

On Country Paths — Walk 1817

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Walks Through Ireland

1812, 1814, and 1817.

Third Walk,

Through Munster And Connaught, in 1817

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The following Letters were commenced, and the pedestrian Tours pursued under the idea of subsequently forming an historical work on Ireland. This object has been impeded and retarded by unexpected obstacles, and the fruits of considerable observation on that country are now submitted, with great diffidence, to the public, in Letters, partly penned on the spot, and partly extracted from notes. The situation of Ireland is highly interesting. That her misery is great and that no adequate remedy appears to have been applied, cannot be denied by impartial men. The body of her people can scarcely procure the conveniences and necessaries of life, the country seems retrograde rather than progressive. Improvident legislative provisions have turned dearth to famine ; — pestilence has followed. Political injustice keeps alive the fever of the mind.

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LETTER XXI.

Castlebar, October 15, 1817.

MY DEAR L.

I walked with one of the mountaineers of Achill to Castlebar. The road is pleasant, and the number of small lakes you see, interspersed through a fine corn-country, makes it still more so. The intelligence and acuteness of the Achill farmer were great ; he conversed with equal facility in English or Irish, and his remarks were all drawn from nature and observation ; nor is it too much to style such people accomplished, who possess two languages, speak them grammatically, and clearly express in them the ideas of an independent soul. The lower order of English in the country, compared with those of Ireland, fall far short in this point of comparison.

Castlebar is a good town, of four thousand inhabitants, or more ; and has been rendered celebrated by the French occupying it some time, after the discomfiture of the English troops in 1798. On leaving it, they received their first check from the limerick militia, commanded by the present Lord Gort. The service his lordship rendered the country on that occasion was a signal one. He prevented all farther assistance joining the foreign enemy, and gave time for the government at Dublin to take proper measures. They were not very extraordinarily energetic ; and full credit must be given to the people of Connaught at large, who so calmly beheld a French force, for some time, victorious in the heart of their country, whilst the chief governor made a very deliberate progress indeed from the capital. In such cases speed is often victory ! Since that period no French force has appeared on the shores of Ireland ; but it may be too much for ministers to suppose, that no other invasion was projected or thought of. The army sent under General Humbert was ridiculously small, and evinces, in the then rulers of France, utter ignorance of this island, and of the art of war. From the rupture of the peace of

Amiens, however, a fearful number of years elapsed, till the late obstinate and narrow-minded usurper of France immolated himself. For ten years did the patience and loyalty of the bulk of the Irish remain firm. They sent no invitations abroad ; and waited with fond hope, that a benevolent prince would complete the fabric the revered sovereign had begun. To such people something is due. Whatever a heated and sanguinary few,—blinded by wild love of power,—by desire of revenge,—and by blind admiration of Bonaparte,—may have wished, or have thought,—the nation remained untainted and firm !

In all our walks we have found the grand body of the Irish sound and well-affected. But it were too much to expect, that if a formidable army had been thrown into the country from France, in the period I mention, among some, that a great deal of confusion would not have occurred, and, in many cases, even danger, from the military ardour and great sensibility which so peculiarly characterize this people !

I am truly concerned to find that fever has raged in a severe, manner at Castlebar. It has proved mortal in many cases, and has continued a long time here. The heart sickens under the repeated observation of so great a mass of human wretchedness, and our toilsome way has been frequently made insupportably painful to us by it. We have had various escapes by entering cottages, or having linen washed in houses where persons, scarcely convalescent, were.

Castlebar is a place of considerable inland trade, and is a handsome-looking town. Its environs are pretty, and the ancient park of Lord Lucan, adjoining the extremity of it, ornaments it very much. It is the greatest linen-market in Mayo ; the sales of the last month, amounting to £3,300 worth of linen, and £1,900 worth of yarn. It is said here, that a communication by water with the sea could easily be formed, by means of neighbouring lakes.

The chief object of attraction in Castlebar for us was, however, Mr. Bald's celebrated map of the county of Mayo, which had been exhibited to the members of the House of Commons in England. Mr. B., who is a Scotch gentleman, of great taste and talent, resident in Castlebar, with the utmost urbanity, not only granted our request to see it, but shewed it us himself, and explained many parts of this superb work. The map is extremely large, covering a great part of a good-sized drawing-room when unrolled.

Having walked over nearly the whole of this extensive county, such a work was to us doubly striking and interesting. We felt surprize and admiration at this fine display of genius ! The whole is executed in a masterly and novel manner, and presents to the view this vast county, with its mountains, ruins, vales, lakes, shores, and woods, so beautifully delineated, that the eye is never satiated in looking over them ! The neighbouring islands, and Achill, proudly prominent above all were not omitted.

Mr. Bald has also formed a singular model of Achill, which represents that island with a curious felicity. His great work of the map of Mayo has been executed for the grand jury, and occupied Mr. B. and an ingenious young gentleman who assists him, above six years ! In it we easily traced our own steps, and Mr. Bald so clearly pointed out every other part of Mayo, that we seemed to have walked over them also !

On the subject of fever, he was full of information, some of which was so valuable as to deserve transmission to government. Alas ! when we looked on this beautiful map, and its highly intelligent and talented author pointed with a long wand to various places unknown to us, where pestilence raged, how very melancholy did this exquisite geographical picture look ! As Mr. Bald was good enough to invite us to breakfast with his family, we enjoyed his

conversation still longer. He is occupied on some work, I believe, on local geography. Every thing he said was instructive.

As pedestrians, with somewhat differing, but not very uncongenial pursuits, we could all exchange those original ideas, obtained by actual inspection, and we all had but one opinion of the general suffering of the country, far exceeding what has reached the observation of the great and wealthy, or of government ! Mr. Bald informed us, that fever was of longer duration than was thought in Mayo. This gentleman, it is supposed, will be appointed surveyor of roads in this county, if the newly-projected plan of taking their management out of the hands of grand juries takes effect. The idea does the present secretary much honour; for certainly great abuses have existed, and much oppression fallen on the people under the old mode. It is impossible not to allow, as I have already said, very great merit to the present minister for Ireland, as one passes through this country, in many respects.

The alteration in the mode of appointing sheriffs is in itself, a great benefit, and the secretary's very laudable vigilance in regard to the public money, demands the highest praise. The more the Irish people find that he wishes to rescue them from the effects of petty despotism, the more amenable will they become, and the more attached to the English government. But unless that gentleman direct his powerful mind to a revision and better formation of the magistracy, very incomplete indeed, I fear, will prove much of his most meritorious labours ! On the political balance of this island, he has demonstrated a desire that it should remain as it is ! I cannot help thinking, if he knew all the local grievance that has come in our way at various times to remark, that his upright and generous mind would revolt with the true spirit of a Briton at it, and that he would abhor the nature of party-policy mixed with religion, as much as we have done. " There is a cloud hangs over us," said a very respectable and intelligent Catholic to me, within these few days, " which extinguishes us whenever we raise our heads." A painful feeling to exist in the breast of man ! Doubly so, when the depressed class are taught, that better privileged individuals are all government-men ; and that opposition to them will be reported as disaffection to the king !

The public-buildings at Castlebar are very respectable. We left it in the middle of the day for Ballinrobe, and walked through a fertile corn-country many miles. Fever spread its baleful hand in too many cottages, and the mournful looks of numbers spoke volumes !

As evening began to announce the decline of day you will imagine us, my dear L., near Ballinrobe, and soon reposing in some humble inn ; but an adventure awaited myself, instead of this. As I descried Moore Hall at a great distance, over-looking Lough Carrah, I determined, if possible, to see its worthy possessor, the author of the late " History of the Revolution of 1688," before I bade farewell to Connaught.

I set forward across the fields. I was sufficiently acquainted with the Irish language to explain myself, or I should have gone quite astray. Through the tangled dell and rocky field I made my path good ; but often heard with sorrow, from an occasional friendly guide, of the prevalence of mortality, arising from fever. The way was much longer than I expected, and I reached Mr. Moore's house with some difficulty, and very much exhausted. Fortunately I found him and Mrs. Moore at home ; and the reception I received from this highly-endowed gentleman, and the amiable Mrs. M. banished all sense of fatigue, under which I was then nearly sinking. The mansion is a noble one, seated at the head of Lough Carrah, and is built in a foreign style. As I opened my window very early the following morning, an enchanting sight, just before the sun arose, offered itself. Lough Carrah, a fine lake of several miles long and two or three broad, spread itself before my view, with a chain of mountains to the right. A

wooded island in front, and a fertile country, chequered with corn-fields and meadows, completed the landscape. The dawn glowed over the lake, and the birds sung as if in summer, whilst the crow and magpie picked their food. Suddenly the orb of day arising, swelled and magnified till the great circle was complete ; but soon he was lost in an impending purple cloud, and softened grey tints fell on the lake, as the sky was streaked with gold ; and the birds yet sung on the distant spray.

Lough Carrah is one of those lakes which pours its waters through the subterraneous passages at Cong ; its sandy beach is of a silvery cast : and several handsome places appear in the distance, near its shores. Such a situation, where nature smiled and genius reposed, was delightful to behold ! How much so to the pedestrian. ! How pleased was I that I had deviated from the road for such an object ! But it is thus the pedestrian enjoys and best uses his full liberty, by forming no regular plan, and taking advantage of every pleasant incident on the way.

To-morrow I purpose proceeding to Cuss Lough. Lord Tyrawley's villa. Mr. Moore is kind enough to invite me to remain a day at Moore-Hall. I conclude this now, by assuring you, my dear L., how truly I am, &c. &c.

Cuss Lough, (Lord Tyrawley's.) .

I now write to you from one of the sweetest spots imaginable—Lord Tyrawley's cottage, on the edge of Lough Mask—where I have rejoined my companion, according to our arrangement, and where this venerable nobleman has given us a most hospitable reception. Cuss Lough commands views of the most lovely scenery in nature ! A venerable wood nearly surrounds Lord T.'s cottage ; and the wooded islands, far-spreading mountains sweeping round Lough Mask, and that noble expanse of water in its vicinity, nearly twelve miles long and proportionally broad, form the finest landscapes imaginable.

Mr. Martin's very beautiful and well-wooded place on the lake, adjoining Lord Tyrawley's grounds, completes the enchanting scene. His Lordship comes here, twice in the year, for a month or six weeks, from, his principal residence. This accomplished nobleman travelled in hit youth over much of the Continent, and was in office a long time under the Irish government. His mind retains all its brilliancy, and his manners have so rare and extraordinary a degree of polish, that each person in his company feels himself gratified and exalted. True politeness is surely one of those virtues, most desirable in society, since it is brought into action the oftenest, and embellishes and makes domestic life more happy than any other ! It is difficult to leave Lord Tyrawley's company without being improved ! He has now retired for ever from the splendid and busy scenes of former life ; and has none of the disappointment of an exiled courtier about him. To courts and brilliant circles he seems rather, like Coriolanus, to say, " I banish you : " And though he has felt the stings of ingratitude from too many, and been neglected in high quarters, where he merited thanks and attention, the suavity of his temper and characteristic cheerfulness sustain him wonderfully ! He told me several very amusing and interesting anecdotes of Mr. Fox, of whom he was the friend in early youth, and who retained a pleasing recollection of Lord Tyrawley to the last ! You may imagine, my dear L., the conversation of such a nobleman, and the scenes of his enchanting cottage, have made weariness disappear.

LETTER XXII.

Tuam and Athenree, Oct, 20, 1817.

My Dear L.

We left Lord Tyrtrtley's on a very fine morning, and bid him farewell with sincere regret. Our Walk through Ballinrobe brought us though a country of good agriculture and much corn. The last enquiry I made in Mayo, was in regard to the Irish wolf-dog. That race no more appears in Connaught ; and we learn that the last of them Were sent to Lord Taaffe, about twenty or thirty years ago, to Hungary.

We reached a small farm-house and inn halfway to Tuam, where we rested yesterday night. I grieve to say, that fever is to be traced from Castlebar the whole way to Tuam : many afflicting incidents of houses where the inhabitants had expired, and left them vacant—of others infected, and their neighbours afraid to approach them, and of others burnt down, to stop the spread of the malady—met us on our way. At our farm-house they gave us a very tolerable reception, and we dined with the family in a very comfortable manner.

Pedestrians, like us, were generally supposed to be dealers in some small way, gentlemen's servants school-masters, or surveyors; and we took no pains to contradict these ideas. We were treated with civility and plainness, and avoided the propensity to flatter, (too common to the Irish,) by the simplicity of our appearance, and the humility of our manner of travelling. The lower Irish could never suppose a gentleman would *walk* several hundred miles on roads and common country paths !

Our landlord's son had got some education, and in this cottage we found the Iliad of Homer in its original language, as also the works of Juvenal and Virgil in theirs.

We heard of dreadful ravages of fever in Roscommon, from the people of this small inn. High rents were also mentioned, as ruining and depressing the whole country.

A very ingenious young man, a land-surveyor, was described to us as having made a clock from his own invention and combinations. I went to see it, and found in his cottage a wooden one going extremely well, and apparently well-constructed. The maker of it joined our rural circle soon after, and proved a very intelligent, ingenious, and diffident young man. As conversation warmed him, he displayed many of the marks of real genius. We were now approaching the centre of Galway, a county which has a good deal of respectable yeomanry, and less of the feudal system and of vassalage remaining ; than in Mayo. We perceived, in our evening's conversation, no dislike of England, or of strangers, but the contrary. Our host was a sensible farmer, and his son could deliver his opinion on the Grecian Bard, and the merits of Juvenal yery well. The surveyor was in every respect acute, and reasoned clearly and strongly. Here and everywhere we have found veneration and love for his present majesty. His benefits are, I perceive, strongly remembered !

Our map of Ireland was spread on the, table, as we sat before a large turf fire. Our cottage friends examined it, and decided on our route to the Shannon with great intelligence and rapidity. They then began to enter into the objects of the tour ; and, on my explaining what we had done, were highly pleased. We got exceedingly good and clean beds, and were reasonably charged. I ought to remark, that in all our travelling, except a few inns, the charges were too high ; and that war-prices, in time of peace, at hotels and inns, are an im-position. The inn-

keeper can now afford every thing cheaper ; and, if his taxes be high, may expect, when things return to a right state, and peace, commerce, and agriculture, bless the land for some time, that his custom will be greater.

We started early for Tuam, but, by lingering behind to examine an old castle, I had the good fortune to see a very charming cottage, pleasure-ground, and woods, of Mr. Blake, near Tuam, who not only allowed me to look at them, but invited me to an excellent breakfast, just then on the table. This gentleman introduced me, as a traveller, to his family ; and by his urbanity and pleasing conversation, made an hour pass most pleasingly. Is not this genuine hospitality, my dear L. P and do I seem too partial to Connaught, in recording, in a warm manner, so generous a virtue, flourishing thus in it ?

From Mr. Blake, who had been bred to the bar, I learned the approaching dissolution of Mr. Curran in London. Turn to my first letter on the walk to Bag and Bun, and agree with me that the coincidence of things is curious. At the time of setting out on that tour, we passed the country-houses of two very celebrated personages in Ireland, on the popular side. They were then in health. I have often conversed and spent many hours with both since. Now, as we conclude our Connaught and Munster excursions, they are both dropping into the grave ! How awful the memorandum ! How truly does life resemble our tours! a passage through various scenes and then, one gladly rests in final repose ! Of these personages, one character, the prudent guide, as well as energetic leader of Catholic millions ! the other, the most brilliant orator of Ireland ; a patriot of considerable consistency, and not subservient to English party : both are passing to the silent tomb ! I shall never again hear the animated and powerful language of Keogh ! I shall never again enjoy the flashes, the wit and pleasantry, or the oratory of Curran !

We reached Tuam on its fair-day. The country appears very fertile around it ; but fever was spread in every direction, and its afflicting consequences struck the mind with melancholy, though the day was fine, and the landscape luxuriant.

A vast crowd of people filled the town, well-dressed and respectable ; cattle and various country commodities were exposed to sale. What may the extent of this population become in fifty or a hundred years? What new results may be expected ? Shall another system be tried ? or will the present one be continued till the mighty waves of a doubled or quadrupled population rise, and foam, and roar, over the heads of its rulers, in another century ? These are serious questions. The evidence of prodigious number, which the pedestrian continually receives in the country and towns of Ireland, presses them upon him. As long as the body of the people are depressed by want of privileges which the favoured few enjoy, they will be in some measure discontented. It is consistent with human nature that it should be so. As long as they are discontented there will be danger from the foreigner in war, or from a future Lord Edward Fitzgerald, or a William Wallace, in war or peace ! As long as the population is augmenting, that danger is increasing ; the quantity of materials becoming larger to which flame may be applied : and as long as such danger is before the eyes of British statesmen, they cannot consider the empire secure !

Arrived at Tuam, we had the pleasure of seeing his Grace the Archbishop of Tuam, and of communicating particulars relative to fevers, which happened to be unknown to him. This very venerable and most amiable prelate manifested all that hospitality and politeness which sit so well on high station, and shine so much in Connaught. At his request, we went to see his cathedral, which is one of the handsomest small buildings of the antique kind I have ever seen. The stained glass in its Gothic windows threw on its aisle a softened light as the even-

ing fell. This Archbishop of Tuam has done the whole of these windows at his own expence. He has also made his own house extremely pretty. If it had been in our power, I should gladly have stayed another day to dine with the Archbishop of Tuam. His manners were so dignified, yet kind, that he gained respect and esteem the more condescension he shewed. He pays much attention to a dispensary at Tuam, which has done a great deal of good. This worthy prelate is far advanced in years, but still enjoys the health of green old age.

We called on the Catholic bishop to mention the state of the country, as to fever, but did not find him at home. He is highly spoken of, and has taken judicious measures in prohibiting wakes, where a person dies of fever. This custom once seemed to me an ancient and harmless one. It is a corruption of some old practice, but leads to nothing but immorality and intemperance. The Catholic clergy would do well to suppress it entirely, or so modify it, that no drinking or singing were allowed, and none but relatives to attend. As the Irish are fond of dissipation, they make the wake the scene of it too often, and convert a mark of veneration for the dead into a waste of time (to say the least) for the living. Music and dancing, at proper times, should rather be encouraged in a vivacious nation ; but it would tend a great deal to civilize Ireland, if the jollity of the wake was totally suppressed.

In walking through this country, it is impossible not to know and learn that many daring and profligate characters exist, which early habits of drinking, most of all, contribute to form. The laudable pains of government and magistrates can never succeed in reforming the unruly, until the manners of the people be improved. The influence of the Catholic clergy can do a great deal in this respect, but not every thing. I am sure they wish to regulate their flocks as much as possible. Education has, however, much to perform, but poverty stands in its way. It is far from being so backward, however, as may be supposed. At the small inn where we rested at Tuam, the son of our hostess had the Orations of Cicero, the *Æneid* of Virgil, and some other Latin books, in his possession. Classical knowledge must always spread refinement and good sense ; and I am very far, indeed, from the opinion of a popular writer of the day, that it is superfluous or useless.

The works of the greatest genius in Greece or Rome teem with historic and moral truths. They must expand and strengthen any mind ; and the circumstance of such knowledge being acquired with pains, is favourable to habits of application and industry. Let these interesting works be all thrown aside, and an era of folly and ignorance must arrive. I should be very sorry to see Ireland without her classic learning ; surprisingly diffused as it is through the rural walks of life. To the indigent scholar, his books are great consolation : in them, too, he finds the germs of eloquence and taste, which may conduct him to a happier state, and they are companions in the bleakest field or humblest habitation. Without such knowledge, presumptuous ignorance may dogmatize, and the weakest men, or most foolish women, become legislators. It preserves a just barrier between the idle and industrious, and prevents cunning from domineering over uninformed minds.

To classic knowledge England owes much of her glory. The manly sentiments of Grecian and Roman authors have taught her to improve on her. Saxon constitutions, and blend both into her own admirable policy. The Irish seem born for classic lore ; and it is really grievous to notice the early dawn of genius so prevalent, and to know that so much poverty and other depressing circumstances operate—

“ To freeze the genial current of the soul.”

The population ought not to be set up to produce everywhere propounders of law, of medicine, or of religion. Professions requiring pains, time, and expence, fit men for these

offices. But classic knowledge scatters sweet flowers, of which all might gather a few, and transplant them to his humble homo with happy effect !

On the day after our interview with the Archbishop of Tuam, we very early pursued our way. The morning was cold, and very unfavourable. Nature looks very cheerless in October, when the sun appears not, and the chilling breeze mourning along the naked fields. In Ireland, the want of trees is so great, that such mornings are often the most melancholy moments to the pedestrian. Galway is a country fertile in corn. and respectable for the industry of the people ; but it has not the romantic scenery of Mayo.

We walked very rapidly to Monyvea, having looked at a large monastic ruin in our way, and arrived to breakfast in the midst of severe rain. As we had feared, the weather begins to break and the termination of our tour at Killarney promises to be unpleasing. But we make the best of these things, and prefer the little hardships of coming winter to the extreme heats of summer—often dangerous to the pedestrian,—and in this season of pestilence it might be highly so. Monyvea is a very neat village, and the handsome house of Mr. French adjoins it. There is here, also, a large charter-school, containing one hundred and forty girls. I could not help wishing it had been given as a temporary fever-hospital. Nor do I, my dear L., speaking impartially, perceive that these institutions are of any public utility. They prove a heavy expence to the state, and can never accomplish the views of their original founders. All these young girls will form wives for Catholic young men, and go to chapel with their husbands. The arguments applied by the Romans to the Sabine women will ever prevail, and love finish what gentle constraint began.

The charter-schools were formed on a weak system. The great tide of religious opinion has flowed on, undiminished and unchecked. The buildings remain,—useful chiefly for a few individuals—and instructive, as a lesson to tyrants, that the mind is beyond their reach ; and that, though men may be exterminated, religion cannot be conquered. As the system is long ago abandoned, these schools must be looked on as very expensive incumbrances, in times like these, when the difficulties of the state are great.

From Monyvea we proceeded to this small town of Athenree, under heavy rain. We heard of fever every mile! The priest of a neighbouring parish, who officiated on Sutiday, died last night in one week's illness. Ecclesiastics and physicians are greatly exposed to danger. What lives might not small fever-hospitals have saved ! Athenree has some very interesting ruins of a castle and abbey. It was once a fortified town, and of great note in Connaught. Much of the walls and towers remain. Near this town, in ancient times, fell, in the bloom of youth, Feidlim, the warlike young king of Connaught.

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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