

A-loose on the West Ocean

Spring and Autumn in Ireland

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MDCCCC

To

*The Brave and Gifted
Irish People*

I tender this volume.

*SAINT PATRICK'S DAY,
1900.*

PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS is reproduced from two papers that appeared in 'Blackwood's Magazine' in the years 1894, 1895. It has been thought that their republication, expressive as they are of the love and admiration the author has long felt for Ireland, and which now animates all hearts, may be deemed not inappropriate at the present moment.

I.

"THIS damnable country!" Such was the description given of Ireland, now many generations ago, by an English statesman to his superiors in London concerning the land he had been sent to administer; and the same phrase, or the same sentiment in different words, has been re-echoed many a time since, by politicians and non-politicians on each side of the Channel, respecting the island "lying a-loose," as Campion the historian in the reign of Elizabeth has it, "on the west ocean." This damnable country! Far be it from me to add the very smallest stone to the colossal cairn of controversy that has been raised over the Irish Question. I went to Ireland for the first time in the spring of 1894, and I returned from it with the feeling that it is anything rather than damnable. Indeed I sometimes find myself almost wishing that the intervening seasons would pass, that it might again be May, and I might anew be gathering thrift amid the landward-flying foam of Loop Head, listening to the missel-thrushes shrilling in the gardens of Tourin or the woods of Dromana, watching the smiles and tears of fair fitful Killarney, losing myself in the gorse-covered clefts of match-less Glengariff, or dazzled and almost blinded by the boundless bluebell woods of Abbey Leix. I do not willingly allow that Ireland is lovelier still than England, but it is. One has said with Æneas, perhaps too often, when Spring came round, *Italiam petimus*. Yet are not Bantry Bay and Clon-Mac-Nois as beautiful, and as hallowed by the past, even as the Gulf of Spezia and the cyclopean walls of Sora? But then I went to Ireland, not in the pursuit of angry polemics, to which I would add nothing new, but in search of natural beauty and human kindness. Nowhere have I ever met with more of either.

First impressions are a sort of premonitory experience; and, as the sun sank lower in a cloudless sky over a surgeless sea, I could not gaze on the tender sinuosities of the Wicklow Mountains, or turn to the Hill of Howth, Ireland's Eye, and the more distant Lambay Island, without a sense of rising gladness that I was at last to set foot on a land that greets one with so fair and feminine a face.

The most indulgent imagination could hardly cast a halo over the unloveliness of Dublin ; and not even the most gracious and agreeable hospitality could make regret prevail over anticipation as I turned my face westward. But the gorse, the pastures, and the streams of Kildare would have made one forget the most attractive of cities, though I was well aware I was passing through perhaps the least beautiful part of Ireland. A couple of mornings later I was driving on an outside car, balanced on the other side by a congenial companion, towards Athlone, where we were to take train for the coast of Clare. The driver assured us that he could easily traverse the distance in an hour and twenty minutes, so I gave him an hour and forty. I had quite forgotten, in the exhilaration of a new experience, that absolute accuracy is not a Celtic gift, and that time is computed long or short, according as it is thought you wish it to be the one or the other. Moreover, the Irish mile is a fine source of confusion when distances are computed. In one county a mile means a statute mile, in another it means an Irish mile ; and though you may recollect that it takes fourteen of the first to make eleven of the second, it does not at all follow that your local conductor will do so. My companion, who knew something of the road, suddenly asked me from under her umbrella—for it was raining in the most approved Irish manner—what time it was, and, on getting her answer, she rejoined we had still three miles to cover and only eighteen minutes to do it in. The wish to oblige, and native hopefulness of temperament, made the driver exclaim, “ Oh, we’ll do it !” and straight-way he imparted to his horse an alertness of which I had not thought it capable. Watch in hand, I saw us trot through the streets of Athlone at a rattling pace, and we had both made up our minds that the train was caught. But, again, that curious vagueness of mind and happy-go-lucky indiscipline of character came into play ; and, though we really were just in time, he drove past the entrance to the station, and did not discover his mistake till too late. It then turned out that he had never been to Athlone before, and had not the faintest notion where the station was. I have observed that most travellers in such circumstances fume, fret, and objurgate. We laughed consumedly, though we were well aware that Athlone is scarcely a place in which to spend several hours pleasantly, and that now, instead of arriving at Kilkee at half-past three, we could not get there till after nine. Perhaps our good-humour was due in some measure to the fact that, some three miles away, was a house where we knew we could consume the inevitable interval agreeably enough ; and we were soon making for it. But Irish hospitality does not understand the mere “ looking-in-on-us” which satisfies so many English people ; and we were bidden, indeed irresistibly commanded, to pass the night with the hosts we had thus surprised. We were amply repaid, in more ways than one, for our equanimity ; for the next day was as fine as the previous one had been morose, and so we started on our wanderings in search of striking scenery, in sunshine instead of in storm.

I am told Kilkee is “ a fashionable watering-place.” Happily watering-places and fashion mean something different on the west coast of Ireland from what they signify on the south coast of Britain, or one need scarcely have bent one’s steps towards Kilkee even in order to see Loop Head and the Cliffs of Moher. Even at the height of its season, for I suppose it has one, Kilkee must be what those who resort to Eastbourne or Bournemouth would call a very dull little place. You can get out of any part of it in two or three minutes, to find yourself on the undenized cliffs that form the westernmost barrier between this Realm and the Atlantic.

If there were any strangers in the place in the early days of May save ourselves, I did not observe them. We were the sole occupants of a large, old-fashioned, and quite comfortable enough inn, which the local taste for high-sounding words would probably wish one to call a hotel. It takes its name from Moore’s Bay on which it stands. You observe by various little indications that the standard of comfort, convenience, and refinement is lower by a few inches than in England ; but why should it not be ? I pity the people who travel through the world with their own weights and measures, their own hard-and-fast rule of how things should look and how they should be done. If you have to sit with the door open because, should you not do so, the smoke and dust of the turf fire would be blown all over the house,

is that such a hardship to folks who have got nothing to do but to be pleasant and enjoy themselves ? If the green Atlantic water, the blackly towering cliffs, the vast expanse of rising and rolling emerald down, the soft insinuating air, and the sense of freedom and “awayness,” do not compensate you for the lack of hot water in your sleeping chamber and for a certain friendly irregularity in the service, go not to Clare or Galway, but follow your own trite footsteps to Brighton, Nice, or Cannes. We for our part thought Kilkee, its lean chickens, its imperfect soda-bread, and its lack of vegetables save the national potato, absolutely delightful. How the winds must blow and bellow sometimes, and the waves rear and plunge and toss their iron-grey manes along and over that crenelated coast ! The word “over” is no figure of speech, for there are times when the foam is flung, by waves indignant at the first check they have met with for two thousand miles, high over the foreheads of the loftiest crags and far inland on to the stunted grass of the grey-green downs. There is a peculiar pleasure in watching how gentle the strong can be, how strong the gentle ; and when we got to Kilkee there seemed at first almost a caressing touch in the dimpling green water, as though it had the soothing stroke of a soft and velvety hand. But as we pushed on to the bolder bluffs and towards the open sea, even on that comparatively windless May sundown, the waves, when challenged or interfered with, waxed black and angry, swirled round and round in great sinuous troughs and coils, and then rushed and raced with imperative fury through the jagged channels made for them by the millions of domineering breakers that had for centuries preceded them, and forced a way somehow, somewhere, through the granite barriers. We stood hushed by the splendour and sonorous terror of it, and, like Xenophon’s Ten Thousand, I cried out at length, “θάλασσα ! θάλασσα !” as though I had never seen the Sea before. Neither Yorkshire nor Devonshire cliffs can show anything comparable in stern beauty and magnificence with the west coast of Ireland. Their billows are baby billows, mere cradles rather, swaying and swinging for a child’s or a lover’s lullaby, when paragoned with these monsters of the real deep, these booming behemoths, never fixed nor crystallised, and therefore never extinct,—charging squadrons of ocean-horses, coming on ten thousand strong, glittering and gleaming in all the panoply of serried onset, and then broken and lost in the foam and spume of their own champing and churning. Turn the headland, which mayhap now fronts leeward, and all those war-like waves seem like dolphins at peace and play. Their very backs subside, and you see nothing but indescribably green water, green of a green you have never seen before, pearly, pellucid,—the mirror, not of eternity, but of whatever tender mood of the moment. Look round ! look wide I look far ! your eye will meet nothing but the lonely and uncompromising gaze of Nature. This it is that gives one the sense of “awayness” of which I spoke. Is it not the duke in “Measure for Measure” who says—

“For I have ever loved the life removed.” ?

Here indeed he might have got it, far more effectually than in any cloister that was ever reared. England nowhere now gives one quite this sensation. Should you get beyond the smoke of the locomotive, you will with difficulty evade the shadow of the tourist. But even by this all-penetrating person some of the most beautiful parts of Ireland are forgotten and spared.

A road that for the most part follows the wavering coastline was made from Kilkee to Loop Head in the dark days of the still remembered Famine, and the driver of our car told me he had helped to make it. He was communicative enough in answer to questions put to him ; but in his case, as in many another later on, I observed little of that loquacious gaiety, and still less of the spontaneous humour, which we are educated to expect from Irish companionship. Of course, my experience was limited and imperfect ; but I found myself once remarking, no doubt with a touch of extravagance, that it must be a very dull English-man who finds Irish people particularly lively. Doubtless they are more amiable in the social sense ; but I cannot put aside the impression that sadness is the deepest note in the Irish character. They remind one of what Madame de Stael said of herself, “*Je suis triste, mais gai*” Under pro-

vocation or stimulus they become both loquacious and merry ; nor need the provocation be very forcible. But they readily fall back again into the minor key, and much of their wit springs from their sensibility to the tearfulness of things. “ You can talk them into anything,” said one of themselves to me ; and I think it is still more true that they can talk themselves into anything, for the moment at least. They are sad, but not serious. Indeed their want of what an Englishman means by seriousness is very noticeable ; and they shift “ from grave to gay, from lively to severe,” with astonishing mobility. It is the profound sadness of their character which makes them so sociable, since in companionship, and most of all in voluble talk, they for a time escape from it. A person of high seriousness requires no one to help him to be gravely cheerful, and his spirits are never depressed by solitude. It is in society, rather than in solitude, that he is conscious of being, or at least of seeming, morose. The gaiety of a sad person is always demonstrative, exuberant, almost noisy; for he wants others to see how tremendously happy he has suddenly become. Once removed from “ wine and women, mirth and laughter,” he relapses into the passive gloom natural to one who is conscious of a mystery which is too congenial to him for him to want to solve it. The Irishman sees into his native mist, but not through it. He is best understood when you watch him abiding within the influence of brown, barren bog, of unapproachable peaks, and of the wail of homeless waves. Though otherwise but little akin to the island of the lotos-eaters, Ireland is withal a land where it seems always afternoon. In their normal movements the Irish are much quieter than the English. I am speaking, of course, of peasants, not of politicians, nor yet of folk huddled so closely together in streets that they irritate each other all day long. The very children in Ireland do not shout as English children do. Both young and old stand, or sit, or gaze, well content to do so : the being alive,—I might almost say, the waiting for life to come to an end,—seeming to be occupation enough for them. Ebullitions and explosions of gaiety, of course, they have ; and these are so volcanic that they perforce attract much attention. But I think people fail to observe that, like to volcanoes generally, their normal condition is one of quietude. They have irregular impulses, but they have no settled purpose. How can they have, in a world they do not profess nor care to understand ?

“ Their soul proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk or Milky Way.”

They know their own cabin, their own patch of “ lazy” potatoes, their own boat and fishing-nets, their eternal dependence on the forces of Nature, their eternal feud with people who they think do nothing for them, yet claim a share in the fruit of their labours, the imperfectly understood theories of a pastor who, perhaps, is himself imperfectly instructed in the dogmas he affirms, and that there is something called Ireland whose lot they believe is, and has immemorially been, as hard as their own. Truth to tell, in ordinary moments, and when some one does not come and “ talk them into” indignation, they bear its supposed wrongs very patiently, just as they patiently bear their own. When not stimulated by professional agitators they ask little, they expect little, from life. They are not *indociles pauperiem pati*. Indeed poverty seems natural, and even congenial, to them. Life is not to them, as to Englishmen or Scotsmen, a business to conduct, to extend, to render profitable. It is a dream, a little bit of passing consciousness on a rather hard pillow, the hard part of it being the occasional necessity for work, which spoils the tenderness and continuity of the dream. A little way before you get to Loop Head, there is a series of seaward-jutting rocks of low elevation, which have been christened *The Bridges*, for the waves have burrowed under them, so that they stand arched in midair. At the extreme point we saw a young fellow in knee-breeches, blue woollen stockings, short jacket, and Mercury hat, the only human thing visible, save ourselves, whether seaward or landward, gazing apparently at the waves.

“ I wonder what he comes here for,” said my companion.

“ Ask him,” I said, and she did so.

“ I’ve coom to see the toombling,” he said.

The “ toombling” was the plunging and shattering of the breakers, and looking at them was occupation enough for this letterless lad. A potential poet, some one perhaps will say ? But no. A poet, to be of much account, must understand, must find or put a meaning into, inanimate things ; and this boy, typical of his race, was asking no questions, much less finding harmonious answers to them. He was only gazing at the “ toombling” he could not control, any more than he and his can control the wilful seasons, the fiat that brought them here, that will take them away, and that deals so austere with them in the interval.

Such, at least, was the explanation I offered of his being there, and the cause of it. Perhaps we found reason, in some degree, to modify our conclusion a few minutes later ; for, seeking to return to the point where we had left our car, we passed through a gap in a loose stonewall, and saw sitting under it, just to the right of us, a bare-headed, bare-legged peasant girl of, I daresay, some eighteen years of age, just as unoccupied as the youngster we had left pondering at the waves, but looking by no means so unhappy. On her face was

“ The bloom of young desire, and purple light of love,”

and her eyes seemed to sparkle with amorous mischief. Possibly she was the cause of his having gone, in vexation of spirit, to look on the “ toombling,” and so make himself yet more miserable, like many another tantalised swain before him, by communicating his ephemeral sorrow to the permanent indifference of Nature.

Within three miles of Loop Head, we were told, no flower will grow save the pink sea-thrift ; and I can well believe it. It is a sort of Hinterland to the ocean, within whose influence it lies ; and, though the sea has not actually annexed it, it permits no law save that of its own blustering barrenness to rule there. The Coastguard Station represents the indomitable audacity and imperious usurpation of man ; but at Loop Head, though he can build walls, and take and record observations, he can do no more. He can grow nothing for his own sustenance ; and on many a wild winter night, if he ventures out-of-doors, he has to crawl on hands and knees under the protection of the walls of the small herbless enclosure, lest he should be blown and battered against the barriers of his own raising. From the lighthouse one gets a commanding view of the estuary of the Shannon. Looking southward, one descries, if dimly, Kerry Head, Brandon Mount, and the hills of Dingle promontory, with the summits of Macgillicuddy’s Reeks darkly behind them. Northward lie the mountains of Connemara, and the islands of Aran well out to sea. A little way below the Coastguard Station, there is what you may call either a little island or a huge rock, separated from the mainland by a narrow but terrific chasm. An enterprising engineer thought a few years ago he would like to throw a bridge across it, and he persevered in his task for about half the distance. He then wearied either of the labour or the cost, and the intended communication thus stops short mid-way over the profound black gap and the tormented waters. Last year, however, a derrick was pushed across, and a small party landed for the day, leaving behind them a couple of goats. One we could still descry calmly grazing, but the other had either died or been blown out to sea. On the dark narrow ledge on each side of the rocky chasm, all the way down innumerable puffins were congregated, as restless in their flight, and as melancholy in their cry, as the waters over which they skim, or into which they fitfully dive and awhile disappear.

It takes some time to get beyond the impression of such a scene, even though one may have left it, visually, behind ; and I could still hear those pairing seabirds, and still see the sweeping, swirling coils of strandless water running in and out of the black honeycombed abysses, until the bay and village of Carrigaholt, and the hamlets of Cross and Kilbaha, obliterated the reminiscence by stimulating the senses to receive fresh sights and sounds. I

was greatly surprised at finding so many National Schools in so wild and poorly populated a district as that between Loop Head and Kilkee ; and I noticed that, almost in every instance, an older, meaner, and thatched building had been superseded by a new, larger, and more commodious one of stone and slate.

In the afternoon of the following day we crossed the Shannon from Kilrush to Tarbert, and had occasion to note how a river, nobler and more inviting in its proportions than any English stream, be it Thames, or Severn, or Mersey, showed neither sail nor funnel, and is practically neglected by the commerce of the world. The modern rhetorician, primed with statistics, and animated by conventional convictions, might doubtless produce, and, for anything I know of, may frequently have produced, a striking effect on the platform by dwelling on this conspicuous fact, and out of it manufacturing another Irish grievance. But I think I can perceive that, in presence of the many painful phenomena and perplexing problems that owe their origin to high-pressure enterprise and material development, it is gradually becoming pardonable to hint that Civilisation, as properly understood, is not necessarily identical with huge cities, countless factories, and interminable goods-trains. I am aware that the English ideal of life is, or has been till quite recently, that every man, woman, and child should get as much work out of himself as he possibly can, and should in turn get as much out of the machines that he produces. In a word, according to this view, existence was given us in order that we may be perpetually active, and by our activity go on increasing what is called the wealth of the world. Of course, as it is only fair to add, there underlies this theory the further doctrine or belief that, by the operation thus described, Man will best expand his intellect and most surely improve his morals.

An examination of the soundness of this view, to be of any value, would require no little time and demand no little space ; and this is not the moment for it, in any case. But one cannot travel in Ireland without perceiving that this so-many-horse-power and perpetual-catching-of-trains theory of life is not one that is accepted by the Irish people ; and I do not think it ever will be. Their religion, their traditions, their chief occupations, their temperament, all of which I suppose are closely allied, are opposed to it. The saying, “ Take it aisy, and, if you can’t take it aisy, take it as aisy as you can,” doubtless represents *their* theory of life ; and, for my part, if it were a question either of dialectics or of morals, I would sooner have to defend that view of existence than the so-many-horse-power one. Far from a wise man getting all he can out of himself in one direction, he will, it seems to me, rigidly and carefully abstain from doing so in the interests of that catholic and harmonious development which requires that he should get a little out of himself in every direction. One would not like to assert that the bulk of the Irish people are “ harmoniously developed.” But neither, if one may be permitted to say so, are the English or the Scotch people ; and as, in reality, all three probably err by lobsided activity or lobsided inactivity, it still remains to be seen whether too much perpetual-catching-of-trains or too much taking-it-aisy is, on the whole, the wiser course, and the less insane interpretation of the purport and uses of life. I fear one is not an impartial judge ; for, when one continually hears the Irish upbraided with sitting on gates or walls and doing nothing, one remembers that some of us in England likewise sit on gates and walls and do nothing, and are greatly addicted to that pastime. But whether taking-it-aisy, or for ever trying to beat the record, be the best use to make of life, certain it is that the English, speaking generally, hold the one theory, and the Irish, speaking generally, hold the other, and manifest little or no intention of abandoning it. Unfortunately, Englishmen are not satisfied with being allowed to hold their own view of life. We cannot help trying to force it on the acceptance of other people ; and, if they prove recalcitrant, we at once regard them as inferior, because they are different from ourselves. Our religion, our manners, our morals, our way of conducting business, our pace, our goal, are ours, and therefore must be the best. No doubt it is this masterful narrowness that makes us an imperial and a conquering race. But should we not do well to interpret *parcere subjectis* as including some consideration for the conceptions of life and duty entertained by the peoples we have annexed ? Failing to do so, we find ourselves

baffled, all the same. There is a feminine power of passive resistance in the Celtic race which all our masculine Saxon imperiousness has not overcome. The Virgilian *curis acuens mortalia corda* applies but imperfectly to the majority of the Irish people, who quietly refuse to be prodded and sharpened into exertion beyond a certain point, let heaven send them what cares and difficulties it may. No doubt, an agricultural people always take life more easily than a manufacturing people. One cannot well live habitually in the presence and within the influence of Nature without imbibing and finally imitating something of her deliberation and serene patience. Man may increase the pace of his machine-made wheels and pistons, but he cannot compel or induce Nature to go any faster. Neither, beyond a certain point which is soon reached, can he force her to be more wealth-producing, as the most recent results of high farming plainly show. The bulk of the Irish people are bred and wedded to the soil, the air, the seasons, the weather, mist, hail, sunshine, and snow ; and familiarity and co-operation with these help to deepen that pious Christian fatalism which is innate in their temperament. Therefore they work in moderation, and with long rests between whiles,—rest, perhaps, not absolutely needed by the physical frame, but akin to that passiveness which Wordsworth somewhere calls wise. Compare an ordinary English or Scotch with an ordinary Irish railway station, and the contrast is most striking. In the latter there is a total absence of fuss, bustle, expedition, and of a desire to get the trains off as summarily as possible. Even the railway porters are of opinion that there is plenty of time between this and the Day of Judgment in which to get life's rather unimportant business done, after a fashion.

After leaving Kilkee, I was so anxious to get to Killarney, and to get there quickly, in order that we might enjoy the sharp and sudden contrast between the barren grandeur of Clare and the leafy loveliness of Kerry, that, had it not been for the foregoing reflections, prompted by the splendid but sailless Shannon, I might perhaps have been impatient at the railway dispensation which forbade us to get farther that night than Tralee. But abiding by the true traveller's motto,

“ *Levius fit patientiâ
Quidquid corrigere est nefas,*”

—I am sure Horace learned that little bit of wisdom, not in Rome, but at his Sabine farm,—we congratulated ourselves on the easy-goingness which permitted us to have tea and a couple of hours at Listowel, to saunter towards sundown by the banks of the salmon-haunted Feale, and to gaze at what is left upon its banks of the last stronghold that held out against Elizabeth in the Desmond insurrection.

Spring never arrayed herself in beauty more captivatingly childlike than on the mid-May morning when we arrived at Killarney. She had been weeping, half in play, half for petulance ; but now she had put all her tears away, or had glorified what was left of them with radiating sunshine. Was it April ? Was it May ? Was it June ? It seemed all three. But indeed every month keeps reminiscences of the one that precedes and cherishes anticipations of the one that is to follow it.

“ Fresh emeralds jewelled the bare brown mould,
And the blond sallow tasseled herself with gold ;
The hive of the broom brimmed with honeyed dew,
And springtime swarmed in the gorse anew.”

There is no such gorse in wealthy Britain as enriches the vernal season in Ireland. I had come to that conclusion from what I had seen in King's County, in West Meath, and in Clare itself ; but they in turn seemed poor in this opulent flower compared with the golden growth all about Mahony's Point and many another open space near Killarney Lake. Yet, at the same time, here was

“ June blushing under her hawthorn veil.”

For Ireland is the land of the white as well as of the black thorn. But indeed of what wild flower that grows, of what green tree that burgeons, of what shrub that blossoms, are not the shores and woods and lanes and meadows of Killarney the home ? Such varied and vigorous vegetation I have seen no otherwhere ; and when one has said that, one has gone far towards awarding the prize for natural beauty. But vegetation, at once robust and graceful, is but the fringe and decoration of the loveliness of that enchanting district. The tender grace of wood and water is set in a framework of hills, now stern, now ineffably gentle, now dimpling with smiles, now frowning and rugged with impending storm, now muffled and mysterious with mist, only to gaze out on you again with clear and candid sunshine. Here the trout leaps, there the eagle soars, and, there beyond, the wild deer dash through the arbutus coverts, through which they have come to the margin of the lake to drink, and, scared by your footstep or your oar, are away back to crosiered bracken or heather-covered moorland. But the first, the final, the deepest and most enduring impression of Killarney is that of beauty unspeakably tender, which puts on at times a garb of grandeur and a look of awe only in order to heighten, by passing contrast, the sense of soft insinuating loveliness. How the missel-thrushes sing, as well they may ! How the streams and runnels gurgle and leap and laugh ! For the sound of journeying water is never out of your ears, the feeling of the moist, the fresh, the vernal, never out of your heart. My companion agreed with me that there is nothing in England or Scotland as beautiful as Killarney, meaning by Killarney its lakes, its streams, its hills, its vegetation ; and, if mountain, wood, and water, harmoniously blent, constitute the most perfect and adequate loveliness that Nature presents, it surely must be owned that it has, all the world over, no superior. I suppose there is a time when tourists pass through Killarney. Happily it had not commenced when we were there. But I gathered that they come for but a brief season ; and a well-known resident and landowner, to whom we were indebted for much that added to the inevitable enjoyment of our visit, told me that he had in vain tried to provide himself with a few neighbours, by maintaining and even furnishing some most attractive and charmingly placed dwellings on his estate. It is so far away, so remote from London. And then— it is Ireland.

To portray scenery by language is not possible, often as the feat has been attempted in our time. The utmost one can do is to convey an impression of beauty, grandeur, or picturesqueness ; and one would but use familiar epithets and adjectives to but little purpose, were one to attempt to depict in words what one saw on Long Island, at Muckross Abbey, at Torc Waterfall, in the Lower Lake, the Upper Lake, the Long Range, or what one gazed out on at Glena Cottage, where we found tea and Irish slim-cakes provided for us in a sitting-room silently eloquent of the taste and refinement of its absent mistress. Equally futile would it be to try to describe the eight hours' drive from Killarney to Glengarriff by Kenmare Bay. I can only say to everybody, “ Do not die without taking it.” As for Glengarriff, I scarcely know how any one who goes there ever leaves it. For my part, I have been there ever since. It is a haven of absolute beauty and perfect rest.

I came to the conclusion at last that the reason why, though Ireland is more beautiful still than Britain, it is less travelled in and less talked about, is that it has never produced a great poet, a great painter, or even a great novelist, I mean one who has sung or depicted the beauties of Ireland so as to excite general enthusiasm about them. *Carent vate sacro*. The crowd have not been bewitched into going to Ireland ; and indeed, if they went, the crowd would never discover loveliness for themselves, or at least never apprehend its relation to other loveliness. I hope I shall not give offence to a race I greatly admire, if I say that Irishmen do not seem to love Ireland as Englishmen love England, or Scotchmen Scotland. If Tom Moore had only loved Ireland as a poet should love his native land, he might have brought its extraordinary charm home to the world, and made its beauty universally known. I am sure the Vale of Cashmere is not lovelier than Innisfallen and all that surrounds it ; but, for want of in-

timate affection, he wrote of both in precisely the same strain and style, insensible to local colour, local form, local character, and in each case satisfying himself and asking us to be satisfied with vague dulcet adjectives and melodious generalities. But in truth I doubt whether the Irish are a poetical people, in the higher sense. They have plenty of fancy, but little or no imagination ; and it is imagination that gives to thought, feeling, and sentiment about a country a local habitation and a name. The Irish are too inaccurate to produce poetry of the impressive and influencing sort. The groundwork of the highest imagination is close attention to and clear apprehension of the fact, which imagination may then, if it chooses, glorify and transfigure as it will. To the typical Irishman of whom I am speaking, the fact, the precise fact, seems unimportant. He never looks at it, he never grasps it ; therefore he exaggerates or curtails,—the statement he makes to you, and indeed the one he makes to himself, being either in excess or in diminution of the reality. I am aware that, according to the habitual conception of many persons, perhaps of most, exaggeration and imagination are one and the same thing, or at any rate closely akin. There could not be a greater error. Not only are they not akin, they are utterly alien to each other. Fancy exaggerates or invents. Imagination perceives and transfigures.

Equally common is the belief, more especially in days when pessimism is a creed with some and a fashion with others, that poetry and sadness are not only closely but inseparably related ; and, up to a certain point, and within a certain range of poetry, but necessarily a lower and a narrower one, that is true. Much beautiful lyrical and elegiac verse do we owe to sadness ; but it is unequal to the task of inspiring and sustaining the loftier flights of the poetic imagination. The Athenians were not sad. The Germans are not sad. The English are not sad. They are serious, which is a totally different thing; and, as I have ventured to assert, the Irish character, though sad, is noticeably wanting in seriousness. Be it observed too, in passing, that serious people are accurate—of course, as far as human infirmity will permit. But, as regards poetry and sadness, did not Euripides long ago say, in “ The Suppliants,” that it is well the poet should produce songs with joy ; and did he not ask how, if the poet have it not, he can communicate delight to others ? The joy here spoken of is not a violent nor a spasmodic joy, which is own brother to sadness, but a serene and temperate joy, such as Tennyson had in his mind when he wrote concerning the poet :

“ He saw through life and death, through good and ill,
He saw through his own soul.”

I was again struck by the superiority of Irish scenery to its reputation, when, passing round from west to south, I found myself on the Blackwater. What Englishman has not seen Warwick Castle, and to whom are its romantic position and imposing aspect not household talk ? How many Englishmen have seen, or even heard of, Lismore ? To my surprise and shame, I suddenly discovered that Lismore—concerning which, I will be bound to say, most persons, if interrogated, would vaguely reply, “ Lismore ? Lismore ? It belongs to the Duke of Devonshire, does it not ?”—is more beautiful than Warwick, and almost as picturesque. It was my good fortune to spend several days in a charming and hospitable house, whose spacious grounds slope gradually down to the Blackwater, where that noble stream is a quarter of a mile broad ; passing on one side the ruined Castle of Tourin, and on the other the woods of Dromana, through which one galloped, as only Irish horses will gallop, over rough and uneven ground, for the better part of two hours, without coming to the end of them. What strikes one in Ireland is the abundance of everything, the “ lots to spare,” what Irish people call “ lashins.” Flower-garden, kitchen-garden, pleasure-garden alike, are invariably much larger in Ireland in proportion to the size of the domain than in England. An Irish acre is about the very least anybody apparently has ever troubled himself to enclose for vegetables and fruit ; and frequently this handsome allowance is exceeded where, from the domestic conditions, you would have thought it considerably in excess of the needs of the family. This superfluous and prodigal assignment of space frequently leads to a good deal of untidiness ; but Irish

people seem to prefer waste places and neglected corners to prim parsimoniousness. But it must not be supposed that all establishments in Ireland are untidy and uncared-for. I saw several gardens, not only near Dublin,—like Lady Ardilaun’s beautiful one of St Ann’s at Clontarf,—but in the most remote and rustic parts of Ireland, that would hold their own against the best-kept ones in England. In the grounds of the house on the Blackwater to which I have alluded, I found the most effective spring-garden I ever saw, the Irish climate being peculiarly favourable to spring and early summer gardening, where man seconds with any pains the bounty and geniality of Nature. One must go to the most favoured spots in the south of Devonshire to meet, in England, with such flowering-shrubs, such rhododendrons, such out-door azaleas as abound all over the west, the south, and even the east of Ireland. At the same time, with Irish gardens and gardening, as with most other Irish things, “taking-it-aisy” is the general law. The result is far from being disastrous, where neglect and unkemptness have not been carried too far. Many a fair and precious flower is coddled and cultivated out of existence in these trim and orderly days ; and I shrewdly suspect that the greater part of the old-fashioned herbaceous plants which have recently come into favour with all of us, and which had died out in most parts of England, have been brought back from Irish gardens, where they have always flourished undisturbed and un-superseded. I can say for myself that I am indebted to the sister island for several new, otherwise old, herbaceous flowers ; for, as we all know, Irish people are never happier than when they are giving what they have got.

One wishes that this love of flowers, which educated folk in Ireland exhibit in so marked a manner, was felt by its peasantry. Could their whitewashed cottages but have little gardens in front of them, instead of what they call “the street,” which consists of a dunghill-tenanted bit of roughly-paved, and not always paved, ground that abuts on the road ; could they be got to plant creepers against their walls, to cherish a climbing rose, to embower their porches in honey-suckle, Ireland would, as if by enchantment, be an utterly transformed country to travel in. But just as its people, in many respects so gifted, have little imagination, so have they little feeling for beauty. After leaving the country of the Blackwater, I found a warm welcome in Queen’s County from one who is indeed a Lady Bountiful, and well known as such, and who is doing her utmost to get the peasantry to understand the charm and refining influence of flowers, just as she has employed almost every known device for adding to the grace and dignity, as well as to the material comfort, of their lives. If she succeeds, as I fervently hope she may, she will indeed have been a benefactress to the people among whom she lives, and who, I could perceive, are not insensible to her large, catholic, and unostentatious interest in them. I had always imagined that Kent has no superior as a habitat for wild-flowers. But all that I know at home of floral woodland beauty fades into insignificance when compared with the miles on miles of bluebells, under secular timber of every kind, through which she led me on the evening of my arrival. At last I saw Fairy Land, not with the mind’s eye, but with the bodily vision ; and not for days did the colour of that seemingly endless tract of wildwood hyacinths fade from the retina. Here again was another, and perhaps the most surprising, instance of the lavishness, the abundance of everything in Ireland, of which I have spoken, and the complete ignorance on the part of Englishmen of what Ireland has to show in the way of natural and cultivated beauty, which they are supposed, not unjustly, to love so dearly.

No country is beautiful throughout, but I cannot agree with the opinion I have heard expressed so frequently that the centre of Ireland is ugly. For my part, I have yet to see an ugly country where it still remains country ; and I cannot understand how any rural tract can be otherwise than enchanting to the eye that has ample colour in the foreground and the middle distance, and boasts a mountain horizon. Alike in Queen’s County, in King’s County, and in Westmeath, the Slieve Bloom Mountains are rarely out of sight ; and I observed more than once, in the light and shade of their ample folds, effects of colour such as I had hitherto seen only in Italy. I spent a delightful morning, wandering tracklessly and aimlessly over a portion of the Bog of Allen, which strongly reminded me of the wetter portions of the Yorkshire

moor-lands familiar to my childhood. But, apart altogether from the glamour of association, I saw in its colour and its character, in its heather, its bog-cotton, its bilberry leaves and blossoms, an effective and unusual contrast to the golden gorse, to the patches of green oats, to accidental clumps of timber, and to the irregular barrier of purple hill-land in the immaterial distance. It was pleasant to pay a visit to a property in that part of Ireland, the owner of which was, for thirty years of his manhood, engaged in administering the affairs of many millions of her Majesty's subjects in India, and who, now that in the course of nature he has come into his inheritance, spends his days, his pension, and his savings in improving the old home and developing his estate, instead of hanging about London Clubs and trying to extract diversion from the hackneyed amusements of society. Will those who come after him do the same? Let us hope so; for what Ireland most wants is the presence, the love, and the encouragement of its own children. I found the majority of landowners with whom I talked in favour of the compulsory sale and purchase of holdings; and when I asked if they did not think this would finally deplete Ireland of its rural gentry, which would be a culminating curse to it, they one and all expressed the opinion that it would have no such effect, since the expropriated landlords would retain the house, the demesne, and what we call in England the home farm, and would live on excellent terms with the farmers and the peasantry, once the burning question of the tenure of land was extinguished.

It has frequently been said to me, when extolling the extraordinary beauty and natural charm of Ireland, "But what a climate! It rains incessantly." This assertion is one of the exaggerations incidental to ignorance or to very partial knowledge. Most persons of one's acquaintance who live habitually in London abuse the English climate, which, I humbly venture to assert, is the best climate in the world. The climate is good, though the weather may sometimes be bad; just as in Italy and kindred countries, the weather is generally good, but the climate is usually the reverse of pleasant, being almost either excessively hot or excessively cold, or, thanks to conflict between sun and wind, both one and the other at the same time. One cannot well conceive of an agreeable climate without a certain amount of rain. Londoners, who do not like to have their hats injured or their boots soiled, and to whom the beauty of Nature, as not being within sight, is a matter of complete indifference, consider the weather good when the pavements are clean and the sky cloudless. But that is a characteristically narrow view of the matter. It may be that Ireland has too much of a good thing in respect of rain. But there is a quality of mercy in Irish showers, which are, for the most part, of the soft sort sent by southerly or westerly breezes. We had abundant sunshine at Killarney; but I remember greatly enjoying a tramp in the rain one wet morning up to Aghadoe and Fossa. I cannot understand why people abuse rain as they do. It is one of the most beautiful, as well as one of the most precious, of Nature's gifts. Watch it beginning to fall on the silvery water, making delicate fretwork of the dented surface, which, as it falls faster, becomes a sheet of dancing diamonds. Then the watery spears slacken, and gradually cease to descend, and the lake resumes its silvery serenity as though nothing had happened. I say it rained that morning, and on into the early part of the afternoon; and what a goodly sight were the young children, the girls especially, making haste homeward from school, with bare legs and bare heads, save that some of the girls cowed the latter with their picturesque shawls, lest they should be caught in another shower! It might have rained all day, for anything I cared, after the comfort I had gleaned from the stockingless legs and unbonneted heads that went withal with comely garments and well-washed faces; and I came to the conclusion that Irish rain is warm as an Irish welcome, and soft as an Irish smile. But by three o'clock in Ireland the children leave school, I observed, at that early hour—the clouds melted into thin air; and what Killarney then was for hour on hour, till the gloaming deepened into starlight, I shall never forget, but should vainly attempt to describe.

No eulogy of the attractions of Ireland would be complete that did not bear grateful testimony to the hospitality of its people, the example of which seems to be imitated even by those who go to dwell there only for a time. On first arriving at Dublin, anxious as I was to

push on into the interior, I could not well reject the graceful welcome that kept me a willing prisoner for several days in a comely home, surrounded by a beautiful garden and exquisite grounds, not far from the Vice-regal Lodge ; and, on reaching the Capital again on my way homeward, it was difficult to get away from the hearty hospitality of the brilliant soldier, himself an Irishman, who had just published the first instalment of that important biography on which he had for years been working, amid a thousand distractions of public duty, private friendship, and social intercourse, with characteristic tenacity ; and the popularity of which, added to the distinction its author has won as an active and successful soldier, justifies one in enrolling him among those *quibus deorum munere datum est*—the original, it will be remembered, only says *aut—facere scribenda, et scribere legenda*.

My parting exhortation, therefore, naturally is “ Go to Ireland, and go often.” It is a delightful country to travel in. Doubtless the Irish have their faults ; I suppose we all have. Ireland never had, like England, like most of Scotland, like France, like Germany, like Spain, the advantage of Roman civilisation and Roman discipline, by which their inhabitants are still influenced far more than they dream of. Ireland, no doubt, is a little undisciplined ; for it has remained tribal and provincial, with the defects as with the virtues of a tribal and clannish race. But the only way to enjoy either a country or a people is to take it as it is, and not, when you travel, to carry your own *imprimatur* about with you. There is no true understanding without sympathy and love, and Ireland has not been loved enough by Englishmen, or by Irishmen either. The direst offence, however, against the duty they owe to each other would be to sever or to weaken the tie that subsists between them ; and I cannot help thinking it might be insensibly but effectually strengthened, and rendered more acceptable to both, if Englishmen would but make themselves more familiar with the charm of Irish scenery and Irish character.

I have said the Irish seem to be somewhat deficient in a sense of beauty. Yet I noticed one gesture, one attitude, as common as the gorse itself, the gracefulness of which would be observed if one met with it even in Italy or Greece. As you drive along the rudest parts of Ireland, there will come to the open doorway of a ling-thatched hut a woman, bare-headed, bare-footed, very quiet and patient of mien, and she will raise her hand, and with it shade her eyes, while she gazes on you as you pass. Then she will return to the gloom of her narrow home. When I think of Ireland, now that I have visited it, I seem to see a solitary figure, that emerges at moments from a settled twilight of its own, to gaze, but with shaded eyes, at the excessive glare and questionable march of English progress.

Spring and autumn in Ireland (1900)

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