

Sketches in Donegal 1827

*Sketches in Ireland : descriptive of interesting, and hitherto unnoticed districts, in the north and south*

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Caesar Otway

1827

LETTER 1.

TO THE REV. SIR F. L. B——SSE

MY DEAR SIR,

You are pleased to remind me of an offer that I committed myself to, of giving you some sketches of my occasional wanderings through my native land. I am glad it engages so much of your attention, and therefore I the more regret, called as I am to the performance of my promise, that I cannot summon to my assistance any notes or memoranda, but must trust to a memory that is daily acquiring a greater tendency to treachery, and returns what I committed to its keeping very much impoverished and very faded. But take, Sir, as I can give it, my reminiscence of a three weeks' tour, during the summer of 1822, in the mountains of Donegal.

A friend who enjoys a College living in the north-western district of that county, invited me to come and see how snug he was in his mountain valley.—“Come,” said he, “and ease your eyes, palled as they must be on the flats and fields of Leinster, with the contrasted varieties of our northern hills—the iron cliffs that breast the Atlantic Ocean—our mountain ranges the lake, the glen, the rushing river—these may afford subjects of surprise and excitement to your discursive mind ; and after our day's ramble is over, when we come home at evening, a ring of salmon fresh from the river, a leg of mutton fed on our hills, may, when garnished with heart's-ease on your own part and a hearty welcome on mine, make your excursion to our valley as pleasant as you or I could wish.” Who could resist such an invitation, that had time and opportunity to accept of it ? I could not ; and therefore I stepped into the Derry mail, a place of purgatorial suffering :—a public coach, travelling by night and full withal, is my antipathy ;—with bent body and contracted limbs, and every sense in a state of suffering, hearing, smelling, feeling, seeing ;—at all times the undertaking is hateful, but with a nurse and young child beside you—Oh, it is horrible !

By morning's dawn we had got into the province of Ulster, The moment you enter it, you perceive its peculiar features, its formation quite distinct from every other portion of Ireland. There are hills, swells, plains and flat table lands in the other portions of the kingdom ; but here it is all hill and valley, all acclivity and declivity. Driving along the new line of road that winds around these never-ending hills, you seldom see for a quarter of a mile before you. At first you are struck with the beauty of these eminences, so minutely subdivided, so diversified with patches of grass, oats, flax, and potatoes ; the intervening valley, either a lake, bog, or meadow ;—but soon you get tired ; your eye becomes tantalized with having a constant barrier presented to its forward prospect ; you are displeased that you cannot obtain any

extended view of the country you are going through ; you are in an eternal defile. As I am no courier bearing despatches ; as I leave home to exercise my eye and my mind, I like the old straight forward road over the hills ; I can then see and breathe more freely. But I am not intending to describe the province of Ulster ; and shall only say that its natural features explain why the English found this portion of the island so difficult to conquer. It was easy for O'Neil, amidst the interminable fortresses of his hills, woods, bogs, and defiles, often to defy, and always to elude his invaders. Madame de la Roche-Jacquelin, in her most interesting Memoir of the War in La Vendée, describes that country as very similar in its hills, valleys, and enclosures, to the province of Ulster. I was relieved from the tribulation of the mail coach at Strabane, a large ugly town, apparently a place of some trade and business, with a fine river running down to Derry. At four o'clock in the evening I hired a jaunting-car to carry me into the highlands of Donegal, a distance of about twenty-two miles, and late at night I arrived at my friend's house, after travelling along roads almost impassable, over hills almost inaccessible, every ligature and joint of my poor body nearly jaunted into dislocation. However, cordial hospitality, a soft bed, and a day's quiet, repaired and restored me so far as to enable us to begin our excursion and mountain rambles. My friend's glebe-house lies in a fine valley in the north-western district of Donegal, called the Barony of Kilmacrenan, and the whole district is the estate of Trinity College. This valley is watered by two beautiful rivers, which having worked their way and escaped from the mountains, here join and expand into a broad lake interspersed with islands, and surrounded by hills of the most abrupt and varied forms. Directly behind my friend's house rose a mountain the loftiest of the chain, bare, rugged, its sharp white silicious peaks glittering in the sunshine. "What is this mountain called, it is the monarch of these hills ?" "It is called Lough Salt." "Why Lough ? that is the Irish for a lake, not of a mountain ; I suppose you mean Knocksalt."—"Instead of disputing about its name let us get better acquainted with it, and suppose we go after breakfast to its top." The day invited, so we set out on quiet, comfortable ponies. A broad road led up the hill, which my friend informed me was until lately the only pass that led from Dublin, or from Derry to Ards, Dunfanaghy, and the whole north-western coast of Donegal. The mountain rose like a wall before us, yet up that wall the road valiantly climbed, the ponies toiled up it panting and perspiring ; it must be a pretty experiment for a carriage to venture on, and to mend the matter, the road is constructed as a hard causeway, every stone composing it as large as a quartern loaf. But we took our time, the ponies were nothing loath to stop as well as ourselves, and as we looked back on the country beneath us, the whole valley lay smiling under our feet, with its lake, and rivers, and tillage, and meadows, and corn-fields, and my friend's comfortable glebe-house, surrounded by his cherished and thriving plantations : farther still in the circle extended a panorama of encircling hills, and farther still in the blue distance of the extreme horizon lay mingling with the clouds, the mountains of Innishowen, and Derry, and Tyrone ; all forming a picture fit for a painter to sketch and for me to remember.

Thus, now and then talking of the prospect, and again caught in our recollections of old college times—times alas too much mispent, too much misapplied,—we at length reached the top of the mountain ridge, and suddenly turning the point of a cliff that jutted out and checked the road, we came abruptly into a hollow something like a crater of an extinct volcano, which was filled almost entirely by a lovely lake, on the right hand side of which rose the highest peak of the mountain, composed of compact silicious sandstone, so bare, so white, so serrated, so tempest-worn, so vexed with all the storms of the Atlantic, that if mere matter could suffer, we might suppose that this lofty and precipitous peak presented the port-raït of material endurance ; and still though white was the prevailing colour, yet not one tint or shadowing that decks and paints a mountain's brow was wanting. Here the brown heath, the

grey lichen, the green fern, the red crane's bill ; and straight down the cliff, from its top-most peak to the water's edge, was branded in a dark and blasted line, the downward track of a meteoric stone that had fallen from the atmosphere, and shattering itself against the mountain's crest, rolled down in fiery and smoking fragments into the adjacent lake. Last year, amidst the crash of a thunder-storm this phenomenon occurred ; and the well-defined line of its burning progress is and will be for years apparent. On the other side of the lake a fair verdant bank presented itself, courting the traveller to sit down and take his rest after winding his toilsome way up the long ascent, into this peaceful and unexpected retreat ; gentle and grassy knolls were here and there interspersed, on which sheep of most picturesque leanness, some black and some white, with primitive crumpled horns, were grazing. But the lake—not a breath was abroad on its expanse ; it smiled as it reflected the grey mountain and the azure face of heaven : it seemed as if on this day the Spirit of the Atlantic had fallen asleep, and air, earth and ocean were celebrating the festival of repose : the waters of the lake, of the colour and clearness of the sky were

“ Blue ; darkly, deeply, beautifully blue :”

You could look down a hundred fathoms deep, and still no bottom : speckled trouts floating at immense depths, seemed as if they soared in ether—then the stillness of the whole scene—you seemed lifted as it were out of the turmoil of the world into some planetary paradise, into some such place as the Apostle in the Apocalypse was invited to, when the voice said, ‘ come up hither.’ You might have supposed that sound had no existence here, were it not that now and then a hawk shrieked while cowering over the mountain top, or a lamb bleated beneath, as it ran to its mother—I could have gone to sleep here, and dreamt of heaven purchased for poor sinners like me by a Saviour's blood ; I did at any rate praise the God of nature and of grace, and drew near to him in Christ, grateful for all his blessings and all his wonders of creating and redeeming love. But the day was advancing, we had farther to go and much to do, and my friend drew me away from my abstraction and repose that had settled and softened into prayer. So we mounted our ponies and rode about a quarter of a mile along a level road, as smooth as a gravel walk, that coasted the lake, until we came to a steep bank, where we let our horses graze along the water's edge, and ascending a ridge or rim as I may call it, of the cup or crater in which we were embosomed, all of a sudden the most magnificent prospect that ever met my eye presented itself—the whole range of the northern coast of Donegal. Seemingly beneath your feet, but really some miles off, lay the expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, like eternity before you, over which fancy flew, and almost impelled you to strain your eyes to catch a glimpse of America. Some leagues out at sea, but apparently within your grasp, lay Torry Island, [1] rising out of the deep like a castellated and fortified city ; lofty towers, church spires, battlements, bastions, batteries, presented themselves, so strangely varied and so fantastically deceptive were its cliffs. Jutting out far into the ocean, lay the promontory of Horn Head, so called from a cliff at its extreme point, where it fronts the Atlantic, having the form of a horn ; a place which in Pagan times might have been consecrated to the worship of the horned Ammonick Jupiter ; but more of this mountain bye and bye. Nearer, but still along the coast lay the grand and extensive demesne of Mr. Stewart, uncle to Lord Londonderry, a place perhaps unique in its kind, of immense extent, the house and offices forming almost a town in themselves ; for being near twenty miles from a market-town, he is obliged to have all his accommodations within his own premises. This fine place, which I may say stands on the Atlantic Ocean, is yet so well protected by high lands from the western blast, that trees of the loftiest kind, and shrubs of tenderest foliage, grow here in luxuriance. As a fine well-managed farm, a highly kept and wooded demesne, possessing in perfection ocean and mountain views ; and still better, as affording me from its hospitable

owner, the most kind and gracious reception, I know of no place in Ireland that surprised or satisfied me more. Nearer yet, as, from our magnificent standing, we seemed like visitors from another world looking down on the incumbent coast, stood Dow Castle, belonging to General Hart, apparently an ancient fortress, but seeming not to enjoy much of the care or presence of its owner. Northward of Dow Castle lay the Sands of Rosapenna, a scene that almost realised in Ireland the sandy desert of Arabia ; a line of coast and country extending from the sea, deep into the land, until it almost meets the mountain on which we stood, and exhibiting one wide waste of red sand ; for miles not a blade of grass, not a particle of verdure, hills and dales and undulating swells, smooth, solitary, desolate, reflecting the sun from their polished surface of one uniform and flesh-like hue. [2] Fifty years ago this line of coast was as highly improved in its way, as Ards on the opposite side of the bay now is—it was the much ornamented demesne, and contained the comfortable mansion of Lord Boyne, an old fashioned manorial house and gardens, planted and laid out in the taste of that time, with avenues, terraces, hedges and statues, surrounded with walled parks, and altogether the first residence of a nobleman—the country around a green sheep walk. Now not a vestige of all this to be seen ; one common waste of sand, one undistinguished ruin covers all. Where is the house ? under the sand—where the trees, the walks, the terraces, the green parks and sheep walks ? all under the sand—lately the top of the house was visible, and the country people used to descend by the roof into some of the apartments that were not filled up, but now nothing is to be seen. The Spirit of the Western Ocean has risen in his wrath, and realised here the description Bruce gives of the moving pillars of sand in the deserts of Seimaar ; or it recalls to memory the grand description which Darwin gives of the destruction of the army of Cambyses in the Nubian desert. The reader may pardon me for quoting it,

Gnomes, o'er the waste, you led your myriad powers,  
 Climb'd on the whirs, and aim'd the flinty showers ;  
 Onward resistless rolls the infuriate surge,  
 Clouds follow clouds, and mountains mountains urge ;  
 Wave over wave the driving desert swims.  
 Bursts o'er their heads, inhumes their struggling limbs ;  
 Man mounts on man, on camels camels rush,  
 Hosts march o'er hosts, and nations nations crush :  
 Wheeling in air, the winged islands fall —  
 And one great sandy ocean covers all !

Nothings indeed, as I am told, can exceed the wintry horrors of the north-westerly storm, when it sets in on this coast, and its force has been for the last half century increasing.—The Atlantic bursting in, mountain-high, along the cliffs—the spray flying over the barrier mountain we were standing on, and falling miles inland, the sand sleeting thicker and more intolerable than any hail-storm, filling the eyes, mouth, and ears, of the inhabitants—leveling ditches, overtopping walls, and threatening to lay not only Rosapenna, but the whole line of coast at some not very distant period, in one common waste and ruin ; and to increase the horrors of the tempest, M'Swine's Gun [3] is heard firing nature's signal of distress, and the report (heard 20 or 30 miles inland) announces that earth and ocean are labouring in the hurricane.

But to return to Lough Salt :—After looking along the coast and satisfying your eye with its very varied outlines, you have time to take a view in another direction ; to the south-west, towards the immense precipitous mountain called Muckish, so named from its resemblance to a pig's back—not a fat pig of the Berkshire or Cheshire breed, but a right old Irish pig, with a

high and sharp back, every articulation of the back-bone prominent and bristled. I think it is one of the highest (if not the very highest) mountains in Ireland. But, with the reader's leave, I mean to give hereafter a narrative of an excursion to its summit. To the south lay an immense mass of mountains, stretching toward Donegal bay, over which, rising above the rest in conical elevation, stood Arrigal : in comparison with which, the hill over Powerscourt is but a a grocer's sugar-loaf ;—and still more distant to the south-east lay the mountains of Barnesmore, in which is the celebrated defile—of it the Scalp in the county Wicklow, is indeed but a very miniature representation.

But directly under us was a most curious picture to be seen : the mountain on which we stood, as it descended to the west, presented sundry shelves or vallies, in each of which lay a round and beauteous lake. These Tarns looked like mirrors set in the mountain's side to reflect the upright sun ; and five or six of such sheets of silver presented themselves, until at the very root of the mountain, a large expanse of water, a mile or two over, studded with islands, sufficiently wooded to be ornamental, finished the whole picture, and farmed the last beauty and curiosity I shall record of this surpassingly interesting hill ; Before I retire from my mountain—(I love to linger on its recollections)—I shall observe, that to allay our thirst, caused by the heat of the day and our exertions, we went, (in order to obtain a glass out of which we might drink of the pure water of the lake,) into the only house that is to be seen on the whole mountain—a wretched hovel evidently a place where travellers could obtain a supply of that much-loved liquor of the North, *poteen* whiskey.

A young woman of not very prepossessing appearance, but abundantly civil, gave us what we wanted ; but while speaking to her, we awoke a man who was sleeping in an inner apartment, and forth came the master of the house, half drunk—a gaunt grisly figure, accoutred with a bay coloured wig, apparently made of cow's hair, and which, but half fitting his head, moved according as he scratched it, from one side to the other, and his natural grey glibs or locks appeared ; without shoes or stockings, his mouth begrimed with the tincture of chewed tobacco—altogether a specimen of an old Irish kern. Half in English, half in Irish, he addressed my friend, who returned the salutation by saying, “ Oh, bow do you do, Briney O'Doherty ?” “ But what brings you here, Doctor ? there are no tithes to be got on Lough Salt.” “ Oh, I came to shew my friend here, this mountain, and our pretty lake, and the fine prospect.” “ And Who is your friend ?— Och I what need I ax ! sure I know from his cut, and his fine spick and span dress, that he is one of the folk that does be coming idling here from Dublin. But what need I care, seeing he's no gauger, which I for sartain know to be the case, as he is in company with your Raverence ; for well I know that your honor would not travel one yard with those gauging varmint, that rack poor dacent people. But I'll wager my pipe, that fine gentleman with the black coat—for fine feathers, you know, make fine birds—as is the way with all your Dublin people, likes that poisonous Parliament, [4] instead of our own sweet poteen ; but no matter ; what brought your Raverence and your outlandish friend into this poor place of mine ? I think I heard you call for something.” “ O, Briney, we wanted something to get a drink of water in.” “ Water, water ! Why, bless my body, the cold water of Lough Salt would kill you : as for the Dublin man he may go to the Deoul his own way ; but for your Raverence, one of ourselves, as I may say,—one who loves to let poor men live,—not one drop of could water shall you drink without having a dash of the crathur in it ; so, Molly, fill out a pint.—Don't be talking about paying for it ;—for sure as it's my own, I can pay for it to-day myself—that is if you have not plenty of money in your pocket.”

Seeing that he was in such a state of intoxication, that there was no contradicting him, we let him take his own way, and taking a sup each, and drinking to his health, he soon finished

off the half pint to himself. The man seemed to live on this fiery beverage ; his drinking did not seem to increase his intoxication, but it made him more communicative and garrulous. He appeared acquainted with the whole ancient history of the country ; it was surprising what a knowledge he had of the old families of the district, and of the changes of property that had occurred in it. He spoke of his own ancestors, the O'Doherty's, told us how they once owned all Innishowen, which the Chichesters cheated and robbed them of ; he told us in his own way, how Sir Cahir O'Doherty, surprised the ancestor of the present possessor of Dow Castle, and took Culmore fort from him by stratagem [5] :—" O, (says he,) it was a *nate* thing, and worthy of Sir Cahir's father's son to take the Castle of Culmore from that Saxon heretic. I never look down towards Dow Castle, but I bless God and the Virgin that Cahir O'Doherty's blood flows in these withering veins." " But, Briney, how much land have you got here ?" " Och, sure the whole mountain-side is mine; and sure I have it still all to myself. My people had it all once ; we had cows, and sheep, and goats, and grouse—all that flew and all that fed were our's. But now the man that calls it his estate may drive poor Briney for the rent of his cabin, and for the grass of his poor ould cow. But God is good,—the times may mend, and who knows but Briney, or Briney's son, may have his own again."

We at length got tired of this specimen of an old Irish clansman, and returned home, fatigued and hungry after our mountain excursion.

On the following day we proceeded over a wild moorland and once wooded tract of secondary mountains to see the Rock of Doune, or as it was originally called the Rock of Kilmacrenan. On the summit of which, from the earliest Milesian times, the chieftains of Tyrconnel were inaugurated with savage solemnities by the Abbots of Kilmacrenan, successors of Columkill. The rock rises a peculiar natural fortress, in the midst of one of the, most inaccessible districts, I have ever crossed. It somewhat resembles the rock of Dunamase in the Queen's county—and might, if defended by resolute men, defy any force unaided by cannon—and a difficult matter indeed, would it be to bring cannon to bear on it. This was a most appropriate fortress for a mountain chief ; and if the place of his installation was befitting his wild and savage rule, (according to Giraldus Cambrensis) the ceremony of his inauguration was still more rude and bestial. He says " that the people of Tyrconnel, a country in the north of Ulster, created their king after this manner—all being assembled on a hill, a white beast was brought before them, unto which he who was chosen as king approaching, declared himself publicly before the people to be just such another, (that is a mere beast) ; whereupon the cow was cut in pieces, boiled in water, and a bath prepared for the new king of the broth : into which he entered publicly, and at once bathed and fed—all the people meanwhile standing round, fed on the flesh and supped up the broth ; at this comely feast and ceremony, it was not proper that the king should use any cup or vessel, nay, not so much as the hollow of his hand ; but stooping down his mouth, he lapped like a beast on all sides of the bath of broth in which he was immersed. Having thus washed and supped until he was weary ; the whole ceremony of his inauguration was ended, and he was completely instituted in his kingship of Tyrconnel."

The Irish historians are very angry with Girald Barry, for telling this story of their kings — and Gratianus Lucius [6] describes the ceremony as quite otherwise. He says, that when the investiture took place at Cil mhac Creunain, he was attended by O'Ferghail, successor to Columkill and O'Gallachuir, his marshall—and surrounded by all the estates of the country. The Abbot O'Ferghail, put a pure, white, strait, unknotted rod in his hand, and said, " receive. Sire, the auspicious ensign of your dignity, and remember to imitate in your government, the whiteness, straitness, and unknottiness of this rod ; to the end that no evil

tongue may find cause to asperse the candour of your actions with blackness, nor any kind of corruption or tie of friendship be able to pervert your justice—therefore, in a lucky hour, take the government of the people, to exercise the power given you with freedom and security."

This, to be sure, is quite a different story—and it is not for me to decide, which is true ; but this must be said, that the English in all their communications and treaties with the O'Donnells, found them as Sir Henry Dockwra described—"Proud, valiant, miserable, tyrannous, unmeasurably covetous, without ally knowledge of God, without any civility towards man"—and James I. in a declaration, which he published, Nov. 4th 1607, says, " that their condition was to think murder no fault—marriage of no use, nor any man valiant that does not glory in rapine and oppression." If James spoke truth, it were not out of keeping in such savages to swill the cow broth in which they bathed.

This rock was also famous in the reign of James I. as the spot whereon the arch traitor, Sir Cahir O'Dogherty, closed his life. Sir Cahir, as I before said, had surprised Culmore, taken Derry, murdered Sir George Pawlet, and the whole garrison, and burnt the town to ashes—he was the last hope of the Pope and the Spaniards. This rebellion was designed to be the most general that ever arose in Ireland, and Sir Cahir keeping the Lord Deputy at bay in this impracticable country ; his retreat was the Roek of Kilmacrenan—and here he lurked in secret until the succours that were promised, and were (as O'Sullivan says) actually coming from all sides, arrived.

The plantation of Ulster had not as yet taken place ; but already many Scots had settled themselves along the rich alluvial lands that border the Loughs Foyle and Swilly ; and it was Sir Cahir's most desired end and aim to extirpate these intruders, hateful as strangers, detestable as heretics. He was the Scotsman's curse and scourge. One of these industrious Scots had settled in the valley of the Lennon ; Rory O'Donnel, the Queen's Earl of Tyrconnel, had given him part of that fertile valley—and he there built his bawn. But Sir Cahir, in the midst of night, and in Sandy Ramsey's absence, attacked his enclosure, drove off his cattle, slaughtered his wife and children, and left his pleasant homestead a heap of smoking ruins.

The Scot, on his return home, saw himself bereaved, left desolate in a foreign land, without property, kindred or home ; nothing his, but his true gun and dirk. he knew that five hundred marks were the reward offered by the Lord Deputy for Sir Cahir's head.—He knew that this outlaw was the foe that had quenched the fire on his hearth with the blood of his wife and little ones, and with a heart maddened with revenge, with hope resting on the promised reward, he retired to the wooded hills that ran parallel to the Hill of Doune ; there, under covert of a rock, his gun resting on the withered branch of a stunted oak, he waited day by day, with all the patience and expectancy of a tiger in his lair. Sir Cahir was a man to be marked in a thousand and proudest in his bearing of any man in the province of Ulster; his Spanish hat with the heron's plume was too often the terror of his enemies—the rallying point of his friends, not to bespeak the O'Doherty : even the high breastwork of loose stones, added to the natural defences of the rock, could not hide the chieftain from observation.

On Holy Thursday, as he rested on the eastern face of the rock, looking towards the Abbey of Kilmacrenan, expecting a venerable friar to come from this favoured foundation of St. Columbkil, to shrive him and celebrate mass ; and as he was chatting to his men beside him, the Scotchman applied the fire to his levelled matchlock—and before the report began to roll its echoes through the woods and hills, the ball had passed through Sir Cahir's forehead, and he lay lifeless on the ramparts. His followers were panic-struck ; they thought that the

rising of the Scotch and English was upon them, and deserting the lifeless body of their leader, they dispersed through the mountains. In the meanwhile the Scotchman approached the rock ; he saw his foe fall ; he saw his followers flee. He soon severed the head from the body, and wrapping it in his plaid, off he set in the direction of Dublin. He travelled all that day, and at night took shelter in a cabin belonging to one Terence Gallagher, situated at one of the fords of the river Finn.—Here Ramsay sought a night's lodging, which Irishmen never refuse ; and partaking of an oaten cake and some sweet milk, he went to rest with Sir Cahir's head under his own as a pillow. The Scotchman slept sound,—and Terence was up at break of day. He saw blood oozing out through the plaid that served as his guest's pillow, and suspected all was not right ; so slitting the tartan plaid, he saw the hair and head of a man. Slowly drawing it out, he recognized features well-known to every man in Tyrconnel ; they were Sir Cahir's. Terence knew as well as any man that there was a price set on this very head—a price abundant to make his fortune—a price he now was resolved to try and gain. So off Terence started, and the broad Tyrone was almost crossed by O'Gallagher, before the Scotchman awoke to resume his journey. The story is still told with triumph through the country, how the Irishman, without the treason, reaped the reward of Sir Cahir's death—This was the last of the Irish rebellions that took place before the plantation of Ulster.

Sir Cahir's body is buried beside the rock.—Tony O'Donnel, who accompanied us showed us his green grave, and seemed to hold the memory of this rebel in the respect due to his opposition to the English yoke and English religion. There is a sort of cave in the eastern side of the rock, which forms a vestibule to an immense cavern which is said to be within ; this is the favourite abode of the *good* people, and their council chamber. There is a rock closing the visible cave which is said to be the fairy's door.—O'Donnel shewed us the pannels of the door wrought on the rock, and also the very identical key-hole which the king of the fairies unlocks. A thousand times, troops of tiny people are seen entering the cave, and some gifted mortals have observed the door open, and have got a glimpse of sumptuous apartments and splendid banquetings within ; but as my informant said, “ things and times are changed with the *good* people ;—once on a time they sported and rioted through these hills, and were as wanton and mischievous as bulls upon a brae in summer ; just for sport they would strike a sheep or a goat with an elf-bolt, and there it would lie with the skin as whole as yours or mine, but when its body was opened it was all full of wounds ; at another time they would throw an evil eye on a cow, and the poor *baste* would wither and waste till it fell off its standing—the women churned from morning to night and could get no butter ; and what was worse than all, the finest childer in the parish were carried away, and the poorest squalling croutheens placed in the cradle in their stead—Manus M'Swine in this way had a fine boy taken from him, and one all head and mouth, left in its stead, there it lay in the chimney corner, everlastingly bawling—the roar never out of its mouth except when it was cramming with milk and white bread ; and the day the priest went to christen it, you would hear its bawls all over the hills and up to Lough Salt ;—thus it lay the world's torment) until one day that Con M'Gilligan, the tailor, came.—Now Con used to come once a year to give a week's mending and making, and so he staid in the house a sewing, while Manus was abroad working and the mistress went out to milk the cow, and just to make the needle run glibly through the clotli. Con began to lilt up a song, when with a squaking voice from the cradle in the hob the little crathur cried out, “ Con jewel, go to the salt-box and take out an egg, my dacent lad, and just dress it in the ashes for me, or I will cry so loud that it will spoil your singing.” “ O then,” says Con, “ is it you that spakes—by the powers I all along knew you were nothing at all but a leaving of the *good* people—not the breadth of my nail will I go until you tell me who you are and all about yourself.” “ Well now do, Con, make haste and roast the egg for me before the mistress comes in, and believe me it will be well for you.” So Con thought it

all out dangerous to anger the crathur, and so he went and roasted the egg in the ashes, and afterwards though he did not much like it, fed the urchin who seemed to like mightily a fresh egg. “ Well, and now my sweet little fellow who are you, and where did you come from ? for sartain I am that you are not a nathural bairn.” “ Oh then Con you never said a truer word than that—I am one of the good people—I am sent here by our king as a bit of a punishment ; but next hollantide eve, please the pipes, I will be back and dancing on the moor braes round the Rock of Doune.” “ Well and,” said Con, “ when and where were your born ?” “ Tut man, I was never born—I was once upon a time as pretty a winged angel in heaven as could be, as beautiful, as good, and as happy as the day was long ; and there was terrible war there, for they that are devils now, rebelled and were turned out, and down they came falling head foremost, tumbling and rolling until they dropped into hell, I with all those who are now called *good* people, took neither hand or part in the fray—we joined neither God nor devil, and so because we were neither good nor bad, neither this thing nor that thing, God Almighty was pleased to turn us out—not indeed into hell, but here we came to flit up and down through the world—sometimes indeed for good, more times for bad—now merry—now sad, and here we are to be until the day of judgment, growing less and less, time after time, and I fear very much unless we mend our manners we must all of us in the end go to hell. But no more of that now, my dear Con, for its a sore subject ; you seem to be a good and likely boy and know how to roast an egg, so Con dear, meet me the night of hollantide at the Rock : — I will be after making of your fortune.”

The week before hollantide the child was observed to bawl no more ; it would not sup any more milk ; and one morning it was found stiff and cold in its cradle. To be sure Manus and his wife were not sorry to be so well rid of what was a vexation and a shame, and Manus went with a light heart with the unlucky thing under his arm, and he put it quietly in the church-yard on the north side of the old abbey, where the sun never shone upon it.

“ Twenty times a day did Con M’Gilligan argufy with himself whether he would mind the fairy’s bidding, and go to Doune Rock on the night of All-Souls, or not : ’twas head or harp between conscience and curiosity—and curiosity won the toss ; and so he set out in the light of the full moon to the Rock. As he came near, and was turning the corner of a rocky ridge out of which an oak in former times used to grow, he found something drop from the tree on his shoulder, and looking up, he saw the natest little gentleman in the world sitting there just like an old acquaintance. “ I’m glad to see you, Con—and so you can put trust in the *good* people’s word : and now it’s I that will shew you that I am a gentleman, and up to my word to a hair’s breadth; so now mind my bidding, and follow me ; but first take this musheroon in your left hand, ’twill make you, while you hold it, as light, and thin, and small as myself : and mind for your life you dont name the name of God, or say a Pater Noster.” As Con had gone so far, he thought he might as well go on ; so taking the musheroon from the fairy, in the twinkling of an eye, he became less than a nine-pin, and it was all his wonder that though his legs were so small he went as fast as thought ; so thus they slid on, until they came to the side of the Rock where the fairies’ door is, when his leader put his hand in his fob, took out a little key, and slipping it into the key-hole, before you could say Jack Robinson they were in the finest palace in the world. King Solomon, nor King David, nor King George, God bless him, neither have nor had such furniture, such household stuff, in kitchen or in parlour.—“ And now,” says the fairy to Con, “ dont you want a little money ? come this way with me and fill your pockets.” So they turned down an entry and came to a great iron grated door, with a huge padlock to it, which at the faairy’s touch opened, and they entered into a sort of cellar, full of bags of gold. “ Make haste now, Con, and fill your pockets.” So Con set to work, and crammed as fast as he could ; and just when he had all his pockets full, he cried out, “ thank

God I'm rich enough for ever !” He had no sooner said this, than Crash, dash, went every thing about his ears ; light left his eyes, and sense his brain ; and on the following morning, as if awaking out of a sound sleep, he found himself lying at the mouth of the cave, and what was best of all, he found when he clapped his hands to his pockets, that they were full of good hard cash. So up he got, and as he was going towards home, says Con to himself, “ What came by fairies may go by fairies ; if I stay here in this country, there may little luck or grace go along with me or my money.” So Con set off for Derry, and took shipping for New York, as he heard for sartain that fairies never go as far as America; and there he lived and died—and there his children are rich people to this very day.”

“ Well now,” says I to Tony O'Donnel, my informant, “ what do you think is the reason of the fairies not beings seen now ? or why are they not now as powerful for good and evil as formerly ?”—“ Why to what should it be owing but to yonder blessed well ? From the day that Father Freel sanctified that holy water, the *good* people have scampered off ; and och but it was the world's trouble to Friar Freel to bless this well. He knew rightly that there was a holy well wanting in this quarter, and he prayed to St. Patrick and St. Columkill to tell him where he should find one that was proper to fix upon and bless. So the holy saints appeared to him in a dream, and desired him to go to six different wells and take six rushes with him, and dip a rush in each well, and then set fire to them, and whatever rush took fire and burned bright, as if it was dipped in wax or tallow, that then the well in which the burning rush was dipped should be made holy for ever after.

“ So according to these directions the good Friar proceeded ; he provided himself with rushes, and went and dipped them in the best spring wells of the country, and then he set fire to them, but not one of them would burn—at last he came to Doune, and here he dipped his rush, and the moment he took it out of the water and applied a coal of turf to it—why, my dear sowl, a blaze came from the wet rush as bright as from one of the tapers on our chapel altar ; and it continued burning clear and steady the whole day and next night. So here Father Freel stopped, he fasted and prayed six days and six nights, going round the well on his bare knees, and this being finished, the sanctity of it has grown in grace, and Character, and vartue, ever since—at first it was only good for the cure of cattle, the murrain and the black-leg ; and then it came on to cure horses of mange, strangles, and surfeits ; but now it cures Christhens ; and look, Sir, at all these crutches stuck round the well ; look at these hand-barrows. I saw myself with my two eyes, the bed-rid come here on these crutches, and they went away, after going their rounds, as straight and nimble as you or I, and they left these things behind, as well they might, to prove and to certify God's wonders done unto them at this Holy Well.

“ Sir,” said he, “ the black-mouthed Presbyterians there below on the Lennan, are forced to confess and believe in the wonders of this Well. Not long ago a bitter psalm-singing Presbyterian, who farms part of the townland of Drumgarton, his name is John M'Clure, he used to laugh at us poor Catholics as we passed him by, going to this blessed spot—Oh ! it would make your flesh creep to hear all he said, turning the sacred well into game ; but one spring, just as we were going to labour the ground for the barley, his horses took the mange, and they got so lean that they were dropping off their standing : they could not plough his field, they were unable to crawl to the bog to bring home a creel of turf, he tried brimstone with them, but it did not do ; all the tobacco-water and sulphur in Derry had no effect ; so, says he, half joke half earnest, to his neighbour Jerry M'Swine, I'll go to the Well of Doune and wash my horses with your holy water, and who knows but the Saint will cure a Presbyterian's horse as well as a Catholic's cow. So off he set with his horses, and he brings a

pail with him to lift the water, and when he came near the well, as he could not lead his horses close to it by reason of the bog, he tied the cattle to a stone, and down he went to fetch the water, and raising it with his pail, off he set to pour it over his horses. But my dear honey he had not gone ten steps from the well, when the pail, as if it had no bottom, let out all the water ; back he goes again, but no better was his bad luck, he might have been lifting the water until Lady Day and yet not one drop of the blessed liquid would the heretic be permitted to carry, it stole out of the pail as it would out of a sieve : at length of a sudden dimness came over the man's eyes, and it would make you laugh to see Johnny M'Clure wandering about the bogs as blind as a beetle, tumbling into the bog-holes, rolling and weltering in the mud. At length fear came on the man, and the grace of God gave him a good thought, and he vowed to the blessed Mary and the Saints, that if he recovered his sight he would go to Mass on next Sunday. The moment he said this he saw his eyesight come ; up he bounced, ran to the well and took a hearty drink, and he became as good a Catholic and as happy a man as ever you saw ; immediately he took up the pail, lifted it full of water, which the pail now carried as staunch as need be, and a Catholic neighbour making the sign of the cross while he washed the horses with the water, in a hand's turn (as I may say,) they became as clean and sound as a trout, and Jack M'Clure went home, his cattle cured, and he a good Catholic, which he remained to his dying day."

This story Tony O'Donnel told with all the unction of perfect faith—I verily believe he placed a full reliance on the truth, of what he narrated. This well is in the highest odour of credit in this vicinity—its efficacy is notorious in sundry ways—one virtue it has for which its fame deserves to extend beyond this mountain district—good housewives use it as a sovereign and certain alexipharmick against infidelity in husbands ; nothing need be done but keep a bottle of this sacred water well corked under the bed's head, and the good man of the house remains as he should be, true and faithful. A valuable well is not this ? and highly to be prized this anti-jealousy water—pity it is so little known beyond these hills ; even Protestant ladies are known to rely on and to experience the full efficacy of this simple remedy against a very troublesome evil. The water keeps well ; it is, (as emblematical of the purity it provides for,) incapable of corruption ; it might be forwarded to all parts of the World ; and I trust that Paris and London may yet derive ample trade in, and derive important advantages from this too-long neglected water. While I was there I observed sundry pilgrims going round the holy well on their naked knees ; they trudged along upon stones set in the miry puddle, and it was curious to observe the countenances of these people, as with intense eagerness and abstracted looks they proceeded repeating in low and suppressed tones sundry Paters and Aves.

There are sundry peculiar Station-days, on which the crowds resorting hither are immense ; hither the sick and healthy flock, the sick to obtain health—the healthy to merit grace. The resort to this blessed well not only cures complaints, but it procures marriages ; and it is ascertained much to the satisfaction of his Reverence the Parish Priest, that after these Stations, weddings are rife, and therefore approaches to this well are crowded on such occasions with the young and the healthy, the gay and the well-dressed ; and as much conviviality and merry-making is mixed up here, with the superstitions of the devotioners of the Church of Rome, as is usual in all quarters of the globe. There is one accompaniment to this blessed well, which is found to help the efficacy of its waters not a little, and that more especially since they have been found effectual in the cure of human maladies, I mean a snug comfortable little cabin, just under the Old Rock and close to the well, in which pilgrims can get at a reasonable rate a drop of the " Poteen ;" and a dash of this *elixir illegalis* through a bottle of water, has been found to farther its sanative effects in no small degree and measure.

A few days after our walk to Doune Rock, we set out on an excursion to an Alpine lake, some miles off, embosomed in the midst of wild and lofty mountains. The valley in which this lake lies is called Glen Veagh. On our way to it, we went along a road parallel to the River Lennan, and after about five miles ride came to a very beautiful lake, out of which this river discharges itself.

[1] Off this island Sir John B. Warren in 1798, encountered a French fleet, with troops and rebel chieftains on board, and capturing them all, he crushed the hopes of the French army that landed at Killala, and broke the spirits and the cause of the rebels who had joined them.

I was sorry that it was out of my power to visit Torry Island. It is about twelve miles from shore, and I am informed that it is an interesting spot. Here are the ruins of a fortress, erected by Erick of the red arm, one of the Norwegian Sea Lords, whose roving rule extended around these isles and coasts. The name of this island is of Runick etymology, and Thor-Eye, now corrupted into Torry, denotes that it was consecrated to Thor, the Scandinavian deity, that presided over stormy and desolate places. Here is also a tower and church, built by St. Columkill, and a portion of the church-yard is dedicated to some ancient saints, his followers, who are there interred; wherein, if any one presumed now to bury a corpse, the following night it would be cast with violence out of the ground. My informant assured me that a friend of his buried his daughter in this forbidden spot, and the following morning after the funeral, the body was found on the surface—again it was interred—and again the following morning it was exhumed. The father determined to watch over the grave the third night; and accordingly enveloping himself in his great coat, he threw himself on the grave, and there he lay praying for the soul of his dear departed girl.

Thus he lay until the stars told him that midnight was past, when all at once a noise rose from beneath—a mighty heave was given as from an earthquake, and clear and clean the maiden was left in her coffin on the green grass.—You may be sure that after this experiment some other resting place was found for her bones.

A foreigner, who is not more remarkable for his attainments in mineralogy and natural history, than he is for his agreeable and amiable manners, went lately to this island; I am not informed whether his explorings were attended with satisfactory results: but as bodies do not rest in their graves, no more could the carcass of this philosopher rest in his bed; yet it was not owing to the intervention of angry saints, but to the assaults of hungry vermin. We are informed that this learned zoologist, on his return to the continent of Ireland, was so anxious to divest himself of the sundry genera and species that attached themselves to him, as by a kind of elective attraction; that divesting himself of his integuments, he was seen through a telescope, wading into the sea, armed with scrubbing brushes, resolutely intent on expelling, destroying, drowning all the specimens of entomology that were inclined to attend on the professor, even as far as the museum of the Dublin Society.

The people of Torry Island seldom come to the mainland. A fishing boat containing seven or eight men was lately driven by stress of weather into Ards Bay, and the wind for some days continued so directly contrary that they could not venture to return to their island. Mr. Stewart of Ards gave these poor people shelter in a large barn, and supplied them with plenty of food and fresh straw to lie on; not one of these people were ever in

Ireland before ; the trees of Ards actually astonished them—they were seen putting leaves and small branches in their pockets to shew on their return. Mr. Stewart had the good nature to procure a piper for their amusement, and all the time the wind was contrary, these harmless people continued dancing, singing, eating, sleeping—a picture of savage life in every age and clime.—There are about 500 inhabitants on the island, and these poor creatures have been in the course of the present summer, visited by a great calamity.—In the month of August last, a strange and unforeseen storm set in from the north-west, which drove the sea in immense waves over the whole flat part of the island ; the waves even beat over the highest cliffs—all their corn was destroyed, their potatoes washed out of the ground, and all their springs of fresh water filled up ; nothing can be imagined more deplorable than this. The island is the estate of the Bishop of Raphoe.—There is reason to believe that his lordship will do all in his power to meet the wants of this wretched people. 1826.

- [2] I have been informed by a friend resident in the neighbourhood of Rosapenna, that the blowing of the sand to its present extent, may be attributed to the introduction of rabbits that were permitted to encrease, and their borrowing disturbing the bent grass which kept the sand down ; the tremendous west and north-west winds on this coast began, and have continued to operate with encreasing mischief.

At Rutland, in that district of Donegal called the Rosses—there was expended about forty years ago the sum of £30,000, which expenditure was defrayed, partly by Government, and partly by the landlord, Marquess Conyngham, in order to create a town and fishing establishment on a coast that teemed with herrings. It is a curious fact, that the year after these buildings were erected and all the expense incurred, the herrings deserted the coast ; and what is equally surprising—the sands began to blow, and now large ranges of lofty buildings three or four stories high, are covered on the sea-side with sand—you can walk up to the ridge poles of the roof.

- [3] M'Swine's Gun is a natural phenomenon on the coast, which shall be more fully described hereafter.
- [4] Whiskey that is made in a licensed still, and to which the people in Ulster have a great aversion is called Parliament.
- [5] After Sir John O'Doherty's death, Cahir his son pretended great inclinations towards the English, and was made in consequence, a Justice of Peace ; he contracted an intimate friendship with the English, and particularly with Captain Hart, Governor of Culmore near Derry. On a certain day Sir Cahir invited Captain Hart to dinner, and he left his Fort, and came with his wife and his little child (to whom Sir Cahir was godfather,) to the Chieftain's feast. After dinner, O'Doherty arose and called Hart aside, and plainly told him that he hated the English, that he must be revenged and he should have Culmore ; “ quietly surrender it to me, or yourself, your wife, and child shall die,” and immediately a band of armed kerns rushed into the room : Hart kept his courage, and Sir Cahir ordered his men to execute him. Just at this moment in rushed Hart's wife and Lady Doherty, And urged by the entreaties of the women Doherty was dissuaded from the murder. He therefore sent Captain Hart out of the room, well guarded, and then addressing his wife, he said, “ Madam, go instantly off to Culmore with this band of soldiers ; get them peaceable entrance into the Fort, or your husband and child will cease to live.” The woman, terrified, submitted to the undertaking, she went with the rebels to the castle that night, told the

sentry that the Captain, her husband, had broken his leg, and the man without scruple admitted her and her party into the place. The consequence was the murder of the whole garrison. Hart's life was saved, but he was utterly ruined.—See *Cox's Hibernia Anglicana*, vol. ii. p. 14.

[6] Archdeacon Lynch.

Sketches in Ireland: descriptive of interesting, and hitherto unnoticed districts, in the north and south (1827)

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