

Welcome, Welcome Stranger

Nicholson, Asenath

Ireland's welcome to the stranger, or, An excursion through Ireland, in 1844 & 1845

1847

My place of stopping was Outerard. A clean house and hospitable woman gave me a pleasant evening. The town is a tidy one in outward looks, and is somewhat celebrated for having a mineral well, and a salmon-leap in the river. A bathing house is made in a rock of curious construction, and a cottage of such beautiful finish that it is an ornament to the town, and a standing monument of the correct taste of the doctor who designed it. The family refused any compensation, sending me away with the kindest wishes, and I turned into a house where were huddled a group of boys and girls. Certainly if there is any skill in packing lumber, they had acquired it, and any merit in a desire for instruction, they deserve it. When I entered, the "master skilled to rule" was standing, one foot upon a chair, his elbow resting upon his knee, spectacles across his nose, a pen in his hand, which he was mending, ever and anon flourishing it, as he vehemently expatiated on some clause in the lesson he was explaining. He bowed long and low to me, and then spoke in Latin to a boy who answered in the same language. Then turning to a bevy in a dark corner, who were urging their rights by hunches and threats, he told them that the wandering Arab in the great desert of Sahara, or the Siberian at the frozen regions of the north, could as well understand the meaning of civility as they; and should he enjoin taciturnity (though that was too refined a word for such boors as he had before him), they would as readily obey him.

"I have done much, honored lady, for these lads before you, and to say the truth they are the first fellows in the kingdom. Come here; let's hear you conjugate this verb." Before the boy had half run through, "There, lady, what do you think of my manner of teaching?" "It cannot be disputed, sir." "I ought to be promoted for what I have done. Go on, honey, and tell the whys and wherefores. And so you see, lady, no stone's unturned." I assured him I had seen nothing like it in all Ireland. "Hear, hear, my good fellows! Here's a lady of the first order speaking, and mark what she says. I knew when she entered, by her looks and language, she was a lady of the highest order. Now mark!"

"Full well they laughed, and counterfeited glee."

Hear, hear! I made a speech somewhat in keeping with the place and persons, and had I never before felt my own greatness, now was the favorable moment. A long and low bow, ended by two or three short ones and a hearty good-bye on my part, finished the morning comedy.

My journey lay through a wild mountainous country, and the red petticoats scattered here and there upon hill and lake side gave a romantic touch to the strange scenery for many a mile. A walk of six miles called for rest and a little soap for my blistered feet, and turning into a cabin upon the top of a hill, I heard reading as I entered the door. The woman of the house was sitting with an infant on her lap, reading to a friend who had entered, and I soon perceived she had a cultivated mind, though her lot was cast in that desert. She was a Protestant, and said, "you have no idea of the dreadful condition we are in upon these mountains. No school, and scarcely a book, and seven miles from any church." I promised, if I passed that way on my return, to spend a night with her, and bring her some books. I now felt the want of my luggage. An old man and his daughter entered with each a heavy burden, which they tried to lighten at every cabin upon the mountains. They were dealers in dry goods. "I hope," said the intelligent woman, "you will keep the company of these worthy people across the

mountain." I had not walked far when a cough behind caused me to turn about, and the girl said, "Ye are quick on the fut, and I feared we should not gain upon ye." The father soon joined us, and after a "God save ye kindly, we're all travellers together," he added, "I rair'd the little gal yonder, and a blackguard of a fellow kept his eye on her for a twelvemonth, till by her consent and mine he married her, stopped with her one month, took the few pounds she had gained by dailin', and went away, the villain, and set up the business, and has never put the two eyes on her sence."

We were all fatigued, our feet blistered, and we sat down upon a bank of one of the beautiful lakes which are dotting this wild mountain-scenery for many a mile. Having my Testament in my hand, "ye have a nice little book," said the old man. "Shall I read a little?" I asked. "Plaise God, ye will," was the answer. I opened at the 14th of John, and read. "Where," said the daughter, "did you get that beautiful book?" "It sounds," said the father, "like our Catholic raidin', and what the priest has told us from the altar." They had heard portions of the Scripture, but did not know that this was the Word of God till I told them. The daughter took it in her hand, turned over the leaves, read a few portions intelligibly, and asked, "Where could I get one? Would you sell me this?" I promised one from my basket, should it reach Clifden while she was there. The old man clasped his hands raised his eyes, blessed the good God that he had met such a lady, and such blessed words which "melt the heart." It was a pleasant hour. We needed no cushioned desk nor fringed drapery, to adorn our pulpit. We wanted no lighted gas to enable us to read our prayers from gilt edged books. The chandelier of day was hanging out in heaven's high dome, and the pure waters of the lake were sparkling in its beams. Our temple was a lofty one, and as we sat together within its broad portals, we read the sweet and condescending words, "Let not your hearts be troubled." "In my father's house are many mansions." "Yes," ejaculated the old man, "blessed be his holy name, there are many mansions." I then felt that God was truly a Spirit, and could be worshipped on the mountain top or lowly valley, and needed no temple made with hands.

"Must we go?" I asked, as the book was closed, "and leave this heavenly place?" "Plaise God, we must," the old man answered. Our walk was ten miles upon the top of a mountain spotted with lakes. The old man became fatigued, and they stopped as the sun was setting, at a miserable looking lodging-house for the night, leaving a three miles' walk for me alone, with weary feet, before I could find "a dacent house for a body like me." The daughter, to encourage me, told me one of the "good lies" which so much abound, that it was "but a short mile under yer fut." Darkness soon came over me, and no smoke of a cabin cheered my eye. I sat down upon a little hillock, and again looked over the scenes I had passed, and thanked God that I was in Ireland, and that I had met the old man on the mountain, and hoped he would rest his weary old limbs, though I might not find a shelter. I heard a footstep, and as it approached, inquired if the lodging-house of the mountain was near. "A perch or two under yer fut, and ye are in it." I went on; as I reached the door I heard laughing, music, and dancing. It was a barrack; and a piper, with more whiskey than good sense in his brain, was blowing with all his might for the barefooted girls and merry lads, who were in the highest glee. "Is this a lodging-house?" I inquired. "Go back, and you will find it." I stumbled my way back of the barracks, and opened a door, and a tidy looking woman received me very coldly by saying, "We never turn people out of doors. But why are you here so late? Why didn't you stop back? Are you travelling alone?" By this time my patience was departing, and I answered, "Do you keep lodgers? and can you keep me?" "We never turn folks out of doors." "I do not suppose you turn people out of doors, if you put out a sign to ask them in." The master heard this, stepped into the room, and quite in Irish mood bade me welcome, though he was an Englishman. "Sit down, and make yourself as comfortable as you can. We will do as well as we can for you." A clean bed was provided; two others, well filled, were my companions, but never was rest more refreshing. The next day was rainy, and

I employed my time reading, writing, and listening to the music of two fiddlers, who told me they were employed by gentlemen to amuse them at their houses. So fond are the Irish of music, that, in some form or other, they must and will have it. A piper entered on a wooden leg, and called for a glass of whiskey, which the daughter gave him, and feeling a little jealous lest the fiddlers might be thought more than rivals, he gave such proofs of dexterity as put all to silence. "We live so remote," said the man, "that these little droppings now and then on a rainy day make the time pass very pleasantly. In fact, I don't know how we should get along without them. It's nature, you see," holding a granddaughter of eight months' old upon the floor to see her dance. "You see, ma'am, they'll dance before they can walk."

The next morning the inn-keeper took me to see a marble quarry in the mountains, which he had explored; the rain beat us cruelly, but we proceeded. The slabs were beautifully variegated with green, brown, and black. This quarry was opened, and then stopped, the owner not accepting the offer of seven pounds a ton by Government. The quarry is immense, and thousands of men might find employment if they would be allowed to work. These mountains abound in the richest minerals. This man has spent much time in exploring and analysing their properties, and has found copper and some other ore. Yet rich as Ireland is in all that might make her a bright gem indeed among all the nations, her Government gives her arts and manufactures but little encouragement.

The sun looked out long enough for me to put all in readiness for departure, and when I had proceeded about a mile, the wind increased almost to a tornado, and the rain seemed to have cleared out all her pipes, and was pouring forth torrents fresh and clean. I was now in a woeful plight—my parasol, which had withstood many a buffeting, soon turned inside out, and became a wreck. No cabin was near till I was drenched. At last a miserable one met my eye, and going in, I was welcomed by two young women, and a young man, who was a traveller too, and inquired, "Where did ye come from, that ye are out in this stawrm?" Telling him, and that it was fine when I left, he said, "Aw, he's a blackguard and a rascal to let ye from his door to-day. He knew it would be stawrm, an' he's a honey tongue, but his wife is a sour heifer; and wasn't ye a payin' the blackguard, that he was so willin' to let ye come." "I was paying them full price for all I had." "They are divils then, and the divil'll have 'em, and that's the end on't." I heard of Connemara—that it had been a custom from time immemorial, that if a stranger is not welcomed into a cabin at nightfall, or leaves it in a storm, the cabin-holder is immediately called upon to inquire into the reason; and if it appears that it is inhospitality, that family is set up as a mark of contempt to its neighbors.

The storm was increasing, and I could not stop, for the mud cabin was nearly as wet as the road; the poor woman said, "If ye could stay, ye should not go out." After walking a few yards, the wind was more violent and the rain heavier. I turned my back, and strove to ascend a hill in that way. In despair I stood; when looking to my left I saw at a distance a cabin, and a little girl standing at the door. She was gazing at me, as I supposed, from idle curiosity, and, as the last alternative, I hesitatingly turned towards the dreary abode. "Welcome, welcome, stranger, from the stawrm; ye're destroyed. I told the little gal to open the door and stand in it, that ye mightn't think we was shuttin' ye out in the stawrm; we've got a good fire and plenty of turf; and though the cabin is small, and not fittin' for sich a lady as ye, I'll make it better than the mad stawrm without; and I'll soon heave over a pot of potatoes, and get ye a sup of milk, and I wish my wife was here. I'm but a stranger; but here sence Monday." All this passed before I had time to tell my country, pedigree, or business to Ireland. But when he heard all that, he was more anxious still to heap me with kindness. A huge pile of blazing turf soon dried my clothes, and I was sitting "high and dry" by the side of the heels of a stage horse, who was taking his lunch from a pile of straw at the foot of a bed. In an hour the potatoes were ready, and the kind little girl brought me a broken soup-plate with two eggs on it, and a "sup of milk." The eggs I gave to a coachman who had dropped in to exchange

horses, and took some salt and my tea-spoon, which I carried in my pocket ; and upon a stool by the side of a pot, on which a basket was placed containing the lumpers, I ate my supper with the family and coachman, not only with a cheerful, but a grateful heart.

Night came, but what was to be my lodging ? The bed in the room was nothing but a pile of straw, with a dirty blanket and heavy woollen quilt over it ; but the horse, to my great delight, was removed by the coachman, leaving two good bundles of clean straw untouched. The father went out ; a little son fell asleep, and I persuaded him to go to bed, the girl saying, “ He musn’t lie there ; father told us that we are to sit by the fire, and ye are to lie in the bed.” I refused telling her I should not do it ; but when the father came in, he told the son in anger, “ he’d break every bone in his body if he didn’t go out of that.” I at last prevailed on the father to allow him to remain, and told him I had an excellent bed in my eye. “ An’ sure it isn’t the bundle of straw ; not a ha’porth of yer wet and wairy bones shall lie there to-night.” I insisted that I greatly preferred it as a luxury, and finally took one bundle removed the band, made a little opening, and placing it before the fire, put a second one at the bottom of the door, as the breach was large and the wind piercing ; and then with some loose handfuls stopped the crevices above and around, till all was quite snug. Then wrapping my coat closely about me, I lay down in as comfortable a nest, and slept as sweetly as I ever had in America or Ireland.

The fire died upon the hearth, and the cold awakened me. The day was the Sabbath ; the storm had not in the least abated. I had my Testament, and spent the morning reading the crucifixion and resurrection of the Saviour to the family. The father assured me that “ he had never heard a ha’porth of it read before ; we are as ignorant, good lady, as the goats upon the mountain. God help us !” A woman entered with a red petticoat turned over her head, and the man told her in Irish who I was, and that I had come to see the poor. She reached her hand, and said in Irish, “ Then she is my sister.” The little girl explained, “ She is a very religious body, and means you are her sister if you are religious.” She was a mountain Connemara girl, but not a fac-simile of the one I met in Oranmore. She gave me a hearty shake of the hand as she went out, telling the man she must come and see me again. The man said, “ If ye could spake in Irish, ye could do good to these cratures, for they are as stupid as the marble-stone.” One told me that they wore red petticoats to keep off the fairies ; “ and this,” he added, “ they fully believe.” While he was deploring their ignorance, his little son told him he had dreamed a bad dream. “ Bless yourself, then, nine times, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, when ye are goin’ to sleep, and ye won’t dreme at all.” “ Do yon believe this ?” I asked. “ I do, ma’am ; the priest told me so, and the priest must know.” “ The priest, sir, insulted you if he told you so ; it is all nonsense, and you should not listen to it.” He shook his head at my incredulity, but said no more.

The rain ceased, and I must go to the next lodging-house, about two miles. Asking the man if he could change half-a-crown, “ For what ?” as I hesitated, “ I will not change a half-crown, nor a shilling, nor a six-pence ; nor a ha’porth shall the childer take, for that Black-guard bed ye laid yer wairy bones upon. If I had a half-crown, I would give it to let ye ride to Clifden.” This was true Connemara hospitality, and I went out without leaving a farthing, where I had had value received, and should have felt it a great privilege to give them a little.

I reached the lodging-house, and saw the good woman and all about her in unusual trim for the people in that mountain, and felt much cheered at so neat and comfortable a looking place. “ But we cannot entertain ye, because a daughter is to be married this evening.” I then was more anxious to stop, for among all the varieties I had seen, I never had been present at an Irish wedding. I went to a second, was denied ; to a third, the answer here was, “ She could not accommodate so dacent a body.” Decent or not decent, I told her I must stay. The rain was beginning, and I could not reach Clifden that night, neither was I willing to be out so

long on the Sabbath. At last she consented, and gave me a good fire, a piece of bread, and a plate of well cooked potatoes, which are always given without charge in every lodging-house where I stopped. The room where I lodged had potatoes cut for planting, which was the creditable reason why a “dacent body” should not be put in it.

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Clifden—Clifden Castle—Irish Holidays—Walk to Roundstone—Hardships of Irish Tenants—Three Guides pointing three different ways—Potatoes a Curse upon Ireland—A Rough and Weary road—Absence of Trees—An aged Pilgrim—Good Wishes—A Timely Supply—Judicious Advice—A Kind Curate—A Connemara School—Ascent of the Diamond Mount-ain, and Adventure by the Way—Tully—No Bread to be had in the Town—The Isle of Oma, and the Satires thereof—Change for the better in Connemara—Return to Clifden.

Monday morning, walked in the rain to Clifden. Was directed to a lodging place, and found an intelligent Protestant woman, who immediately brought me tea and toast, as she saw me wet and fatigued. The romantic town of Clifden presented a novel appearance, built as it is upon a hill in part. The picturesque church stands on an eminence, looking trim and independent above its neighbors.

Visited the Protestant school, taught by a male and female teacher. The children are mostly Roman Catholics, and are partly clothed by the society, and are advanced to grammar and geography. Next I went to the national school, a great building gone to decay, the school kept by a widow for the paltry compensation of ten pounds a year. The boys had all withdrawn, and no interest whatever was taken in the school. Bishop M’Hale had prohibited the reading of those portions of Scripture appertaining to the lessons ; and the teacher, though a Catholic, talked seriously of leaving the school on account of it. She is an intelligent woman, and at the time of her marriage had possessed a property of twelve thousand pounds, which her good husband had the art of spending in a few years. He is now dead, and she sits in a dilapidated school-room fifty-two weeks every year for a salary of ten pounds. I left the school, and ascended a difficult mountain to take a full survey of the town. It was a most picturesque view. Mountains of rocks on every hand, and the sea behind a little declivity ; the scattered buildings here and there among the wildness of the rocks about the village, make one feel transported back to days of chivalry, when all the superstitious legends were in full vogue, when fairies were plying their skill, and knights and chieftains were the men of renown.

April 30th.—I walked forth after a shower, scarcely knowing or caring whither. I followed a neat romantic path till a splendid stone gateway met my eye, and, quite contrary to monarchical etiquette, the entrance was open and free. I received a hearty welcome from the good-natured keeper of the lodge, and an invitation to walk in and take a cup potatoe, “the best in all the world,” she said. “Ye are welcome to go all over the grounds, no walls or gates preventing. And if the owner was at home, he would take ye through the castle.” Her husband led me to the path, and left me to wander in the pleasure grounds where I pleased. A romantic pile of moss-covered rocks was the first object of curiosity. The roof was broken through, and water trickled from the rocks down to a channel under the stone-floor, which bears it silently away under ground. Recesses in the interior made this structure a still mater wonder, and seeing two laboring men, I inquired what it could be. “A grotto, ma’am. An’ ye’re a stranger from England, I s’pose.” “No, sir, from America.” “From America ! America ! welcome, thrice welcome. An’ I see ye have the green badge of Ireland,” alluding to my green coat, “and do ye know the shamrock ?” picking a sprig and handing it to me ; “Ye are Ireland’s friend, I know, and do ye think we shall ever get any good ? America is doin’ much for us, an’ we’ll never fight for England.” The chief speaker was white-headed, yet he expected to live to see Ireland have her rights. As they said, “God speed ye,” I looked after these old men, and surely, I thought, it is true—

“ Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
Ireland ‘ never is, but always to be blest.’ ”

Following the winding path, I soon found the castle, proud in height and architecture, embosomed in wood, without gate or wall. After surveying it on every side, I was more satisfied with its plan than any I had seen ; for while it looked up in independent grandeur, it seemed to look down with a bland smile, and say to the humblest visitor, “ I hope you are pleased.” Going on through the wood, I entered a garden such as few domains could boast ; tastefully laid out on mountain side and valley, without any enclosure, and gradually losing itself ill woods among rivulets and cascades. The apple and lilac were in bloom, in the midst of these varied delights. Now appeared a fairy castle, a house with variegated pillars and open door, made of shells of the most delicate shades, arranged in stars and circles of beautiful workmanship. These showed exquisite taste in the designer, and must have been done with great cost and care. I found that a laboring peasant was the architect of this wonderful fabric, but he was kept most religiously in his rank, laboring for eight pence a day.

Not a spot in all Ireland had been to my liking so much as this, because it breathed such a republican air of liberty. Not a placard said, “ No trespass ;” no surly porter followed to say, “ My master allows no one about the place without a written pass.” But here the visitor may sit, stand, or stroll, fanned by the breezes of summer with the sweet scent of every flower, and feel that all was made for his enjoyment. Leaving the enchantment, I went, to the rocky shore (for the ocean is dashing its waves in front of these delights), gathered a few shells, and returned by the sea-side, passing a monastery of monks where eighty boys are instructed, and where five monks now reside. Its style and comfort are not like Mount Mellary.

Thursday, May day.—Here the ancient custom of dressing poles with flowers, and placing them before the doors of the rich, is kept up. Horses and carriages are ornamented with them, and the children of the peasantry call at the doors of the gentry to receive presents. [1] The holidays of the Irish peasantry present to the stranger the character and condition of this people in the broadest outlines. You see how the liberty, which on such an occasion is allowed the greatest latitude that it ever can take, is chastened by a cringing servility, which says, “ I am your humble slave.” You see the effort at tidiness and show, which give you the extent of the scanty wardrobe acquired by the ill-paid labor of the master. You see the quick perception of generosity and meanness, as the gift is put into the scale with the donor’s wealth and station. You see the full mark of enjoyment which the Irish heart is capable of reaching above all others, both in sunshine and storm ; and you see that God has stamped his image as legibly, as nobly, yes, as invitingly, on the peasant as on the lord.

I determined, if possible, to see Roundstone that day, a walk of ten miles. Walked a few miles, when a little boy of ten years old came up with a staff, and was a pleasant companion, telling me many wonders of the wild barren country. Passing a pile of stones, he paused, and I walked on a few paces ; he seemed fixed to the spot. I said, “ it is a wild place, boy.” “ A dreadful place it has been, ma’am, for robbers. There is one buried under that pile of stones there, who lived about here, and stayed on that island in the lake you see back there ; it was long they watched him, and at last one night they killed him, and put him under that pile of stones.” I inquired after reaching the town, and was told that the story was true ; that before Father Mathew had been there,

Connemara was infested by robbers. I asked the boy to read ; he did so intelligibly, and answered every question from the second of Matthew, respecting the birth of the Saviour, correctly. “ And what,” I asked, “ is to become of this world .?” “ The great Judge will come and burn it up,” was the answer. He was ready in the Scriptures, though he had been trained in the Catholic church.

Two miles from the town a decently clad farmer accosted me. He had been to attend a lawsuit, a case of ejectment. "I have worked," he said, "on a farm since a boy; my father died, and left it to me, three years ago. I had made a comfortable house for myself and family, and been preparing manure all winter to put in a greater crop of potatoes and corn. The agent came round, saw the improvements, and told me I should not sow any seed, but must quit the premises." And he was actually ejected, notwithstanding the encouragement he had had from the landlord to make the improvements. From twenty to twenty-four shillings an acre were tenants giving on this rocky spot, which in many places could not be ploughed. "I must take my little all," added the man, "and leave my fathers' bones, and seek a home in America." Hard is the lot of the poor man in Ireland. If he is industrious, his industry will not secure him a home and its comforts; these he must lose so soon as this home is above the abode of the ox or the ass.

"Why don't you," said I to a widow who had an acre of ground, "make things about your cabin look a little more tidy? You have a pretty patch of land, well kept, and might look very comfortable." "But, lady, I have but one little slip of a boy of fifteen years of age, and he toils the long day to raise a bit of vegetable to carry to market, and he helped me to put up this little cabin, and if I make it look nice outside, the agent will put a pound more rent on me, or turn me out and my little things; and I couldn't pay the pound." These are facts all over Ireland. If the poor tenant improves the premises, he must be turned out or pay more. If he do not improve it, he is a lazy dirty Irishman, and must be put out for that. I reached Roundstone, and was kindly received by a Christian Protestant woman who had invited me there before in Clifden. Met an intelligent police-officer and his sister; and in the morning visited the school, taught by a Roman Catholic, and supported by the Home Mission. It is in its infancy, its funds low, and the children supplied themselves with what books they had, which were few and defaced. I sat in the school-room till eleven, waiting for the scholars to assemble, and with much urging succeeded in hearing two girls attempt to read. The teacher is a learned man, but the appearance of his person told that a schoolmaster's salary in Ireland is a poor inducement to plod through the declensions and conjugations of a Latin grammar. The whole together was not attractive. The Testament is kept in school, and the teacher observed, "It is read by all who wish to read it, and the others omit it."

Mr. Crotty, the Presbyterian clergyman who employs the teacher, says he can do no better in the present state of things. Poverty sits brooding on everything here. A Church of England curate, a Presbyterian clergyman, and Romish priest divide the town among them, leaving a scanty pittance to each of the laborers. Mr. Crotty was once a Romish priest, and is now a thorough adherent to those principles he once denied. He certainly has done honor to the change he has made, if the voices of his neighbors weigh anything; for the Catholics all spoke kindly of him as a peacemaker, wishing to do good to all, and "given to hospitality."

Roundstone, which might as well be called Allstone, stands upon a pleasant bay, and has a strand about two miles distant, of two miles in length, and in some places of nearly half a mile in width, of the finest white sand, and the most beautiful shells in the whole island. Here I spent some hours alone, amid the drifting of the sand, gathering shells, and endangering my eyes; almost threatened with a burial in the vast heaps that are piled nearly mountain high; my feet sinking deeply at every step. An ancient burying ground is back of the strand, and many of the dead bodies have been washed out, and have been found among the sand. The poor peasants, men, women, and children, were gathering sea-weed, loading their horses, asses, and backs with it, to manure the wretched little patches of potatoes sown among the rocks. They walked home with me to town, some of them with loads upon their backs which to me looked frightful. "This," said a fair young girl, who had rested her basket a moment upon the wall, "this is what the good God puts on us many a long day, and we mustn't complain." I must acknowledge I cannot comprehend how such unnecessary, unheard-of, degrad-

ing suffering can be made to sit on young hearts like this so uncomplainingly. Working a whole life for a potatoe ! yes, a potatoe ! “ We have them for a rarity,” said a young Irishman as he rose from his supper, “ we have the lumpers three hundred and sixty-five days in a year.” “ A great blessing,” I answered. “ The greatest curse that ever was sent on Ireland ; and I never sit down, see, use, or eat one, but I wish every divil of ’em was out of the island. The blackguard of a Raleigh who brought ’em here, entailed a curse upon the laborer that has broke his heart. Because the landholder sees we can live and work hard on ’em, he grinds us down in our wages, and then despises us because we are ignorant and ragged.”

This is a pithy truth, one which I had never seen in so vivid a light as now.

Saturday.—I left the kind Mrs. Moran, where I had stopped, and directed my footsteps to Clifden. The police officers, at my egress, detained me some time at the door of the barracks, with multiplied inquiries about America, and kind wishes for myself. As I proceeded, the wind became so strong in my face that walking was almost impossible. I was soon joined by a woman going to Clifden with a heavy burden on her back. “ And why did ye lave Roundstone ? The people were all waitin’ to see ye on Sunday, and the hotel Keeper’s wife was to keep ye a few days, for she has been in America, and she’d like to discourse ye, and she knew ye’d no good place to lodge.” With her heavy burden she was soon out of sight, for she most be in Clifden for market. I sat down ; the gusts were so violent in my face, that I could scarcely make my way. A man with a loaded team met me, and said, “ Ye cannot walk with this storm in yer face ; go into the Half-way house, and wait till I come back, and I will give ye a ride into Clifden.” He had five miles to go and unload his team, and five miles more to return to the spot. I went into the Half-way house, but was glad to get again upon the street, and buffet the storm. I had travelled fifty miles in this part of the country, and never seen a tree or shrub, unless what was planted by the hand of man as an ornament, and this only once. Yet we are told that all these mountains and valleys were once covered with trees ; that the bog-oak found so far beneath the surface is one proof, and the turf another.

I soon saw an old man leaning upon a staff approaching, as I supposed, to beg, “ An’ ye’re an American, an’ I’ve been hurryin’ home to see ye ; an’ ye’re alone, and a stranger, and my heart wawrms towards the stranger. I’ve a daughter in America, an’ I didn’t hear from her these three years, an’ I’d go there to-morrow if I had the manes, if I knew I should die in a week. This is a dreadful place, ma’am. They are all haythens. They buried a parish priest, and dragged him off in a common cart ; they did indeed, ma’am ; and I beg ye to be out of this mountain, ma’am, as soon as ye can.” The old man’s eloquence increased as he proceeded. “ I’m from Kilkenny, and the people there are civilized. Oh, must my ould bones be buried here !” I had the Testament open in my hand, and went to a wall, and sat down. He tottered towards me, and I said, “ If you will stop, I will read some of Christ’s words to you. You are old, and if you love Christ, you will soon be where he is.” “ Ah, I am a sinner, lady, a great sinner, an ould sinner. But do ye tell me ye arn’t lonely on these wild mountains ?” “ I am not alone ; Christ is with me, and I hear him say, ‘ Let not your heart be troubled.’ ” “ And d’ye say that Christ is with ye ! Oh, if I could say that ! Oh, if my ould heart could feel that !” I read the 14th of John in his wondering ears, while he, at every sentence which struck him, would lift his withered hands, exclaiming, “ And is this Jesus ? Did he say this to sinners ?” I read, and talked, and read again. The winds had hushed, and the sun shone out, and told me I must hasten ; I looked in the old man’s face, the tear was trembling in his dim eye ; I turned away. “ I have kept ye too long, ma’am ; pardon me, but my heart wawrms towards the stranger.” He tottered away, and I heard him praying the good God to bless the lone stranger. Never can I forget that old man of the mountain.

Within two miles of Clifden I entered a miserable hut, and found a company of women sitting on the floor. The woman of the cabin said, “ Are ye a widow ?” Answering in the af-

firmative, “An’ I’m the same, and but one cratur in the world that belongs to me, and she’s dark, ma’am. I put her in bed a sound child, an’ she was dark in the mornin’. She’s gone to the next town. She fiddles, but her fiddle is poor, and I can’t reach money to buy her a new one.” I went out, she followed, pitying and wishing she could do something for me. Looking me earnestly in the face, “Would ye know me, ma’am, if ye should see me again? I shall want to see ye, and know how ye do.” She turned away, then called again, “God speed ye, and give ye long life, and may I see ye again.” Hoping to hear no more tales of sorrow till I should reach Clifden, I hurried on, but was soon accosted by “God save ye kindly, and have ye travelled much since I met ye?” I looked up, and recognised the old man with his pack, to whom I read the Scriptures on the banks of the lake. I recollected my promise to give him some books, but had none with me, and could only say again, “Be ye warmed and be ye filled.” He bade all manner of good wishes, and hoped I should meet his daughter in town.

I hastened to the post-office with anxiety, and found a letter enclosing two pounds ten, with a bundle of Bibles and tracts from the same kind clergyman who had been the instrument, at my first setting out, of getting the Bibles from the Hibernian Society. I wept tears of gratitude, that I, a stranger in a strange land, should be so carefully remembered. I went to the coach-office, for though the carriage was paid in Dublin, yet eighteen pence more was demanded, or the books could not be given. This was another trick played upon me by Bianconi’s agents; I paid it, resolving never to have any more to do with his agents or cars. I have observed throughout Ireland two classes of men with a superabundant capital of insolence—post-masters, and the agents of coaches and canal-boats. Civility seems to be lost on them, more than on any others I met in the country. This I attributed to two causes; the hurry and perplexity of their business, and the pride of being so exalted above the spade, in a country where stations above the peasant’s lot are so enviable.

I was now almost happy. I had the prospect of doing a little good, where so much good was needed. The daughter of the old man I met upon the lakes called, and modestly reminded me of the promise to give her the Word of God. She had not forgotten what we read together, and said she had thought much of it since. I gave her one, offering her some tracts, but she, too, wanted nothing but the Word of God. A young Roman Catholic lady was lodging in the house, and she possessed good sense and a tolerable education. She examined the bundle of tracts, and found some on controversial subjects. She begged me not to offer these. “You have,” said she, “done good here, by showing to the people that you did not come to quarrel with them about their religion, but to do them good, by giving each books as they might read; but if you circulate these, it will be said you are like all others, and the good you have done will be lost.” This was sterling advice, and I followed it. She took a Testament, and it was her constant companion. I have found her reading in bed, and by the wayside.

Sabbath.—Went into the Sabbath-school, and found the old curate and his young wife, with each a scholar teaching. He gave us a cool rational sermon. This curate and his wife were very kind; and the little attentions they showed me left pleasant mementoes on my mind. They invited me to tea, and asked me to play on the piano; they afterwards left the town, not expecting to return till I should be gone, and sent me the key of the piano, as I must, they said, be lonely, and I might have access to it at any hour in the day. [2] A Bible-reader was sick in the house where I lodged, and very poor; but rich in faith. He had labored long and faithfully in a retired part of this desolate region, slept upon a ground floor, and at last sank under the accumulated weight of his burdens. From him I learned much of the poverty of the country, and much did he lament the want of vital piety in the hearts of those who professed Christ. “I am sick,” he said, “of nominal Christianity.”

Monday morning,—My heart was light and buoyant, and the young Catholic lady set off with me to Diamond Mountain, a walk of ten miles, where we had been invited by two policemen the Saturday previous. We filled a basket with books, and were early on our way. The walk was romantic, diversified with lofty mountains, transparent lakes, and every variety of man, woman, and child, that poverty could present. Women with all kinds of burdens, doing all manner of work ; some shovelling sea-gravel into baskets, lifting it upon their backs, and throwing it upon the potatoe-ridges. “ This is hard work,” I observed, “ for women.” “ This is our lot,” answered one, “ and we must do it ; but if we had money to go to your country we wouldn’t be here.” One shrewd woman said, “ I wish there would be war ; then we’d have both work and money. Anything for a change. Here we toil like dogs and beasts, and live because the Almighty God don’t call us.” This woman was daily employed at this heavy work, for five pence a day, leaving her husband and ten children at home, a mile from her place of labor. We passed her cabin, and found her husband doing a little job at coopering. Miserable, miserable huts, and ragged children, so darkened the pleasant scenery of mountain, lake, and river, that my morning buoyancy began to flag a little.

On a rocky promontory of steep ascent sat a Connemara woman, with a red flannel jacket and petticoat, looking out, and a ragged girl standing near. I ran up the rock, sat down at a little distance, and commenced singing. She sat mute, looking into the sea, as if petrified ; and though a boat was cheering, and crying “ Long life to you,” she remained unmoved, and when I proffered my hand, and spoke kindly, she looked steadily, but made no attempt at speaking. We passed down and left her, nor did she move till we had gone from her sight. We next called at a cabin, where a number of children had collected, to whom we gave books. Finding they attended a school near, we entered the school-room, and may I never see the like again. In one corner was a pile of potatoes, kept from rolling down by stones, on which the ragged bare-footed children were seated. In another corner was a pile of cart wheels, which were used for the same purpose ; and in the middle of the room was a circular hole made in the ground, for the turf fire. Not a window, chair, or bench could be seen. The pupils, with scarcely a book, looked more like children who had sheltered themselves there in a fright, to escape the fury of a mad animal, or the tomahawk of some yelling savage, than those who had assembled for the benefit of the light of science. This was a Connemara school, and it was all they could do. I had seen sprinkled all over Ireland, schools in miserable cabins, where were huddled from forty to seventy in a dark room without a chimney ; but they had benches to sit upon, and their school-room was upon the wayside, while this one was in a wet backyard. Those parents who are able, pay a penny a week ; those who are not, pay nothing ; while the wealthiest among them pay half a crown a quarter. I saw many schools of this kind, where the child takes a piece of turf under his arm, and goes two miles, and sometimes three, without breakfast. In many parts of the south, and among the mountains, they could eat but once in the day from Christmas to the next harvest, and this meal is generally from two to three o’clock.

We now proceeded to the police-station. Here the wife of the sergeant treated us politely, and placed a dinner of meat, bread, and potatoes before us ; and the sergeant then sent two of his men to show us Diamond Mountain, so called from having upon the top a transparent stone which resembles a diamond, and is used in breast-pins and bracelets. We waded through bog till the ascent became difficult, and the rain poured down without mercy. We crawled under a shelving rock, but the furious wind sent the drops to seek us out, and we again attempted the ascent. To me it was quite difficult, and a little dangerous, my India-rubber shoes slipping, and compelling me to crawl, and support myself by holding to the heath. Here I lost a second pair of silver-mounted spectacles, which I used entirely for reading, and which had served me years for that purpose. I looked back to Lismore, renewed the lament there made at the loss of my favorites, and felt that spectacle troubles were peculiarly my lot.

The mountain was a mile high ; one of the men had gained an eminence above us, and commenced rolling tremendous stones down the precipice, which bounding from hillock to hillock, from rock to rock, made a most frightful appearance as they tore their way, splitting and thundering till the mountain trembled as by a slight earthquake. To finish the drama, he crept upon the highest peak of the rock, where was poised a stone of tons weight. He gave a desperate push, and dislodged it. I saw the first movement of his body and fell upon my face, supposing man and rock were tumbling together. The young woman had succeeded in reaching a shelving part of the cliff, and was holding by some twigs. I ventured, as the thundering a little ceased, to peep up, and saw her standing like a petrified monument, her white naked feet looking like marble. When the rock had shattered in fragments, all was still, and the police-man called out, " I am here." I looked, there he sat upon the frightful pinnacle, happy, as he afterwards acknowledged, that he did not pay for his presumption by going headlong.

The steep upon which the young woman stood was nearly perpendicular ; she had contrived to accomplish the ascent by disrobing her feet, and insisted that I should do the same, and follow her. " Here," she said, " you can see all the world, and all the sea, and here, too, is a cave." I crept up with my India-rubbers upon my feet, but so steep and so slippery was it, that I could retain my position only by holding fast to the heath. Here was a cave like a room, with a stone in the middle for a seat, and the roof of square stones as if laid by the hand of man. It seemed impossible that this could be the work of nature, yet what monk or chieftain could carry up his food and his water, and subsist upon the mountain ? It was a proud height. A mile were we sitting, or rather hanging, above the level where we commenced, and the sea and earth seemed spread beneath us. The presumptuous man kept his position, looking at the crumbling fragments, and said he well nigh lost his balance, and was shocked at his own bold exploit. We could not reach the diamonds. The rain was pouring, and how to descend was the question. The bare-footed girl could keep her hold, while my slippery rubbers exposed me at every step to a long slide which might be fatal. But by sitting down and sliding where walking was impossible, I succeeded in reaching a cabin near the bottom, in time to secure a couple of roasted potatoes, which the adventurous policeman and girl had prepared from a heap in the corner, where was a fire, and a little girl only to keep it.

We reached the barracks, leaving the diamonds to sparkle at a distance, as all diamonds generally do. But a kind lady gave me some fine specimens which were gathered from the rock, and nothing now remained but to compose my mind with the loss of the spectacles, and a breast pin of Killarney curiosity in addition.

A good fire and pot of potatoes dried our clothes and filled our mouths ; and now for the lodging. The policeman had promised to secure this, but deferred it till night, when we had no time for choosing. And if the compassionate reader has been touched by our mountain adventure, let his sympathy follow us to the lobby at least of our resting-place.

As the policeman led us to the door, " You will as usual," he said, " find cattle in the room, but you will have a clean bed." Ah, the poor hapless girl and myself tested that bed ! We entered the house, two cows were lying and chewing their cud, and a horse caparisoned with a straw saddle taking his supper. The mistress was sitting on a stone projecting from the chimney, her head up the pipe of it, smoking. She could lodge us " right well," and we were shown into the room, our feet sticking upon the floor, which when damp is like pitch and tar. We instantly committed ourselves to our fate. The father and mother soon joined us, and men, women, and boys, were in an almost open loft over our heads.

Daylight did certainly dawn ; we rose in good time, paid our bill, and said good morning to the mistress, leaving her in the same spot where we found her, and at the same employment, with her cows and horse by her side.

Tully was the next destined post, without breakfast. Wind and rain confronted us at every step ; we called at the cabins when we could not help it, and certainly they were among the miserable. It was twelve when we reached Tully. I had gone supperless to bed, and passed a sleepless night, and walked through mud and rain till twelve, and now felt the need of food. To our sad disappointment, not a loaf of bread was in the town, and the good Methodist lady where we stopped said there had been none for six weeks ! Can you believe, who may read this, that in 1845, when there had been no failure of crops, an assize town with tasty-looking houses lived six weeks on nothing but potatoes ! An old man kept a shop with a little flour, but so rare was the call for it that he was out of town most of the time, leaving his door locked. He returned that day, so that by two o'clock my hunger was a little calmed by a soda cake. We then visited the National School, taught by the son of the woman where we stopped, and found it under good regulations. The teacher had a salary of twelve pounds a year.

We walked out of town ; stopped at a cabin where a Catholic old man, who had been a sailor, kept us too long ; for so powerful was the effluvia from various kinds of filth of cabin and cattle, that the girl, though used to such places, became nauseated, turned pale, and was faint. We gladly got out into the fresh air, but the girl was quite ill for an hour. We sought a decent house, found a decent bed, and paid a decent price, and took a breakfast of potatoes with the good Methodist woman. Walked back, and took a second tour on Diamond Mountain for the spectacles, all unavailing, and we returned to Clifden, certainly wiser than we were three days before, and I was certainly poorer. The next morning for Omey.

At an early hour I set off from Clifden (the capital) to visit this island, the distance of seven miles. Reaching a village of the most ancient kind, such as houses of stone, constructed like a loose stone wall, without gable ends—some with tops like a bee-hive or inverted basket—some with holes for smoke to ascend, and some with no way for its escape but through the door ; I selected one of the largest dimensions, knowing that there would be a full turn-out from every cabin and potatoe-field in sight and hearing. I was not disappointed. As if by magic, in a few moments every neighboring cabin was vacated, the hillside and bog had not a foot to tread them—every spade was dropped, and in a few moments the ground of the cabin was literally packed with men, women, and children, in rags and tatters—some with hair erect, and some with caps, and some with hats, but more with none. In one solid mass they all sat down upon their haunches, and began their welcomes to Ireland, and their wonder that so “ goodly a body should leave so fine a country to see such a poor people ;” my polka coat, my velvet bonnet, and all that outwardly appertained to me passed in review. Taking out a tract, I read a little, while they wondered at my “ plain spache,” and thanked God that they had seen such a devotee, going, as they supposed, on penance. “ And sure ye must be hungry—and such a dacent body wouldn't ait a potatoe.” Assuring them I was not hungry, they all rose and joined in one universal valedictory of, “ God bless ye, and speed ye on yer journey.” One woman followed me out, and begged me to turn into her cabin and take an egg ; I told her that I was greatly obliged that she should show me so much kindness, but I must hasten to secure a walk across the strand before the tide should set in.

I crossed the strand, and reached an island a mile in diameter, of one rude pile of stone, with a little patch now and then of green, without a road, the foot-paths being so obscured by sand blown in from the beach, that guess-work was my only guide. Here were huts, some of stone, and some of mud ; and here, too, were habitations dug in the sand, as rabbits burrow, and whole families live therein ; an aperture to crawl in admits the inmates, serving as door, window, and chimney ; on the ground straw is spread, which serves for table, bed, and chair. At each end of this island live the owners, called “ lords.”

The miseries of that island must be seen to be believed. I went into a hut, and found a family about drawing their stools around a basket of potatoes. They received me with much

urbanity, made sensible inquiries of my country, and spoke of the good she had done to poor Ireland. Seeing that their dinner was cooling, I said, “ your potatoes look quite tempting, sir ; may I take one ?” “ Take one !” said the delighted wife, “ would ye ate one. ?” The man added, “ I was ashamed, ma’am, to be seen aitin’ ’em while you was in. This is a dry bit, without milk or butter, ma’am, and yer country never ait like this.” “ Can you read ?” I asked. “ I could once, ma’am, but my eyes are grown dim.” I handed him a tract, and he read tolerably ; went out, and called his son to choose one from my bundle for himself, as I had given him the privilege. They had selected the finest potatoes for me, and toasted them upon the coals. They had two guests besides ; a beggar, and a friend of their own, and all had a scanty dinner but myself. The guests would not eat till I was well supplied, and the poor man did not make a comfortable meal, and this was the only meal for the day.

The son was sent to show me the path to Lady M——, and, wading ankle-deep in sand, I made my way to it, and found an entrance into the kitchen. The lady had gone to Clifden, and the floorless room was a deposit for calves, pigs, hens, and ducks. Two servants were sitting on the hearth, and handing one a tract, which had a red cover, the scene that followed I better *felt* than my tongue or pen can describe. The girl went out, and in a few minutes the dilapidated door, with a tremendous noise, was burst open, pouring in a host of men, boys, and girls, who were employed planting potatoes ; and they with one consent pounced upon me, demanding books, and they must be *red* ones. Begging them to be quiet, and I would make an equal distribution (having about fifty with me)—they would hear to none of this, but rummaged my basket, demanding an entrance into my pocket, all clamoring at once, some in Irish, and others in broken English, while the servant girl stood aghast. A man more manageable than the rest, who had entered before the mob, and had been reading a tract, declared to them that the books were “ dacent,” and that they were blackguards ; and after I had given the only one in my possession, he succeeded by physical force to drag them out of the house—such as were dragable, while the others took their own time and own way. I made off, with an apology from the servant, that she could give me nothing to eat, as all was “ locked up.”

My next depot was to be at the extremity of the island, where lived the other “ lady.” She, too, was out ; but I was admitted into the kitchen, and had a quiet survey of what was passing there. Here I counted sixty-three living and moving beings, quadruped and biped, besides such as walked erect—a kennel of dogs, three coops for hens, chickens and ducks, a calf or two, a pen of young pigs, a fold of sheep and lambs, and an able-bodied goat—these all walked and talked each his own language, with no pugnacious symptoms ; and if the “ lion and lamb did not lie down together,” the goat and lamb did.

But the “ lady,”— she entered with a goodly-looking daughter of fifteen, both attired in long linen coats, with respectable tails reaching nearly to the ground, worn by the father and brother. They passed through in dignified silence, and in a moment the lady returned, saying, “ Come down to the parlor.” I went down to the parlor, and here was a ground floor, a dirty-looking bed, a few wooden-bottom chairs, and a table by the wall, with one leaf turned up, and a platter of potatoes and a cup of milk. “ Will you take some dinner ?” I did not decline, for I was hungry, and a long walk before me, and the tide not yet out, and the sun was set. The lady was young-looking and handsome, and the mother of sixteen hopefuls, was rich, and rode out to Clifden, giving great dinners in the city, and on the island, assimilating herself to the society around her.

Eight o’clock, the tide was said to be out, and I had a strand of a mile to cross, and six miles to Clifden then before me. A boy was sent to show me the shortest coarse, and when I had nearly reached the strand, a girl called out, “ The mistress says may be you’ll come back, and stop all night.” A strange oversight, my pride answered, that this invitation was not given before. I thanked the child and went on, quite to my disadvantage. Midway the strand in the

sea was quite deep : I waded in and stood demurring ; the night was dark, and to find a passage out seemed impossible. I turned back, and made my way to the “ lady’s ;” she then made a shrewd investigation of the cause of my visit. Looking at her altogether, her savage living, her ragged dress, and pretence to high rank, I was disgusted to find myself at the option of such an “ out of the way affair,” and I told her plainly I came to Ireland because I had a *right* to come ; that they were daily sending loads of beggared and abused emigrants to us, and I had come to see how and what they could be at home ; and making the application to her own kitchen, she understood me when I said, “ I have seen, and am satisfied.” She was rebuked, and treated me with uncommon attention through the evening. She gave me a clean bed, in a floorless room, a cup of milk by my side to drink in the night, and in the morning presented me with a dish of potatoes, and was sorry she had no bread ; declining the potatoes, I walked the seven miles without eating, and was much enriched by what I had seen.

My way home was intricate. I found myself entangled in rocks, after crossing the strand, and was a full hour climbing and creeping to get out. I at last found the road, and the village where I stopped the preceding day, and had another meeting. One woman among them had been bred in Galway, and invited me into her cabin, which though dark was cleanly, and remarked that Connemara had greatly improved in the last twenty years. That then their time was spent in the most degrading vicious manner that could be imagined ; the can of whiskey was carried from cabin to cabin, and whole days and nights spent in glee and drunkenness ; and their persons, their cabins, and their beds so filthy that they were intolerable to all but themselves. I assured her the latter was now the case throughout Ireland, so far as I had travelled ; and were it not that they were God’s creatures, made in his image, and bound to his tribunal, I would say of many of them, “ He that is filthy let him be filthy still,” before I would risk my eyes, my nose, or my garments within galloping distance of their multitudinous disgusting unmentionables. “ No hope,” she sighed, “ for poor Ireland !” Glad was I to see Clifden, having eaten scarcely three ounces of food since I left it.

- [1] I was told at Glengariff that the old lord furnishes his pocket with shillings to meet the little girls at the door at May morning, who first present him with an egg ; a shamrock, or a bunch of wild flowers.
- [2] This little act of kindness said more for their true Christian hospitality towards a stranger, than money would have done.

Ireland’s welcome to the stranger, or, An excursion through Ireland, in 1844 & 1845, for the purpose of personally investigating the condition of the poor (1847)

Author : Nicholson, Asenath, 1792-1855

Subject : Nicholson, Asenath, 1792-1855 ; Americans ; Travelers ; Poor

Publisher : New York, Baker and Scribner

Year : 1847

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : New York Public Library

Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive

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Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

October 24 2011