

Letters from Ireland, 1837

Charlotte Elizabeth

MDCCCXXXVII

THE following pages would have appeared six months earlier, but for various hindrances which delayed the work of filling up what was but a brief outline. That they should appear at all may be deemed by some readers matter of apology also ; but at a period when such strenuous efforts are made to place in different and opposing lights the country and the people referred to, it seemed desirable to add to the collection even such a sketch as this, taken recently from the life. Facts, rather than inferences, are adduced : and if it be objected, that too much of a private and personal nature is interspersed with what concerns the public, it may be pleaded in excuse that not a small portion of English readers are still misled by prejudice or mistake, in their calculations regarding the Irish character. The writer has had many discussions with friends who, desirous of seeing and judging for themselves of this most debateable land, were deterred from gratifying that laudable wish by a degree of bodily fear. Their imagination represented a succession of perilous obstacles, of which the least formidable menaced highway robbery, or submersion in an unfathomable bog. Not a few really pathetic remonstrances were used to dissuade her from so daring an undertaking as that of traversing from south to north the dreaded country: exacting, at the same time, a distinct promise that, if permitted to return with life, she would publish a full and true account of every hair-breadth 'scape ; together with a correct transcript of the impression made on her mind by an attentive view of existing circumstances. That promise is now redeemed ; and happy will she be if these familiar ' Letters ' tend to remove an unfounded apprehension, or unjust suspicion, as to this lovely country and its interesting inhabitants ; or to arouse a spirit of more impartial inquiry, where the judgment may have been prematurely biassed in matters deserving of the most serious, most patient, and most scrutinizing investigation. When Englishmen learn to view Ireland as she is, the first great step will be achieved towards making Ireland what she ought to be.

*July*, 1838.

LETTER I.

COUNTY WEXFORD.

*June*, 1837

You will not be much surprised at the date of this letter, knowing how anxiously I have been seeking an opportunity to take flight westward. That I have been permitted so to do, is a matter of thankfulness and joy. A long absence from Ireland, with a watchful eye constantly turned towards it, has prepared me to make the most of the short period allowed for this visit : and here I am, all alive to the delight so earnestly coveted.

It would be a grave speculation, worthy of some calculating English head, to ascertain how far the public health has been affected by the locomotive improvements of the age. I do not refer to the impregnation of our atmosphere with gas and steam, but to the serious increase of maladies requiring change of place. Formerly, and within our recollection, the privilege of being too delicate to stay at home was reserved for those whose abundant wealth and superabundant leisure enabled them to encounter a cost of money and time, far beyond the means of their neighbours. Now it is astonishing what an indispensable necessity has fallen upon the bulk of our countrymen, and still more of our countrywomen, to migrate.

How our grandsires and grandames contrived to attain the robust old age that we have admired to see, without an annual flitting to other climes, is a problem indeed. I can shrewdly guess at some of the attractions which irresistibly impelled you towards the far north : but I will not excite your tender sympathy by recapitulating the ailments that rendered my journey almost a matter of life and death. I believe they might, however, be summed up in the Swiss disorder, *Malade-du-pays*. Ireland, to be sure, is not my native country ; but if all her children loved her as I do, the migratory propensity would here be little known. The rich would stay at home, and the poor would be fed.

My route hither was from London, *via* Bristol and Waterford : my travelling companions two blithesome boys, in all the exuberance of joyous freedom from school restraints. One delighted to conduct a guest to his paternal dwelling his own loved Irish home ; the other all expectation of what he was to see and to hear and to enjoy in the land for which he is led to pray as constantly as the morning breaks upon his English abode. I think the habit of stately, and by name, praying for Ireland in the family worship, tends more than any thing else to keep alive the flame of Christian love, which, I bless God, does not waver or fail in my bosom towards her.

We had been advised to take our passage on board the *Nora Creina*, Waterford steamer ; but while waiting her arrival from Bristol, we were attracted by the handsome, spacious appearance of a rival vessel, the *St. Patrick*, lying just below us. We strolled on board, and finding every thing within answerable to the exterior, with the prospect of a rapid passage, and the unconscionably low fare of half-a-guinea each, instead of the £1. 17s. that was demanded before a lively competition reduced it, we shipped our luggage, secured our berths, and became the staunch partizans of *St. Patrick* against all the world. It is marvellous how the selfish principle operates in these matters ; and I think peculiarly so in naval concerns. Whatever vessel you may make choice of for a trip, where choice is allowed, becomes immediately the safest, the fleetest, the best navigated in the service. Nay, should the kindness of a friend bring you into close acquaintance with a man-of-war, allowing you to walk the decks, to number the guns, to inspect the wonderful machinery of that mighty ‘ home upon the deep,’ you become identified with it ; you are personally glorified in all the victories achieved by the gallant ship ; and you are ready to maintain that for the skill and bravery of her officers, and seamanship of her crew, she has no competitor in the royal navy. What marvel then that we, being fairly established on board the *St. Patrick*, laughed to scorn the idea of the *Nora Creina* or any other boat bound for Waterford coming within the influence of the mighty swell that we should leave in our track ? It really was an exceedingly fine vessel ; and as I sat upon deck, luxuriating in the consciousness that I was fairly embarked for Ireland, I know not with whom I would have exchanged situations.

An amusing scene passed before us : the agent was receiving passage-money and distributing tickets ; and when the steerage pas-sengers advanced in their turn, it was quite a foretaste of Ireland. The lounging gait, the easy unembarrassed air, the arch expression of countenance, and rich nationality of phrase and accent, all gave such a zest to the humorous remark and quick retort, bandied between the parties engaged, that my English youth was quite amazed at the freedom of the poor people, and playfulness of their superiors ; while the naturally high spirits of his Irish friend were wound to a pitch of enjoyment that enhanced my own. At length all was settled, and we cleared away in capital style from the land, holding our majestic course towards the mouth of the Avon, not forgetting to bestow a few farewell jokes on the *Nora Creina*, whose bright red chimney top was peeping from the other side of the lock, and of whom we had got the start so completely as to leave her no reasonable chance of enjoying more than a distant sight of us during the voyage.

But alas for all sublunary glory! In our anxiety to anticipate *Nora*, we had also a little

anticipated the tide ; and though no boat could be better worked, yet as we were obliged to leave sea room for the numerous vessels passing inwards to the basin, we brought our gallant steamer too near shore for the present depth of water ; and with one bold plunge the mighty St. Patrick stuck so fast in the mud that all the machinery on board would not affect his extrication. Nothing could be more interesting, more animated, more picturesque, or more provoking, than our situation. Not a shadow of danger, to rouse any deeper feeling ; and only for one circumstance it would have been delightful. Here rose perpendicularly above us the splendid rocks of St. Vincent, exactly at the foot of which, in their loftiest and most magnificent point of view, we lay : across the water, dancing and sparkling from the continual agitation of passing ships, were spread the beautiful wooded heights of Leigh. I do not think that any river can afford a more strikingly imposing coup d'œil than we had then full leisure to contemplate : but that annoying red chimney-top marred all our gratification. The Nora Creina had cleared the lock, had put on her steam ; and while our men were straining every nerve in ineffectual efforts to float St. Patrick, his fair rival paddled by in triumph, bestowing on us a merry cheer whether of condolence or exultation is best known to those who uttered it.

By means of a rope we were at length hauled into deep water again, and had the satisfaction of following Nora, but at as respectful a distance in the rear as we had intended her to keep. We passed into the Bristol channel, and without further adventure held on our way. An excellent dinner was provided, and the afternoon passed pleasantly on deck, a bright sky above, and a wide outspread of tranquil water around us. Towards evening, as I watched the sun's westward progress, that splendid reflexion which renders a sun-set at sea so glorious, suddenly appeared; a stream of light seemed to descend perpendicularly from the flaming orb, still high above the horizon, and to settle on the wave beneath in a body of effulgence it was like a carpet of silver tissue interspersed with diamonds, a little larger than the sun's apparent diameter. At that moment my young Hibernian friend approached, ' Do you see that, Robert ?' I asked, pointing to the brilliant object before us. ' Yes,' he replied ; ' *and Ireland is just under it.*'

Oh ! what a multitude of mixed feelings came crowding to oppress my mind at that moment ! I knew that the morrow must dawn before I could catch a glimpse of that distant shore ; but here its location was unexpectedly pointed out to me, and that too with an association of the sublime and beautiful not often occurring together. Ireland is called the land of song ; and I think it is the experience of all who have deeply pondered on her history, and looked upon her glorious landscapes, that the feelings excited on her behalf always partake of something which, for want of a better term, I suppose I must call romance. That mixture of the wild, the terrible, the joyous and pathetic peculiar to the Irish character, which is stamped on the natural scenery of the land, marks the pages of her changeful story, and thrills in her national melodies, rouses in those who are conversant with it a species of enthusiasm incomprehensible to such as have never felt it. The anxious bustle of preparatory arrangements, the shifting scenery of a rapid journey, the events of our outset, and the many new faces appearing around me, amid the lively quarter-deck concomitants of a fine day, had almost lulled to sleep a chord long strung in my bosom. It was now touched struck with a force that sent the vibration through its entire length and breadth; and from that moment I was dead to all else but the absorbing theme of our loved, unhappy Ireland. Often, very often, during a long absence of many years, had I breathed the language adapted to one of the Irish melodies.

How dear to me the hour when daylight dies,  
And sunbeams melt along the silent sea :

For then sweet dreams of other days arise,  
And memory breathes her vesper sigh to thee.

Can you not imagine with what a rush of gratified feeling they recurred to me now that I was pursuing a swift and steady course towards the land ? The silver speck enlarged, it lengthened, it approached us, assuming every moment a deeper glow : and there it lay, stretched from the furthest horizon to the very keel below me, and kindling into diamond brilliancy the gushes of foam from our paddle wheels. How exquisitely expressive of my sensations was the next verse

And as I mark the line of light that strays  
Along the cool wave tow'rd the burning west,  
I long to tread that golden path of rays,  
And think 'twould lead to some bright isle of rest.

' Rest !' that word presented too painful a contrast to the reality, of what is, and has been, and too probably will yet be the lot of Ireland. You will not be surprised to hear that I did not withdraw my eyes from that quarter so long as the faintest lingering blush continued to mark the spot ; and that by five o'clock the next morning I was at my post, in eager expectation of the first glimpse of Erin. It appeared at last ; and after swallowing a hasty breakfast from the abundance of good cheer provided on board the St. Patrick, we again seated ourselves on deck, to mark the bold outline of the Wexford mountains, and the fine approach to Waterford.

On a jutting point of land, conspicuous alike for size and situation, stands the tower of Hook, a round, white building ; and several other martello towers are seen along the coast where it stretches off to the north east, forming the bay of Ballyteig. Hook being rounded, we had fairly entered the harbour's mouth ; and shall I try to tell you what I felt when beholding on either side the sweet green shores, like arms outspread to receive, with the national ' cead-mille-failte,' the ' hundred thousand welcomes' of Irish hospitality, a returning friend ? No, I will not attempt it: you know the many touching circumstances that must have combined to render it an hour of trying emotion to me ; you know that, since last I beheld her, Ireland has become the grave of that ' dear lost companion,' who, from earliest babyhood was to me,

' Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes,  
Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart.'

and you know that a pilgrimage of sorrowing affection to that spot had been for years the object of my daily wish and nightly dream. The circumstance threw a shade of indescribable sadness over my mind : the heart knew its own bitterness ; and the tears that for an hour would not cease to fall, as I looked upon the soft and beautiful scenery around me, were indeed tears of love and grief, sacred alike to the memory of the dead and the doom of the living. I could at once take up the language of David and of Jeremiah ; I could say with the former, " I am distressed for thee, my brother," and with the latter, " Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people !"

Nothing could be more lovely than the gradually narrowing banks of Waterford harbour. There is no striking object no grandeur of any kind, but a character of simple beauty and repose. A gentle acclivity leads the eye to prospects diversified indeed, yet varying without a break upon the uniform placidity of the scene. Here, a nobleman's or gentleman's seat, with its fine background of wooded hills, and a spacious lawn in front ; there, a less conspicuous abode, or cluster of modest dwellings, with the slight spire of a village church peeping out beyond them. Again, where the shore flattens, a busy tribe of fishermen, launching or unlading their boats, with their lowly cabins scattered or congregated a little farther inland. The houses in Ireland are, as you know, almost universally white ; and you could not but admire the picturesque effect thereby produced, when they are thinly scattered on rising grounds clad

with that delicious verdure, the just boast of the Emerald isle, and relieved by a sufficiency of trees and hedgerows, which is not always the case, though Waterford harbour can display as much as the eye of taste would desire. We passed along, under a glorious sunshine ; and the necessary demand on my attention, when the marvellously moderate charges for cabin fare and attendance were presented and the selection of luggage commenced, gave a turn to the tide of feeling, better suited to the realities of the moment.

What changeable beings we are ! No sooner were those tears dried, than a flow of cheerfulness, presently amounting to the most mirthful glee, succeeded. We found ourselves near our friend Nora, whose red chimney-top had discarded its long black pennon of smoke, and whose passengers were already dispersed to their several destinations. Patrick was laid alongside his rival, who formed a bridge for us to the pier ; and Robert having recommended that, as we had not to seek a public conveyance, and were under no obligation to hasten ashore, we should remain quiet until all the rest were landed, we collected our trunks about us, and sat still, delighted spectators of the lively scene.

For, whatever else an Irish scene may lack, there is never a deficiency of liveliness in it. There is something in the national character always on the *qui vive* for amusement ; and an unsophisticated set of Irish porters, at home, are very different from any fraternity whom you have probably seen exercising that calling. I never was more amused by the contrast than now, that I had so recently experienced the sturdy demands, and witnessed the angry competition, of the London and Bristol professionals. As I sat guarding my little stores, many a polite offer of service was tendered, more with the air of a gentleman who wishes to oblige you, than of a hungry fellow whose dinner, and supper too, depend on what he may gain by it. ‘ I’m just going over there,’ pointing across the Nora ; ‘ may-be, I’d carry your luggage with me,’ said a fine, broad-faced Paddy, who had strolled up, and stood before us with great composure. ‘ Thank you ; but I’m not going ashore yet, and there’s a gentleman managing the luggage for me.’ Paddy responded to the smile with which this was spoken, touched his fragment of a hat, and, wheeling off, saw a large telescope, fixed in its rest, with the broad end about eight inches from an upright board. Not heeding the latter obstruction, Paddy immediately placed himself at the eyeglass, and applying his hands to his knees squatted down till he brought himself, as he thought, in the right line of vision to enjoy an excellent view of the harbour and distant shipping. A long pry convinced him, I suppose, that the glass was a bad one ; for he walked away in search of some other amusement. This, trifling as it was, delighted me beyond measure : I felt myself in Ireland ; and when at last permitted to spring ashore, my very feet seemed to rejoice in the privilege of kissing the beloved soil again.

Waterford has a most noble quay, little less than a mile in length, broad, and at the point where we landed exhibiting some fine buildings. The most conspicuous of these is a very ancient tower, of Danish origin, round, massive, and once no doubt of prodigious strength. It is said to have been erected in 1003 ; and among the purposes to which it has been applied, was that of a fortress, by Earl Strongbow ; a state prison, too, wherein were confined his captives, Reginald prince of the Danes in Waterford, Malachi O’Faellan, prince of the Decies, with other conquered opposers ; and a mint, by Edward IV. It is now the head-quarters of the police establishment in Waterford. In occasionally naming the police, I must guard you against the mistake of identifying them with those peaceable-looking gentry, who, with blue coats well buttoned up, and respectable round hats, perambulate the streets of London, apparently not only inoffensive but defenceless too ; and whose chief business, as a casual observer would surmise, is to answer the frequent queries of bewildered pedestrians, at a loss whether the right turning or the left will sooner bring them to their destination. The police force of Ireland present a far different aspect : their uniform is dark green, altogether of military fashion, with regimental cap, broad black belt, short musket, cartouche-box, and bayonet. The officers, or chief and deputy chief constables as they are called, wear swords.

This is one of the saddening characteristics of poor Ireland. The sword of the Spirit has been withheld from her children ; therefore the carnal weapon is become indispensable to control the excitable and misguided populace.

All around us, however, was peace and good humour when we trod the broad and well-placed flag-stones that separate, with a delightful promenade, the water's edge from the carriage-way ; and crossing the latter, proceeded on another excellent pavement, along a line of handsome shops, which spoke well for Waterford's trading prosperity. Our plan was to engage a private conveyance to New Ross, where we meant to dine ; and I had little difficulty in persuading my guide to order an outside car, that we might be as Irish as possible. We were shewn into a handsome drawing-room at the proprietor's office ; and while waiting, I had leisure to admire the beauty of the splendid river, with its rising banks on the opposite side, and regretted my inability to take a survey of the town. Our starting scene was amusing enough : the car was of very ordinary materials, and the driver presented as grotesque an object as could well be imagined. The very slender remains of what had once been a hat caught the master's eye, and an order was given to find him a better. " Can none of you lend Barney the trifle of a hat ?" resounded through the establishment. Several were produced ; but Barney's phrenological developments set at defiance all attempts to force a covering on them. At length one shouted out from the hall, " Here's Pether's hat ; it'll just fit." ' Pether's out,' responded the official man, ' and can't want it. Clap it on, Barney.' This was done ; and just as we hoped our delays were ended, a difference appeared in our respective computations of the fare, which required no less than a committee of the whole house, all talking together, to settle. We began almost to regret having declined places on the mail car, which had long since rattled merrily away loaded with our fellow-passengers : but the difficulty was overcome, and we stepped across the threshold. Alas ! we were arrested by a storm of indignant eloquence, directed against poor Barney, who, it seemed, had taken the master's own particular bridle for our use ; and many were the exclamations, while he in the most leisurely way removed the handsome bridle, replacing it with an article that would scarcely hold together. At last we fairly mounted our vehicle, Barney in the driver's seat, my Irish friend occupying one side with me, and on the other our English youth with his hatbox, and a mountain of luggage piled up between.

Away we went, at a tolerably equal pace, so long as the fine level pavement of the quay lay beneath us ; but, Oh ! the jolting that ensued, when, after crossing the river, we began to ascend and descend the abrupt little hills ! My spirits rose to the highest pitch of joyousness, while the vehicle danced along, as if in sympathy with my bounding heart. The road was narrow and wild, the banks low ; and our position of course commanded only a view of one side of the country ; but that was a highly Irish one. If you ask what is the distinctive mark of an Irish landscape, where the country has no particular feature of mountain, valley, or wood, I must reply, that it consists chiefly in a gradual easy swell of ground, from the road upwards, divided into portions much smaller than we usually see in England, fenced by very low boundaries of a few stones, or a bank of earth, but rarely displaying a quickset hedge or row of trees. This method of laying out the ground gives you a full view of each separate patch ; and these again, being variously cultivated, present a picture altogether dissimilar from English scenery. The background, in this part of Ireland, is almost invariably a fine mountain peak, or chain of gigantic hills rearing their dark summits against the sky. Add to this the frequent glimpse obtained, now of some venerable ruin, standing alone in its little surrounding sanctuary of grass and shrubs; then perhaps, a light playful stream murmuring over the bright pebbles ; and anon, a noble plantation, holding in its bosom the family mansion, the glebe house, and often the village church. And at this season you may fill up the canvass with every variety of rich and glowing tint the whole family of wild flowers can supply. Although quite the end of June, we were regaled with the choicest beauties of spring, mingled with those of midsummer. Shrubs and trees of the hawthorn, presenting literally one mass of rich and frag-

rant blossoms, adorned the road side ; and these, as we advanced farther into Wexford, were richly interspersed with tall bushes of furze, not yet entirely stripped of their golden buds. It was not until we had left New Ross considerably behind us, that we found ourselves thus hedged in ; but never did we miss the glorious profusion of flowers, among which the fox-glove, larger and more beautiful than I have usually seen it in our gardens, continually reared its head, waving above the little rude fence of stones that often constituted the only barrier between us and the corn or potato-field.

But you will expect to hear something of New Ross, the antiquity of which I greatly longed to explore ; for, although still called ‘ New,’ it was chartered by Richard II. and was at a very early period a place of great strength. A more recent and painful interest also attaches to it, from its having been the scene of a sanguinary battle in the rebellion of 1798, when thirty thousand rebels attacked the town, defended by about twelve hundred effective troops, and a hundred and fifty yeomen. The assailants were fully armed with muskets and pikes, and had four large guns, besides swivels. A number of Romish priests, robed, and bearing crucifixes in their hands, moved through the lines, kindling the wildest enthusiasm in the bosoms of their unhappy victims. As we crossed the bridge above the noble river Barrow, and ascended the exceedingly steep streets, I could not but shudder at the recollections excited : for, within the memory of some who then surrounded us, those streets had actually been choked up and the passage impeded by heaps of mangled bodies, the victims of civil war. I saw the spot where a serjeant of the Donegal militia, with sixteen men and two badly mounted ship guns, defended his post against six hundred furious assailants, whom he repulsed with tremendous slaughter. The bare fact that six carts, with a great number of men, were employed throughout the whole of two long summer days in collecting the dead bodies, and shooting them into the river hard by, gives an appalling view of the scene. It was here too, that the circumstance really took place, which I have seen in the form of a jest, and, of course, considered an absurd fabrication. One of the infatuated rebels, relying no doubt on some imaginary charm conferred by his priest, rushed up to a cannon, just as the gunner was about to apply his match, and thrusting his hat and wig into it, cried out, ‘ Come on, boys, her mouth is stopped !’ In an instant he was blown to pieces.

I could not, however, take more than a hasty survey of the corner of the town through which we passed ; time only allowing us to regale on a dish of mutton chops, and exquisite potatoes ; which, together with the assiduous attention of the waiter, reminded me again that I was in Ireland. The genuine courtesy with which this class of people here fulfil their duties, and solicitously strive to anticipate your wishes, with their thankful acknowledgment of a small gratuity at parting, is remarkable : it belongs to that national hospitality which, go where you will, delights to cherish you. This I will say of the lower orders of Irish people, that a smile and a kind speech addressed to them, an avoidance of contemptuous looks or disparaging remarks on what is before you, and a fair word of commendation with regard to any thing Irish, when you can utter it in their presence, will, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, win their warm hearts, and render them for the time being your attached, devoted servants. I envy not the person who would derive no pleasure from this return for pleasure conferred. Sun-shiny looks enlighten the dreariest scene ; and why should we not elicit them ?

At New Ross we parted from Barney, after making him as happy as we could ; first by chatting on the road, asking him numerous questions, and letting him hear our exclamations of delight at revisiting his loved country. The only cloud that passed over his countenance arose from my asking if he could speak Irish. ‘ Spake it !’ he replied, with some warmth : ‘ Why shouldn’t I spake it, and I an Irishman ?’ But, when he heard us extolling its antiquity, and heartily wishing we knew as much of it as he did, his countenance shone with smiles ; and he opened the storehouse of his knowledge, both local and traditional, with liberal hand.

If ever you travel in this country, particularly in the more retired quarters of it, I recommend you to pursue a similar plan : for it is astonishing what a mine of original thought and curious information conveyed in language the most quaint and expressive, you will frequently open. I have not to reproach myself with merely jesting and chattering during our short ride ; for when the poor man pointed out the spot where a cruel murder had recently been committed, and gave us the particulars, I spoke freely to him of the blessed effects which would result from a knowledge of God's love in giving his own Son to die for sinners ; and strove to lead his mind to the great propitiation offered for our transgressions. He not only listened, but gave a cordial and feeling assent to what was said.

After leaving New Ross we were engaged in an adventure that threatened serious consequences. Descending a narrow, broken road, we were to pass a line of small cars laden with stones, the leaders of which either had some party feud with our driver, or were exceedingly ill-disposed. When desired to let us pass, they returned a volley of irritating language, addressed to him ; and one man seized our horse's head, endeavouring to drag us into a dry ditch by the road side. He reeled however so much from intoxication, that he twice lost his hold ; and on the third unsuccessful attempt, our driver managed to slip by him, and to clear the whole line. Had the man lost his temper, or the horse been restive, or had we exhibited any signs either of fear or resentment, I know not what might have occurred : but through the mercy of God all parties were restrained, and we proceeded in safety.

Barney's successor was not so interesting as he, but possessed a fund of humour and drollery, delivered in a dry, quaint way, that kept the boys in a continual roar of merriment. We introduced the youngest of our party as an Englishman : no one could have mistaken the other for aught but what he is intensely Irish and I am proud to say, that among the natives of this land I am universally greeted as a countrywoman, and never betray myself unnecessarily. So Pat thought he had the majority in his favour entirely ; and the broadsides of sly wit that he discharged at the solitary John Bull were irresistible. On my making some passing remark expressive of warm attachment to Ireland, he said nothing, but leaping down from his elevated seat went to the hawthorn hedge-row, and cut the most beautiful plume-like spray of its delicate blossoms that ever I beheld. Of the look and gesture with which he presented it I can only say, that if I were to carry a costly tribute of loyalty to the foot of a throne, I would try to imitate the carman of New Ross. These people are all heart; all glowing warmth and devotion of feeling. Oh that we studied them aright for their own profit ; and strove to lead in bands of love those who cannot, will not be driven by the goad of stern authority.

The mountain range, behind which the sun had disappeared, now rose in grander altitude and more defined outline, as we approached the foot of its fine termination. Blackstairs and Mount Leinster, constituting in appearance a single mountain, soon engrossed the landscape of which they had formed the back ground ; and most majestically do they rise before my window in this delightful mansion, where all the graces of polished elegance were combined with the ardour of Irish hospitality, to welcome us at the threshold. Late as it was, we found the family dinner table awaiting the expected completion of its joyous circle ; and though I had not been in bed for two nights, and was pretty well fatigued with such a day's jaunt over roads of indescribable ruggedness, I lingered long to trace under the soft twilight of this summer midnight, the wavy line of Blackstairs mountain ; and rose, almost with the sun, to explore the amphitheatre that seemed to shut me in. Indeed, I was rather too early ; for a tremendously fine watch dog, seeing a stranger in the grounds at that hour, thought it right to arrest my steps, which he did by taking up a position at about four feet distance, and sustaining one continuous bark, that would have shaken stronger nerves. I dared not advance or retreat ; so stood perfectly still, neither speaking nor shrinking, nor menacing ; but looking as innocent and unconcerned as the circumstances would admit of; well knowing the dog to be a shrewd physiognomist. Great was my relief when some one from the house called him off.

I record the event for the benefit of early risers in strange places ; and shall henceforth take especial care to procure an immediate introduction to all the dogs in the family, wherever I go. Happily for me, this was a civil Newfoundlander : he has a comrade of prodigious size, a mastiff who, had I crossed his path while ranging on guard, would probably have torn me in pieces. The house would not, humanly speaking, be safe for a moment, from nightfall to sunrise, without these faithful sentinels, whose well-known ferocity in defence of their charge holds many a midnight foe at bay. They are indeed a noble gift to man from his all-bountiful Creator.

To visit Ireland with no purpose of promoting in any way the good of her people, would be criminal indeed : and I know no way of promoting it so effectually, as by bringing their actual state fairly before the public eye in England. I write, of course, with that view, and will relate nothing which cannot be substantiated. Books are perpetually coming out on Irish subjects, but none that meet the case. One travels with a view of ascertaining the existing relationship between landlord and tenant, scanning with a sharp judicious eye what bears on that point; but caring for none of those things which stand in the same relative position to the other as the soul does to the body. A second makes a tour in search of the picturesque : anxious to be himself pleased, and to please his readers, he carefully screens off from view whatever would mar the beauty of his picture, and introduces immortal beings as he does the stocks and stones, to heighten the landscape. Or else, with a cynical supercilious discontent, finds fault with every thing, without attempting either to ascertain the disease or to suggest a remedy. Another comes over, fully awake to the supreme importance of the moral and spiritual branch of the subject ; but having received a wrong bias at home, he visits Ireland much in the spirit with which some good people open their Bibles, anxious to discover somewhat in favour of his preconceived notions, instead of being willing to model them by what he shall find there. They who know the vast influence of first impressions, particularly where the individual is prone to jump to hasty conclusions, may, if they have an interest in the matter, give the desired colouring to all that he shall see, by commending him at the outset to a clever misrepresenter of facts ; a character by no means hard to find among the divided and deeply-prejudiced parties of this unhappy land, and so the result shall be a heavy blow unconsciously dealt to his friends, and a chuckling triumph secured to their foes. Now I am not going to set myself up as an oracle, where so many have failed: far from it. My purpose is, simply, to read Ireland as I read an important book : to receive no text without a careful examination of the context ; and on every occasion to recur to first principles. Or, if you prefer a plainer expression, to judge of the tree by its fruit.

Letters from Ireland, 1837 (1838)

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