant from the spot where I had left the stage, I was assured I should find an excellent breakfast,) I ascended that part of the mountain where, on one of its vivid points, a something like a human habitation hung suspended, and where I hoped to obtain a *carte du pays* : the exterior of this *hut*, or *cabin*, as it is called, like the few I had seen which were not built of mud, resembled in one instance the magic palace of Chaucer, and was erected with loose stones,

“ Which, cunningly, were without mortar laid.”

thinly thatched with straw ; an aperture in the roof served rather to admit the air than emit the smoke, a circumstance to which the wretched inhabitants of those wretched hovels seem so perfectly naturalized, that they live in a constant state of fumigation ; and a fracture in the side wall (meant I suppose as a substitute for a casement) was stuffed with straw, while the door, off its hinges, was laid across the threshold, as a barrier to a little crying boy, who sitting within, bemoaned his captivity in a tone of voice not quite so mellifluous as that which Mons. Sanctyon ascribes to the crying children of a certain district in Persia, but perfectly in unison with the vocal exertions of the companion of his imprisonment, a large sow. I approached—removed the barrier : the boy and the animal escaped together, and I found myself alone in the centre of this miserable asylum of human wretchedness—the residence of an *Irish peasant*. To those who have only contemplated this useful order of society in England, “ where every rood of ground maintains its man,” and where the peasant liberally enjoys the comforts as well as the necessaries of life, the wretched picture which the interior of an Irish cabin presents, would be at once an object of compassion and disgust. [4]

Almost suffocated, and not surprised that it was deserted *pro tempo*, I hastened away, and was attracted towards a ruinous barn by a full chorus of female voices—where a group of young females were seated round an old hag who formed the centre of the circle ; they were all busily employed at their *wheels*, which I observed went merrily round in exact time with their song, and so intently were they engaged by both, that my proximity was unperceived. At last the song ceased—the wheel stood still—and every eye was fixed on the *old primum mobile* of the circle, who, after a short pause, began a *solo* that gave much satisfaction to her young auditors, and taking up the strain, they again turned their wheels round in unison.—The whole was sung in Irish, and as soon as I was observed, suddenly ceased ; the girls looked down and tittered—and the old woman addressed me *sans ceremonie*, and in a language I now heard for the first time.

Supposing that some one among the number must understand English, I explained with all possible politeness the cause of my intrusion on this little harmonic society. The old woman

looked up in my face and shook her head ; I thought contemptuously—while the young ones, stifling their smiles, exchanged looks of compassion doubtlessly at my ignorance of their language.

“ So many languages a man knows,” said Charles V., “ so many times is he a man,” and it is certain *I* never felt myself less invested with the dignity of one, than while I stood twirling my stick, and “ biding the encounter of the eyes,"and smiles of these “ spinners in the sun.” Hero you will say was prejudice opposed to prejudice with a vengeance ; but I comforted myself with the idea that the natives of Greenland, the most gross and savage of mortals, compliment a stranger by saying, “ he is as well bred as a Greenlander.”

While thus situated, a sturdy looking young fellow with that figure and openness of countenance so peculiar to the young Irish peasants, and with his hose and brogues suspended from a stick over his shoulder, approached and hailed the party in Irish : the girls instantly pointed his attention towards me ; he courteously accosted me in English, and having learnt the nature of my dilemma, offered to be my guide—“ it will not take me above a mile out of my way, and if it did *two*, it would make no *odds*,” said he. I accepted his offer, and we proceeded together over the summit of the mountain.

In the course of our conversation (which was very fluently supported on his side,) I learnt, that few strangers ever passing through this remote part of the province, and even very many of the gentry here speaking Irish, it was a rare thing to meet with any one wholly unacquainted with the language, which accounted for the surprise, and I believe contempt, my ignorance had excited.

When I enquired into the nature of those choral strains I had heard, he replied —“ O ! as to that, it is according to the old woman’s fancy ;” and in fact I learnt that Ireland, like Italy, has its *improvisatores*, and that those who are gifted with the impromptu talent are highly estimated by their rustic compatriots ; and by what he added, I discovered that their inspirations are either drawn from the circumstances of the moment, from one striking excellence or palpable defect in some of the company present, or from some humourous incident, or local event generally known.

As soon as we arrived at the little *auberge* of the little village, I ordered my courteous guide his breakfast, and having done all due honour to my own, we parted.

My route from the village to Bally—— lay partly through a desolate bog, whose burning surface, heated by a vertical sun, gave me no inadequate idea of *Arabia Deserta* ; and the pangs of an acute headache, brought on by exercise more violent than my still delicate constitution was equal to support, determined me to defer my journey until the meridian ardours were abated ; and taking your Horace from my pocket, I wandered into a shady path, “ impervious to the noontide ray.” Throwing my “ listless length” at the foot of a spreading beech, I had already got to that sweet ode to Lydia, which Scaliger in his enthusiasm declares he would rather have written than to have possessed the monarchy of Naples, when somebody accosted me in Irish, and then with a “ God save you, Sir !” I raised my eyes, and beheld a poor peasant, driving, or rather soliciting, a sorry lame cow to proceed.

“ May be,” said he, taking off his hat, “ your Honour would be after telling me what’s the hour ?” “ Later than I supposed, my good friend,” replied I, rising, “ it is past two.” He bowed low, and stroking the face of his companion, added, “ well, the day is yet young, but you and I have a long journey before us, my poor Driminduath.”

“ And how far are you going, my friend ?”

“ Please your Honour, two miles beyond Bally——”

“ It is my road exactly, and you, Driminduath, and I, may perform the journey together.” The poor fellow seemed touched and surprised by my condescension, and profoundly bowed his sense of it, while the curious *triumviri* set off on their pedestrian tour together.

I now cast an eye over the person of my *compagnon de voyage*. It was a tall, thin, athletic figure, “ bony and gaunt,” with an expressive countenance, marked features, a livid complexion, and a quantity of coarse black hair hanging about the face ; the drapery was perfectly appropriate to the wearer—an under garment composed of “ *shreds and patches*,” was partially covered with an old great coat of coarse frieze, fastened on the breast with a large wooden skewer, the sleeves hanging down on either side unoccupied, [5] and a pair of yam hose which scarcely reached mid' leg, left the ankle and foot naked.

Driminduath seemed to share in the obvious poverty of her master—she was almost an anatomy, and scarcely able to crawl. “ Poor beast !” said he, observing I looked at her, “ Poor beast ! little she dreamed of coming back the road she went, and little able is she to go it, poor soul ; not that I am *overly* sorry I could not get nobody to take her off my hands at all at all ; though to-be-sure 'tis better to lose one's cow than one's wife, any day in the year.”

“ And had you no alternative ?” I asked.

“ Anan !” exclaimed he, starting.

“ Were you obliged to part with one or the other ?” Sorrow is garrulous, and in the natural selfishness of its suffering, seeks to lessen the weight of its woe by participation. In a few minutes I was master of Murtoch O'Shaughnassey's story : [6] he was the husband of a sick wife ; the father of six children, and a labourer, or cotter, who worked daily throughout the year for the hut that sheltered the heads, and the little potatoe rick which was the sole subsistence of his family. He had taken a few acres of ground, he said, from his employer's steward, to set grass potatoes in, by which he hoped to make something handsome ; that to enable himself to pay for them he had gone to work in Leinster during the last harvest, “ where, please your Honour,” he added, “ a poor man gets more for his labour than in Connaught ; [7] but there it was my luck (and bad luck it was) to get the shaking fever upon me, so that I returned sick and sore to my poor people without a cross to bless myself with, and then there was an end to my fine grass potatoes, for devil receive the sort they'd let me dig till I paid for the ground ; and what was worse, the steward was going to turn us out of our cabin, because I had not worked out the rent with him as usual, and not a potatoe had I for the children ; besides finding my wife and two boys in a fever : the boys got well, but my poor wife has been decaying away ever since ; so I was fain to sell my poor *Driminduath* here, which was left me by my gossip, in order to pay my rent and get some nourishment for my poor woman, who I believe is just weak at heart for the want of it ; and so, as I was after telling your Honour, I left home yesterday for a fair twenty-five good miles off, but my poor *Driminduath* has got such bad usage of late, and was in such sad plight, that nobody would bid nothing for her, and so we are both returning home as we went, with full hearts and empty stomachs.”

This was uttered with an air of despondency that touched my very soul, and I involuntarily presented him some sea biscuit I had in my pocket. He thanked me, and carelessly added,

“ that it was the first morsel he had tasted for twenty-four hours ; [8] not,” said he, “ but I can fast with any one, and well it is for me I can.” He continued brushing an intrusive tear from his eye ; and the next moment whistling a lively air, he advanced to his cow, talking to her in

Irish, in a soothing tone, and presenting her with such wild flowers and blades of grass as the scanty vegetation of the bog afforded, turned round to me with a smile of self-satisfaction and said, “ One can better suffer themselves a thousand times over, than see one’s poor dumb beast want ; it is next, please your Honour, to seeing one’s child in want—God help him who has witnessed both !”

“ And art thou then (I mentally exclaimed) that intemperate, cruel, idle savage, an Irish peasant ? with a heart thus tenderly alive to the finest feelings of humanity ; patiently labouring with daily exertion for what can scarcely afford thee a bare subsistence ; sustaining the unsatisfied wants of nature without a murmur ; nurtured in the hope (the *disappointed hope*) of procuring nourishment for her, dearer to thee than thyself, tender of thy animal as thy child, and suffering the consciousness of *their* wants to absorb all consideration of thy own ; and resignation smooths the furrow which affliction has traced upon thy brow, and the national exility of thy character cheers and supports the natural susceptibility of thy heart.” In fact, he was at this moment humming an Irish song by my side.

I need not tell you that the first village we arrived at, I furnished him with the means of procuring him a comfortable dinner for himself and Driminduath, and advice and medicine from the village apothecary for his wife. Poor fellow ! his surprise and gratitude was expressed in the true hyperbola of Irish emotion.

Meantime I walked on to examine the ruins of an abbey, where in about half an hour I was joined by Murtoch and his patient companion, whom he assured me he had regaled with some hay, as he had himself with a glass of whisky.—What a dinner for a famishing man !

“ It is a dreadful habit, Murtoch,” said I.

“ It is so, please your Honour,” replied he, “ but then it is meat, drink, and clothes to us, for we forget we have but little of one and less of the other, when we get *the drop* within us ; Och, long life to them that lightened the tax on the whiskey, for by my safe conscience, if they had left it on another year we should have forgotten how to drink it.”

I shall make no comment on Murtoch’s unconscious phillippic against the legislature, but surely a government has little right to complain of those popular disorders to which in a certain degree it may be deemed accessory, by removing the strongest barrier that confines within moral bounds the turbulent passions of the lower orders of society.

To my astonishment, I found that Murtoch had only purchased for his sick wife a little wine and a small piece of bacon : [9] both, he assured me, were universal and sovereign remedies, and better than any thing the *phisicianers* could prescribe, to keep the disorder *from the heart*. [10] The spirits of Murtoch were now quite afloat, and during the rest of our journey the vehemence, pliancy, and ardour of the Irish character strongly betrayed itself in the manners of this poor unmodified Irishman ; while the natural facetiousness of a temperament “ complexionably pleasant,” was frequently succeeded by such heart-rending accounts of poverty and distress, as shed involuntary tears on those cheeks which but a moment before were distended by the exertions of a boisterous laugh.

Nothing could be more wildly sweet than the whistle or song of the ploughman or labourer as we passed along ; it was of so singular a nature, that I frequently paused to catch it ; it is a species of voluntary recitative, and so melancholy, that every plaintive note breathes on the heart of the auditor a tale of hopeless despondency or incurable woe. By heavens! I could have wept as I listened, and found a luxury in tears. [11]

The evening was closing in fast, and we were within a mile of Bally——, when, to a day singularly fine, succeeded one of the most violent storms of rain and wind I had ever witnessed. Murtoch, who seemed only to regard it on my account, insisted on throwing his great coat over me, and pointed to a cabin at a little distance, where, he said, “ if my Honour would demean myself so far, I could get good shelter for the night.”

“ Are you sure of that, Murtoch ?” said I.

Murtoch shook his head, and looking full in my face, said something in Irish ; which at my request he translated—the words were—“ Happy are *they* whose roof shelters the head of the traveller.

“ And is it indeed a source of happiness to you, Murtoch ?”

Murtoch endeavoured to convince me it *was*, even upon a *selfish* principle : “ For (said he) it is thought right lucky to have a stranger sleep beneath one's roof.”

If superstition was ever thus on the side of benevolence, even reason herself would hesitate to depose her. We had now reached the door of the cabin, which Murtoch opened without ceremony, saying as he entered—“ May God and the Virgin Mary pour a blessing on this house !” The family, who were all circled round a fine turf fire that blazed on the earthen hearth, replied, “ Come in, and a thousand welcomes”—for Murtoch served as interpreter, and translated as they were spoken these warm effusions of Irish cordiality. The master of the house, a venerable old man, perceiving me, made a low bow, and added, “ You are welcome, and ten thousand welcomes, *gentleman.*” [12]

So you see I hold my letter patent of nobility in my countenance, for I had not yet divested myself of Murtoch's costume—while in the act, the best stool was wiped for me, the best seat at the fire forced on me, and on being admitted into the social circle, I found its central point was a round oaken stool heaped with smoking potatoes thrown promiscuously over it.

To partake of this national diet I was strongly and courteously solicited, while as an incentive to an appetite that needed none, the old dame produced what she called a *madder* of sweet milk, in contradistinction to the sour milk of which the rest partook ; while the cow that supplied the luxury slumbered most amicably with & large pig at no great distance from where I sat , and Murtoch glancing an eye at *both*, and then looking at me, seemed to say, “ You see into what snug quarters we have got.” While I (as I sat with my damp clothes smoking by the turf fire, my madder of milk in one hand, and hot potatoe in the other) assured him by a responsible glance, that I was fully sensible of the comforts of our situation.

As soon as supper was finished the old man said grace, the family piously blessed themselves, and the stool being removed, the hearth swept, and the fire replenished from the bog, Murtoch threw himself on his back along a bench, [13] and unasked began a song, the wild and plaintive melody of which went at once to the soul.

When he had concluded, I was told it was the lamentation of the poor Irish for the loss of their glibbs or long tresses, of which they were deprived by the arbitrary will of Henry VIII. —The song (composed in his reign) is called the *Caulin* [14] which I am told is literally, the fair ringlet.

When the English had drawn a pale round their conquests in this country, such of the in-

habitants as were compelled to drag on their existence beyond the barrier, could no longer afford to cover their heads with metal, and were necessitated to rely on the resistance of their matted locks. At length this necessity became “ the fashion of their choice.”

The partiality of the ancient Irish to long hair is still to be traced in their descendants of both sexes, the women in particular ; for I observed that the young *ones* only wore their “ native ornament of *hair*,” which sometimes flows over their shoulders, sometimes is fastened up in tresses, with a pin or bodkin. A fashion more in unison with grace and nature, though less in point of formal neatness, than the round-eared caps and large hats of our rustic fair of England.

Almost every word of Murtoch’s lamentation was accompanied by the sighs and mournful lamentations of his auditors, who seemed to sympathize as tenderly in the sufferings of their progenitors, as though they had themselves been the victims of the tyranny which had caused them. The arch policy of “ the ruthless king,” who destroyed at once the records of a nation’s woes, by extirpating “ the tuneful race,” whose art would have perpetuated them to posterity, never appeared to me in greater force than at that moment.

In the midst, however, of the melancholy which involved the mourning auditors of Murtoch, a piper entered and seated himself by the fire, *sans facon*, drew his pipes from under his coat, and struck up an Irish lilt of such inspiring animation, as might have served St. Basil of Limoges, the merry patron of dancing, for a jubilate.

In a moment, in the true pliability of Irish temperament, the whole pensive group cheered up, flung away their stools, and as if bit to merry madness by a tarantula, set to dancing jigs with all their hearts, and all their *strength* into the bargain. Murtoch appeared not less skilled in the dance than song ; and every one (according to the just description of Goldsmith, who was a native of this province,) seemed

“ To seek renown,
By holding out to tire each other down.”

Although much amused by this novel style of devotion at the shrine of Terpsichore, yet as the night was now calm, and an unclouded moon dispersed the gloom of twilight obscurity, I arose to pursue my journey. Murtoch would accompany me, though our hospitable friends did their utmost to prevail on both to remain for the night.

When I insisted on my host receiving a trifle, I observed poverty struggling with pride, and gratitude superior to both : he at last reluctantly consented to be prevailed on, by my assurance of forgetting to call on them again when I passed that way, if I were now denied. I was followed for several paces by the whole family, who parted *with*, as they *received* me, with blessings ;—for their courtesy upon all occasions, seems interwoven with their religion, and not to be pious in their forms of etiquette, is not to be polite.

Benevolent and generous beings ! whose hard labour

“ Just gives what life requires, but gives no more,”

yet who, with the ever ready smile of heart-felt welcome, are willing to share that hard earned little, with the weary traveller whom chance conducts to your threshold, or the solitary wanderer whom necessity throws upon your bounty. How did my heart smite me, while I received the cordial rites of hospitality from your hands, for the prejudices I had hitherto

nurtured against your characters. But your smiling welcome, and parting benediction, retributed my error—in the feeling of remorse they awakened.

It was late when I reached Bally——, a large, ugly, irregular town, near the sea coast ; but fortunately meeting with a chaise, I threw myself into it, gave Murtoch my address, (who was all amazement at discovering I was son to the Lord of the Manor,) and arrived without further adventure at this antique *chateau*, more gratified by the result of my little pedestrian tour, than if (at least in the present state of my feelings,) I had performed it Sesostri-like, in a triumphal chariot, drawn by kings ; for “ so weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,” appear to me the tasteless pleasures of the world I have left, that every sense, every feeling, is in a state of revolt against its sickening joys, and their concomitant sufferings.

Adieu ! I am sending this off by a courier extraordinary, to the next post-town, in the hope of receiving one from you by the same hand.

H. M.

- [1] This little marine sketch is by no means a fancy picture ; it was actually copied from the life, in the summer of 1806.
- [2] Although in one point of view, there may be a policy in his close association of splendid objects, yet it is a circumstance of general and just condemnation to all strangers who are not confined to a partial survey of the city.
- [3] “ Every unprejudiced traveller who visits them [the Irish] will be as much pleased with their cheerfulness as obliged by their hospitality; and will find them a brave, polite, and liberal people.”—Philosophical Survey through Ireland by Mr. Young.
- [4] Sometimes excavated from a hill, sometimes erected with loose stones, but most generally built of mud, the cabin is divided into two apartments, the one littered with straw and coarse rugs, and sometimes, (but very rarely) furnished with the luxury of a chaff bed, serves as a dormitory not only to the family of both sexes, but in general to any animal they are so fortunate as to possess ; the other chamber answers for every purpose of domesticity, though almost destitute of every domestic implement, except the iron pot in which the potatoes are boiled, and the stool on which they are flung. From those wretched hovels (which often appears amidst scenes that might furnish the richest models to poetic imitation) it is common to behold a group of children rush forth at the sound of a horse’s foot, or carriage wheel, regardless of the season’s rigours, in a perfect state of nudity, or covered with the drapery of wretchedness, which gives to their appearance a still stronger character of poverty ; yet even in these miserable huts you will seldom find the spirit of urbanity absent—the genius of hospitality never. I remember meeting with an instance of both, that made a deep impression on my heart; in the autumn of 1804, in the course of a morning ramble with a charming English-woman, in the county of Sligo, I stopped to rest myself in a cabin, while she proceeded to pay a visit to the respectable family of the O’H’—s, of Nymph’s Field : when I entered I found it occupied by an old woman and her three granddaughters ; two of the young women were employed scutching flax, the other in some domestic employment. I was instantly hailed with the most cordial welcome ; the hearth was cleared, the old woman’s seat forced on me, eggs and potatoes roasted, and an apology for the deficiency of bread politely made, while the manners or my hostesses betrayed a courtesy that almost amounted to adulation. They had all laid by their work on my entrance, and when I requested I might not interrupt their avocations, one of them replied “ I hope we know better—we can work any day, but we cannot any day have such a body as you under our roof.” Surely this was not the manners of a cabin but a court.
- [5] This manner of wearing the coat, so general among the peasantry, is deemed by the natives of the county of Galway a remnant of the Spanish mode.
- [6] Neither the rencontre with, nor the character or story of Murtoch, partakes in the least

degree of fiction.

- [7] It is well known that within these last thirty years the Connanght peasant laboured for *three pence* a day and two meals of potatoes and milk, and four pence when he maintained himself; while in Leinster the harvest hire rose from eight pence to a shilling. Riding out one day near the village of Castletown Delvin, in Westmeath, in company with the younger branches of the respectable family of the F——ns, of that county, we observed two young men lying at a little distance from each other in a dry ditch, with some lighted turf burning near them; they both seemed on the verge of eternity, and we learned from a peasant who was passing, that they were Connaught men who had come to Leinster to work ; that they had been disappointed, and owing to want and fatigue, had been first attacked with ague and then with fevers of so fatal a nature, that no one would suffer them to remain in their cabins : owing to the benevolent exertions of my young friends, we however found an asyhim for these unfortunates, and had the happiness of seeing them return comparatively well and happy to their native province.
- [8] The temperance of an Irish peasant in this respect is almost incredible ; many of them are satisfied with one meal a day—none of them exceed two—breakfast and supper ; which invariably consists of potatoes, sometimes with, sometimes without milk. One of the rules observed by the Finian Band, an ancient militia of Ireland, was to eat but once in the twenty-four hours.—See Keating’s History of Ireland.
- [9] It is common to see them come to gentlemen’s houses with a little vial bottle to beg a table spoonful of wine (for a sick relative,) which they esteem the elixir of life.
- [10] To be able to keep any disorder from the heart, is supposed, (by the lower orders of the Irish,) to be the secret of longevity.
- [11] Mr. Walker, in his Historical Memoir of the Irish Bards, has given a specimen of the Irish plough-tune: and adds, “ Whilee the Irish ploughman drives his team, and the female peasant milks her cow, they warble a succession of wild notes which bids defiance to the rules of composition, yet are inexpressibly sweet.”
- [12] “ *Failte augus cead ro ag duine uasal.* ” The term gentleman, however, is a very inadequate version of the Irish nasal, which is an epithet of superiority that indicates more than mere gentility of birth can bestow, although that requisite is also included. In a curious dialogue between Ossian and St. Patrick, in an old Irish poem, in which the former relates the combat between Oscar and Ulan, St. Patrick solicits him to the detail, addressing him as “ *Ossian uasal, a mhic Fionne,* “ *Ossian the Noble*—the son of Fingal.”
- [13] This curious vocal position is of very ancient origin in Connanght, though by no means prevalent. Formerly the songster not only lay on his back, but had a weight pressed on his chest. The author’s father recollects having seen a man in the county of Mayo, of the name of O’Melvill, who sung for him in this position some years back.
- [14] The Cualin is one of the most popular and beautiful Irish airs extant.

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