

To The West 1838

Rambles in the south of Ireland during the year 1838

Lady Georgiana Chatterton

—when pleasure begins to grow dull in the east,
We may order our wings and be off to the west

MOORE

1839

MY principal object in publishing this book, is to endeavour to remove some of the prejudices which render so many people afraid either to travel or reside in Ireland—to shew how many and various are the attractions that misunderstood country contains—and to furnish the most decided proofs that a tour in some of its wildest districts may be keenly enjoyed by an English-woman, rendered fastidious by ill-health, and frequent visits to the more refined and luxurious countries of the South of Europe.

These rough notes were written during my last residence in Ireland; but some of the observations they contain are the result of my experience in many previous visits to that country.

For some historical and other matters, which I believe are but little known, I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Crofton Croker.

G.C——.

London, April 6th, 1830

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Pictures of Cottage Life—The Widowed Bride—Generosity—Excursion to Askeaton.

Vermont, near Limerick.—I AM delighted with the interesting pictures of real life which appear before “the window” of this room. It is, if I may use the expression, quite a magic lantern of rural feelings—of the pleasures, and pains, the dull and poetic realities of cottage life. And yet not dull—for there always appears to be much of poetry in a mode of existence which is new and strange to our eyes. The realities of life only strike us as dull when we have experienced them ourselves, or when they are brought home to our comprehension, by a similarity to our own circumstances.

A miserable-looking, tattered Irish boy, munching a potatoe, for instance, appears a dull reality to another ragged boy in the same predicament ; but to a looker-on in a higher rank of life, he is a picturesque and interesting object. He reminds us of Murillo’s beautiful pictures, and his utter destitution affords subject for thought and wonder. Thus the ragged boy excites our imagination, and consequently our poetic feelings, more highly than a pretty girl in our own rank of life, would do, who was well dressed, and sitting in magnificent rooms in the midst of refinement.

In our drive yesterday, I saw a girl standing at the door of a miserable cottage, with a black pan in her hand, filled with some green herb, which appeared like spinnach pounded fine.

“What is that nice-looking stuff?” said I to M—.

“Nettles, probably,” said she, very composedly.

“Nettles ! and are they really going to eat them ?”

“Oh yes !” replied M—, “and they are often glad to get them for food, and also that yellow weed you see growing among the corn.”

Poor creatures !—the green pounded nettles in a black pan, held by a half-naked yet smiling girl, must be a dull reality to the rest of the cottage inmates ; but to me it was all wonderful, and strange, and interesting—a scene to dwell upon and sketch, in the mind, and with the pencil !

But to return to the window of this pleasant room. To-day I sat near it with my book, sometimes looking at the printed pages, but more often at the pretty view and living pages on the outside ; thinking of the various poor people who came, and went, and stood on that venerable charity-worn bit of sod, near the opposite bay window of the parlour. My attention was particularly arrested by the beautiful profile of a young girl. Her face was raised towards the kind listener within. Tears glistened in her long dark eye-lashes, and her hands were clasped with an air of silent entreaty. A large blue cloak enveloped her slender figure, and in the true Irish and mantilla fashion it descended in graceful drapery from her head, over which it was folded. The expression of deep anxiety which was at first depicted on her interesting countenance, gradually changed to a look of hope, and when she sat down on the steps and leant her head on her hand, a smile played round her pretty mouth. My curiosity to ascertain the cause of this change of expression was strongly excited, for I saw that she had not received either money or food. Dear M—, perceiving the look of interest with which I regarded her, said,

“I must tell you that pretty creature’s history ; for indeed it is a touching one. Not six months ago she was the pride and the belle of the village, and not a care darkened her young brow, now so full of anxiety and painful thought. Her cheeks were then rosy and dimpling with the light-hearted joy of gay eighteen ; many a bitter tear has coursed over them since. Well, Kitty Purcell, for that is her name, was married about four months ago to a young man who was just twenty-one the day of the wedding. He bore an excellent character in the village, and for three months they lived together as happily as possible. They had no cares and few wants, and were all the world to each other. True, they were very poor, but then the young man was healthy and strong, and if work did not fail they had no fear but that they would get on ; to add to their happiness, Kitty had the prospect of being a mother ; which, while it made her perhaps more anxious about the future, increased the industry of the youthful pair.

“Their little cabin was tolerably comfortable, and a palace it seemed to them, brightened as it was with contentment and love. One prime object of ambition, however, to the Irish peasant, that on which so many schemes of improved fortune are founded, was lacking. I mean a pig. They looked forward to being able one day to procure this desideratum, but the prospect seemed very distant. What was Kitty’s delight when one evening she saw her

husband return home after a longer absence than usual, driving before him a pig, which he told her he had bought that morning at the fair of Limerick. She could hardly sleep for joy.

“ The next day, when Michael Purcell was at his work in the fields, and Kitty was in the cabin by herself, busy in settling a straw bed in one corner for the newly acquired treasure, a man came into the kitchen.

“ ‘ Where did you get this bonnove (little pig) ?’ he said, sternly ; ‘ how did you come by it, young woman ?’

“ ‘ My husband bought it at the fair,’ replied Kitty.

“ ‘ The pig is mine,’ said the man ; ‘ I’ll swear to it any where.’

“ ‘ If the pig is yours, honest man,’ said the young woman, ‘ sure you must have it, an’ welcome, if it was worth twenty pounds ;’ and she gave the pig to him instantly.

“ When Michael Purcell came home, his wife told him what had happened ; she was so miserable at the slur that rested on his character, that she prevailed on him to go at daybreak to Adare, and endeavour to find out the man who he said had sold him the pig. While he was absent on this errand, the police came to the cabin to arrest Michael for having stolen the animal. Poor Kitty was horror-struck.

“ ‘ He’s as innocent as the child unborn,’ she exclaimed ; ‘ indeed he is. The minute he comes home I’ll take him down to you myself to the barrack, and he’ll clear it all up, and make you sensible that he had neither hand, act or part in such a thing.’

“ And so she did. Kitty sat outside the door of her cabin, and the moment her husband appeared in sight, she flew to meet him, and entreated him to accompany her to the barrack. In the innocence of her heart, and the full confidingness of her conjugal love, she twined her arm within his, and drew him towards his accusers. ‘ I told you I’d bring him,’ she said, ‘ and shew you ’twas belying him you were.’

“ What was her agony and dismay when he was forcibly dragged from her by the police, and thrust into the black hole of the barrack, from which next day he was removed into the Limerick jail.

“ Michael was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to transportation for life. He was instantly sent off to the hulk in Kingston harbour, a sort of floating prison, where convicts await the arrival of the ships that take them out to New South Wales. There he is now lying.

“ His wretched wife, in her agony and despair, came off to pour her tale of woe into my dear father’s compassionate ears. It was about a fortnight since that her poor sorrow-stricken face first appeared at that window. Since then it has gradually brightened, and I have watched the expression of returning peace, or rather hope, that is beginning to succeed that first haggard, hopeless despair. My father, whose benevolent heart is always open to the appeal of suffering and distress, was deeply interested by the sad story of this young pair ; their little cup of happiness dashed from their lips just as they were beginning to taste its sweets ; the picture of humble domestic pleasure so soon darkened and clouded. He is exerting all his energies to obtain the pardon of the young man, and get him restored to his wife. It seems the

judge who tried him recommended him to mercy, and that is so far favourable ; but still we know not whether the effort will be successful.

“ My father has drawn up a petition to the Lord Lieutenant, and is now busy trying to get signatures to it. Oh ! how many wearisome journies that poor young creature, the ‘ widowed bride’ as we call her, has had about this petition ; how many times her anxious, interesting face has appeared at that window since first the negociation began ; and with what intense anxiety she scans her benefactor’s countenance every time she comes, as though her fate were written in it.”

M— then asked me whether I should like to see the petition, and while she went for it to her father, I took another long gaze at the delicate and youthful form seated on the steps, and thought how much hope, and fear, and devoted love, and sickening anxiety must throb in the heart over which that blue mantle was folded. The concluding clause of the petition is so touching and simple that I must transcribe it.

“ That petitioner humbly intreats your Excellency will take this case into your merciful consideration, and restore her husband to her, and not allow him to be transported to a foreign country, where she would never see him again. That if your Excellency should not comply with the prayer of this petition, you may at least permit your humble petitioner to accompany her husband, and that you will please to give directions that she may be received on board the same vessel which is to take him away from his native country ; that for your Excellency’s kindness in so doing, petitioner will never cease to pray for your Excellency.”

My morning at the window has convinced me of what has been sometimes said in the newspapers, but which until now I never had an opportunity of observing myself—that the Irish poor support each other. This literally is the case.

“ How do you live ?” I enquired of a wretched-looking woman, surrounded by a group of little ragged children, who represented herself as “ a lone widow,” without any means of support.

“ Why thin, up and down among the neighbours, lady. They’re very good to me, an’ one gives a bit, an’ another a sup, an’ ’tis lost I’d be entirely widout them.”

“ Look at that old woman,” said M —, pointing to one who made her appearance with a sickly-looking little child, who dung to her with great fondness while she stroked his head, and looked affectionately down upon the little fellow. “ That poor woman has no friends, and is dependant on charity for her support. Her sons and daughters are dead. and yet in her helpless old age, she took compassion on that deserted orphan, quite a stranger to her, and is trying to bring him up. Her kindness and affection towards the little creature are really beautiful. Many of her neighbours would willingly take her in, and give her an asylum in their cabins, were she alone ; but she will not consent to part with her charge, and suffers all privations for his sake. A few months since she came here suffering from a dreadful cold : and when I asked her the cause, she confessed that it was owing to her having taken off her only gown in the severe weather, to cut up into clothes for the child after the measles.

“ How wonderful !” I exclaimed ; “ this is charity indeed !”

“ Oh,” said M—, “ I could tell you a thousand instances of this kind ; the charity of the poorest of the Irish poor to each other is such as may well bring us to shame. Yesterday I asked that pretty little girl you observed at the window, who it was had given her the petticoat she had on ; “ ’Twas Marianne Rowan gave it to me,” was the reply ; and when she said so, I could not but think of the widow’s mite, for I more than doubted whether poor Marianne, whom I must show to you some day, had another petticoat for herself.”

“ Potatoes,” continued M—, who saw my interest was kindled by these touching traits of my favorite Irish peasantry, “ potatoes are the usual alms. The protuberances you see at the back of the wandering mendicant, are nothing else than a bag of these, collected at different cabins. I have been sometimes in a miserable hovel when a group of beggars has appeared at the door to ask for “ something for God’s sake.” In a corner was the scanty store of potatoes, which looked hardly sufficient to supply the wants of the family for a single day. And yet to that little heap I have seen the poor woman of the house invariably turn at the appeal, and taking two or three of the best potatoes in it, give them to the beggar with a cheerful— ‘ Here, honest woman, you’re kindly welcome to ’em, an’ I wish it was more I had to give ye.’ Lodging they never refuse ; a thing that perhaps will appear more strange to your English ideas than what I have already told you ; though among the poor here, such cheap charity is thought very little of. I have known a woman and her sick daughter to be kept for months in a cabin in the village of Clarina ; and when I remarked to the owner one day, how kind it was in him to allow them to stay there, he said, in quite a surprised tone of voice, ‘ Ah thin, ’twould be a queer thing for any Christian to refuse a craythur that wanted it, a comer of the cabin, and a lock of straw to lie on. What harm would it do a body for them just to stretch under the same roof, poor, quiet craythurs ?’ ”

Monday.—We had a very fine day for our expedition to see the extensive ruins of the castle and abbey at Askeaton. The place was celebrated in the desolating wars of the 16th century ; and the castle, which owes its splendour to the great Desmond family, was the last fortress which held out for the last of this powerful race. This was Garret, the 15th earl, the vicissitudes of whose life, and the heroic conduct of his countess, in the busy reign of Queen Elizabeth, would furnish excellent materials for a romance. I was, therefore, delighted to see the ruins of his ancient residence, and the adjoining abbey, where lie the mouldering remains of many a brave Geraldine of Desmond.

The drive from this place to Askeaton is through a country which is only interesting from the number of old castles and ruined towers dotted over its uneven surface. The road is very good, being the high road from Limerick, to Tarbert and Killarney. The first ruin we approached, after crossing Court Bridge on the left hand, was the single remaining tower of Curraheen Castle. The extensive ruins to the right are those of Court Castle and its old house, a place celebrated in the last century for the hospitality and boisterous gaiety of its halls. A few miles further, the fine high tower of Bollane Castle stands on a commanding height near Dromore Wood. Soon afterwards the road skirts the pretty woods and thriving plantations of Holly Park ; lately purchased by Sir Auhrey De Vere. And then we came to the little modern town and interesting old ruins of Askeaton.

The castle occupied a small island in the River Deel. The towers which remain are of excellent masonry ; and the window-frames, chimney-pieces, and stair-cases, which are laid bare by the outer walls having been thrown down, are of beautiful workmanship. The greater part of the castle is built on a solid rock, which rises perpendicularly out of the river ; and the

island was surrounded by a strong wall, part of which, with its battlements, still remains. It must have been a very strong fortress.

The tenth Earl of Desmond, who had been in the custody of the Mayor of Dublin, made his escape to this castle ; which, in 1573, he garrisoned against the Queen Elizabeth's forces. In the April of the following year, it was attacked by Sir George Carew ; but the garrison retired during the night, leaving a train of gunpowder. which blew up part of the fortress, and the English took possession of the remainder of the castle.

On the west of the castle stands the splendid banquetting hall, now converted into a tennis court, to which it probably owes its preservation ; but alas ! for the benefit of the ball-players, the fine traced gothic windows have been walled up on the inside, which, of course, mars the handsome architecture of the room. It put me in mind of the old banquetting hall at Kenilworth castle ; and indeed the exquisite finish of the chimney-pieces and windows is quite equal to that part of Kenilworth called Leicester's buildings, which was built on purpose for Queen Elizabeth's reception ; a proof that the traduced Irish at any rate possessed as much taste, and were as forward in the art of building in those times as the English ; for this castle must have been erected long before Leicester's buildings.

A comparatively modern edifice, though now in a more dilapidated state than the Desmond's castle, stands on the same Island. It is a curious brick and stone house, with irregular sloping roof, and melancholy aspect, built by the Hell-fire Club, and was consecrated to their unholy Orgies by haying one of the members thrown out of a window into the river in a drunken frolic—an appropriate introduction into the river Deel, or De'il, as W— has written it. We scrambled up a tumble-down staircase, to see the room where this heroic feat was performed ; and I was struck with the unfinished, ugly look of everything belonging to that old house : it is stamped with that reckless character which characterized the Irish in the last century.

This character for recklessness, which has erroneously been, and still is attributed to the whole nation, never could have existed in the days when those beautifully-finished and graceful edifices were raised, whose remains meet our gaze at every step ; and that it does not exist now, is shewn by the well-kept and well-ordered residences of those landed proprietors who do not desert their country.

The buildings seen from the bridge—the castle, one of whose beautiful towers is 86 feet high, the old banquetting-hall, and the more modern hell-fire club-house, form a very picturesque group.

After rambling over these ruins, and sketching two views of them, we proceeded to the abbey. It is well situated on the banks of the river below the town ; the cloisters are still very perfect ; small, but beautifully finished. There are twelve, pointed arches on each side of the quadrangle, supported by short cylindrical pillars of black marble, whose high polish still remains : only two of the pillars are wanting, and these were removed in rather a strange way. A Dutch captain who happened to come up the river Deel, which runs into the Shannon, visited this ruin, and being desirous of carrying some present to his wife, seized upon two of these highly-polished pillars, and sailed off with them—rather a ponderous token of remembrance for his beloved.

The church must have been a very fine one ; the walls and windows, with their rich tracery, and many of the old monuments, still remain, adorned by luxuriant ivy and wild flowers ; but the roof is gone, and the pavement broken up by modern tombstones, and encumbered with pieces of old coffins, skulls, and bones ; for this ruin, like all others in Ireland, is a favourite burial ground.

That this interesting place is not often visited by strangers, is shewn by the fact of there being no beggars in the town, no guide, no old man or boy on the look-out for a penny. A few ragged children followed us, from mere curiosity to see what we could possibly want there ; and though evidently half-starved, and almost without clothes, not one of them begged. After making a sketch of the interior of the church, I went to draw one of the cloisters, and left my parasol, shawl, &c., on a tombstone, requesting W—, who was copying an inscription at the further end, to take care of my things. He did not hear me, but the ragged boys did. “ I’ll see to ’em, lady,” said one of the group, with a look of such evident honesty, that I felt perfectly happy to leave my goods at their mercy.

The view from a mound behind the abbey is very pretty ; the motley town and magnificent castle ; the clear sparkling river, with its ancient bridge of five arches ; boats loaded with turf and sea-weed ; women in bright and many-coloured dresses, beetling linen on the banks ; heaps of turf, piled up for sale on the quay ; and some picturesque and lazaroni-like vendors, smoking their dudeens, or sitting in social circles round a little fire, “ which,” said one of them, “ they kept burning for company-sake, and to light their pipes ;” carts, and wild-looking horses, and countrymen, who were carrying off seaweed to manure land ; others bargaining for turf with animated gestures ; all these objects, in a brilliant sunshine, against a clear blue sky, looked very vivid and very original.

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Strange predicaments of the peasantry—Excursion to Castle Connell, and the Falls of the Shannon—The Donkey with many owners—Irish abstinence.

Tuesday.—It often happens that when peasant girls come into service in a gentleman’s family, direct from the wretched hovels in which they have been brought up, in a wild part of the country, they are surprised and perplexed by all they see : the commonest things are new and astonishing to their simple gaze. As the dwellings of the Irish poor are never more than one story high, what excites their perplexity, and often their fears, more than anything else, is, of course, a staircase.

A friend told me she once took a very interesting orphan girl from a cabin, or rather farmhouse, as it was called, which had belonged to a tenant of hers. The poor girl was so terrified at the prospect of being obliged to go up the long winding flight of stairs which led to the attic where she was to sleep, that she crept up on all-fours ; and after accomplishing this feat, she remained up there a whole day before she could summon up sufficient courage to encounter the still greater apparent danger of coming down. She at last accomplished the dreaded descent by turning her face from the dizzy height, and creeping down backwards.

I heard to-day an anecdote, which shows how apt we are to be afraid of what is new. A young carpenter came here for employment, from Kilkee, a delightful sea-bathing place on the western coast, abounding in ocean scenery, but where there are no trees—literally none. The highest-growing plants usually seen by the inhabitants of that place were the “ praties.”

The astonishment of the poor fellow at the first sight of a tree cannot be described. He looked timidly at the roots ; then, with an expression of the greatest alarm and wonder, slowly raised his eye up the stem, and when it arrived at the upper branches, his terror lest the stupendous mass should fall upon him was extreme. He could never be persuaded to go home at night along a road which unluckily was bordered by a row of his gigantic enemies, without having some one to accompany him; and even then used often to exclaim in dismay, before encountering the walk, “ How do I know now but some of them big, tall craythurs will be down upon me before I know what I’m about.”

It was winter when he first went to the country, and all the larger trees were of course leafless. When summer came, and he saw these fearful giants become more and more massive every day, and all those large formidable leaves flapping about in the wind, the poor fellow’s astonishment knew no bounds.

His attachment to the family at Vermont, who gave him work, soon reconciled him, however, to the strange novelty of his abode. It is delightful to hear the enthusiastic, and often poetical way in which he speaks to me of his friends here. A few days ago the young ladies passed by, basket in hand, on one of their usual errands to the cottages of the poor. It was a sultry morning, and the summer flies were gathering around their bonnets. He looked at them for a moment without speaking and then burst out into the most earnest exclamations :— “ The blessed Virgin Mary reward them ! God and the saints open the gates of heaven before their face !”

“ See now, lady, look at them flies—’t isn’t flies at all they are, though they look like ’em,” he added, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper ; “ them are the holy angels that’s flitting round their darling heads in that shape—to guard and guide their steps wherever they’ll go.”

Vermont, Friday.—We have passed the last few days at Doonass, a beautiful place near the rapids of the Shannon. The sound of those rushing, falling waters, was most soothing and melodious, as heard from the house, which is situated at some distance, in a beautiful park, sloping down to the river.

I walked several times on its banks to enjoy the splendid sight, and to watch some people who were fishing for salmon. It made me quite nervous to see the boats shoot some of the falls, knowing that unless they had kept exactly the right course, they would have been inevitably dashed to pieces.

Close to the river, the sound of the rushing waters is awfully loud ; but there is something very harmonious and exciting in the effect it produces on the mind—an effect something similar to that caused by the sound of Handel’s hallelujah chorus, when performed by a full orchestra, in a cathedral. It seems like the voice of the giant river, uplifted in praise to the great Creator.

We returned from Doonass to Vermont, by Castle Connell and Mount Shannon. The scenery all along that part of the Shannon is very beautiful. The Keeper, and other bold mountains, form picturesque backgrounds to near views, which are beyond description lovely. Castle Connell is a nice little spa-drinking town on the river, in the midst of its prettiest scenery. We went to taste the chalybeate spring, which, whatever may be the quality of the water, cannot, I should think, fail of performing a cure on the invalid who is sent into

that fascinating little abode. The inducements to take plenty of air and exercise in that fine scenery, must be of infinite use to the sufferer.

The ruins of a fine old castle, formerly belonging to the De Burgs, are situated on a steep rock above the town. There is a tradition which is firmly believed by the surrounding peasantry, that this ruin will fall upon the wisest person in the world, if he should pass under its walls. The late Mr. ——, a gentleman of much consideration in the neighbourhood, fancied himself entitled to the honour of being crushed to death by the ruins. He never could be prevailed on to approach them ; and when obliged to ride along the high road to Limerick, which runs near, he always passed the dangerous spot at full gallop.

We visited Lord Clare's residence, the grounds of which are beautifully kept, and the house very comfortable ; but it looks too like an English place to have much attraction for me, who so greatly admire the distant views and mountain prospects which Irish domains usually afford. There is scarcely a mountain visible from the house, but I discovered my dear Carrig O'Gunnell castle, from one of the windows.

A gentleman who dined here to-day, told us of a trick his workmen played him this morning, which illustrates the superstition of the Irish.

He is repairing his house, and sent a donkey and cart to fetch something in haste, which the builders stood in immediate need of. The time when it should have returned had elapsed, and Mr. L——, vexed at its non-arrival, walked out on the road to see whether he could discover any appearance of the returning vehicle. At the foot of the hill was a smith's forge, round the door of which was assembled a crowd of persons. In the midst of these he descried his donkey standing stock-still, surrounded by a set of women, who were passing a miserable-looking half-naked child round and round over its back, and, under its body, while the empty cart was lying on the road side.

“ What's all this foolery about ?” exclaimed Mr. L——, making his way through the crowd, and, not very well pleased to find that his errand had been stopped in the very outset

“ Oh ! we're just done, yer honour—just this very minute—the donkey'll be released now in less than no time.”

“ But ——,” began Mr. L——, in no very complacent tone of remonstrance.

“ Sure we're axing yer honour's pardon,” said one of the women ; “ 'tis fits the weenoch has got, and we're curing him—passing him nine times nine under the donkey, yer honour.”

“ Don't you thinks,” said Mr. L——, eyeing the starved and shivering infant, “ if you were to get your child better clothed, with proper food and medicine, it would do him more good than all this nonsense ?”

“ Food, yer honour ?—Och thin, if this don't cure him, troth an' there's nothing else will.”

This story gave rise to another, in which one of the long-eared tribe was also the principal actor.

Mr. L—— was once walking across the common at Buxton, when he saw two tall raw-boned Irishmen approaching, one of whom led by a rope bridle, a small shaggy donkey. They

had reached the middle of the common, when an old woman darted out of a house close by, and commenced a violent attack upon the men, abusing them as thieves and robbers, and demanding why it was they presumed to carry off her donkey. The Irishmen quietly answered that the animal was theirs, and that they had bought it that morning. A fresh torrent of abuse was the old woman's reply ; and by this time a crowd had collected, who all took part against the men, and endeavoured to terrify them by threats. They, however, remained unmoved, taking care to keep together, and above all not to let go their hold of the donkey, which they firmly contended was theirs.

Meantime, the clamour increased ; the old woman and her friends endeavouring to seize the donkey. A huge bully of a fellow, counting on the superiority of his formidable bulk, over the lean, spare-looking Irishmen, stepped out from the crowd, and swaggering up to the pair, ordered them with fierce and threatening gestures to deliver up instantly their prize. The Paddies said nothing to this braggadocio, but one of them coolly raised his hand to the assailant's throat, and gave him a quiet gripe which made him slink away home as sick as death.

The old woman called upon the blacksmith to prove that the property was hers, for he had shod her donkey that very week. He came forward, examined the hoofs, and declared that those shoes were none of his, and that, moreover, he never remembered to have seen the animal before. But the pertinacious dame was not to be silenced even by this ; she declared that the donkey was hers, that the Irishmen had stolen it, and that justice she would have.

“ Well,” said the man, “ listen here, ma'am ; we'll lave it to the word of God. Isn't it said that the ass knoweth his owner, and the ox his master's crib. Do ye all stand out of the way, and we'll lave the craythur to herself. If she takes the road to your house, ma'am, why let her be yours in the name o' God ; and if she goes any other way, why we'll take our baste and away with us on our journey.”

This proposal was agreed to by all parties ; the crowd moved away a little space, and the Irishman left their “ baste” standing, doubtless much to her surprise, by herself on the common. After a moment or two she pricked up her ears, looked about her, and then marched off, taking, to the infinite vexation of the old woman, the road diametrically opposite to that which led to her cottage.

The Irishmen re-took possession of their property, and in a few minutes all the people had dispersed to their respective homes ; and as the donkey and her owners passed by that of the old shrew, she appeared at the door, and vented her rage and disappointment in a volley of epithets.

The Irishmen stopped short. “ Now I'll just tell you what it is, ma'am,” said one of them— “ you've stopped us on our road this mornings and you've given us throuble and vexation enough to rise the spirit out of any man. I'll tell you what—I've two pounds in my pocket here, and be my sowl, I'll *wear 'em* on you, aye, I will to the last penny, until I get my revenge.”

Mr. L—— said he never heard anything to equal the force and energy, both of this expression, and the bitter and heart-felt way in which it was uttered. He has never forgotten the earnest “ I'll wear them on you,” of the incensed Irishman since.

I have often observed the very un-English regard to their meals which prevails among all classes in Ireland. Mr. L—— tells me that in the lower ranks, where one might naturally expect to find more inclination to mere animal enjoyments, this anti-Dalgetty indifference to the “provant,” is still more striking.

His workmen and masons, who receive three and six-pence a day, and who might therefore indulge in that grand desideratum to an Englishman—“a good dinner,” live in the most frugal manner. They hardly ever taste meat,—a bit of bread, or some potatoes and milk, satisfy their wants ; and occasionally, they add to this un-luxurious fare, a little dried fish.

“Sure ’tishn’t in *ateing* we’d be spending our money, yer honour,” was the reply, with a contemptuous emphasis on the word “*ateing*,” when he asked them why they did not feed themselves better.

Perhaps it was something of the same disregard to the efficacy of nourishment that influenced a poor family of whom he told us this evening ;—mingled with the deep-rooted regard to the rites of the dead, which is such a prominent characteristic in the Irish peasantry.

A poor child was very ill—dying, to all appearance. The doctor ordered nourishment as the only means of saving its life.

“You must get some meat immediately,” he said, “and make broth for the child.”

“Ah where would the likes of us get mate ?” mumbled the mother, when the doctor was gone. “Sure the beef would cost fourpence, and where would we get fourpence, I’d like to know.”

The child died—and the same evening the father went to the gentleman in whose employment he was, to get *thirty shillings* in advance to wake the corpse.

Thus they who could not command fourpence to save their child when living, contrived to procure thirty shillings to “wake” him, when , dead.

Vermont, Thursday.—“Do come to the window !” exclaimed M—. this morning ; “here is the poet.”

She had told me all about him before, as it seems he is a constant visiter and prime pet here. No wonder, for I have seldom met with a more entertaining and original character, than this thoroughly Irish and romantic old man. He is truly a “born poet.” All his expressions are poetical—he talks of common events in an Ossian-like style, and occasionally bursts out into rhyme. He leads a wild rambling life, “Here to-day, gone to-morrow, like the bird that cuts the air with its restless wings”—as he said himself; and his reading seems to have been as desultory as his movements, to judge from the scraps and quotations with which his conversation abounds. He asked me my christian name ; and after rubbing his forehead, and taking a turn on the gravelled space before the door, returned to the window, and throwing himself into an attitude, burst out into a long poem composed in my praise. This impromptu effusion was full of extravagant hyperbole, and had several oriental and really most beautiful similes and images.

When I went out to take my afternoon stroll round the garden, I was delighted to spy my old friend, sitting on a bench regaling himself with bread and cider. He rose the moment he saw me, and came up with a courtier-like air, uttering expressions like those we meet with in the Arabian night's entertainments. As I saw he was disposed to follow my steps, which he did at a respectful distance, keeping his hat in his hand, while his grey hair floated in the breeze, I gladly got into conversation with him.

The old poet was most enthusiastic about the ancient glories of Ireland, and well versed in those old bardic histories which are now said to have more romance than truth in them.

Rambles in the south of Ireland during the year 1838 (1839)

Author : Chatterton, Georgiana, Lady, 1806-1876

Volume : 2

Publisher : London, Saunders and Otley

Year : 1839

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : New York Public Library

Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive

<https://archive.org/details/ramblesinsouthi00chatgoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org

December 13 2013