

Achill, Erris & The Milesians - Walk 1817

Walks Through Ireland

1812, 1814, and 1817.

Third Walk,

Through Munster And Connaught, in 1817

Newport, Sept, 22, 1817.

The environs of Newport are very handsome. The view from Melcomb-hill of Clew-bay, and its archipelago of islands, transcends any thing we have seen. There are near four hundred islands in this bay,—some of considerable size,—some cultivated,—and others quite verdant. As the sun illumined this enchanting scene to-day, I thought it quite divine. The sea was calm, and the golden rays of the noble orb of day glowed on its bosom.

Within a mile and a half of Newport is a fine lake and salmon-leap, surrounded by wild scenery, and only wanting trees to make it equal to Wales, or Italy. On returning from it may be seen a ruined abbey, situated near its extremity, with very picturesque effect. The Rev. Mr. Mahon, the rector, has a charming cottage, and tasteful gardens, enriched with choice flowers and shrubs, on the river-side, at a short distance from this town, and has proved how much the hand of taste can, in a little time, do in this highly-gifted country. This gentleman has shewed us great politeness and hospitality. The worthy agent of Sir Neal O'Donnel, Captain Taylor, has also very much facilitated all our wishes by unremitting kindness, and in all his conversation displayed an enlightened and acute mind.

Since our arrival here, we have visited Lough Con, distant ten or twelve miles from this. Our walk was romantic and wild. We pursued our way through a long tract of mountain-country, encompassed by sublime scenes.

From Lough Corrib the whole country, reaching to these parts, appears diversified with numerous lakes. If trees adorned this country, it would not yield to Switzerland in wild beauty. As our walk extended, we found ourselves at the foot of Nipheen mountain, which overlooks all the neighbourhood with majestic air. On passing it, we obtained a charming view of the barony of Tyrawley, rich in corn and varied agriculture, but nearly ruined, we hear, by the system adopted to prevent illicit distillation ; a system hostile to agriculture, to revenue, and the peace of the country. It is melancholy to say, that scarcely any spot of this country is exempt from pestilence, and, I fear, has little medical aid.

We reached Lough Con in the middle of the day ; and, at Prospect, the seat of Colonel Jackson, were received by Captain Jackson, his younger brother, with great politeness. He had just recovered from fever, caught by humanely enquiring into the wretchedness of the people around.

Lough Con is a noble piece of water, adorned by many fine places on its banks. Colonel Jackson's has a great deal of beauty, and is joined by Mr. O'Donnel's. Both have delightful views of the lake ; and Nipheen, rising behind, gives grandeur and effect to the picture.

Near Lough Con, the French landed in 1798, at Killala, and marched to Ballina, but returned again. On their way to Castlebar, they passed this lake on their ill-timed and inconsiderate expedition.

On our return to Newport, the evening closed fast upon us in the mountain-wilds. Our way led through a long vale at the foot of Nipheen. The mountain-streams gurgled beside us, and the setting sun poured his lingering and declining glories on the head of Nipheen. His shadow darkened the vallies and the road. How pleasing, yet mournful, was the scene ! Neither foreign nor domestic warfare disturbed it. The sound of water, or the occasional croak of the distant raven, was only heard. Soon, the last rays of the sun disappeared, and the gloom of the mountain-vales suddenly thickened round us. Far from any habitation, or from mortal ken, we committed ourselves to Providence, and lost not a thought on fear. But on emerging from the low grounds of the vales, another scene awaited us. The moon, breaking from the darkened side of Nipheen, spread her silver light on every thing. The cascades of the passing streams glistened in her beams. The late gloomy shades vanished, and the sweet night-scene harmonized the soul ! Thus pleasingly surprized, and accompanied by the fair queen of midnight-hours, we rapidly pursued our way to, and shortly arrived at Newport.

You see, my dear L., the pedestrian has not much to apprehend in this country, but I do not recommend such experiments to be too often made. For ourselves, we must bear testimony to the honesty and innocence of the people at large, among whom we have at all hours walked ; but there are *mauvais sujets*, no doubts in some parts, whom it would be rather unpleasing to meet. Yet, I think, the whole body of the country equally untainted by disaffection, or dishonesty. Near, and in great cities, I cannot say so much ; as there the Irish character appears to less advantage in the lower walk. Surely, these people have great and singular merit, at this moment, when famine and fever drive them to despair ;—surely, they have no common merit,—when genteel persons may wander among them, without arms, and, confiding in them, pass unmolested !

As we have had several days repose at Newport, and the hospitality of Sir Neal and Lady Catharine O'Donnel has made us enjoy ourselves very much, we shall commence our final excursion to Erris, with fresh vigour, very soon.

Believe me, yours, &c. &c.

LETTER XX.

Newport, Oct. 9, 1817.

MY DEAR L.

Newport had been unexpectedly enlivened by the arrival of a number of American ladies and gentlemen, who were very nearly lost on their way to Liverpool, from the United States, on the dangerous coasts of Mayo ; and the society of our Newport friends increased by the addition of some well-educated and pleasing people, when the captain of the American vessel was good enough to take us, in a boat he employed, to his vessel, which exactly lay in our way to Erris.

We started the first of this month, and I proceed to relate to you an excursion which amply repaid all the toil and hardship it occasioned. Take the trouble to examine your map of Ireland, and to discover on the coast of Mayo the island of Achill, the promontory Coraan, Black Soda-bay, and the Mullet. There we directed our course. The day was tolerably favourable, and our boat scudded through the varied scenes of Clew-bay rapidly. The numerous islands, and the sublime mountains of the vicinity, rendered the voyage delightful ; and our

worthy captain steering our small bark, we had a good pilot and pleasing companion united in one.

Our boat-men chiefly spoke Irish, and the beauty and grandeur of these novel and remote pictures, every moment shifting, and succeeded by fresh ones, very forcibly recalled the mind to ancient days.

You may smile on my theory, of a golden age in Ireland, but there is no impossibility in the case ; and it is a glad relief to the mind to fly to it, and repose there, from the dreadful series of oppressions and calamities this amiable people have been compelled to endure from bad institutions, and the long-continued misrule of numerous despots !

Early history makes mention of a Milesian king, resisted by the aborigines of the country, who made what was called a plebeian war against the military aristocracy fastening upon them. This chieftain, or king, resorted to the Scottish Picts, and brought their forces to aid him in the subjugating to Milesian tyranny the peaceful inhabitants, who wished to have their own independence, and moderate government of a patriarchal king. Tyranny prevailed, and Milesian kings established themselves. We were going to visit a relic of the ancient race, if it any where existed.

I must leave you, my dear L., to decide as you please on the subject, and shall hasten to introduce you to the interesting spots we have explored. As we reached Achill-sound, at the extremity of which lay the American vessel, lately so much endangered, the wind and tide proved contrary, and we were obliged to land at Achill-bay. This was just as we could have wished. Achill-bay, or the small Achill, is an island, inhabited by ten or twelve families, who cultivate a little oats and barley, some flax, and potatoes ; have some sheep and cows, and follow fishing when weather permits. They all speak Irish.

When we entered the little bay, whose silvery sand appeared plainly through the deep and transparent wave, and got on shore among these good and simple people, several of whom spoke English very well, we seemed to realize the page of Homer, or the not less interesting days of antient Ireland, before her Milesian conquerors came ! The shape of this island is truly picturesque, being composed of two small mountains. This little society lived contented, far from the world, undisturbed by its noise or folly, and unallured by its wealth. They, however, had felt the distress of the times ; their produce brought little ; and their rent, which they paid in one sum, in common, was become too high. They had no priest to perform the offices of religion, which was a grievous inconvenience, and their going to a place of worship was rendered almost impracticable, Their island supplied some turf, but not a tree grew upon it. In summer they found it pleasant, but in winter most dreary. The Atlantic washes it on all sides, and its impetuous waves, during a storm, must make an awful uproar round it. The people were cheerful, obliging, and hospitable. We were received in a respectable cottage, as friends just arrived from a distant expedition. A snowy table-cloth was laid in their best room, and excellent potatoes, milk, eggs, and butter, very soon set before us. All this was done by the mistress of the house and her daughters, without affectation or awkwardness. The good man and his sons, well-dressed young men, who followed fishing, conversed with us in a very intelligent manner. This family refused any payment what-ever for our dinner, and only regretted that the short time we had to stay prevented our having a better repast.

An old man, between sixty and seventy, accompanied me to the summit of one of the mountains, with as much activity as a young lad. The view from thence was charming—of Achill, the mountainous main land, and sea. My companion spoke with great good sense, and lamented the severity of the times, but without acrimony. I could long have remained to enjoy the prospect, but time pressed. We descended to the cottage where we had dined, passing a few reapers in one of the small fields of barley this island boasts.

There was an originality about these people I had not anywhere seen. Their minds, calm and contented, were sullied by none of the odious passions of envy, revenge, avarice, or inordinate lust of power, which fill the breasts of so great a portion of mankind. They wanted nothings and had no tormenting desires for riches they could not use, and splendour they could not enjoy. The men had sufficient occupation between agriculture and fishing, mending nets, and occasionally going to Newport or Westport. The women had their, household cares, spinning, and mending or making clothes, to attend to. Some of our friendly host's family came with us to our boat, and bade us farewell affectionately. We embarked, much gratified with their kindness, having experienced how faithfully they adhered to the spirit of the ancient Irish law, which says,—“ The most holy men of Heaven were respectable for their hospitality ; and the gospel commands us to receive the sojourner, to entertain him, and to relieve his wants.” But I was sorry these islanders had not more comforts, better gardens, out-houses, cattle, and more fowl. They were, however, happily exempt from fever,—a great blessing at this moment, and free from any of the miseries attending extreme poverty.

We now proceeded up Achill-sound ; but the wind was adverse, and we were compelled to land on the larger island of Achill. The American ship lay at its farthest extremity, and we had a walk of five miles, in a dark evening, before we could expect to procure a boat and passage to the ship.

Achill is a large island, of singular situation. It is nearly the most western and remote spot of Ireland ; contains about five thousand inhabitants, and is the sole property of Sir Neal O'Donnel. They manufacture a great deal of woollen stockings, and some linen, and cultivate with great care all the arable parts of this very extraordinary and chiefly mountainous island. Our walk lay along the eastern side, through boggy and wet ground. Fortunately, an inhabitant of the island had taken his passage from Newport in our boat, and became our guide. The way was difficult, and most fatiguing ; and night overtook us as we passed some good cottages. We met with great civility from these worthy islanders, whose habitations were comfortable, and farms tolerable. The language is universally Irish, but the majority speak English very well.

We had proceeded several miles, when it became extremely dark, and we in vain looked for a boat. We enquired at different cottages, and were everywhere received at their fire-sides with cheerfulness and hospitality, and their milk and potatoes bestowed with a very good grace. I perceived in the countenances of many of the young women a Grecian or foreign style of beauty, quite different from the English, or the physiognomy of Munster or Leinster. They seemed modest and sensible ; certainly, in the expression of countenance, manner, and gesture, quite different from those of Munster. The black eyes and hair, so common there, are not at all in Achill. We saw great quantities of stockings in sacks, in some of their houses, and flax. They seemed to have abundance of firing, and to be cheerful and contented, but complained of high rents.

After a long and painful night-walk among these friendly and honest islanders, we at length heard of a boat, which Captain Hillman engaged. We had a quarter of a mile to walk, and the men of the cottage, to whose friends the boat belonged, contrived torches, by placing burning turf on poles, which the wind kept quite flaming and bright. We thus got in safety to the water-edge ; and a boat, with four active young men, rowed us in about an hour to the American ship. These islanders were very cheerful, and encouraged each other in Irish, as they rapidly urged the boat along ; nor was the song omitted. This ancient national music sounded finely in the calm air, as we passed through the dark and picturesque night-scene. Innumerable stars sparkled in the sea.

“ Qui, se spiega la notte, il fosco velo,
Nel mare emulo al cielo,—

Piu lucide, piu belle
Multiplicar le stelle!”

We arrived at one o'clock in the mornings as the stars brightened our way, and the moon, struggling with surrounding clouds, frequently peeped forth. The American vessel was a noble one, of several hundred tons, and had sustained little damage ; and from her captain we experienced the most pleasing attention on board.

The following morning displayed to us romantic and noble scenery on all sides. The mountains of Ballycroy, Koraan, Achill, and of distant parts of Mayo, formed a truly sublime and varied picture, as our vessel lay in the calm water, and the morning-sun played over the now quiet waves ! The boats of Achill (the main land) crossed the bay, or approached the ship with provisions. We found an opportunity, after breakfast, of exploring part of Achill.

Mr. Conway, an agent of Sir H. O'Donnel's, coming to our vessel to visit the captain, lent us his boat, and we immediately sailed for the island. Its picturesque shores and lofty mountains rendered our short voyage very pleasing ! We landed on a gentle declivity, and soon discovered that the most specious appearances often conceal a false and disgusting interior. Our walk to the mountains of Achill lay across a boggy and soft plain, which sunk every step as we advanced. But we had been promised a fine view and great gratification! if we ascended the mountains, and scaled Menahan Point Head. As we reached the rising grounds, many comfortable cottages presented themselves, and in one of them, with very humble accommodations indeed, resided the priest of Achill. He was a young man of modest and pleasing address, and gave us all the refreshment in his power to offer—some very good milk ! His conversation was correct and liberal ; and his small library, containing, among others, some historical French works, seemed the chief society he could have in this sequestered spot ! His emoluments cannot exceed twenty or thirty pounds per annum, if so much. Surely, my dear L., the situation of these respectable ecclesiastics deserves the attention of government ; and, as the age of persecution has passed away for ever, some plan to rescue them from so much poverty and degradation is called for.

From the Rev. Mr. Macmarm's house we began to ascend the hilly sides of Achill, and soon reached the base of a range of mountains. After above an hour's toilsome climbing up the mountain-side, we gained the summit of a ridge commanding a great view ; but we continued, without intermission, till we reached the wished point of Menahan Head. It is quite impossible to do justice to a prospect surpassing all expectation! Before us the Atlantic rolled his blue waves to the rocky shore or sandy beach of Achill. Numerous villages, small but populous, and reduced to a diminutive size from our elevation ; lakes, rivers, and cultivated patches of fertile land, and intervening small mountains, were spread immediately around us below ! On turning round, the distant scenery of the Reek and Crowpatrick, Joyce's Country and Connemara, of Nipheen and neighbouring mountains, of those of Ballycroy and Koraan, and the far-stretching lands of Erris and the Mullet running into the sea, astonished and delighted the eye, by such a profusion of sublime picturesque as we had never witnessed before ! The day was fine ; the sky and sea of a bright blue. All around was profound silence. The presence of the Deity was every where ! His awful hand had fashioned all. Clew, Black Roda, and Broad Haven Bays, Clare, Ennistore, Ennishea Islands, were seen by us, and Achill-bay, that hospitable little spot, so recently visited. On the summit of Menahan a small heap of stones lay, to which Mr. Bald, engineer and surveyor, a gentleman of unquestionable genius, resident in Mayo, had added varieties of the greenest moss ; and that plant vulgarly called “ London pride,” formed a couch of great beauty around it. Here reposing, what a scene for contemplation ! How truly contemptible appeared the bustle and the pomp of a distant and anxious world below ! What toil ! What passions raised for momentary and evanescent triumph ! *There* all the stir of commerce, the noise of cities, or the clash of arms, the pale and anxious statesman, the noble vainly elevated by a name, the courtier accustomed to

smile, and bow, and flatter, the patriot languishing for power and followed by crowds of expectants, princes moving in splendour and bristled with etiquette, professions of several kinds preying on the community, and profiting by their wants, or their weakness ; *here* the quiet occupations of agriculture, the early labourer stealing to his work, the fragrant breath of blooming nature, and the morning-hymn of a thousand birds !—yet anxious passions tear the rustic ; envy, avarice, and suspicion, often corrode his soul ; the noble, for a coloured ribbon, or another sounding name ; the rustic, for some petty emolument, or his share of power, feels the same ! The love of money has pervaded all ! To accumulate with anxious rapacity, and spend in selfishness, is the principle of too many. To do what is good or great is lost in the desire to get money. Such is that world below ! Happy if one could remain far removed from it ; but the command of the Creator impels the mind to take a part, and contribute what man can to public and domestic happiness ! This sublime theatre, composed of so many grand scenes, and formed and coloured by a mighty artist, long detained us in silent admiration. How majestic those mountains ! How placid the blue Atlantic ! How interesting this island, with its agriculture, hamlets, and fisheries beneath the eye ! We descended at length very rapidly, an inhabitant of the island having accompanied us. As the mountains were tolerably dry, and a soft verdure met the foot with elastic pressure, our descent was nothing impeded, and required a good deal of activity. Our guide ran with ease, and we were not backward in keeping up with him. The fine prospect lessened ; we approached nearer to the lower grounds, and soon reached and mingled with the cottagers of Achill, leaving our lofty speculations behind, and glad to repose on level ground ! Achill forms a small republic in itself ; and the peaceable manners of these simple and good people render them happy under their own customs. They have small and bad roads ; and several hamlets, chiefly on the sea-shore, whose houses, built with round stones and without gables, have a very singular appearance. They are free from the parties or factions of other parts, and rarely see strangers among them. They have neither physician nor lawyer, yet are healthy, and submissive to the laws. They are exceedingly hospitable ; marry young, and hate comfortable dwellings. As mountaineers they are naturally very active, and have an independent manner, very agreeable to meet. They have few diseases ; but have not escaped fever, which is beginning to make ravage among them. They fish in summer, but very little in winter, as the sea is very tempestuous at that season. The want of a market-town is severely felt by them. None is nearer than Newport, a distance of three or four-and-twenty Irish miles. Petty traders accordingly buy up their stockings, linen-webs, butter, and other commodities, at a low rate, and sell them again at a high price.

Neither dispensary nor hospital are within thirty miles of these islanders ! They have abundance of sea-manure, and would bring cultivation to the greatest perfection ; but a bad system, common to much of Connaught, reigns here. The fertile grounds are let in a sort of tenancy in common. The hamlet divides a portion of land among its inhabitants, and all are bound in one lease to pay a certain rent. If one family is less industrious, and cannot make out their share, the rest must supply it. The happy plan of each small farm having its garden, lands, and boundary independent of another, is not practised here. Accordingly, there is less improvement, and there exist continual causes of discord in the small community. One portion of the divided land may be better soil than another, and the latter pay the same rent ; a stranger may come in to inherit a part, having belonged to a relative, and call for a new division, which the landlord may grant, and the whole hamlet be thrown into confusion by a fresh partition. The inhabitants of it are too much in the power of a landlord, and are pledged for one another in a way quite destructive to rural independence. The landlord does not get as much rent thus, as he would from small independent farms ; and has more trouble than they would occasion. The custom, however, is very ancient, and in no manner to be ascribed to modern landlords, or their agents. It is, perhaps, coeval with primitive times, and may have suited pastoral or agricultural life of more simplicity than the present, and a state of property less rigidly defined or valued than now ! Small societies, for the benefit of mutual protection and aid, may have lived in this way very well. No love of money then reigned. The thing it-

self was unknown in Ireland at a remote period, as her old laws shew. This vestige of patriarchal life marks, in very distant days, simplicity and purity of manners, freedom from avarice, and exemption from all petty despotism, rural liberty, and general tranquillity ! I think it proves great antiquity in the people here, but the custom were now—“ more honoured in the breach than the observance,” and if quite obliterated by all landlords, calling in these leases of hamlets, and granting separate ones to each tenant, great improvement and much happiness would follow. The gentlemen are very well disposed to aid the people, and, perhaps, have rather acquiesced under than sanctioned the custom.

Tithes are paid by the islanders of Achill, and as they are universally Catholic, and many have never seen a church or minister, seem here a very ungracious exaction.

The people of this island are extremely intelligent. They converse with ease on most usual subjects ; have a love for information ; are respectful, but not mean to superiors ; are tolerably educated, reverence the laws, and are quiet and loyal.

In the autumn of 1798, when the French landed, a very few young men of Achill, filled with that military ardour common to the Irish, joined the invaders, and were never more heard of. The example has had strong and efficacious consequences, in leading the whole community to reflect on the fatal miseries of foreign intrusion. Their insular state, and many inconveniences, have rendered these mountaineers inured to great exertion. An Achill-man will easily go to Castlebar in one day, and return the next. The distance to it is above thirty Irish miles. A small town, formed on the neighbouring main land ; would give them great relief, and many advantages.

It appears to me, my dear L , that grand juries and government have directed their exclusive attention to roads ; but that some money could have been very well applied to forming small market-towns, through or near which these roads might pass. Intercourse and passage are great goods in society ; but convenient marts for the people are primary wants, and easily formed !

As to roads, perhaps it were better if the care of them devolved altogether on government. I think, too, if they appointed commissioners to report to them in what mountainous, or remote districts, small market, or post towns, with a dispensary and apothecary, were much required, a vast deal of good could be done by money there applied, and now flowing in perfectly useless channels. I should hail it as an auspicious day for Ireland, when such a character as the present Irish Secretary, intelligent as he is, resolved to have the true state of Ireland inspected, and then determined, instead of money passing through the hands of great men, or stagnating in partial institutions, now out of date, (and only making many useless places) to apply it to small country roads, to country manufactures, country market-towns, dispensaries, and fisheries ! He would economise thus more in a year than his predecessors have done in ten ; and, by making the army less wanted, through this wholesome and cheap progress of comfort and civilization, save the nation much useless expence! I think things could be pointed out by a pedestrian, that he might not disdain to know, and would be beneficial for England as well as Ireland ; but the great derive their information from other sources.

On leaving Achill we took leave of our friendly young priest, whose simple refreshment of milk was again offered, and accepted.

We left him in his humble cottage with sentiments of esteem and pity. Placed in this most remote and sequestered isle, without any society suiting the education he had received, and without such a rural abode as might increase his means, and give him pleasing occupation, he was performing sacred duties to his fellow-creatures, and truly following the example of his

great Master. We bade him adieu, hoping, at some future period, to find him more comfortably situated !

We regained our vessel in time for dinner. Captain Hillman had some gentlemen of the revenue on board, and Mr. Conway. We spent a pleasant evening, and went home with the latter in his boat, much indebted to the worthy and sensible captain for all his very friendly offices. The tide caused us to set out late, and we had almost a midnight voyage to our new friend's residence ; but that kind guide brought us safely to his sweetly-situated cottage, near Castle Duna. His nephew, a young priest, accompanied him—well-educated, sensible, and pleasing. Here we found what we had heard of parts of Connaught thoroughly realized.

As there are no inns whatever, you are received at private and genteel houses, and well and agreeably entertained. They “ receive the sojourner, and relieve his wants.” In Mr. Conway's house we had excellent beds, and the very best linen. Mr. Conway gave us a hearty and unaffected welcome ; and the following morning a breakfast of the best tea, eggs, cold meats, and hot cakes ! The character of our host was very manly and independent, full of excellent sense, and offering the picture of that of the Tyrolese Hoffer to our minds.

The environs of Castle Duna are wild and very interesting. Mountains towering in all directions ; the island of Achill, and the beautiful Black Roda Bay, Achill Sound, and Ballan Bay, formed a noble landscape. In winter it must be extremely grand. Here, as at Achill, vast numbers of sea and wild-fowl resort. The wild swan is very common ; plover, curlews, ducks, &c. &c. Rabbits are abundant ; and in the neighbouring river, at the proper seasons, vast quantities of salmon are caught. The fishery belongs to Sir N. O'Donnell.

From Mr. Conway's happy and most friendly abode we proceeded to cross the river I mentioned ; and, leaving Ballycroy, entered the barony of Erris. A long direct road led us through a flat and very uninteresting country, where the cottages were very poor, and the people spoke nothing whatever but Irish. They had, however, small gardens, vegetables, and some flax ; and their farming is far from contemptible.

As we advanced we found better land, and a more smiling appearance of things. A very new species of manure struck us. It appeared thrown on ridges of land like half-whited cotton, and was a sort of sea-moss. In its first state, when cast up, it is red and very soft and mucilaginous. When spread on the earth and exposed to the sun and weather, it assumes the appearance which caught our eyes so much. It is prodigiously rich, and yields three or four crops without renewal. It has only been thrown in within these seven or eight years. They have not tried wheat with it, as that grain is very little grown in this part of the country ; but I am sure it would answer for it.

As we left the long tract of flat ground, which covered an extent of nearly seven miles, we began to enter a neck of land in Erris, called the Mullet, and had Broadhaven Bay on our right, and Black Roda on our left. The sight of very improved farming and well-cultivated land, gratified us much. Agriculture spread its delightful colouring to the edge of the arm of the sea opposite to us, and at our hand prodigious fine crops of oats were falling beneath the sickle.

Good habitations, and a well-dressed, sensible, and friendly people, appeared on all sides ; and in Connaught's most sequestered and western parts, we discovered scenes not much inferior to those of the barony of Forth ! Fine fowl, turkies, &c. good cattle, respectable out-houses, were to be seen, and the calm independence of unoppressed agriculture. Amazed and delighted, we often stopped to look round. In the extremity of the west of Ireland, in that Connaught, so long and so much misrepresented, which in England may be thought a barbarous and dangerous wild, we beheld a country well cultivated, tranquil, and civilized, and no

whit inferior to England herself. In the remote parts of that side of the island, where the English never came till modern times introduced them, we saw as much civilization, and better agriculture, than in Leinster in general, their original settlement.—Oh, statesmen ! read the page of history, and study human nature here ! The human plant need not be fiercely torn away from the soil to create civilization ! Let it be irrigated by the sweet stream of conciliation, and enriched by genial knowledge ; it grows luxuriant, and well repays the benevolent cultivator's care. All the works of agriculture flourish under its shelter, and care and good government, like the paternal and judicious gardener, easily regulate the willing stem and branches. Good and various fruit is produced. Nor is the skilful graft, to be omitted, or despised ; it improves it :—for so we have seen in the barony of Forth, and, in modern days in Connaught itself. But statesmen who madly attempt to eradicate, or contemptuously neglect the wholesome crop of a vigorous and indigenious people, will ever find that it overpowers their feeble plans, and brings their cares and their old age to a sorrowful conclusion!

In reading the history of Ireland, my dear L., what a painful conviction springs up, that by this kind of fatal error England has caused to herself centuries of anxiety and expence. What generous minds have stink in the straggle !—Shall I speak of St Leger !—of the gallant commander Sir John Norris, dying of broken hearts !—of Essex foiled and ruined here !—of Spencer, disturbed and dying in obscure wretchedness !—and of many others ?—Nay, did not your immortal Queen Elizabeth drop into her tomb, worn out, and subdued by her Irish wars, formed on this wrong principle ? Did not its consequences hasten the fall of Charles the First ?—the overthrow of your constitution ?—and retard the glorious William in the full tide of glory ?

We read in these historic pages that one Stukely, an Englishman, disappointed in his wishes by the Irish government, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, went to Spain and Italy, and obtained assistance from the Pope and King of Spain, to invade Ireland.

Going to Portugal for additional supplies, he met the spirited, romantic, and ill-fated king Sebastian, who promised him, if he lent his small force of Spaniards and Italians, for his expedition to Africa, that, on his return, he would farther powerfully aid him, and accompany Stukely to Ireland ! Stukely complied, and was lost, as well as the king, in his unfortunate enterpriae against the Moors ! Had things happened otherwise, and Sebastian, flushed with victory and glory, put his promise into execution, can any person say how far such an heroic character, precisely uniting the Irish feeling, might not have succeeded ?

Lord Edward Bruce nearly overthrew the English power in Ireland in the reign of Edward the Second ; and, but for his envious jealousy of his brother, which lost him the battle of Dundalk, might have triumphed.

A respected gentleman, now in office very near the royal person, may recollect an expression of mine, used with honest freedom some time ago, in the palace itself, “ that in time of war, a man capable of being a William Wallace, could do a great deal in Ireland.” In fact, my dear L., a great and mismanaged population is so prolific a source of disorder and danger in a state, that men of animated and heroic souls require great steadiness of mind and principle to prevent them from impelling the mighty mass, if it were only to better regulate it !

As we walked, well-pleased, through these fertile and populous scenes of agricultural life in Erris, the evening began to overtake us ; but we had been told to avail ourselves of the hospitality of the country, and we fearlessly trusted ourselves to it. We had heard of Mr. Henry Nash's house, and found ourselves near it The modest mansion sat on the side of a gently-rising hill, overlooking the sea. Taking short paths through the fields, and those advantages within the pedestrian's power, we arrived there as the gathering shadows of an October evening admonished us that some shelter was necessary. Mr. Mash, on stating our case,

received us with warm and true hospitality, introduced us to part of his family, and, after a good dinner soon set before us, we spent a cheerful evening with this amiable and respectable gentleman, who is still a young man, and of truly polite manners.

The next day, after breakfast, he furnished us with horses to go to Bingham-castle, and accompanied us part of the way, to shew us some curious remains of antiquity on the shore, not more than a mile from Carne, the name of the hill on which is Mr. Nash's house. We rode to the spot, through great sand-hills and hollows, on the Atlantic coast ; and, in a great sandy plain, were first conducted by Mr. N. to a circular spot, in late years stripped of great heaps of incumbent sand. There we saw vestiges of stone-coffins, formed by placing large flat stones at the sides, bottom, and head, in manner of a coffin, and there had been also a stone lid. When first discovered, some years ago, the skeletons of the dead were in them. They were scattered afterwards. Several skulls, and some remarkably large thigh and other bones, apparently long preserved, were lying near them. A little farther, we saw a similar spot, each about sixty feet in circumference.

We then proceeded a quarter of a mile farther in the vast plain of sand, and saw a large place, once inclosed by a wall, some of which remained, about three hundred feet in circumference. A division had been made into two parts of this spot, and one head, or grave-stone, stood in it. Skulls were scattered around. At some distance we observed another circular burying-ground, about one hundred and twenty feet in circumference, in the centre of which was a round kind of building, ten feet high, and full of sand. Round this were stone-coffins, skulls, and bones. Mr. N. said, that on the first discovery of these places, by the blowing away of the sand, the interior of the coffins had the appearance of having been scorched by fire. On digging a little in one of these coffins, a human rib was discoverable.

About a quarter or half a mile from these ancient remains, is the site of the old city of Baldurrock. All these cemeteries had been covered with sand, which shifts greatly here, and lying in that manner for a lapse of centuries, unknown, had been recently uncovered. They are near the Atlantic sea. History cannot account for these monuments, as the mode of burying seems different from any thing ever known in this island. The Egyptians were fond of burying in stone caverns, receptacles, and coffins. The antiquity of Ireland cannot be doubted, and the mind staggers under conjecture as to these coffins.

Tradition says, a king of Munster formerly invaded Connaught, fought a great battle with its king and his troops—was defeated with great slaughter,—and that these burying-grounds were then made for the dead. It seems not likely that enemies would be interred with such care and regularity, instead of being thrown into one large pit. The ancient city of Baldurrock, and these cemeteries, may have once been in the centre of extended lands ; for marks of the encroachment of the sea are evident. Ireland may have been joined to the now-distant islands, or formed part of the Atlantic continent, which gave name to the sea. Stumps of trees, and bog, are often seen on the strand here, uncovered by the violence of the waves.

These are conjectures : but that a very different state of things existed once at Baldurrock, is manifest. The mind endeavours to penetrate into the gloom and uncertainty of antiquity with pleasing and tremulous anxiety ; doubts where it is advancing, yet longs to proceed and ascertain what it hopes or fears. On the eastern shores of Ireland, similar remains of bog and stumps of trees are to be seen, so that this islands former junction with Great Britain is not at all improbable. When this has been,—if such be really the fact, no one can do more than surmise.

But this great globe, my dear L, may have undergone many greater alterations since it was first poised and impelled by the Great Creating Hand ! What myriads of the human race may have blossomed and withered since that awful moment ! seas have retired or encroached !

and continents and islands been diminished or added to ; who can pronounce ! and what is left us but silent admiration of the Almighty Author, in every thing wonderful, beneficent, and over-ruling! not, as some unhappily think, gloomy, and avenging, but clad in divine benevolence, and full of sub-lime wisdom !

As we left the cemeteries which have occasioned so much reflection, we perceived on the shore small boats, made of horse-hair, and wooden ribs, called coracles. They ride a calm or gentle sea wonderfully, and are moved by paddles. The men prefer them to the large row-boat, and very few accidents are heard of from them. The following is the description of such boats, in South Wales, by a tourist, which I transcribe for you. “ The traveller may have seen, in his excursion down the Wye, a curious kind of fishing-boat, called a truckle, or coracle (in British, *cwrwgyl*), made of strong-ribbed basket-work, lately *covered with horse-hides*, but now with tanned canvas, formed like the section of a walnut-shell, and generally four and a half or five feet long. The truckle is scarcely ever made to hold more than one person, who is obliged to keep his balance well, by sitting in the middle of it, making way with a paddle, one end of which is rested upon his shoulder, while a stroke is made alternately with the other end. These boats are only adapted for lakes, rivers, or a very smooth sea, and are so light, that the fishermen throw them over their shoulders, and carry them home. They are in common use on the river Usk, and in many other parts of Wales, and are of very early origin.”

The coracles in Connaught are larger than those thus described, and, we understood, generally manned by two men. Their antiquity must be very great ; and, if I may venture to guess, they have been long before the Milesian conquest of Ireland.

At Baldurrock, we took leave of Mr. Nash for a few hours, and set forward on horseback to Bingham-castle. We reached it in an hour, passing, at times, through heavy sands, and the level but fertile peninsula which forms one side of Blackroda-bay. At some distance, we perceived before us the very noble castle of Major Bingham. It is quite modern, and scarcely finished, but has a very grand air, and highly ornaments so flat a country as this part of Erris. It is built in the old Gothic style, and its front extends a great way. The sea washes the borders of a handsome lawn ; and the surrounding scenery of mountains, the island of Achill, and of the ocean, spreading on each side of the peninsula on which the castle stands, is quite unique and grand.

The picturesque is of the boldest kind. To those fond of the sea, and all its wild charms, I know scarcely any situation which would appear superior to that of Bingham -castle. The worthy possessor, and founder of this noble pile, received us with the most genuine politeness, and shewed us the handsome apartments, and small elegant adjoining church of the castle not yet finished. The interior of this building is adorned by many paintings ; and a covered green-house connected with it, will form when finished, a pleasing winter walk in this exposed scite. Major B. had the goodness to shew us his farms and demesne, almost the whole of which he has, in the most praiseworthy manner, reclaimed and improved. The building of this castle must have given employment to great numbers, and still continues to do so.

A great tract of this country is Major Bingham's, on which he proposes to make considerable improvements ; and thinks, I believe, of making a small market-town in some part of Erris. At present there is no post-office within from twenty to thirty miles of him or the other gentlemen of these parts.

We returned to a late dinner, much pleased with our day's excursion ; and as Mr. Nash was kind enough to invite us to stay a day or two in this new and very interesting country, we promised ourselves more information, and gratification of our curiosity, than the opportunity of a transient hour could have afforded. We were not disappointed. We had been told at

Newport, that a poet of respectable talents resided in Erris. We did not, however, know that he resided at Carne, very near Mr. Nash. This gentleman knew and respected him, and invited him to meet us at dinner on the ensuing day after our visit to Bingham-castle.

Erris, it seems, has been distinguished in this portion of Mayo, as having produced many bright scholars, in Irish as well as English, and education has been always very much cultivated in it. Mathematics, poetry, and classical learning, have thriven here a good deal ; and, in former times, it is said, even more than now. The peculiar situation of Erris, so remote from the perils, the glories, or devastation of wars, from corrupting ambition, or the rancour of factious parties, left it leisure to cultivate the Muses with success. Almost all the people speak English and Irish, and both well. This possession of two languages must in itself strengthen the understanding, and make ideas more clear and precise. The young men go out into the world to sea, the army, or traffic, and have a genteel address, very advantageous to them.

Walks through Ireland in the years 1812,1814, and 1817 : described in a series of letters to an English gentleman (1819)

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