

Sketches of Connaught

Patriotic Sketches Of Ireland Written in Connaught.

By Miss Owenson

Vol. I.

London

1809.

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Preface.

IN that happy age when the first gloss of nature is fresh on every sense, when infant attention hangs eagerly on the tale of fanciful tradition, when the heart trembles to the pathetic, and the imagination revels in the marvellous ; it was my destiny to have had the first warmed into feeling—the other, first kindled into ardour, by the pensive legend of national woe, or the romantic tale of national heroism.

To have caught from the paternal lip the transmitted “ song of other times,” breathed in the native strains of my native country, and emulous of the lay which ingrafted on the simple sensations of childhood the glowing sensibilities of maturer life, early to have learnt to lisp its echo, and to awaken the first tones of my infant lyre to the inspirations of national enthusiasm.

In a more advanced period of existence, I became the resident of those scenes sacred to the airy images of my childhood’s wonder ; from whence tradition still sends forth her tale of interest ; and where to the heated fancy, the *genius of Ireland* still seems to droop over her silenced harp, and at intervals to snatch from its tremulous chords a strain which like the music of her own bards is “ sweet, though mournful to the soul.”

Here, revelling in the ever ready *cead mile faltra* of Milesian cordiality, the frequent visitant of the peasant’s hut, the sometimes guest of the chieftain’s mansion, my heart in its general intercourse, thus touched on the two extremes of Irish wretchedness and Irish comfort. While in the genuine aspect of the national character, whether viewed in the rough-hewn traits of unmodified illiteracy, or the polished features of educated refinement, my mind still found a sanction for that national partiality, which if not an intuitive principle, at least, formed the first of its imbibed ideas.

It was requisite therefore I should leave my native country to learn the turpitude, degradation, ferocity, and inconsequence of her offspring ; the miseries of her present, and the falsity of the recorded splendours of her ancient state ——. This ungracious information I acquired during a short tour through a sister isle ; and it was in the course of one of the many conversations which occurred on the subject of my (always termed) “ unhappy country,” that a hint casually suggested, formed the origin of a little work, which has since appeared under the title of the “ *Wild Irish Girl*.”

Yet I came to the self-devoted task, with a diffidence proportioned to the ardour which instigated me to the attempt ; for as a *woman*, a *young woman*, and an *Irish woman*, I felt all the

delicacy of undertaking a work which had for the professed theme of its discussion, circumstances of national import, and national interest.

But though I meant not to appear on the list of opposition as a fairy amazon, armed with a pebble and a slings against a host of gigantic prejudices : although to compose a national defence, to ward the shaft of opprobrium hurled at the character of my country, to extenuate the effects or expose the causes of its popular discontents, was as incompatible with my sex and years, as with my trivial talent, and limited powers ; yet I was still aware that in the historic page, recent details, and existing circumstances of Irish story, lived many a record of Irish virtue, Irish genius, and Irish heroism, which the simplicity of truth alone was sufficient to delineate ; many a tale of pathos which woman's heart could warmest feel, and truest tell, and many a trait of romantic colouring and chivalrous refinement, which woman's fancy fondest contemplates and best depicts.

Still however in that era of life, when the faculties of the mind abandon themselves to the wild impulse of imagination, or fondly hover round the local territories of the hearty I found it difficult and uninteresting to confine myself to a mere relation of facts ; and in preference to a cold detail of " flat realities," determined on the composition of a national novels spun from those materials which the ancient and modern history, manners, and habits of my country supplied ; and while fiction wove her airy web, to draw the brightest tints of her variegated tissue from the deathless colouring of truth.

To blend the imaginary though probable incident with the interesting fact, to authenticate the questioned refinement of ancient habits, by the testimony of living modes, faithfully to delineate what I had intimately observed, and to found my opinions on that medium which ever vibrates between the partial delineation of national prejudice, on one side, and the exaggerated details of foreign antipathy on the other ; such was the prospectus my wishes dared to draw. If I failed in their accomplishment, that failure arose from the mediocrity of very limited talents, which I soon found were inadequate to realize all my heart dictated, or my hopes conceived.

The world however had the indulgence to tolerate the execution in favour of the motive, and the reception with which it honoured " the Wild Irish Girl," was such as surpassed my most sanguine expectations, and stimulated me to further exertion in that cause, which it is impossible to examine without interest, or to embrace without enthusiasm. Politics can never be a woman's science ; but patriotism must naturally be a woman's sentiment. It is inseparably connected with all those ties of tenderness which her heart is calculated to cherish, and though the energy of the citizen may not animate her feelings to acts of national heroism, the fondness of the child, the mistress, the wife and the mother, must warm and ennoble them into sentiments of national affection. For myself, while my heart still triumphs in the principle which leads me to effuse over the world's ear the " native wood-notes wild" of my native country, I would wish it to be believed that I have ever swept the strings of the Irish harp with the tremulous touch of conscious inability ; that in humbly endeavouring to revive the faded shamrock, that which droops round my country's emblem, I have ever brought to the grateful effort an anxious hope, rather than a sanguine expectation of success ; and that in touching on the grievances of the lower orders of my countrymen, and their fatal but consequent effects, unswayed by interest, unbiassed by partiality, the hope of wooing the attention of abler minds to a subject on which my own has long dwelt with ineffectual anxiety, and unavailing regret, has been the sole motive of the feeble and individual efforts, I now humbly submit to the world's consideration.

Sidney Owenson.

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THE scenery which environs the town of Sligo [1] is bold, irregular, and picturesque : and though despoiled of those luxurious woods which once (in common with the rest of the island) enriched its aspect, it still preserves many of those traits which constitute the perfection of landscape ; hanging over a beautiful bay formed by the influx of the “ steep Atlantic,” sheltered by lofty mountains, and reposing almost at the brow of a hill along whose base the river Gitley steals its devious way. The high road [2] by which it is approached for the last twenty miles, winds through a scene of romantic variety, which frequently combines the most cultivated and harmonious traits, with the wildest and most abrupt images of scenic beauty. The groves, the lakes, the enchanted islands, and all the glowing charms of an Italian scenery which diffuses itself over the picturesque and cultivated scenes of Florence-court [3] are suddenly replaced by a dreary heath, and a bold and continued mass of rocks, through which nature, time, and art, seem to have cut a deep and narrow defile which, entered at that hour sacred to the sombre grandeur of the true sublime, awakens in the heart of the traveller such a warning as the entrance to Dante’s Inferno holds out.

I left Dublin in the autumn of 1806, with the intention of rambling through such scenes in the north-west of Connaught as I had not yet visited ; and it was here my little journey began to receive its first decided character of interest ; it was here that the impression made on my imagination insensibly communicated to memory the first of those rough sketches which, divested of the delicate pencil touch the *pentimenti* (to use a technical phrase) of studied art, and practised judgment. I have copied with the same rude simplicity with which they were drawn in the moment of passing observation, as the heart was touched by objects of moral interest, or the fancy awakened by scenes of natural beauty. I had watched the last beam of the setting sun stealing his faded splendours from the last of those lakes which precede the entrance of the cavern-path, and the broken and irregular masses of rock which arose pyramidically on either side, partially caught the retreating glow of the horizon, and displayed the greatest variety of light and shadow, till gradually openings a rich and expansive prospect broke on the eye : the lakes, and fairy land of Hazlewood [4], the bold attitude of Benbubin, the beetling brow of Knock na-ree [5], the ocean’s gleaming line, commingling with the horizon, and the town of Sligo spreading irregularly along the base of a lofty hill, crowned with meadows, and successively betrayed by the expanding view ; till the softening influence of twilight mellowed every outline into air, and dissolved every object into one mild and indistinct hue.

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THE literal meaning of the word *Sligo* is the “ *town of shells*” and the derivation of the epithet is traced by local history and oral tradition to the following curious origin. Many of the inhabitants of Esdera (now Ballysidore), a flourishing and neighbouring town, having been driven by the vicissitudes of civil dissention from their native place, fled to the shore, and of the shells and pebbles flung by the violence of the tide along the coast, erected a number of huts which formed the infancy of Sligo. Sligo is now a large opulent and commercial town, while its parent city is one of the most ruinous and wretched villages in the province : still distinguished for the beauty of its situation and the romantic wildness of its environs.

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The recurrence of a scene, a sentiment, or a sensation, peculiar to the early stages of existence, owes much of the magic charm which accompanies it to the medium through which it is viewed. Memory is too warmly imbued with the glow of imagination, not to shed over the

image which it preserves a prismatic hue ; and the perception of mind that attends an actual feeling, is perhaps less forcible (and certainly less gracious) than that emotion with which it is contemplated in the vision of memory, when fancy lends it a superadded charm, and we hang with a tender regret upon its faded recollection.

In the days of childhood, in the happy recess of school-holidays, I have caught a distant view of Sligo abbey, in a moment of such felicity as childhood only experiences, “ when we feel that we are happier than we know.” An idea of its venerable ruins had insensibly associated itself with the remembrance of the lively susceptibility I then possessed, to every impression ; and that idea still preserving its ascendancy in my mind, rendered the object that gave rise to it, an object of peculiar interest, and ardent curiosity.

I have always loved those scenes, which connect the pleasures of intellect with those of sense, which are equally dear to reflection and to fancy, over which the mental sympathies extend themselves, and where the heart and the eye repose with equal satisfaction and delight.

The abbey seemed to have mouldered into new beauty, since the cursory view I last had of it. Recent decay had touched its cloisters with a painter’s hand—and the influence of a few added years, and the vicissitudes of a few successive seasons, had mellowed its once grey tints into a variety of glowing hues, and had enriched its vegetative drapery with more luxuriant masses of foliage.

The abbey, whose former extent and beauty may be calculated from the wreck which time has spared, owes its foundation to Maurice Fitzgerald ; who, under the invocation of the Holy Ghost, erected it for the friars of the order of St. Dominic. Like other religious edifices, it found its sanctity no protection against the ravages of war, and the vicissitudes of civil dissension ; and falling a prey to the contending factions of the province, it was pillaged successively in the years 1270, 1360, and 1394 : so that in 1414, its revenues were scarcely adequate to the support of twenty friars ; while all that the rapine and violence of war had spared, was finally destroyed by an accidental fire. The abbey, however, must have been an object of no trivial consideration to the Romish see ; for pope John XXIII. issued apostolic letters to promote its restoration, and elicited the humble mite of the poor, and the splendid contribution of the rich sinner, through the medium of their salvation, by offering the remission of ten years and forty days penance to all who, on the feasts of the Assumption and St. Patrick, should visit the ruined abbey, and contribute to its repairs. Foremost on the list of its benefactors, stood O’Connor, lord or chief of Sligo, the lineal decendant of the ancient kings of Connaught, and whose posterity still boast that the blood-royal of Ireland flows in their veins.

Disposed by a certain tone of mind to behold with a touching interest, a scene never to be viewed with indifference, while a preexisting train of ideas were refreshed and associated by the corresponding impressions which my senses received from every object around me, I sat down on the tomb of the royal O’Connor, and plucked the weed or blew away the thistle “ that waved there its lonely head.” The sun was setting in gloomy splendour, and the lofty angles of the abbey-tower alone caught the reflection of his dying beams, from the summits of the mountains where they still lingered : the horizon betrayed a beautiful gradation of tint, which insensibly softened into the reserved colouring of twilight, while broken hues, and irregular masses of light and shadow, flung through the pillars of the cloisters, or from the high-arched portals of the chapel, harmonized the general outline of the ruins, and shed around such aerial and in-distinct forms, as fancy woos to aid the vision of her wildest dream. Nor did she now refuse to “ give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.”

While my eye now rested on those objects that formed a festival to my fancy, which revealed in a train of visionary ideas full of poetical interest, my mind insensibly recurred to those events and circumstances in the religious and political history of my country, from whence these objects stole their interest ; and tracing the sacred footsteps of Christianity, from the moment of its admission into Ireland, to the period of its existing influence, I sighed to reflect that those mild tenets by which it preached “ peace and good-will to all men,” were still opposed by the cold contracted dogmas of intolerance, flinging its gloomy shadow on religion’s cheering rays, like the noxious vapours which, rising from the corruption of the earth, meets and obscures the beam whose radiance comes from Heaven.

Such scenes are never to be visited with that interest which peculiarly belongs to them, in the broad glare of day’s meridian splendour, since much of their picturesque effect is produced by the solemn stillness of the twilight hour, when the faintest breeze wastes not its sigh upon the “ desert air ;” and when the dim discoloured light sheds a mystic hue on every object, and peoples the gloomy space with wild and fancied forms. The simplicity of reason, and the purity of truth, though they afford the clearest evidence to the mind, and sublime while they enlighten, deny to fancy that image so dear to her illusory desires ; the simple conviction of an abstract faith gives no picturesque forms to her wondering gaze, affords no mysteries to her unlicensed wishes.

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About three miles from the town of Sligo, lies a beautiful spot, called the glen of Knock-na-ree, from the bold and romantic mountains, along whose base it winds the road which leads to it from the town ; it combines many charms of ocean scenery, with many traits of picturesque landscape. The little maritime village of Gibraltar, whose white huts appear glittering among the rocks that skirt the irregular coast ; the cloud-capped heights of Benbullen and Knock-na-ree, with a distant view of the island of Innismurry [6] and a faint undulating line of the coast of Ulster ; unite within the scope of a coup-d’œil, a picture highly animated and romantic. The direct path to the glen is tracked through an expansive meadow, which slopes from the foot of Knock-na-ree towards the bay, and terminating in a certain point, by a narrow defile, forms the entrance of the glen, which winds between a double range of rocks for more than a mile. This romantic glen, rich in all that irregularity so essential to the true picturesque, seems to have been produced by some convulsion of nature ; and the rocks in many places are so perfectly concave and convex, that it appears as if another shock would unite them again into one solid mass.

The strained eye becomes dazzled in the contemplation of their altitude, while it reposes with delight on the beautiful variety of vivid hues which stain their shelving sides ; on the rich foliage of the shrubs that hang their fantastic drapery over the rugged projections ; or on the bending trees which seem to shoot from their deep crevices without the aid of earth to nourish their bare and interwoven roots : while innumerable torrents, dashing from the pointed summits of the highest cliffs, flow at their base in one pellucid stream ; or rushing with congregate force over roots of trees, or projecting rocks, fall into some deep cavity, and form an elevated and natural basin, shaded by the luxuriance of the overhanging shrubs.

The glen is sometimes overflowed by these torrents, while the immense masses of rock (covered with moss and lichens) which they force down at intervals in their steep descent, construct, for the steps of the adventurous wanderer, a species of little causeway ; and the over-arching of the cliffs seems to threaten destruction from above ; or, by a conjunction of their respective shrubs, forms a leafy canopy almost impervious to the beams of the sun. That even some degree of moral charm should not be wanting to this little Vauclose, the rocks in many

places assume the appearance of spacious ruins, sometimes rising in light and spiral shafts, sometimes rudely broken in irregular masses ; while fancied cloisters, imaginary fortresses, and ideal castles present themselves to the eye amidst the creeping underwood and clustering shrubs, by which their grotesque forms are partially veiled. Where the gloom seems deepest, and the opposite rocks almost knit their towering summits, the glen abruptly terminates, and a beautiful sea-coast suddenly bursts upon the view : the bay reflecting on its bosom the opposite shores, spangled with white houses ; the mountains of Donegal floating like vapours in the haze of distance ; and as a back-ground to the animated landscape, the mountain of Knock-na-ree, rising majestically from behind the rocky sides of the glen which reposes at its base.

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AT a period when national taste, like national spirit, lingers through its last era of decay in the Irish breast, it is as rare as it is delightful to meet with one, for whom every relic of Irish antiquity possesses a peculiar interest ; who contemplates with pleasure even the least important production of antient wit in his own country; and by an association of ideas which have their source in the *a. mor patriæ* :, values every little relic as exhibiting some genuine though minute testimony of that progress in the refinements of life, which he fondly believed distinguished his native land, in those days when she was looked upon with admiration and respect by the people of other nations, and regarded with triumph by her own.

To the national taste of Mr. O —— of C —— house, in the bosom of whose charming family I have spent some days since my arrival in this province, the remembrance of which neither my memory nor my heart will be apt to relinquish, I stand highly indebted for what might be considered as a *bonne bouche* to the hitherto unsatisfied appetite of national *virtu*.— His library is stored with antiquities discovered amidst adjacent ruins, or dug out of the bogs on his own estate. Among those which peculiarly struck me were :

An urn, [7] composed of the finest clay, highly polished, elegantly formed, and curiously carved. It was dug out of a sand-hill on the sea-shore near C —— house : and found nearly filled with ashes and a kind of bituminous stuff, over which was placed a beautiful lozenge of thin variegated marble, once perhaps marked with an inscription now entirely defaced. The urn most probably contained the ashes of some Milesian prince, or sacred druid, to whom, in days of paganism, this privilege alone was accorded ; for when the body of the warrior was consigned to the earth, his arms were buried with him. Thus the ancient Irish, like the ancient Etruscans, used both modes of inhumation at the same time : and with that pertinacious adherence to the distinction of the different orders of the state, which marked their ancient *regime*, the inequality of rank and office was ascertained beyond the limits of the grave ; and their love of order and subordination betrayed itself, where even all human distinction ceased to be observed.

A *stylus* made of brass, and curiously engraved, particularly engaged my attention : and when I learnt that it was found in a deep grave amidst the ruins of Sligo abbey, the busy agency of fancy endowed it with an interest it probably had no claim to ; and as I gazed on its point, I imagined that he who had carried it with him to the tomb, and made it his companion in death, had probably made it the confidant of his thoughts, and the herald of his hopes, when living.—It might have been the property of some young monk of St. Dominic ; the vehicle of his sufferings and his love to some self-devoted Heloise, immured within the “relentless walls” of a neighbouring convent. But whether it was devoted to the service of love or of religion, to detailing the miracles of a saint or the charms of a mistress, it interested me from the fanciful speculations it gave rise to.

Two *rings*, dug out of some neighbouring ruins, the one studded with brass knobs, the other constructed of brass loops : and both resembling the talisman described by Vallencey.

Disposed by the ardour of their imagination to every illusion of superstitious error, in no nation whatever were charms more prevailing than among the ancient Irish. The warrior or the knight never entered the field of battle without his ring, or amulet ; and on the fair bosoms of the noblest dames, sparkled the consecrated talisman. Papal policy, taking advantage of this national superstition, consecrated seals, which were called absolution-seals [8], and bore the following inscription : “ Multitude of pardons to the sons of the son of —— ” &c. These were disposed of by the Romish see to the confessors : who enriched themselves by the traffic of salvation ; and retailed the remission of sins at the highest price that timid penitence could give, or exorbitant priestcraft extort.

A *bridle-bit*, and *head-stall*, of a very curious description, made of brass, and found in a bog in the vicinity. On the top of the head-stall was a little pillar of brass elegantly formed, which was most probably erected for the purpose of sustaining the plume of feathers which decorated the proud head of the Beltenebros of some puissant knight of the valley : and indeed the finely carved spur which accompanied it, proved it the property of some Sir Launcelot or Sir Bertram.

A *brass hatchet*, dug out of a bog in Terrerah, and exactly resembling that called by the ancient Irish *tuah snaight* ; derived says general Vallencey, from the Chaldee *tuah*, to strike. A small *spear* or *pike*, the well known *laineach catha* of the ancient Irish.

A *brazen sword*, twenty-two inches long, and exactly formed like that which general Vallencey describes as resembling the sword found in the plains of Canac. It had been dug out of a bog by a peasant; whose good dame, having performed the same operation on its rusty blade as destroyed the value of the shield of Martinus Scriblerus, converted it to the domestic purposes of a hatchet, from which degrading metamorphose Mr. O —— rescued this trusty weapon of some Irish Rolando or Rogero.

An ancient *Irish brogue*, remarkable for the neatness of its form ; made of thin tanned leather, fastened above the ancle in a manner both convenient and tasteful, and closely resembling the Roman buskin.

A *small box* of beautiful marble, of an octagon form, the lid very delicately carved, and covered with inscriptions in a character resembling the Persic. It was found among the ruins of Sligo abbey, and was probably the *bon bonnière* of some self-denying monk.

Many other national relics presented themselves to my observation, which, though too numerous to detail, possessed scarcely less interest than those I have mentioned ; though certainly not more so than the remains of druidical Cromlech, which rose almost immediately beneath the windows of the library.

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WHILE the mind, by an association of its ideas, discovers a spell of attraction” in every thing, however intrinsically valueless, which carries with its protracted existence the character of ages gone by “ with years beyond the flood ;” of objects which time has rescued from the vicissitude of human events, and which tradition has connected with incidents of historic interest ; it pursues with an opposite sensation of delight, every thing in the moral or natural world, which is touched by the charm of novelty, or which owes its interest to

the rarity of its existence. Thus the most sublime objects of the creation excite a less animated sensation in observance than the *lusus naturæ* whose singularity is probably its only excellence. This observation insensibly suggested itself, as I turned with indifference from a very noble view of the ocean, to behold with eager curiosity the water-flight of Glencar.

The water-flight of Glencar derives its source from the summit of a lofty hill whose base it scarcely reaches, if the wind is in a certain point ; there it is again carried perpendicularly back, forming a species of waterspout. Nothing can be more splendidly beautiful than its appearance when seen under the influence of an unclouded sun, rising like a pillar of light : the least variation of the air breaks it into a feathery spray, which falls at a considerable distance, like the misty shower of a summer's evening tinged with the departing glow of the horizon.

Nor is the water-flight of Glencar the only aquatic curiosity in the neighbourhood of Sligo. The hill of Knock-na-shong, or the Hill of the Hawk, is from its elevation the first point of land seen on this coast at sea, and has become a kind of land-mark to mariners. Yet notwithstanding its altitude, and its distance from the shore, its summit contains a small well, which ebbs and flows with the tide. Of both the mountain and the well, tradition has preserved many miraculous tales.

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THE poverty of the lower orders of every nation is always found to derive its source less from national vice, than political grievance. The poverty of the lower orders of the Irish is equally obvious in its causes, and melancholy in its effects. At certain seasons of the year, the high-roads, and even the main streets, of every town and village of Ireland, are infested with groupes of mendicants, who exhibit to the eye all the sad variety of wretchedness which "flesh is heir to." These are not common beggars, who make it a profession to live at the expence of the community ; and who indulge their propensities to idleness and vice, by imposing on the unregulated benevolence of those

" Whose pity gives ere charity begins :"

they are the necessitous families of the Irish peasants.

When the season of employment is over, when the necessity of human labour is considerably disproportioned to the population of the country, as is invariably the case in all grazing-counties of Ireland, where no manufactory offers the avocation to the superflux of willing industry ; and when the scanty hire of the labourer, during the short season it is paid, affords no little treasure stored to ward off the wants of an inactive season ; the Irish peasant quits the spot where he once

" Sat him down the monarch of a shed ;"

quits the family, dearer to his heart from the pang it feels for them ; and beckoned by hope, or urged by despair, departs for a distant province, or even a distant land, in search of that employment, and that reward, which his own impolitely denies.

When the strained eye of sorrowing affection has followed the father and the husband, even till fancy gives what distance snatches from its view, the mother closes the door of her desolate cabin ; and when, as is generally the case, her family are too helpless to relinquish her maternal cares and enable her to work, followed by her little children, and frequently by

an aged parent, beggary is embraced as the only alternative to want and famine [9]. Sometimes with an infant on her back, and another in her arms, while the ablest of her little train is always charged with the tin vessel which carries the sour milk supplied by charity, and another infant wanderer sustains the weight of the blanket which constitutes the only covering thrown over them at night, she commences her sad and solitary wanderings. How frequently, and in what opposite seasons, have I beheld these helpless and wretched groupes straggling along the high-roads, or reposing their wearied limbs beneath the shelter of a ditch ! I have seen the feet of the heavily-laden mother totter through winter snows beneath her tender burthen : while the frost-bitten limbs of her infant companions drew tears to their eyes, which in the happy thoughtlessness of childhood had never been shed to the unconscious misery of their situation, had not bodily pain taught them to flow.

I have met them wandering over those heaths, which afforded no shelter to their aching brows, amidst the meridian ardours of a summer's day ; when violent heat and insupportable fatigue, rendered the stream they stooped to drink, a luxury the most exquisite. I have met them at the door of magisterial power, and seen them spurned from its threshold by him who should have redressed their grievances or relieved their wants ; and I have seen them cheerfully received into the cabin of an equally humble, but more fortunate compatriot, where their wants were a recommendation to benevolence, and their number no check to its exertion. For never yet was the door of an Irish cabin closed against the suppliant who appealed to the humanity of its owner [10].

In Ireland there are no poor laws. In Ireland the reins of magisterial influence are loosely held ; and those to whose hands they are consigned are seldom stimulated to exertion, where self-interest, or party prejudice, affords no powerful incentive. The ill-conducted police of the country-towns of Ireland is a national disgrace ; while that countless hordes of wretches are suffered to wander unrelieved, and indeed unnoticed, is a stain on national humanity. Casual bounty can afford but transient redress : it lies to a certain degree within the jurisdiction of the magistracy, to render that bounty unnecessary by examining into the causes of that wretchedness which so frequently appeals to it ; and by either endeavouring to redress the grievance, or punish the imposition, which equally fling an odium on the character of that country whose negligent police has so long slumbered over both [11]. The establishment of manufactories in the remote parts of Ireland, would undoubtedly be the most effectual check to the progress of mendicancy ; but can there be no medium adopted between the great extremes of idle poverty and affluent industry ?

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I AM at present residing in that part of Ireland where the association of thrashers first arose. I am consequently surrounded by those who formed that association : a peasantry poor, laborious, vehement, and enterprising ; capable of good or ill ; in the extremes of both ; left to the devious impulse of either ; but oftener impelled by the hardest necessity to the latter, than allured to the former, by kindness, by precept, or reward.—Punished with rigorous severity when acting wrong, but neglected, unnoticed and unrecompensed when acting right ; forming the last link in the chain of human society, and treated with contempt because unable to resist oppression, It was with one of these beings, who in the strictest sense, daily performed " the penalty of Adam/" and nightly, perhaps, assumed the daring character of insurgency, that I had some days back the following conversation :

“ Are you laying in your winter's fire ?”

“ No young lady, I am cutting this turf for his honour.”

“ What is your hire by the day ?”—

“ Sixpence one half, and threepence the other half of the year [12].”

“ Have you a family ?”—“ I have a wife and six children.”

“ Then of course you must have some o-round for their maintenance ?”

“ Oh ! yes, two acres at 5*l.* an acre ; but what with the tythe proctor, the priest’s dues being raised, and the weaver having doubled his prices, that day goes by well enough, when we can afford a drop of milk to moisten the potatoes for the young ones.”

He paused for a moment, cast his eyes to heaven, shook his head expressively, and then abruptly applied himself to his labour with an effort of overstrained exertion, that seemed to derive its energy from feelings that dewed his rough cheek with tears, flowing from the sad heart of the father and the husband. [13]

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“ If we do not go to the very origin and first ruling cause of a grievance,”—says Edmund Burke, “ we do nothing :” and if we resort to the light of truth and evidence of fact, it will be found that with respect to every national grievance or political disorder in Ireland, for nearly five hundred years back, a mode of conduct has been pursued, partial in its effects, un-availing in its influence, and nutritive to public evil by an apparent blindness to the pristine existence of that evil, and by the rigidly coercive measures exerted against its natural but fatal effects. Still careless and perhaps ignorant of the cause, still attentive only to the result, the rest of discontent has only invigorated, by the topping of its branches, and the pruning of its suckers.

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[1] Situated in the county of Sligo, province' of Connaught 105 miles from Dublin. It is a borough, post, and fair town.

[2] The seat of Owen Wynn, esq.

[3] In English “ The home of the King.”

[4] Situated in the county of Sligo, provance of Connaught, 105 miles from Dublin. It is a borough, post, and fair town.

[5] The northern road.

[6] The island of Innismurry is celebrated in Irish legend, and is still remarkable for the manners, dress, and customs of its inhabitants. The ruins of the chapel of St. Columbkil, and part of the crosier of St. Molaire, are still shewn there as relics of the two most famous saints in the calendar of Irish canonization; the latter, who was confessor to Columbkil, banished him from Innismurry, his favourite retreat, to Scotland, as a penance for three desperate battles the ambition of his penitent had caused to be fought. The Irish seem to have held all islands in a superstitious veneration. In the river Shannon, the romantic island of Iniscailtre contains the ruins of seven churches and a round tower; and in another of its islands, an anchorite tower 120 feet high, with the ruins of eleven churches, are, I am told, still visible.

[7] This urn exactly resembles that described by Ware, and delineated by Vallency in his Collectanea.

[8] One of these absolution-seals, once the property of a priest, was lately in the possession of Arthur Wolf, Esq,

- [9] I this day overtook a mendicant groupe who were with difficulty creeping on before me : the mother, a delicate-looking woman, had a child on her back, another infant in a deep decay hung on the shoulder of a girl of twelve years old, and two more little ones followed. — I asked the woman what profession her husband was of ; she said, “ he was a slave ;” for it is by this term that the labouring peasantry of Ireland invariably designate themselves. The woman looked ill : I inquired the cause. She replied that in those cabins where they gave her a lodging “ for God’s sake,” she had for some nights back lain on wet straw, the rain which had continued for some days having penetrated through the roof of her lodging.
- [10] As soon as a mendicant groupe appears at their door, it receives the accustomed kead-mille-a faltha ; the circle round the fire is enlarged ; a fresh supply of potatoes brought forward ; and shelter for the night, and clean straw to repose on, voluntarily offered.
- [11] The inhabitants of Crete, says Montesquieu, used a very singular method to keep the principal magistrates dependant on the laws : part of the citizens rose up in arms, put the magistrates to flight, and obliged them to return to a private life. This was supposed to be done in consequence of the law.
- [12] I have been assured, however, that six-pence a day, throughout the year, is in general the averaged hire in most parts of Connaught. Many persons still living remember it so low as fourpence.
- [13] Since the above was written, a young peasant in Westmeath gave me the following account of his family, which I believe is an epitome of the general state of the peasantry in a county not 30 miles from the metropolis.—The boy was the eldest of seven children though scarcely twelve years old, and of course the only one able to labour ; in the summer and harvest season he earned fourpence a day, his father worked for sixpence and eightpence a day through the year ; they paid six pounds for an acre of oats, forty shillings a year for grass for their cow, and forty shillings for their cabin and a little ground for their potatoes ; in winter when the cow was dry, they lived upon oaten bread, and potatoes and salt. Engaged with the care of seven children, the mother could give little assistance except by spinning sometimes : and out of the year’s hire of the father, Sundays and holidays were deducted.

Patriotic sketches of Ireland, written in Connaught (1809)

Author : Morgan, Lady (Sydney), 1783-1859

Publisher : Baltimore, Printed for G. Dobbin & Murphy [etc.]

Language : English

Call number: 8667678

Digitizing sponsor : Sloan Foundation

Book contributor : The Library of Congress

Collection : library_of_congress; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/patrioticsketch00morg>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org

October 18 2011