

Something about Ireland 1851

The footpath and highway : or, Wanderings of an American in Great Britain, in 1851 and '52

Benjamin Moran

1853

•

The young noble, who is whirled through Europe in his chariot, sees society at a peculiar elevation, and draws conclusions widely different from him who makes the grand tour on foot. *Haud inexpertas loquor.*—GOLDSMITH.

•

THE press has teemed of late with the works of American tourists, some artistic, some scientific, and others, again, of a more purely literary type. There are, therefore, many readers who will doubtless expect an apology from one who ventures now to place himself and his itinerary before the public, though claiming no eminence in the world of letters and making little pretension to superiority in any particular accomplishment.

But we live in an age when the people are becoming paramount in all things ; and the wanderings described in this little volume took place among a people more interesting to the American than any other upon earth.

•

This was our first night out of port, and we were not thirty miles on our voyage. The ship was at anchor, her engines out of order, and dissatisfaction general among the passengers. The cabins were really splendid ; but the rich carpets and gaudy mirrors, ample saloons and convenient state-rooms, did not make the machinery whole. We were about to cross the Atlantic, and our engines were already impaired. The captain made the best apology he was capable of at the tea-table ; but that did not repair the break ; and although it was Saturday night, and a glorious moon shone calmly down upon the placid waters and motionless ship, not one of the passengers was content with his prospects. Speculation was busy as to the future ; the probabilities of further accident were discussed ; stories of sinking ships repeated ; and one by one we stole to our berths with the hope of better prospects on the morrow.

The night passed away, day dawned, the steam was gotten up, the anchor hove to the merry and cheerful tones of

“ Billy Bown’s a jolly sailor !
Who stole the *ham* ?”

and, as the iron arms of the powerful mass relaxed their hold on the muddy depths of the Delaware, the impatient ship dashed proudly on her way, as if glad to be once more at liberty. The morning was serene, calm, celestial. The soft breeze from the south was laden with dews and the breath of flowers, and a more magnificent morn never ushered in the Sabbath. Earth and water, air and light, all seemed to be glorifying the great Creator, and the little birds sang, like the stars of old, praise to Him who feigns forever. Every heart was elated ; the borders of evil disappeared ; hope took the place of dissatisfaction ; and as the vessel left one well-known point after another far astern, and the day advanced, we began to realize the fact that

we were really departing. There were several clergymen on board, and as the passengers numbered nearly seventy, the captain proposed religious service, which received the assent of all, and at the sound of the ship's bell we repaired to the saloon, and listened to a sermon by a minister from Erie, Pa.

The vessel made rapid progress after leaving her anchorage, and was soon off Cape Henlopen, where she was "lain to," for the purpose of discharging her pilot. He took his departure, carrying with him a large number of letters from the passengers to friends at home. As soon as he was cleverly clear of the ship, she was put upon her course, the captain assuming, for the first time, the command. The engines worked well, and the sails being hoisted immediately, we ran to sea finely, with a fair breeze and prosperous weather. At three in the afternoon, every vestige of the land was gone. I watched the receding line of beach until it faded from the sight into the vast body of waters around, and felt as if Hope and Regret, like two sisters, had parted at my side—the one to cheer me on the long journey in prospect before me ; the other to dwell with those near and dear to me at home. Every mile we sailed seaward separated us the farther from our friends, and the waters of the ocean grew greener and greener as the distance increased, until they finally assumed a deep, dingy, greenish-blue color, by no means brilliant to view. The sun set somewhat obscurely, and the moon and stars shone brightly over the restless and tireless waves. The wind veered to the east and north, blowing directly against us, and greatly impeding our progress. The sails were all furled, and, in nautical phrase, everything made snug for the night.

We were now fairly at sea. The sky bent above us, like the counterpart of the ocean beneath, and the waves began to cause a motion in our ship by no means agreeable to some of our passengers. Neptune, inexorable tyrant, became exacting, and landsmen began to grow serious and uneasy, and many of them retired at an early hour, not because they were sea-sick, but because weariness had overtaken them.

The first few days out are usually the most disagreeable of a voyage, and the passengers are not generally blest with good appetites. Our breakfast-table, on the morning of the second day, was but indifferently attended, and those who did pay their respects to it were not well. Headaches were prevalent, and the motion of the ship was unpleasant ; but no one complained of sea-sickness—all believed they would escape that malady—and the ladies were not even disposed to acknowledge that they were suffering from it, although their appearance sufficiently proved they were.

But few persons take much interest in the details of an Atlantic voyage unless some remarkable occurrences are recorded ; and, as nothing transpired worthy of remark until our fourth day out, it will be useless to bore the reader with descriptions of life on board. We occasionally saw a " school" of porpoises, a flock of petrels, or a fleet of the little mollusque, which sailors call " Portuguese men-o'-war !" A fog, so thick that it was impossible to see twenty yards from the ship, covered the ocean at one time for twenty-four hours. A sharp look-out was kept to prevent accident, and the bell tolled at regular intervals, to give the alarm to vessels in our vicinity.

The vessel, up to this period, made very fair progress, and we had almost forgotten the accident that occurred to her machinery while in the Delaware, when a heavy jarring was heard in the engine-room, and the ship shook through all her timbers. Crash followed crash in quick succession, and the noise was frightful in the extreme. The passengers were dismayed, and every one eager to learn the particulars of the accident, for something of a serious character had evidently befallen our engines. The nature of the break was made known to us by the captain, and we were assured that it was a mere trifle, and would be repaired soon. The ship was put under canvass, and as the winds were ahead we advanced slowly, the vessel roll-

ing heavily on the waters. A cold, gloomy sky spread over us, and the ocean became greatly agitated. The day went down without a smile ; the only ray visible was a gray streak along the western horizon, which added a more dismal appearance, if possible, to the sullen and chafed waters. Darkness gathered fast, and, as it increased, and the western gleam faded slowly out, the expanse of heaving sea, with naught visible but our lonely and crippled ship, rendered the scene at once grand, awful, and desolate.

The accident was remedied about sundown, and the vessel put under steam, but the engine did not perform to the satisfaction of any, and broke again with a frightful noise early in the evening. This time the break was serious, and the officers no longer attempted to screen from the passengers the actual condition of the ship. The rock-shaft of the air-pump, a very important part of our machinery, had snapped asunder, and as there was no other on board to replace it, we were in a very unpleasant situation. The night was stormy, the condition of the vessel disheartening, and the passengers were mostly restless and anxious. They collected in little groups in various parts of the saloons, where they conversed about their prospects. Complaint was loud, and the countenance of each was serious in expression. Not a single individual had confidence in the machinery, and many conjectures were ventured as to our fate. Sleep fled the lids of the faint-hearted, and not many of the courageous sought the drowsy god. The night advanced, and each silently retired to his stateroom, prepared, however, for making his appearance on deck in the dark, should his presence be required there.

During, the night, the captain held a consultation with his officers as to the best course to be pursued, and the decision was to continue the voyage.

The engines were started occasionally, but they made a fearful noise, and the jarring shook the ship from keel to truck. They had been changed from the low to the high-pressure principle, in the hope that they could be made to perform during the remainder of the passage ; but it was found that there was a serious waste of steam, in consequence of which the force of the machinery was not sufficient to recover the eccentric at each stroke of the piston, and when such was the case the propeller would make a reverse movement, and a crashing noise would follow that was really frightful. In addition to this, we had head-winds to contend against, and a moderately rough sea, two things by no means calculated to elevate our hopes under the circumstances.

At the breakfast-table, on the following morning, the captain made known his determination to continue the voyage, and assured us that, although the engines had failed, he had every confidence in the ship, and was sure that he would accomplish the passage without the aid of steam in a reasonable time, or in four or five days more than at first supposed. He said that a proposition had been under consideration to run the vessel to Halifax for repairs ; but as that port was full six hundred miles from where we then were, it was abandoned, and the voyage continued. The jarring of the machinery he regarded as trifling, and of no injury to the ship, as it neither caused her to leak nor strained her timbers. As an evidence of his confidence in the strength and sailing qualities of the “ Lafayette,” and the certainty of reaching port, he stated that he had with him three pledges for whose welfare he would risk everything he had, and they were a daughter and two of her friends, then at his side. If he really thought there was danger, he would at once return ; but he did not anticipate any further misfortune than delay. This declaration was received with pretty general applause by the passengers, although there were some who were still doubtful of the ship, and anxious to be on shore.

From this time forward our machinery was constantly out of repair. The engines were started at times when the winds were favorable, but they never continued to perform long. The waste of steam was great, and the jarring of the machinery frequent and alarming ; at night particularly so. It was not an unusual circumstance for some of the passengers to remain up

all night, because of the groaning and crashing of the engines, and often did we wish the whole propelling power of the vessel deep in the sea.

Fortunately, the weather was favorable, and the ocean calm. For several days we were blest with winds from the right quarter : the passengers grew cheerful, and, to add to our enjoyment, the engines were purposely stopped, and the jarring, which so much annoyed us, entirely suspended. Our time was passed in a manner most agreeable to ourselves : some reading, some playing drafts, some performing on musical instruments. The favorite amusement on deck was promenading, and as we had a clear, unobstructed space of full two hundred and fifty feet, there was ample room for exercise. Our passengers were a goodly company in all, and generally sociable and disposed to make themselves content.

The monotony of the voyage was broken at times by the appearance of a sail. On some days there were as many as five seen, while on others none came to view. In the absence of something to afford amusement on deck, I was wont to hang over the ship's bows, watching the waves for hours as they broke in foam and roared against the vessel's side. Off soundings, the waters, which in shallower places are a deep green color, are of a bright transparent blue in the sunlight, and when they dash in spray against the ship, they look like an azure scarf, trimmed with snowy lace, fluttering in the wind.

Calms are wearying to the passenger, and productive of much uneasiness. No person, to look at the ocean then, would suppose that the unruffled expanse of water, with its long, dull, sweeping undulations, could be so aroused as to make a plaything of the stoutest ship. Its appearance to me, at such times, has that of a vast rolling prairie, whose rich grass was waving in the breeze of summer. One evening of quiet, the scene presented was beautiful in the extreme. The wide, wide ocean was calm save the soft undulation on its surface : the sun sunk slowly down below the horizon, and flung his gorgeous beams, mellowed and blending, along the waters and the sky. The bright rays tinged the peaks of the waves, fell in a flood of glory on sea and ship, bathed ocean and sky in their golden beams like a blush of joy from the great Creator, and then melted away into softened tints, which faded slowly out, each one growing fainter and fainter, and harmoniously blending as night obscured the hues, until darkness gathered on the face of the deep and silence nestled over the waters.

The incidents of the voyage worth recording were few, but we amused ourselves as best we could, and as each felt inclined. Dancing was practised by moonlight on deck, an old German gentleman, from Baltimore, playing the flute, while the young ladies and beaux gayly moved to the notes of his mellow-toned instrument. Several evenings, after sunset, the captain mustered all the males on deck, and drilled us in true *militia* style. No raw recruits, in the States or elsewhere, ever presented a more laughable appearance than ourselves, and I venture to say, none ever afforded more innocent amusement, or were more benefited by the exercise of drilling. We were marched up and down decks, and put through every conceivable manoeuvre, the most agreeable of which was being conducted into the cabin to enjoy and discuss the merits of a tub of excellent punch, prepared by the steward, at the captain's expense, for our especial happiness. Speeches were usually a part of the evening's entertainment, and songs and toasts added to our gratification. The last of these social gatherings was gotten up by the passengers in honor of the captain, on which occasion one of the company presented the skipper with a huge *wooden* sword, as a token of our appreciation of his services as commander-in-chief of the Lafayette Guards. It was sport, if nothing else ; and while we were so engaged, we were not thinking of our broken engines.

Many trifling things occur at sea that are never alluded to by a voyager, or but casually glanced at if mentioned at all. Sighting a vessel is a frequent event, and there is something grand in the sight of a noble ship approaching to hail. Early one Sunday evening, when the

air was all calm, all serene, one of our passengers, who was blest with good eyes, discovered, in the distance, a faint line of smoke. "There's a steamer," said he ; " an Englishman bound to the West Indies, by the course she's steering."

We looked in the direction designated, but our optics were powerless to discover the reported vessel. The passenger, however, insisted that he was right : glasses were brought into requisition, every eye was turned to the point, we all waited anxiously for the mate's report, and were soon relieved of our suspense. He slowly dropped his telescope, and, as he did it, a bright smile stole softly over his manly countenance, and he uttered a confirmation of our fellow-voyager's assertion. " She's bearing down upon us."

" Can you make her out, Mr. H.?" inquired the captain, bluntly.

" A large steamer, sir, with side wheels, and I think an American."

The reply was received with a slight acknowledgment, and the commander's glass was at once put into requisition. As he lowered it, an order was given to the steersman, and our ship put one or two points off her course to meet the stranger. She was evidently approaching, and that rapidly, for it was not long before we could see her distinctly.

On she came—on—on—and as she gradually neared us, her hull and form hove in sight. All the glasses on board were brought into requisition. To those who were lucky enough to have one, many a question was directed, and all were anxious to get a look at the stranger. The ships neared rapidly now, and our second mate, a methodical, quiet, determined fellow, told us that the vessel approaching was the American steamship Washington, of the New York and Bremen line. He had been an officer in her once, and knew her long before we had an opportunity to hail her.

On she came, nearer and nearer, and, as she approached us, larger and larger grew her form until she appeared like a huge monster of the deep, crushing the waves as haughtily beneath her tread as a proud lion would the waving grass. Her decks were crowded with human beings, and the foam roared and hissed beneath her bows. Our steam was shut off, and we quietly waited until she was abreast our ship, when the captain stepped upon the rail, told our condition, and asked to be reported. The Washington offered assistance, but, as we required nothing that he could furnish, it was declined. As soon as the conversation was ended, we gave three hearty cheers, which were responded to by those on board the stranger. Another and another followed, and each vessel went on her way. The Washington rapidly left us, and when we went on deck after tea she was hull down, far astern of us, and at dusk had disappeared. Some of our passengers had prepared letters for the purpose of throwing them on board, but the distance between the two ships was too great, and closer proximity would have been dangerous, however much it might have been desired.

Our passengers were of many countries and dispositions. There were real gentlemen, and those who never can be such : and true, upright men in rough clothing ; and exquisite and puling fops in broadcloth—a compound at once varied and strange. I had for room-mate a native of South Carolina, then hailing from Mississippi, and a finer specimen of the Southron seldom comes under one's notice. A planter of the South, he possessed all the good qualities of his race, with but few, if any, of their objectionable ones, and was in every respect a polished gentleman. Next to him, in my estimation, was a naturalized citizen of the United States, returning to England on a visit to his mother, after an absence of thirty-six years. There was an old German on board, who had crossed the Atlantic twelve times ; a Frenchman of easy, graceful manners, who was then on his sixth voyage over the deep. He sang well, and at our social gatherings, after evening parade, amused us with the Marseillaise

hymn in his native tongue. There were other Europeans who were returning home on visits to friends, and a number of Americans on their way to the Great Exhibition. There was with us a young Kentuckian, who deserves particular mention. He was about five feet four inches high, nearly as broad as he was long, had light hair and moustache to correspond, and was truly an original character. He played cards and sleight-o'-hand tricks, spoke French, and gallanted the ladies about the decks, drank brandy and smoked cigars, chewed tobacco and sat up the greater part of the night gaming, and, to crown his accomplishments, managed to keep every-body in complete ignorance of who and what he was ; and yet, for all, he was one of the best-natured and most sociable fellows in the world.

Early rising is not often indulged in by passengers at sea, and but few who cross the Atlantic behold the sun emerge from his watery bed. I arose one morning at half past three o'clock for the purpose of seeing him rise in his glory, and I shall never regret breaking my sleep for such a splendid view as the burning orb presented to my gaze. First, there was a pale yellow light, which tipped the edges of the dancing waves with hues of gold, and then a rim of fire, intensely bright, pierced the watery horizon. For an instant it was motionless, then it grew larger, and the vast globe of flame ascended resplendently up the morning sky, its piercing rays chasing the mists before them over the burning deep. It was a glorious scene : the waves were like liquid fire dancing in the sunlight, and the flying mists were rushing like frightened spirits over the waters : the sky was brilliant with crimson, sapphire, purple, and gold, and it seemed to me as if water and cloud, sea and sky, were singing a morning hymn to the Deity. Such a scene will repay a man for the anguish produced by sea-sickness, and that amounts almost to agony.

On our twentieth day out, we found ourselves off the coast of Ireland. We were all on the look-out for land. Sails were frequent, and the less venturesome sea-birds numerous. Our captain announced his determination to run into Cork for coals, provided we could get a pilot. We were not long without one. A coarse-looking, sloop-rigged craft, in appearance like a dull sailing, dirty fishing-boat, hove in sight on our port-bow, and bore down for us. She was a sorry-looking affair compared with the beautiful fairy little cruiser of our Cape Henlopen pilot. As she approached us, we could make her out distinctly ; but I am sorry to say that she did not improve on inspection. She was a beggarly, begrimed tub, filled with a crew of Corkonians—and they were unmistakable. One “ jontleman” hailed us : we lay to—he lowered a cockle-shell of a boat—two or three of his men tumbled over him into it—the oars were plied lustily, and the first representative of her majesty’s subjects that it was my lot to see fairly on the European side of the Atlantic came on board our ship. He was “ Ould Ireland” complete, even to the pipe, and as exacting as possible. The pilot was called into the captain’s cabin for business purposes, while we scrutinized his *beautiful* craft—a thing that looked to me as if she might have been the tender to Tom Hood’s phantom ship, the *Mary Ann*, of Shields : —

Her mast was black, her decks were black,
And so her hull and rails ;
Her shrouds were black, her flag was black,
And so were all her sails.

She evidently wanted scrubbing “ aloft and alow,” and her crew were quite as much in want of a treat to soap and cold water as any of the race I ever saw before.

We soon resumed our course, the pilot directing it, and keeping the ship towards the land. The miles grew fewer between us and it, and before mid-day the cry that has cheered many a despairing soul rang through our ship—Land ! land, ho ! and every eye was turned to catch a glimpse of Pisgah’s top—a faint line which appeared a dull leaden cloud resting on the

horizon, but gave to the uninitiated eye no indications of solid earth until we approached to within a few miles. As the distance diminished, it became distinct, and the bold rocky shores arose, towering over the sea. We soon could trace the roads, the hedges, the stone walls, the thatched huts ; and then we saw men and women moving to and fro in the fields, at the labor of the farm. There was the Emerald Isle, or a portion of it ; and treeless it was, too. Kinsale Head was passed, and then other points followed, and our ship soon gained the entrance to the famous Cove of Cork. As we approached, there was evident curiosity among the people on shore as to our craft and her errand. Numbers of small boats came out to meet us, and cheers and shouts went up on all sides. We were hurried on past forts Camden and Caroline, two frowning defences, one on either side the strait. They ran up their flags as a salute ; and as all things were in readiness with us, guns loaded and primed, ensigns rove and men at their post, an order was passed to the crew to stand by their colors ; and at the sound of the bell our carronades were fired, and the “ starry banner” and the blood-red flag of St. George floated from our mast’s head. The hills echoed and re-echoed the report of our guns, until the sound came back to us for the twentieth time, and the hollow booming roused like magic the entire population of Queenstown. As soon as we were cleverly into the harbor, our vision was greeted by some splendid scenery. There lay the town, directly in front, with its beautiful villas and white houses rising in terraces on the hill-side, until they crowned the top. The noble sheet of water stretched out for several miles to the right and left, while Spike Island, with its barracks and formidable fortresses, reposed like a sleeping war-dog near by.

We were all excitement and admiration ; the town was full of bustle and curiosity about the stranger, boats full of the natives were around us, and “ *Huzzas for America !*” welcomed us as we moved on.

We soon gained a favorable point ; an order was passed to the men we all could hear, as it was clear and intelligible, “ Let go that anchor !”

“ Ay, ay, sir !” was the response ; and the huge cable began to grate and ring as the heavy mass slipped into the sea. The hoarse roar of the ponderous chain soon ceased—our ship swung slowly round with the tide, and lay like a tired giant at rest upon the placid waters.

.

Our visit to Ireland was unexpected and of short duration, but sufficiently long to give us a fair opportunity of seeing how the lower class of Irish live. We landed at Queenstown on Friday afternoon, May 30th, 1851, where we were immediately surrounded by a throng of beggars, at once the lowest and meanest I ever saw. They followed us, pleading for pence, and hung to us like wax. There was no shaking them off, unless you put them aside by force, or gave them into the charge of a police officer. In addition to their half-starved appearance, they were barefooted, and not one in every ten had sufficient clothing to hide his nakedness. No drunken Indian ever presented a more revolting spectacle than did these beggars of Queenstown. They were filthy, and covered with vermin ; so much so, indeed, as to make me shudder to think of them for days after, and cause my flesh to creep with the idea that I had unfortunately come into too close contact with them, and gotten a share of the wandering tribes that roamed unmolested over their skin. This, fortunately, was not the case ; but I could not divest my mind of the idea, until a thorough bathing and cleansing relieved me of the dust and atmosphere of the town.

Old and young—men and women—naked and clothed—they gathered around us in a regular mob, and begged with as much earnestness as a lawyer pleads a cause. There was no means of getting them away but by violence, or flying for refuge into an open door, and it was doubtful whether you would succeed then. We drove the mendicant throng off as well as

we could, and managed to shelter ourselves in a hotel. Here, while partaking of refreshments, we were welcomed, on behalf of some gentlemen present, in a neat and appropriate speech by one of the company. He spoke in a slow, distinct manner, selecting his words with great care, and took occasion to say many flattering things of the United States. The incident was happy, and, to us, agreeable, as it was unexpected. Each Irishman here was a gentleman, and each educated and refined, genteel in dress and manners, and possessing most excellent social qualities. They were in every sense polished and friendly, and gave us abundant proof of their sincerity and hospitality. I do not believe that a more appropriate reception of strangers could be gotten up than the one so unexpectedly tendered our company, or that a more gentlemanly set of men could be found than the Irishmen of whom I speak. They were candid, bland, sociable, and refined ; and their conduct made a lasting impression on our minds. One of the passengers returned thanks for the reception given us, and we joined in three hearty, enthusiastic cheers for old Ireland, and separated, each and every one highly delighted with the true Irish gentleman, and with a more favorable opinion of the inhabitants of Queenstown than we thought it possible for us ever to entertain at the time of our landing. In an hour we had the two extremes of Irish social distinctions set before us, and were glad to find so much that is really noble in a place where at first we thought there was nothing but ignorance, sloth, mendicity, immorality, and suffering.

Queenstown is romantically located, and presents an attractive appearance to the stranger. The houses are built on streets which rise like terraces one above the other, until they crown the hills which overlook the spacious Cove of Cork. Some of the residences of the gentry are really splendid, and in them is to be found all that a man can desire to make him happy.

All along the river Lee, a beautiful little stream which runs into the Cove, and on which the city of Cork stands, there are many handsome mansions and a great deal of fine scenery. Trees are scarce, except in the parks, but the land is cultivated down to the river's brink, and that in the highest state. At one point along the stream we noticed a large building, with two high towers, rising like sentinels up to heaven, and, on inquiring, learned that it was a memorial to Father Matthew, erected by a tailor of Cork in commemoration of the services of that distinguished man.

A number of pretty little cottages peeped out from ivy and flowers as we passed, and the ruins of an old building, hung over with ivy, reminded us that we were in one of the lands of Eld. The dwellings of the poor, when seen and compared with those of the wealthy, were the merest hovels imaginable. At a distance, the shores and villages looked inviting ; but no sooner was foot set upon the soil than wretchedness and misery met us at almost every turn.

Cork has ever been famous on both sides of the Atlantic for the beauty of its harbor and the hospitality of its inhabitants ; but no traveller has yet given the world a correct picture of the degradation and wretchedness of its pauper population. On our side of the ocean, we occasionally hear vague accounts of the condition of the peasantry in the south of Ireland ; and at one period, when a desolating famine prevailed in that portion of the island, a ship was freighted and sent from our shores with succor to the famished and dying. This exhibition of a nation's benevolence and charity is remembered by the inhabitants of Cork and the adjacent country with the liveliest feelings of gratitude, and no American visits that city, at present, without receiving a cordial and affectionate welcome from the upper classes of society. The wealthy portion of the community praise our philanthropy, while the poor heap benedictions and prayers upon our heads. We are regarded by them as a favored and prosperous people ; but, alas for poor degraded Ireland, the American who visits her shores must shudder at her wretchedness, and mourn over her almost hopeless misery.

At Cork, the beggars were far worse than they were at Queenstown, and their perseverance and energy were worthy of a better cause than the one in which they were employed. Men, women, and children waylaid us in such numbers as to completely obstruct our passage, and we were scarcely able to drive them off. The women were the most shameless of slatterns, and made open propositions, of the most revolting character, without a blush. How the respectable portion of the inhabitants content themselves to live in such a community is a mystery ; and the only way to account for it is by supposing that they are so accustomed to beggars and harlots that they regard them as a necessary evil, not worth removing from their town. The men were but little better than the women in point of morality. Their unblushing impudence knew no check ; and they were as far below the beggars of Queenstown as I thought the latter below the drunken savage. The women would take a man by the arm and insist upon his company, and when they found it impossible to induce him to comply, they would commence with a shower of obscenity so horrible and profanely vile, as to make one think them dwellers of Pandæmonium let loose, for a while, to pollute and slime the earth.

Our company divided ; some lodging at the Victoria, others at the Imperial, the two largest hotels of the city. I arose at an early hour the following morning, and took a stroll about the place. Although the sun was high, there were no shops open, but few people in the street, and scarcely a beggar visible—a most remarkable circumstance to me, when I recalled to mind the crowds of the previous night. The thoroughfares were comparatively deserted, and the few persons who were abroad were of the laboring class. The houses of Cork are generally well built, particularly those in the fashionable and business portions. When I speak of houses, I make no reference, of course, to the hovels of the beggars ; my remarks apply only to the dwellings and stores of the affluent and favorably circumstanced. The homes of the mendicant population of Cork are dens of wretchedness, unfit for human habitations.

By eight o'clock the streets began to present some activity, and when we returned to them after our morning meal they were alive with ragged beggars. It was a mystery where they came from. Every stone must have concealed one, as did the bracken the warriors of Roderick Dhu, until the time arrived for them to reveal themselves. They were countless, hungry, importunate, impudent, servile, cringing, and eminently persevering in asking alms. Not one of them had breakfasted, according to his own account ; and “ be plased, yer honor, to give me a ha'penny to get somethin' to ate,” was the sum total of their petition. When a few coppers were thrown them, they gathered them up with eagerness, elbowing and thumping each other gloriously to get at the money ; nor were the successful ones satisfied with their gains, but became more importunate than they were at first. Flattery and persuasion—appeals and threats—were alike used for the purpose of obtaining alms, and the news of our liberality spread like wildfire, if I may judge from the number of ragamuffins that came thronging round us. I thought all the rags in creation were on the backs of our energetic, screeching, screaming besiegers ; and they were of all ages, from the octogenarian to the puling infant in its mother's arms. The race was evidently productive, and there is but little doubt of Ireland being able to produce her quota of men, whether starvation prevails or not. Poverty in Cork is favorable to reproduction, and the low Irish generate as rapidly as negroes in slavery.

The crowd grew denser and denser ; Paddy became pugnacious, and a stray fist occasionally found its way into the face of a friend of its owner's just before it. “ Be aisy, Pat Mulony ;” “ Kape yer elbows in yer pockets, Ted Murphy ;” “ Och, yer a fine Amerikin jointleman, sir ! and ye'll throw me the sixpence ye hould in yer hand,” and such like expressions and compliments, were numerous. We were literally beleaguered by the rabble, until the attention of the police was attracted to the mob, and that useful body made their appearance. The blue coats struck terror into Pat, and the cowardly band fled like criminals before them.

In a much less time than it takes me to write the story, the whole mass vanished like a litter of young rabbits. Some, more daring than the rest, returned to the charge as soon as they thought the officers out of the way ; but they came cautiously—sneaking along as if expecting a blow from some unseen hand, and glancing occasionally to the right and left for a policeman, the sight of whom was sufficient to cause a precipitate and inglorious retreat. Our imprudence caused the guardians of the public peace some work. Paddy was too wide awake to let the “*jointlemen*” who threw pennies about so liberally escape easily, and when we secured jaunting cars and set out on a trip to the country, we had a train of honor, composed of Cork beggars, to escort us on our way, nor did we get rid of the pestering rascals readily. A few pence thrown to them, in hopes of being an inducement for them to discontinue their appeals, was encouragement for them to follow. They knew “the value of peace and quiet” too well to be satisfied with trifles, and ran after us for several miles. As we passed through the purlieus of the town, our retinue increased, and, I am sorry to say, the additions were far from desirable. Carrotty-headed, uncombed females, old and young, joined our guard of honor, and Falstaff’s ragged regiment was a princely set out, to our escort. We had no other way of relieving ourselves of the incubus than using the whip, and that effected our object. They skulked at once, and from flattery turned to abuse. “Yo mane, beastly Yankees, the likes of you jointlemen !” “Sneugh ! yer a set o’ sneakin’ thaves, and bad luck to ye all !” was the vote of thanks that followed us from the exacting knaves.

We dashed boldly out into the country, and soon enjoyed the beauties of rural scenery. Our drive was about twelve miles, going and returning, full of interest to us and highly instructive. There were twelve in our company, four to each jaunting car, an open vehicle, with seats for that number in addition to the driver. The passengers sit facing the wheels, and have excellent opportunities for observation. It is an odd way of riding, but for all, agreeable. Our whip was a fair specimen of his race, talkative in the extreme, and well informed. The roads attracted our admiration, and they certainly deserved it. They are so beautifully smooth, so evenly made, that all jolting is avoided, and you roll over them as softly as if on a floor. They are not lined with wood-fences as with us, but with substantially built stone walls, or hedges of sweet blossoming hawthorn, the odors from which impregnate the air like incense. The fields were highly cultivated, there being scarcely a spot untilled. Trees were rare, except in the parks, where we noticed many varieties, natives to the country, besides exotics. The rural residences of the gentry on the route were beautiful places, there being no expense spared by the proprietors to make each an earthly paradise. Some of them were perched upon hills towering above trees and shrubbery, rich flowers, and clambering ivy ; others were quietly nestled in secluded nooks, at a short distance from the highway, and only visible at openings in the groves, through which they peered, like shy young maidens who are curious to see, yet fear to be seen. They all wore an aristocratic air, and looked the very habitations of ease and affluence. If they were a fair sample of all the rural abodes of Ireland, then we might reasonably expect to see a happy and contented people there ; but, unfortunately, they are not.

I was anxious to learn something of the peasantry, and to see their dwellings, and observe their mode of living. There were abundant opportunities for observation, and, jumping from the car, I soon had a chance to gratify my curiosity. I entered one of the hedge-cottages, on the plea of getting a drink of water, and never did I dream that human beings could be so degraded and sunken in poverty and wretchedness as were the occupants of that sty. Their condition was brutal beyond conjecture, and the place was such as we in the United States would not put a worthless cur into. There were but the four bare walls, a thatched roof, with a hole in it, as an apology for a chimney ; a ground floor, no windows, and not a single article one could conscientiously call furniture. In one corner sat an old woman, picking vermin from the person of a little girl, and apparently well pleased with her occupation. There were no bed, no stove, and no cooking utensils of any consequence in the place ; no chairs, a single table, which would barely hold together, and a pack of filthy rags on the floor for bedding.

The only means of light was the door, and that was so low as scarcely to admit a person in an upright position. In this miserable hovel there were *nine human beings* all women and children, not one of whom had sufficient covering to hide her nakedness, or even give to the beholder the idea that she was clad. They were barefooted and bareheaded. Neither of them owned a bonnet, and shoes were what they never had. On inquiry of the woman, who answered my questions, I was told that her husband was a farm-laborer, and earned about five shillings per week, out of which sum he paid tenpence rent for the hut above described, and supported a family of twelve persons. What their food was, can be surmised from the sum devoted to its purchase ; and as provisions are dearer in Ireland than in the United States, there is reason to suppose that oatmeal and potatoes comprised the assortment. So the woman said, and she probably told the truth. What else could be obtained for the sum that would suffice for twelve persons ?

The other cottages at which I stopped were, with trifling exceptions, similar to the one mentioned, and the occupants were soulless, cringing, listless wretches, but little above brutes, and not so intelligent as some dumb animals. We met several laborers at work on the roads, who told us their wages varied from sixpence to one shilling per day ; out of which sum they are obliged to pay rent, and find food for their families.

Our destination was Blarney Castle, the name of which is famous the world over. We arrived at the lodge-gate early in the day, and, leaving our conveyances there, walked up to the old ruins. The hawthorn hedges sent up their delicious perfume, and thousands of flowers around added their odors to the incense from the new-mown hay. We found the castle much decayed, and overhung with a net of ivy. The walls are worn and broken in places, but still tower to the height of one hundred feet. We ascended by a spiral stone stairway to the top, from which we had a splendid view of the valley below—of waving cornfields, extensive parks, numerous cottages, and large dwellings. Here we met several of our fellow-passengers, among whom were three young ladies, all of whom were delighted with the scenery and ruins. The thick walls, dark cells, secret passages, and deserted halls were new to us, and we were reminded by them that we were in a historic land. Among the curiosities, we were shown the world-renowned “ Blarney Stone,” which is placed on the top of one of the walls of the building, from whence it derives its name. Visitors usually touch it, and the wear it receives from the constant laying on of hands keeps it highly polished. The castle is said to be seven hundred and thirty years old, and was for a long period the residence of a distinguished Irish nobleman, or petty monarch, O’Something—I don’t remember what—whose race and history have alike perished, leaving no other memorial than the walls of Blarney, and the legends connected with them.

The estate contains about eighteen hundred acres, nearly all of which is under cultivation. Five hundred men are constantly employed upon it, at fair wages for Ireland ; and they generally appear content with their lot. There are full as many cattle as men on the estate, and, from my own observations, they are better sheltered in stormy weather than the peasantry, and far better cared for. The stables in which they are kept are infinitely superior to the hedge cottages.

The attendants were exceedingly polite, and numerous. There was one to bow us through the delicious groves of Blarney, an other to guide us through the castle, one to show us the stables, and one to accompany us back to the gate. A very attentive and obliging people they were, and their plan of subdividing labor was remarkable. But cannot one do all ? thought I, and the answer came readily : “ That won’t do ; each one of these has his post, and each expects, ay, demands, pay for thrusting himself into your service, and will get it. If there were but one, he would get a sixpence from each ; but as there are four, each gets his fee, and you are the sufferer—they the gainers.” And my reasoning was correct. “ Be pleased to remember

me, zur ! I took ye till the castle," was the appeal of one, and the same came from the balance, with suitable modifications. We each paid eighteen-pence at the ruins, and thought we were released ; but no, by no means. The coarse, vulgar slattern at the lodge had a claim " for standin' by the gate till yer honors returned ;" but it was not allowed, and we received her pious benediction. Coaxing and flattery were tried at first, but they failed ; and then she abused, as only the low and beastly can abuse. The word " Yankee" was frequent in the torrent of slime she bespattered us with, and the " likes o' ye jointlemen !" was the last expression of hers that reached our ears.

We rolled away towards Cork, over a splendid road, different from the one by which we left the city. The weather was warm, the atmosphere quivered with heat ; but still the air was not very oppressive. The rapid motion of our car created a current, and kept us cool. The peasantry we met were a degraded race, and nearly all barefooted, and without energy, except to beg ; and it surprised me that some of them mustered courage for that, when I considered their laziness. Two or three of the boys ran after our conveyances full five miles in expectation of securing a penny, and, poor wretches, they earned it.

The scenery by the return route was really beautiful. At one point of the turnpike, where there was a sudden turn, a splendid valley burst unexpectedly on our view, like a fairy scene. Around it arose an amphitheatre of hills, and through it meandered a gurgling stream, on whose banks waved the rich verdure of the Emerald Isle. An old castle, ivy-covered, crowned an eminence, and in the far distance peered up the spires of the city.

But few farm-houses, worthy of the name, met our sight. We saw one or two that had a neat appearance, as if they were the abodes of comfort ; but they were all. The cottages, or huts, were numerous, and in some instances so small as to be scarcely seen, or distinguished from mud-banks. In the whole route, we saw but one solitary female with shoes on, among the peasantry, and she was a curiosity. The balance were barefooted and bare-headed ; but, although the weather was quite warm, if either of them had an old cloak, no matter how ragged it was, she had it on. They looked worse than half-civilized Indians with us, by far, and were surely more degraded and brutalized. Their long, dark hair hung loosely over their shoulders, and their black eyes and brown complexions brought to my mind the gypsies of which we hear so much and see so little.

As we neared the city, we met throngs of poor on their way to witness a military review about to take place in honor of the Queen's birthday. It was probably a favorable time to observe the mendicant inhabitants of Cork, as on such occasions they generally turn out *en masse*. The number of beggars is beyond computation ; but, as the population of the place is nearly one hundred and twenty thousand, it would not be far off the mark to set the alms-askers down at one-third that number, or forty thousand who are dependent mainly upon beggary for support in Cork only. To Americans who know nothing of the lower class of Irish in their native land, this may appear an exaggeration, but actual observation will confirm the statement. They are so numerous that it is impossible for a person to walk fifty yards in the city, during business hours, without meeting a score of them. The merchants and tradesmen are gentlemanly in their deportment, and take evident pleasure in showing kindness and hospitality to strangers ; but when spoken to concerning the laboring poor and mendicants, exhibit but little sympathy for that class, and try to avoid allusion to them, and assert that the wretchedness and misery into which they have fallen are attributable to habits of indolence and crime. There appears to be a wall of adamant between the laborer and the respectable caste, and a hatred of each other as strong as ever existed between rival tribes of savages. The rich spurn and trample the poor, and the poor hate them in return for their pains.

The review was not on an extensive scale, about four thousand troops only being out. Among them we noticed a regiment of pensioners, or soldiers who by long service had become entitled to a discharge from the army, with a small annual allowance. Their number was about eight hundred ; the most of them were Irish, and all appeared to be as fond of military display and showy uniforms as young recruits. A park of artillery bellowed forth its thunder furiously, and the rattle of small-arms, at one time, was continuous, giving the uninitiated a faint idea of the roar and turmoil of battle. Every regiment was attended by an excellent band, and the music was to us the most attractive feature of the display. What surprised us most was the variety of uniforms, each regiment having a different dress, and only one of all wore the famous “ red coats” so much despised by our patriotic forefathers.

While viewing the parade, we entered into conversation with several of the assembled spectators, who knew where we were from. They spoke of the condition of Ireland, particularly of the South, and, pointing to the troops as they tiled off, their showy uniforms and glittering arms gleaming in the sun, said that thousands of poor were starving around, and no aid furnished them by the government, while an army was sustained in their midst, at an enormous expense, to keep them in subjection.

We have nearly eight thousand soldiers among us, in time of peace, whose sole duty is to keep us quiet, and hold us in awe. I thought the spectacle one worth a few remarks. Here was a standing army among an ignorant, brutalized, idle, and starving peasantry, maintained at an enormous expense to keep the race in submission, and not one penny expended to better its condition. The general appearance of the throng was similar to that of the laboring men we had seen in our morning’s ride. Their clothing was rags, their conduct debased.

One of the first objects that attracted my attention in Cork was a small donkey, harnessed to a cart about the size of a wheel-barrow, followed by a barefooted woman, who was busily engaged in gathering up the filth and offal that she found in the street. Afterwards I observed the same thing frequently, and noticed girls and men gathering the dung of animals, with their hands, from the highways. Some of the females were among the ugliest creatures alive, and with dirty faces, mopped hair, and ragged garments, looked like so many “ weird sisters.” No one who has not seen the laboring poor and mendicant population of Ireland, on their own soil, can form a correct estimate of their wretchedness, or the degradation into which they are sunk. Suffering is the badge of their tribe, and idleness and crime results of their condition.

We remained in the city until Saturday afternoon, when our passengers returned to the ship. Every arrangement having been completed, the anchor was hove up, and by sunset the Lafayette was once more laying her course for the port of her destination. Forts Caroline and Camden were passed, and before the long summer twilight had faded out, we were again upon the ocean, and out of sight of miserable, sunken, and forlorn Ireland.

In the previous pages I have described what I saw in Ireland, and that in language suited to the subject. Some readers may condemn the tone, and deem it harsh ; but the case warranted it, and I have no apology to make. Human misery never delighted me. My sympathies are with the poor and the downtrodden of the human race, no matter where they dwell, or what their country or complexion. A mere description of the wretchedness and misery of the poverty-stricken and crushed, as given by an observer, is not an evidence of ill feeling towards them on his part ; nor must it be so considered. My sketch of the lower class of Irish, as I saw them, is correct, and I appeal to those who were with me for proof of the assertion. It is written to convey to American readers, as near as a pen and ink picture can, an idea of the actual condition of the Irish poor. We see much misery in the United States among the immigrants from the Emerald Isle ; but we do not see Irish wretchedness in its worst form,

and Heaven forbid we ever should ! That people have been the subject of remark for years ; their condition has been commented upon, by friends and foes, each of whom assigns a reason for their degradation ; but it must be confessed that few have sought to better their circumstances. Philanthropists have made attempts to alleviate their distress, but never succeeded to any great extent, for several reasons : one of which is that they have never yet laid the axe at the root of the evil. They merely apply the remedy to the surface, and fail to touch the seat of disease. Each set of philanthropists acts according to its views of the case, and as each views the Irish with a sectarian's eye, each effects nothing. I do not pretend to say that Catholicism either degrades or elevates the people of Ireland ; but I do say that no reforms will ever be effected among them by those who run counter to their religious notions. The best means of raising them from their present condition is education. Teach them to regard themselves as human beings, and create in them feelings of self-respect and manly independence, and more good will be effected among them than all the relief you can give them against physical want. But few of them at home possess a spark of manliness ; but so soon as they reach countries where they are treated by the respectable and intelligent as human beings, so soon do they become different in every respect, and stand forth men. Much of their servility is attributable to the manner in which what they are pleased to call their superiors treat them ; and so long as the educated and wealthy of Ireland continue to look upon their poor as little better than swine, and treat them like spiritless animals, only to be spurned, so long will their country be full of beggars and sunken humanity. They complain loudly at times of oppression on the part of the government, and poetically deplore the condition of their less fortunate countrymen ; but such expressions will not produce reform. They should act, and not bewail—educate, and not keep in ignorance ; and the change would soon be observed. The mendicant would become industrious, the peasant intelligent, and the people happy. Priestcraft would lose its hold, and rational religion take the place of bigotry and stultified adoration of forms and pageants. The Irish are susceptible of improvement ; and all that is required to prove the fact is to try them. They are not deficient in intellect, nor aptness for learning, and if they were properly educated, they would be equal to the best of the English peasantry, come from where they will. Philanthropists should establish schools, and Irish gentlemen should treat their poor fellow-countrymen as if they were men, not brutes—beings endowed with the same faculties as themselves ; and between the two classes they would soon produce a reform in the degraded that would be lasting and wonderful. Ages must elapse under the present state of things before the lower Irish can be raised to a position of respectability, or even decency.

The footpath and highway : or, Wanderings of an American in Great Britain, in 1851 and '52 (1853)

Author : 1820-1886

Subject : Great Britain — Description and travel

Publisher : Philadelphia, Lippincott, Grambo

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : University of California Libraries

Collection : cdl ; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/footpathhighwayo00morarich>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

January 4 2013