

In The West - 1852

Letters from Ireland

Harriet Martineau

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Connemara

September 3, 1852.

There are few things in the world more delightful than a drive at sunset, in a bright autumn evening, among the mountains and lakes of Connemara. A friend of ours describes the air of his favourite place by saying it is like breathing champagne. The air here, on such an evening, is like breathing cream. It has the best qualities of the sea and land breeze at once. Then there are the grand bare mountains, the Bennobeola, or Twelve Pins, with caprices of sunlight playing about their solemn heads, and shining into their dark purple depths ; and below are waters untraceable and incalculable. We are here at the ends of the earth, to all appearance ; for the land is as a fringe, with the waters running in everywhere between its streaks. There are salt waters and fresh : bays, lakes, river ; dashing torrents ; mirror-like pools ; a salmon-leap here ; an inlet for shellfish there ; and, receding behind, Ballinahinch Lough, with its little island, just big enough to hold the old castle, now a ruin, where tradition says that ‘Dick Martin’ used to imprison people who were guilty of cruelty to animals. Then comes a basin of turf—a filled-up lake, as any one may see, with the last little pool in the middle fast turning into bog. Close at hand are broken banks, gaudy with heath and bog flowers in vast variety ; and beyond spreads the bronzed moorland, with foreign-looking goats, black and white, browsing in a group ; and sea-gulls dipping, as if they took it for the sea. Along the road are brown-faced girls and boys, all healthy-looking, and many handsome ; and women finishing their reaping and binding for the day,—their madder-red petticoats and blue cloaks throwing a wonderful charm of colour into the scene. And next, we cannot but observe that cottages are whitewashed as we approach Clifden. This was noticeable in the neighbourhood of the mansion lately called the Martins’ Castle ; and pleasant it was to see neat white cottages up on the hill-sides, each with its “ stooks” of oats before it. In proportion to the sweetness of such an evening drive is the strangeness of entering the public drawing-room at the inn, where there are ladies and clergymen, all intensely occupied with the condition of the people. There are Bibles open and shut. There is talk of a Protestant lecture this evening ; of Protestant prayers in the morning, preparatory to an examination of the children in the principles of Protestantism. Ladies are busy with crochet-work, or with their accounts of crochet-work sold, or in teaching poor women crochet. The ladies relate that they have thus far sent out teachers to instruct the poor women in cabins in crochet-work, with the simple object of earning their bread : but that now, as these pupils have been almost all Catholics, they shall alter their plan, and give this instruction only in connection with sound Protestant principles. They tell how wonderfully the ministry of Mr.— has been blessed, from his plan of speaking plainly ; that he has plainly told the people, “ If you attend to what the priests tell you, you will go to perdition ; if you learn of me, you will be saved ;” and this plan, they say, has “ certainly been wonderfully blessed ;” “ the people are coming over by hundreds, and the answers given by the children are really astonishing.” This is one statement, earnest and sincere, whatever else it may be.

Another is, that the people were terribly neglected by the priests, and that the novelty of being sought, caressed, and flattered, stimulates their ambition, while it excites their affections ; that the native shrewdness is called forth, and that it is true that the answers of the children are wonderful—that, in fact, their aptitude at theological controversy is something truly frightful to witness ; that their new religion will probably turn out a very transitory

matter ; that, in regard to this very crochet-work, on which their bread depends, the women do one or two pieces admirably, and then grow careless, preferring to do two collars that shall bring a shilling each to doing one which shall bring in six ; that their characteristic versatility and slovenliness will presently extend to their religion ; and that, when the first excitements of praise, gain, notice, and gratified affections are over, it is probable that nearly all the converts will fall back under the old-established power of their priests. They will go back, as Gavan Dufty said, to the old Holy Well.

There is a third account given to the inquirer. It begins like the last, with the declaration that the people were deserted in their need by the priests, who really refused the offices to the dying on which salvation is supposed to depend, when all hope of pay was gone. It is said that the people have fairly found out that the priest's attendance depends on his pay, and that he desires to keep them ignorant : that the grand benefit of the present movement is that it teaches the people something, and rouses the priests to better behaviour, and the people to require it : that the practice of the clergy on both sides teaching that their antagonists are carrying their hearers to hell tends to make the people reject both doctrines ; and that in fact a total infidelity, such as now prevails largely among the educated, in this region of strife, will probably prevail ere long no less extensively among the poor and ignorant.

Here you have the various local opinions, as they have reached us, on a subject which is occupying more attention here at present than any other. From the temper in which it is discussed by the most zealous, it is far from being agreeable to the stranger. And it must not be forgotten that we have at present heard only the proselyting side. At Dublin we found in the National Schools that two or three hundred teachers, from all parts of Ireland, can live and learn together. Catholics and Protestants, at the very age of theological passion—from seventeen upwards—without a word of strife for years together, while earnest in their work as any of the apostles of the west. Here, in the west, we find it taken for granted, or as proved, that the two faiths are opposite as heaven and hell, and that their professors can make no terms whatever with each other. It is perhaps fair to remark that, in the Dublin case, the Church, strictly so called,—that is, the laity in conjunction with the clergy,—are engaged in the work of education. Here, in the west, it appears to us that the enterprise is mainly engrossed by clergymen and ladies. If so, the difference in temper and spirit is easily accounted for. Of this we shall know more as we proceed.

Before we left Galway, we saw increasing reason to believe that the fearful apparent wretchedness of the people is no necessary indication of poverty. The five pigs wallowing near the bed's head is an instance. At the present value of pigs here—a value greatly enhanced by the potato-disease—these five must be worth many pounds. Elsewhere, we have seen a very fine cow, or perhaps two, belonging to a hovel so wretched that you would suppose the people had no prospect of another meal. The pawnbrokers' shops at Galway reveal a great deal. We find that the people have no idea of selling any of their possessions when they want money,—of traffic, in fact. They beg, they pawn, they resort to every possible device before they think of selling a pig, or anything else that they have ; and the collections of rags —Irish rags—at the Galway pawnbrokers' are a singular sight. They would melt the heart of any stranger, unless he should learn that the owners of some of the tatters had pigs or cows or other stock at home, to the value of many pounds. The peasants do not like to be supposed to have any property ; they do not like paying rent, on this account ; and they prefer paying it, if they must, in some sort of barter. All this is a painful evidence of what sort of treatment they must have been subject to, some time or other ; and it makes their present case so difficult to deal with, that one is not surprised to find their most spirited and humane and patient friends despairing of ever teaching them to live cleanly and respectably. But the case may, it seems to us, be fairly regarded as now a hopeful one. We may be some-what misled by the charms of what we have seen of Connemara ; but we are certainly in better spirits about “ the poor Irish” than we have ever before been since we entered the country. We

should never have conceived beforehand that Connemara would be the place where we should feel cheered : but so it is.

In the first place, the healthful appearance of the people is something quite remarkable. Men, women, and children are plump, brown, clear-eyed, comfortable-looking in face and limb. We are told that about one-fifth of the population on and around the Martin and D'Arcy estates (now bearing those names no longer) died during the famine. A good many—nobody seems to know how many—but certainly no great multitude—have since emigrated. Those who remain used to think they could live on nothing but potatoes. In one mansion that we have visited, the servants thought all was over when they were restricted in regard to potatoes, and supplied with Indian meal and other things. Last year, when the potatoes were good, and they were told they might return to them, they begged for a portion of meal also. Six years ago, a girl on the estate said, “ O ma'am, I hope the Lord will take me to himself before I have to eat turnips.” She was soon glad enough to get turnip-tops, poor thing ! And yesterday, an intelligent lad, who was our guide to Clifden Castle, took pains repeatedly to explain to us what turnips were, with a zeal and pride which showed that the growth was new here, and highly esteemed. According to his testimony the ragged people here get meat sometimes, and a good deal of meal. Is not this good, as far as it goes ?

The castle at Clifden, a part of the late D'Arcy property, is inhabited by a gentleman who is said in the neighbourhood to have done much good by “ teaching the people better ways.” They were his turnips that were, with his other crops, shown us with so much pride. And very well they looked. The quantity of land that goes with the mansion, is, we were told, 250 acres, which feeds “ an illigant stock,” and leaves a good deal for sale, and of course employs many people. It was a ragged boy who said, in answer to our remark on the whitewashed cottages which shine all around on the hill-sides, that you may always know that the people are well-doing within when you see whitewash on the outside. We saw some fair plots of oats and turnips before these places ; and girls feeding calves, and here and there a vast hydrangea flowering near the door. From the inlet below, fish come up all the year round. The men bring in large turbot. which sell for 1*s.* 4*d.* or 1*s.* 6*d.* each ; and the boys wade at low tide for shell-fish. The salmon-fisheries, belonging to the Martin estate, employ not less than fifty persons on the average of the year. The tin for the cases is imported from Cornwall, and the cases are made on the spot. Flags are imported, and used for floorings (better than mud !) and also for the grinding and polishing of the marbles of the district. These importations take place at the little wharf erected by the late Mr. D'Arcy, whose unfinished monument (begun before the famine, and left stunted) deserves to be completed by grateful admirers, and to stand for future generations to be proud of, on its commanding summit, visible far over sea and land. What the present exports are it is not easy to make out, without closer inquiry than we have yet had time for ; but it is easy to see what they might, and probably will, be. The agent of the Law Life Insurance Company's property (late the Martins'), is gradually reclaiming extents of bog, which will yield a great amount of produce. The success thus far affords a sure promise of this. Some small openings have been made in the centre of a valley, which reveal not only the green marble of which the celebrated chimney-piece at the Martins' is made, but that there are mountains of it ; and the same elsewhere with the black. The red seaweed, mentioned before, abounds in all the bays. The sea, lakes, and rivers yield a vast wealth of produce : so might the surface of the ground : so does its interior. It is true the hill-sides are deformed by the staring gables of deserted dwellings ; it is true the gardens of the castle are damp and weedy, and the noble fig-tree trailing from the wall ; it is true that the D'Arcy monument is unfinished, and the town of his creation more dependent for subsistence, just now, on the influx of tourists, than a steady trade ; it is true that the timid have a genuine side of the question as well as the hopeful. But it is also true that the two great estates have come into new hands, by which they may obtain that improvement which was before impossible ; and that the people are fed and in health ; and that their district is full of natural wealth ; and that strangers know it ; and it is true beyond controversy that the condition and temper of the peasantry are improved. At this agreeable conclusion we stop for to-day.

The People and The Clergy.

September 5, 1852.

The most experienced travellers find one piece of experience ever fresh and striking—their inability to anticipate, through any amount of previous reading and inquiry, what they shall see and what they shall think in a new country. After wide travelling, extended over many years, we are now feeling this as freshly as in our first journey ; and we need not be ashamed to own it, as the same acknowledgment is made by some persons who were likely to know a good deal more beforehand about the Irish than ourselves—the English settlers in Connemara. Some of them declare that, while in no one respect disappointed, they find the Irish people with whom they have to do, and their circumstances, different from what they expected. After a long course of reading and thought on Ireland and its main interests, there were two things, among others, about which we felt ourselves pretty well assured—that in the wild west we should find the peasantry poor, to the point of hunger ; and that we should be in some sympathy with the Catholics—priests and people—under the injury of the establishment, over their heads, of the religion of the minority, and under the suffering of the contumely with which they are treated by the insolent Protestantism of the country. Do not be alarmed. Do not suppose that we are any nearer than formerly to sympathy with insolence—Protestant or Catholic—or to approbation of the establishment of the religion of the minority over the heads of the majority. We will presently explain what we mean.

Since we wrote last we have seen multitudes of the peasantry and town labourers ; nearly all, in fact, that there are to see ; for they are a people who do not stay much within-doors at this season (to which, indeed, there is little temptation), and we have not seen one unhealthy-looking person. Our attention has been particularly directed to this since we entered upon what are especially called the famine districts. We have passed through the districts of the English settlers ; we have skirted the lonely Kylemore Lough, and crossed the moorlands at its head ; we have travelled the length of the wild Killeries (where it was scarcely possible to believe ourselves within the bounds of our own empire), and traversed the dreary tract which lies between the Erive and Westport ; we have left Connemara behind us, and penetrated some way into Mayo, and we have as yet seen only the same stout, brown, clear-eyed health that we have spoken of in former letters. We are now about to plunge into the very wildest part of the island—beyond Achill to the Mullet, which was depopulated by the famine. If we have a different story to tell after being there, you will soon know it. Meanwhile, I tell you what we have found. From every cluster of hovels by the roadside—from behind a dunghill on which a noble eagle is somehow secured—from over the fences—from all imaginable places—children, lads, lasses, sometimes women, rush forth, with bundles of stockings and socks, with crystals, or bits of marble or of coral, and run beside the car, with their light, easy, bog-trotting pace, for miles, begging, more or less earnestly, or, in some cases, apparently for the sport. They seem to have lost no breath, at whatever distance they may stop ; and they do not look as if they had ever known what sickness was. Several are marked with small-pox ; and cases of the loss of an eye are frequent in the towns ; and we have observed an unusual proportion, we think, of club-feet. But in the faces and forms we see no signs of deficient nourishment, or of the diseases which are generated by bad air and light, damp, and overcrowding.

The testimony of good judges seems to be uniform as to the industry of the labouring classes under fair circumstances, — that is, when they can make money only by industry, and when their labour is fairly paid. If they can beg they will. If they fancy they can find a short cut to wealth, they will try it, eagerly enough ; but, settled down under a just employer, out of the track of tourists and of conflicting religionists, they will work as well as anybody. They are also very provident. It is this part of the experience of the English settlers which has surprised them most. The labourer will live upon almost nothing, and lay by all he can save, till

he has enough to take him to England, or to America. He does not like to be known to have anything ; so he will not let the most honourable and benevolent gentleman take care of his money, or put him in the way of getting interest for it. The long accumulated suspicion of many generations cannot be dispersed at once ; and the peasant would rather forego the interest on his money than let anybody know that he has it : so there is no knowing what he does with it, except when he buys a cow or other stock. The unwillingness of the people to traffic—to sell anything that has once been their own—has been already mentioned. They hold fast by any investment they have made, and evidently consider that they are robbed if they have to part with it. At the time of the famine some persons went on their own horses to obtain relief from the board ; and one man got it who was found to have been, at the moment, the owner of fifteen cows. These were people who would not have stolen anything under any pressure ; but they had a notion that what was once theirs was theirs always, by right. Wherever we have been, and from all sorts of authorities, we have been assured that there is a fine natural sense of justice among the Irish, under whatever strange perversions : and it certainly appears as if, among their most insufferable encroachments and their wildest eccentricities, they had some distorted conception of justice in their minds. In school, and in domestic service, it is found that they rather lack truthfulness ; that in regard to honesty, they are about on a par with the English and that, as to other matters, their morality may be sustained at a high point, if their sense of justice be duly respected, and made the point of appeal. This being the case, the shameless and absurd begging, by those who are not in need, is indeed sadly *infra dig*. The other day we were walking on a half-private road, where two lads were raking and smoothing the approach to a pretty residence, by whose owner they were employed and paid. They asked us for money for mending the road, and were refused. A little further on, their spade, of unusual shape, was standing against the wall. We felt the weight of it. “ There, now,” said they, “ you must give us something for using our spade.” “ Give me a halfpenny,” cried a girl. “ What would you do with it if I gave you one ?” “ I would buy a book with it.” “ Can you read, then ?” “ No.” This one had the grace to run away. Probably their parents, or the habit of a life, may set these children and grown-up young people to run miles after a car ; but our impression is, that they like the fun of it : and they certainly look as well fed and merry as the tourists about whom they swarm.

As for the other matter, it becomes a more painful one to hear of, and witness, and think and speak about, the further we go into the wilds. This is no reason for silence, but the contrary. There is no need to explain that we are wholly unconnected with the conflicting religious “ interests” in this country, and that our sole “ interest” is in seeing the people wise, good, and happy. We have hitherto taken for granted that the Catholic religion was a real faith to its professors, animating their hopes, and more or less securing their morals. We have steadily contended for their rights of conscience, and, as they have been conventionally (since they ceased to be legally) oppressed, we have found our sympathies unavoidably siding with them—including the priests with the laity. We are compelled to say that the further we go, and the more we learn, the more completely that sympathy dies away. We little thought ever to have written this ; but this is what we have to write. We find, from universal testimony,—and by no means from that of the zealous “ Protestants” we have met, whose word we would not take in this particular matter,—that it is a settled thing in the popular mind that “ the priest is no good where there is no money.” Those who cannot say, of their own knowledge, that it is true that the priests refused the last offices “ essential to salvation” to those who could not pay, admit that everybody acts on the certainty that it is useless to send to the priest unless the fee is ready. Again, the fee must be ready, if by any conceivable means it can be scraped together, and for purposes incessantly recurring. A peasant would never think of using a chair, or other article of furniture, till it has been blessed by the priest, which blessing costs half-a-crown. There is scarcely an incident in life in which the priest, and consequently his fee, is not mixed up ; and we are unable to learn what the priest does beyond such paid services as these. He is the policeman of his church ; and it does not seem clear what he is besides. We have endeavoured to learn which alternative of two very sad ones we must suppose to be real,

—that the priest believes in the necessity of blessing furniture, and of extreme unction, or that he does not. If he does, what are we to think of his money stipulations ? If he does not, what kind of a priest is he ? In either case, what is the plight of the people—of that multitude whom I now see kneeling, not only on the steps of the chapel opposite, but on the pavement outside the railings, filling up its whole breadth ? The Catholic and the Protestant zealots seem to be trying, as for a wager, which can fastest drive the people into an ignorant contempt of all faiths whatever. The struggle for victory is as morally bad for the ignorant witnesses as it is painful to those who are out of the battle. They know very well that Protestant ladies are trying in vain to get their tracts laid about in hotels, where the Catholic or politic owners will not suffer them to lie for an hour. Some have much sadder cause to know what the conflict is. Yesterday, we were issuing from the Killery Pass—feeling more as if we were in Norway than anywhere else, with this true fiord before our eyes—when we perceived (what is never to be seen in Norway) a most wretched-looking hamlet, in a slight hollow, high up on the mountain-side. But for the hovering smoke, we should never have supposed those cabins to be dwellings. We asked what that wretched place was.

“ Oh,” replied our Catholic driver, “ the people there are all Jumpers” (Protestants). We inquired further, not seeing the connection between the religion and the wretchedness. He said, in simple reply to our questions, that the people were Jumpers because they were too poor to help it. That the clergyman (whose pretty house he pointed out) got money from England, and offered work to everybody who would go to his church, and refused it to all who went to mass. The priest had no money, and so the people were obliged to be Jumpers ; but they would not be so when they could help themselves. They loved the priest, and wished to go to mass ; and when he called and threatened them with what would happen if they did not, they promised to go ; but they were obliged to break their promise or starve. Such is the Catholic account of the matter, on the spot. Whether the Protestants would allow it to be correct or not, this report shows what is the popular feeling on the subject of the religious conflict. Then we passed the new church, rising under the hands of people thus driven to the work, and thus “ converted.” Next, we met a band of boys,—clean, intelligent-looking, and well-mannered. They pulled their forelocks, and did *not* beg. We observed on this to the driver, who said that children don’t beg on their way to school. All hail to the schools ! happen what may outside. The schools are our ground of hope : we were going to say our *only* ground of hope, but we will not say that yet. Nor will we say what the difficulty is of forming an opinion or a wish on the management of ecclesiastical affairs in Ireland, till we see whether more light arises from further travel.

English Settlers in the “ Wilds of the West.”

September 7, 1852.

These western wilds are the region for English settlers. The further we proceed, the more of them we find ; and we must say that, as far as our observation goes, they seem to be heartily welcome. In old days we used to believe (and we find that some residents think so still) that the peasantry, all over Ireland, had a strong distaste to working for wages ; and that the one good thing in life, in their estimate, was to have a bit of ground on which they might be independent. We now find indications of a very different feeling wherever Englishmen have settled. Mr. A. is a very fine man, who employs sixty people or more, who would be starving but for him. Mr. B. is a gentleman who has a very fine wife, who has so many people come that they keep much company, and spend a good deal of money. Mr. C. has a very fine place and garden, and it employed plenty of people for a long while to raise it and get it into order. Mr. D. has a very fine mill ; and it is a fine thing for the place—it employs so many people. Mr. E. has a very fine farm, and the people are sure of work and wages all the year round. And so on, from one county to another, in the west. Mr. Robertson, the agent on the Martin estates, now the property of the Law Life Insurance Company, has lived in the country for many years and is much esteemed and trusted by his neighbours. It is he of whom we used to hear that he had no locks and bars on his doors, as there was nobody to be afraid of. He is the

lessee of the Martin fisheries, and he employs fifty persons, on the average of the year, on the salmon-fishery near the Martins' Castle. His bog reclamations answer well, and employ much labour. There was some discontent about the 196,000 acres of that property being all transferred to one company; but there was nothing else to be done, as the company had claims exceeding the value of the whole estate. It is not yet divided, to be sold in portions. It has been so laid out that the saleable parts could not be disposed of without throwing away every chance of making anything of the more unproductive. Time will remedy this ; and the management of the estate will proceed with a view to a future division and sale. Meanwhile, there is no necessity for a forcible clearance, nor even for the company to enable the people to emigrate. Some have earned the means, and are gone ; and more employment is found for those who remain. The other great domain, the D'Arcy estate (about a fourth of the size of the Martins'), is divided, and has been sold in portions, of which two or three are bought by Englishmen. Our guide at Clifden told us that the castle and lands belonging to it are bought by a " Mr. Eyre, the head banker of London." Mr. Scully, his agent, now resident at the castle, is gratefully spoken of throughout the neighbourhood, for the pains he takes to improve the people's ways and promote their welfare.

On leaving Chifden for the north, we see, on the first water-power, and at the foot of a little wooded ravine, a large mill, with a dwelling-house beside it. A new settler lives here—with a Scotch name—and he is evidently the great support of the population round him. After ascending the swelling moorland above, to see, far off and away, the lovely coast, with its bays, promontories, valleys, and islands—as sweet a scene as ever basked in autumnal sunlight. The driver points out what he calls the light on yonder hill : this " light" being a clearing where green fields and stubble shine amidst the surrounding moor. This is Mr. Twining's, of Clegan—too far off for us to visit ; but a letter of Mr. Twining's has been published, in which he speaks hopefully of the capability of the district. We turn down to the right, and see a church, a large expanse of drained bog and of advanced cultivation ; and a large, eccentric-looking abode. This is Mr. Butler's, a settler of many years' standing. Some way further on, amidst a scene of remarkable beauty, there is a handsome house, with its roof-tree just laid, and workmen busy about it. In the sloping fallow before the door, two men are harrowing. There is a pleasant and cheery look about the place. It is Captain Fletcher's. Then follow immediately half-a-dozen or so of brilliantly clean dwellings, some gardens, really verdant fields, a post-office, a shop, a school-house, up the hill on the left-hand side ; and on the right, charmingly seated on its green bank, and with garden sweets about it, the grey stone house of James Ellis, whose name is his sufficient eulogy. This Quaker family lives among an exclusively Catholic peasantry, on terms which it would do the conflicting zealots elsewhere good to witness,—if they could go to hold their tongues and learn, instead of preaching mischief where all is now peace. This Friend, who values his own faith as much as any M'Hale or Dallas, employs a large number of labourers, who are all Catholics ; and they find they can all be religious in their own way, without any strife.

Somewhat further on, towards Kylemore Lough, in a solemn seclusion, at the foot of dark mountains, stands the abode of Mr. Eastwood, another English gentleman, who is improving a large estate there. After that, there are no more dwellings for many miles, except the little Kylemore Inn, and some cottages beyond. The moorland is too wild for settlement, and the misty mountains allow too little sunshine to encourage tillage. The singular and glorious Killery follows, with its admirable road, one of the benefits left behind by the lamented Alexander Nimmo. Then comes the Jumper village I told you of, with its new church and pretty parsonage at the extremity of the fiord. Further on, when the Connemara mountains are left behind, and the moor looks as if nobody had ever crossed it before, we come upon the plain, domestic-looking Catholic chapel, and, almost within sight of it, the national school-house of Carrekenedy. That school-house is a pleasant token of English care to light upon in the wilds.

We are now approaching Lord Sligo's property. The road continues most excellent to within five miles of Westport, where Lord Sligo's "demesne" skirts the town. This young nobleman seems to be much beloved, Protestant as he is, by his Catholic neighbours. In the morning, one may see him handing round the plate in his own church in the park for contributions for Protestant schools,—the police of the neighbourhood being on the floor of the church, and the soldiers in the gallery ; and in the evening you may hear from his Catholic neighbours how good he is,—how just and kind to his tenantry and labourers, how generous as a family man, how self-denying under the reduction of fortune caused by the adversity of the country. The reduction of rents and increase of burdens that he has had to bear for his share are no secret, and should be none. There is no disgrace in the fact ; and there is honour in the way in which it has been met. From Westport, for some miles on the road to Newport and beyond it, the aspect of things is more dreary than anything that had before met our eyes in Ireland. We need not describe it. Those soaked, and perished, and foul moorlands, relapsed from an imperfect cultivation ; those hamlets of unroofed houses, with not above one or two roofs in sight ; little bridges, with their centre-stones tumbling out ; graveyards overgrown with thistles, while cattle go in and out over the crumbling earthen fence ; signs of extensive former habitation, amidst which we may see two or three human beings moving about like chance survivors of some plague,—these features of a lapsed country are understood at a glance ; and here we found them. But presently we met a gentleman, riding a fine horse, and looking as if business carried him on so briskly. He touched his hat : we inquired who he was, and found he was another English settler—Captain Houston—who is gratefully spoken of for his excellent and extensive farming ; and he is only one of seven or eight settlers who have large farms near Westport.

As soon as we enter the island of Achill we see a large house half built ; and superintending the work is the owner, Mr. Pike, a magistrate of the island—better known as the late chairman of the committee of the Birkenhead improvements. This gentleman is one of the party of friends to whom one-half of the island of Achill has lately been sold ; the other half being purchased by the Protestant mission in the island. The island—not much smaller than the Isle of Wight—has been for seventy-two years the property of the O'Donnells. By the recent sales in the Incumbered Estates Court of the lands of Sir Richard O'Donnell, this little dominion has come into the hands of English improvers. Mr. Pike employed fifty people last winter. At this season, when they can well take care of themselves by harvest-work, etc., he dismisses them, to be taken on again as soon as they "feel the pinch," as they say. He is going to plant very largely. His experience in the planting of the new park at Birkenhead, and the skill of a man whom he has brought over to direct this part of the business, guarantee his success ; and in half a century there may be woods clothing the bases of the magnificent hills of Achill, sheltering its valleys, and imparting an air of civilization to the wildest shores that the most romantic traveller could wish to see. We have more to say about Achill hereafter. Our mention of it now is merely in connection with the subject of the settlement of Englishmen in Connaught.

The one thing that everybody—high and low, Protestant and Catholic—says about this is, that Ireland is perishing for want of capital ; that there has been too much labour ; that the land is very fine, and the sea most productive,—that there is, in short, every conceivable material of human welfare, if only the people had the means of obtaining and using them. We hear, in these western parts, no political murmuring whatever. O'Connell's name has never once been mentioned to us since we landed, except when we were passing his house in Merrion-square, Dublin, and looking at his door-plate : nor has Repeal been spoken of, except when the subject was introduced by ourselves. The complaint is of want of capital ; and the settlers are popular because they bring it.

All the while, Irish capitalists were keeping money invested in public securities to the amount of nearly forty millions, up to the time of the opening of the Incumbered Estates

sales. Very few English and Scotch have been purchasers there, in comparison with the Irish. Out of the first five hundred and eighty-seven purchasers, only thirty were English and Scotch. The capitalists of Ireland are not the pauperized tenants and embarrassed landlords ; and hence it is that the English settlers are so welcome as they are. But that there are capitalists enough in Ireland to redeem her from her poverty is proved by the equality of the rate of interest received by holders of stock in Ireland and England. (The 1 per cent, more charged on Irish mortgages is owing to the greater irregularity and risk in Ireland, and so is the limit of 6 instead of 5 per cent, in the usury laws.) As long as tens of thousands of Irish capitalists send forty millions of money to England, to receive only 3¼ per cent, for it, it is clear that the thing wanted in this undeveloped country is not capital, but inducement to employ it as strangers are beginning to do. It is with great pleasure that we find how very large a majority of the purchasers in the Incumbered Estates Court are Irish ; and yet it is with great pleasure that we see our countrymen scattered over these western wilds, each a centre of industry and a source of plenty. The Irish purchasers furnish a practical answer to the complaint of want of native capital : and the English and Scotch open up a prospect of national union, political peace, and social regeneration in that part of the United Kingdom which the most sorely needs it.

Achill.

September 14, 1852.

Twenty years ago, there were no roads in the Island of Achill. The people were as truly savage as any South Sea Islanders. When we were crossing the mountain—walking along precipices at a great height above the sea, on our way to Keem—we were told by a gentleman who has known the place for a quarter of a century, that we could not have taken that walk twenty years since, for fear of the natives. The island, whose coast measures eighty miles, was then one vast tract of moorland, yielding nothing but grouse and fish. Its boats were the old currachs, frames of wood covered with tarred canvas, as indeed too many of them are still. Of all the poor inhabitants of the west of Ireland, the very poorest were the people of Achill. They were then to others what the people of South Inniskea now are to them ; the people who worship a stone, dressing it in woollen, and praying to it for wrecks !

The first road in Achill was made by the Government about twenty years ago ; and there are now several : but so few in proportion to the extent of the island, that the traveller is annoyed at the loss of time and the fatigue incurred by the great circuits that have to be made to get from place to place ; and there is no making any short cuts, as the whole surface is bog. Before there was any road, there was a coastguard ; and a tower, conspicuous on a mountain, shows where an officer and a few soldiers were stationed in the days of the war, looking over the sea in opposite directions, and keeping watch against invasion. The coast-guard were less “ dull ” than now. Smart affairs with smugglers were of frequent occurrence in the days of high duties, when the deep coves of Achill offered great facilities for introducing a variety of articles from France, Holland, etc. At present there is no smuggling whatever, and the coastguard find their station horribly dull.

Seventeen years ago the Protestant mission, of which so much good and evil has been said, was established in Achill. Mr. Nangle is now about to leave the station which he has held through this long course of years. He is going to a rather humble living in Sligo county. Our impression is that when he has left his work, and the result of his sojourn can be estimated with impartiality, he will be found to have borne a great deal with courage and patience, and to have done a great deal of good. Whether there have been faults in the doing of his work we have no wish to inquire. Our business is with the results, and they have satisfied us that Mr. Nangle’s residence has been a great blessing to Achill. In the early part of his residence there his life was in danger : he was thrice shot at, and once knocked down by a stone, and nearly killed. It is told with laughter now in the drawing-rooms at Achill, that in

those days there was only one hat on the island (outside the mission, we suppose) ; that it was hung on a pole near the Sounds whence it was taken by any person going to the main- land, to be hung up again on his return. Now, there are schools, not only at the mission settle-ment, but scattered about the island, where boys and girls are taught in both the Irish and English languages. We saw the eager, intelligent, vigilant little boys of Keel—the Catholic Keel—at school, and we saw that there was no dawdling there. The school was dark and poor-looking, but the children were wide awake, and well-mannered, and clean, though, of course, barefoot and ragged. The houses of the settlement occupy two sides of a square ; and apart stands, on a third side, the dwelling of Mr. Nangle. There is a little church, and a post-office, and a humble inn ; the houses are all whitewashed, and all but one slated. On a hill behind Mr. Nangle’s are some unroofed cottages ; and close by, a more dreary sight still, the hamlet of Dugort on the cliff, with its filth and apparent misery. We inquired how it could have happened that, in full view of the settlement, this place could, at the end of seventeen years, be what it is ? The answer was that the property of the place has till now been Sir Richard O’Donnell’s, and that all the mission could do was to educate the children of the Catholic parents living there, hoping for the effects to appear in the next generation—as in Keel and other Catholic places. Now, the mission having bought half the island, the influence of its presence upon the population may be expected to be much greater.

It has already been very great. The skirts of Slievemore, the highest mountain in Achill, which rises behind the settlement, are enlivened with tillage, from a considerable height down to the boggy plain. It is a cheering sight to see the farmhouse from afar off, with its range of handsome stacks, and the sloping fields, some with green crops (so green in contrast with the bog), and others with oats and rye falling under the sickle of the reapers. It is cheer-ing to see the healthy faces of the women, who, a dozen in company, file out of the field by the road-side, each carrying a horse-load of fine oats to the stack. It is cheering to see the boys—ready for a job, but not begging, and looking like civilized beings. The women we meet in the road are knitting. The people in the fields are really working hard. There is life throughout the settlement. That much a stranger can see for himself, without entering into any disputes as to whether things might have been done better. There are contradictions among the residents as to whether the children are or are not improved in morals, in truthfulness, and honesty, by the education at the Mission Schools. One employer says they are, another says they are not ; but the last admits that this may be from the influence of the parents, and the habits of many generations overwhelming that of the recent education.

For a long course of years there was a quietness which might almost be called peace in Achill. The mission pursued its work quietly ; and the island was blessed with a quiet priest, who diligently minded his own business, of which he had quite enough, and let other people alone. Before the famine there were 6000 people in Achill ; and there are now about 4000,—a population sufficient to occupy the clergy, without leaving time for quarrels. But, since the Papal aggression business, the renowned “ John Tuam” has become dissatisfied with the quiet priest, who is understood to have had the utmost difficulty in keeping his situation, and who is virtually superseded by a priest of the temper of “ John Tuam” himself. The last petty sessions show what a state the island is now in, and is likely to be in henceforth. A month ago Dr. M’Hale visited the island, and opened a Catholic chapel not far from the settlement. He left behind him the two priests who are to be tried for assaults on the Scripture Readers belonging to the mission. Without prejudging a matter which stands over for trial [1], we can state these particulars of the case which are declared and admitted on both sides. The admit- ted facts are, according to the report of petty sessions, that the two priests collected the people in the village of Keel (Catholic, and the largest place on the island); that they sup-ported each other in instigating the attack by which a Scripture Reader was stoned, knocked down among the turf, and beaten ; that one of these priests, foaming at the mouth with pas-sion, called the readers “ damned devils” and the Protestants “ jumper devils “ and “ stirabout jumpers ;” that he charged the parents with sending their children to school to lose their souls, to be “

justified by stirabout and redeemed by porridge” that he bade the people “ scald, scald [2], and persecute to death” the Protestants of Achill ; that he pronounced his curse and the curse of God on any one who should sell them a pint of milk or a stone of potatoes ; that he said he had but one life, and he “ would willingly give it to drive out these devils, and see Achill great, glorious, and free, as it was before they came.” An impartial person, arrived from a place where such quarrels are not heard of, happened to be present, and to see the convulsive rage of one of these priests ; to see him run after a woman, who escaped by a stratagem from his blows ; to hear him say that to think of the settlement made his hair stand on end ; to see him endeavour to enter the girls’ school, presided over by a modest young woman ; and to hear him, when the door was (by order of her superiors) shut against him, shout out against her, in the hearing of the crowd, names too foul for repetition !

In following a road across the bog, towards the north-east of the island, we came upon piles of stones which scarcely left room for the car to pass. On inquiry we found that a nunnery is about to be built there—another broad hint of the religious warfare which may be expected now that Dr. M’Hale’s attention is riveted upon Achill. It was by mere accident that we discovered that, of all the population of the Catholic village of Keel, there are no adults who dare go out after nightfall, for fear of the fairies. Dr. M’Hale’s emissaries fear nothing so much as the emancipation of the people from fear ; and nothing arouses their wrath so quickly as the sight of that book in which the people read, “ For ye have not received the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” A tract has been published (in not the best spirit) which contains the report of the trial of a Sligo priest, some time ago, for an assault,—the motto of which tract is, “ The servant of the Lord must not strive,” etc. That priest was punished by imprisonment, and his flock and their neighbours regard the sentence as a piece of Protestant persecution, and English oppression of Ireland. On the other hand, the Catholics complain that disreputable converts, and men who will do anything for a main-tenance, are sent out by the Protestant zealots to distribute tracts and read the Scriptures ; and that they go armed with leaden life-preservers, with which they lay about them, on women and others, on the slightest occasion, or none. Thus is the religion of peace preached in these parts.

Our visit to Keel was on our way to the most romantic and melancholy spot that even romantic and sombre Achill can show ; the place which once was Keem—still spoken of in the Irish guide-books as living, and moving, and having a being on earth. Proceeding from Keel, we went through the village of Dooagh—sordid, like the rest—and began to mount by a good hill-road, till we found ourselves at a grand height above the sea, which, seen from hence, had the deep blue of the Mediterranean. The view of the coasts was superb, from the precipices of Achill, where a woman and seven children were blown into the sea, from the mountain path, one stormy night, to the faint, far distant headlands of Connemara. We saw the entrance of the Killeries, and Clew Bay with its islands (like a shoal of seals), and many islands and rocks besides, with here a glittering lighthouse, and there a few scattered boats—mere black specks on the shining sea. Another turn, and a most touching scene was before us. The road—a very good one, in excellent repair—wound down and down to a little cove where the waters, in the shadow of the rocks, were of emerald green, and the narrow beach of the purest sand. On a green slope behind, under the shelter of high mountains which clasped it round, stood the remains of Keem,—a village of roofless stone cottages, now becoming grass-grown, and silent as the death that laid it waste.

The people lived chiefly by fishing ; but they had some potato-grounds too. When weakened by the famine (which they had somehow struggled through), the cholera came upon them, and carried off a third of their number. The rest went away—some to America, others to wherever they could find food. So the eagles look down from their perch on the ridges above, and see only the places where people once were—smugglers of old, and fishermen since. There is a little potato-patch on the margin of the sand ; and one solitary roofed dwelling stands beside it. Some way up the hillside there is a heap of stones among the

heather, and a man or boy may now and then be seen searching and knocking among the stones. This is what is called the amethyst-mine, and some fine amethysts have, we are told, been found there.

The best tillage is towards the south of the island, where oats grow to great perfection, as well as the other crops mentioned before. The freshwater lakes yield trout of a large size ; and the sea is alive with fish. Fine lobsters may be had for 2*d.* each, and turbot for 1*s.* 6*d.* Geese are 10*d.* each; and they and fowls abound all along the road. A fine dairy of cows wends its periodical way to the settlement. There seems no reason why the island, now so fairly brought under the notice of the friends of the Irish, should not support, in comfort, its present number of inhabitants, and twice as many as it has ever had. It will be a dreadful scandal if its prospects are broken up in the name of religion.

The Wilds of Erris.

September 11, 1852.

We have crossed the wilds of Erris—the wildest district of Ireland, and the scene of the worst horrors of the famine. Of the horrors of the famine we shall say nothing here. It is more profitable to look at the present state of the district, to see if future famines cannot be avoided.

The district of Erris extends north of a line drawn from the two great mountains, Nephin and Croagh Patrick, or the Reek—a holy mountain, to which the people make pilgrimages. Few but sportsmen and poor-law officials know much about Erris. Snipe and trout abound among its blue lakes and ponds, and grouse among the heather, which extends as far as the eye can reach. Police barracks, brilliantly white-washed, glitter here and there ; and near them may be seen a shooting-box, a public-house, and a few cottages. But in one place, at least, and probably more, the high road passes through wilds where no dwelling is seen for miles. The traveller must amuse himself with the vegetation, the various heaths, the exquisite ferns, the marsh willows, the bog-cotton waving in the wind, and the bog myrtle ; or with the cranes, fishing from a stone ; or with the moor game, poking up their heads from the heather ; or with the snipe, swinging on a bulrush ; or he may feast his eyes on the outlines and shadowy hollows of the distant mountains ; for of human beings he will see none for miles together. When he does, it will be a policeman buying apples of a brown-faced country-woman ; or a young lady, with a letter for the mail-car—a young lady dressed in a white muslin gown with flounces, with hair in ringlets, and no stockings or shoes ; or it may be a Londoner, with gun and dog, seeking sport ; or a merry peasant boy, with his donkey and load of turf. The sudden changes of scene are remarkable ; for instance, the finding a fair going on at Bangor—a place of half-a-dozen houses. A company of constabulary are in the road, ready for the fray, which is sure to take place at nightfall, when the people have drunk enough to be quarrelsome. Women in scarlet and yellow shawls are tripping hither over the bog, carrying their shoes and stockings. Maudlin men are swearing eternal friendship, and shaking hands with the landlady of the only public-house, which is so crowded that the poor woman does not know which way to turn herself. Amidst all the noise and signs of drink, and sights of folly, the stranger cannot but remark that he never saw such health in his life before. Throughout this part of the country the old maxim will recur to him, however he may abhor it —“ the fewer the better cheer.” Our business is to tell of things as they are, and not to sentimentalize about how they might be expected to be ; so we state that where one cottage remains inhabited among half-a-dozen that are un-roofed, there may romping be seen before the door, and loud mirth be heard from within. Many a laughing party may be seen round a huge pile of smoking potatoes, in a dirty cabin. The pig is cordially invited to the fire-side, and a great potful of potatoes is emptied before him. Boys and girls show splendid rows of teeth as the car approaches, and, with grins and antics, shout and race after it, putting to flight all the traveller’s preconceptions about the melancholy left behind by the famine.

Another kind of change occurs when he draws near Belmullet. He suddenly observes that the rude fences are apparently built of marble—of glittering and veined blocks of the purest white. He has entered upon a new limestone district ; and he knows he may now look for verdure instead of brown heather. He enters the pretty little valley of Glencastle, and finds its sides bristling with wood, and its slopes carpeted with green. On the upland is a fine harvest of oats, standing in shocks. As he advances, the scene opens finely, the great Blacksod Bay being on his left hand (sometimes hidden by sloping fields), and on his right the beautiful bay of Broadhaven, like a great lake shut in by yellow beaches and mountains of most varied outline. Presently the town of Belmullet comes in sight, with its public works, its wharfs, its drawbridge, and cutting, and all the apparatus of a commerce which does not exist. This town, where a coast-guard inspector resides, is remembered as the head-quarters of the famine, where the clergyman and the inspector and their assistants were almost killed with toil and sorrow,—the toil of serving out the meal, night and day, and the sorrow of seeing the dead and dung heaped before their doors.

The dead and dying were brought from all places round : but chiefly from the Mullet—the remarkable peninsula which obtrudes itself into the sea beyond the town. It was this peninsula that we traversed Erris to see—that we might be sure that we had witnessed the worst of the wrecks left by the famine. Few have seen them, but those whose business lies among them. The waiter at the inn testified his pleasure at having guests to make welcome, so very few go there ; and when we left he wished we could have stayed longer. In the centre of the town there is an air of some pretension, and some look of comfort ; but the outskirts are miserable enough. All this is forgotten however on approaching Binghamstown, the most shocking wreck that we have seen, except perhaps one other village in another part of Mayo. We found more inhabitants remaining than we had expected, and they did not look person-ally miserable at all. But the lines of ruin where there was once a street, the weeds and filth about the deserted hearth-stones, or (what seemed almost worse) the crops of potatoes and cabbages grown on the floors where dead neighbours lived so lately, made our very hearts sick. The Catholic chapel is not considered at all in a ruinous state in comparison with other places, yet its windows are half boarded up, its walls are mouldy, and half the cross on its roof is gone. The large white house near was the seat of a gentleman, of one of the ancient families of Ireland. After a long struggle with embarrassments, he was too weak to bear the stress of the famine year. He let his house for a workhouse, and was thankful to be made its master. In those ancestral rooms he ruled as master—not of his own house, but of the work-house ! He soon died. One of his sons is, we are told, there now as a pauper. His widow and daughters live in an ordinary labourer's cottage near. One such tale is enough, and we will tell no more.

The soil is considered excellent all along the Mullet; and, near Belmullet, the rising grounds were covered with harvests, bristling with ' stocks ' of fine oats. Further on, there were enclosures everywhere, showing what the cultivation had been ; but there was little growth of anything. Some of the fields were lapsing into mere waste ; in others, cattle were grazing. On either hand the most lovely bays ran into the land—bays always alive with fish. Yet we saw only one net, in our drive of fourteen miles and back again. The usual declaration is, that the people cannot fish, for want of boats and nets, which they are too poor to obtain ; but we saw a sight to-day which told a worse tale than even this. Seeing something like a deserted windmill without its sails, we inquired what it was, and found it was a curing-house, going to ruin. An Englishman had come here to establish a fishery. He knew his business ; but he did not know the people who were to do it. He was right about the fitness of the place for a profitable fishery ; but he was wrong in supposing that his fishery must therefore be profitable. The people ruined his project, the success of which would have made their fortune, as well as his. They asked for advances of wages—one half-a-crown—another eighteenpence, and so on ; and then they went off without doing their work. His money melted away, and he departed, leaving the curing-house to rot on the shore of the bay which swarms with fish. And still we are met with the plea that the people are too poor to have boats and nets ; and with complaints that capitalists do not come and settle, to develop the natural wealth of the dis-

trict. Once more we ask why 20,000 Irish capitalists invest nearly £40,000,000 in the English funds, while such natural riches remain to be developed at home ; and, again, we have to pause long for a reply.

We have said, in a former letter, that English settlers appear to be heartily welcome in the west of Ireland. Yet, since we wrote that, we have been where an English gentleman found, one morning lately, that the tails of all his horses were cut off. An English clergyman found, another morning, that one ear of his saddle horse had been cut off in the night. This last act is probably ascribable to theological hatred. As to the other, it appears that the good feeling towards settlers does not always extend to those who make the rearing of stock their object. They buy up or lease land for a sum or rent nearly nominal, when, as in the case of Lord Sligo's lands, the depreciation in value is excessive. They graze their cattle for almost nothing, employing next to no labour, and make vast profits. There is nothing really unfair in this. They give what the land, in a season of adversity, will bring, and they use it in a way most profitable to themselves. Nobody has a right to complain of this as dishonest. But we cannot wonder if the suffering neighbours are quick to feel the difference between this method of settling and that of men who come to till the ground and employ labour. Men see cattle growing fat among the enclosures where their neighbour's homes used to be. Their neighbours are gone—over the sea or into the grave—for want of work and food, and one herd of cattle succeeds another, to be sent away to England, and fill English pockets with wealth, while the Irish peasant remains as poor as ever. And within sight, perhaps, there is another English settler, who employs all the labour round him, and who says that if the land were made the most of, the country would be found to be much under-peopled. The peasantry cannot but draw comparisons between the two orders of settlers. That they should cut off horses' tails is horrible. That they should feel that the graziers could not be making such fortunes, if calamity had not, for the time, annihilated the value of land, is natural and unavoidable. That the extension of tillage will in time restore the value of depreciated lands, and rectify the balance between grazing and cultivation, is the issue to which we must look, and for which we would fain persuade the people to wait with patience. But what patience is needed ! In answer to our inquiry, whether the condition and prospects of the people on or near the Mullet were improving, the constant answer was—" In comparison with the famine years, yes, of course. In comparison with the years before the famine, no. We have no trade—no resources. " Where is the improvement to come from ?" And truly when we had passed through a few more of the depopulated villages on the Mullet, and seen the mere remnant of people that hang about that tract which might be so fertile, we could not but echo the question, " Where is improvement to come from ?" Yet, we cannot but feel that it will come, so rich are the means which Nature has laid there, ready to the hand of man.

[1] One priest has been since convicted, and fined £5. We do not know the fate of the other.

[2] Scalding seems a favourite idea with the priests. " May the Almighty scald your soul, when you come to die !" is one of their imprecations : in one case used by a bishop to a convert.

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