

The West of Ireland 1828

Tour in England, Ireland and France

By A German Prince

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Dublin, Aug.29th, 1828

DEAR AND KIND ONE,

I have passed the last few days in bed with fever and pain. I am but now sufficiently recovered to answer your letter. What you send me from B— is indeed very flattering to me, though the enthusiasm which my little labours excite in him is the growth of his own poetical soul alone, which paints what *ought to be*, and believes that it is. Do not wish for my return before it is possible ; and trust me, that where a man is not he is commonly desired ; as soon as he is there, he is thought, by many, in the way.

I rode out again to-day for the first time to see the fair at Donnybrook, near Dublin, which is a kind of popular festival. Nothing indeed can be more national ! The poverty, the dirt, and the wild tumult were as great as the glee and merriment with which the cheapest pleasures were enjoyed. I saw things eaten and drunk with delight, which forced me to turn my head quickly away to remain master of my disgust. Heat and dust, crowd and stench, ('il faut le dire,') made it impossible to stay long ; but these do not annoy the natives. There were many hundred tents, all ragged like the people, and adorned with tawdry rags instead of flags ; many contented themselves with a cross, on a hoop ; one had hoisted a dead and half putrid cat as a sign ! The lowest sort of rope-dancers and posture-masters exercised their toilsome vocation on stages of planks, and dressed in shabby finery, dancing and grimacing in the dreadful heat till they were completely exhausted. A third part of the public lay, or rather rolled about, drunk ; others ate, screamed, shouted and fought. The women rode about, sitting two and three upon an ass, pushed their way through the crowd, smoked with great delight, and coquetted with their sweethearts. The most ridiculous group was one which I should have thought indigenous only to Rio de la Plata : two beggars were seated on a horse, who by his wretched plight seemed to supplicate for them ; they had no Saddle, and a piece of twine served as reins.

As I left the fair, a pair of lovers, excessively drunk, took the same road. It was a rich treat to watch their behaviour. Both were horribly ugly, but treated each other with the greatest tenderness, and the most delicate attention. The lover especially displayed a sort of chivalrous politeness. Nothing could be more gallant, and at the same time more respectful, than his repeated efforts to preserve his fair one from falling, although he had no little difficulty in keeping his own balance. From his ingratiating de-meanour and her delighted smiles, I could also perceive that he was using every endeavour to enter-tain her agreeably ; and that her answers, notwithstanding her ' exalté' state, were given with a coquetry and an air of affectionate intimacy which would have been exquisitely becoming and attract-ive in a pretty woman.

My reverence for truth compels me to add that not the slightest trace of English brutality was to be perceived : they were more like French people, though their gaiety was mingled with more humour, and more genuine good-nature ; both of which are national traits of the Irish, and are always doubled by Potheen (the best sort of whisky illicitly distilled.)

Don't reproach me for the vulgarity of the pictures I send you: they are more akin to nature than the painted dolls of our ' salons.'

Bray, August 30th.

I am returned hither on purpose to see the park of Powerscourt, from which Sunday lately debarred me. It would not be easy for Nature to unite greater capabilities than she has lavished here with bount-eous hand ; and her gifts have been skilfully turned to account.

You enter by the Dargle, a very deep and narrow glen, thickly wooded with high trees. In the bottom gushes a full and rapid stream. The road ascends on the right side, and the eye travels down the green depths, out of which it catches here and there a gleam of the water, or a bold group of rocks. Three large mountains rise above the glen, and, though at some distance, seem quite close, as their base is hidden : they were tinged this evening with a deep rosy red, by a sun worthy of Italy, and con-trasted beautifully with the bright green of the oaks.

Further on, the path suddenly opens on a rocky cliff, called ‘ The Lover’s Leap,’ where the glen diverges into several valleys, formed by chains of lesser hills, but terminated at some distance by the highest mountains of the neighbourhood. In the midst of this landscape appears the house, situated on a gentle slope on the edge of a wood, and surrounded by beautiful flower-gardens. From hence to the great waterfall, a distance of five miles, the road leads through ever varying scenes, which are more like those of beautiful nature than of a park. At length you reach a wood, and the rush of the distant waterfall meets your ear before you catch sight of it. It is inconsiderable, except after rain, but then it is magnificent. The lofty rocks are thickly covered on either side with shrubs, the cascade dashes through their varied foliage, and falling into a basin, flows away through a beautiful meadow. Around this are venerable oaks, under which a house, suited to the character of the place, has been built. Here, refreshments are to be obtained, and it is the usual resort of the many parties of pleasure who come hither. Green footpaths lead still further into the wild mountain country ; but as it was already dark, I was obliged to return. On my way hither, I had gone over the greater distances in a gallop ; and to avoid unnecessary delay, had taken up the ragged boy who acted as guide, behind me, regardless of the wonderment of the passers by, who knew not what to make of so extraordinary a cavalcade. At night I was obliged to ride slowly along the stony road, till the moon rose, orange-coloured, behind the mountains, and half shrouded herself in evening mists. I reached the inn at Bray, tired and hungry, at eleven o’clock.

August 31st

I found this country inn so pleasant that I resolved to prolong my stay over to day—Sunday. Living at inns affords one a good opportunity of observing the middle classes. Every man here shows himself as he is, and seems to feel himself alone. I have already told you that English travellers of this class (I include all the inhabitants of the three kingdoms who have English manners and habits) usually pass their time, when not out of doors, in a common room called the coffee-room. In the evening this coffee-room is lighted with lamps ; candles are carried, if called for, to the gentlemen who sit at the separate little tables. It has often surprised me that in a country in which luxury and refinement on all the wants of life are so universal, even in the best provincial inns (and often in London) tallow candles are commonly used. Wax candles are an unwonted luxury; and if you ask for them, you are treated with redoubled civility, but your bills are also doubled throughout.

It is very diverting to observe the perfect uniformity with which all behave, as if machines out of one workshop. This is particularly observable in their eating : though placed at separate tables, and no individual taking the slightest notice of any other, they all seem to have exactly the same usages, exactly the same gastronomic tastes. Nobody eats soup, which, unless bespoke beforehand, is not to be had. (This is the reason, by-the-bye, for which my old Saxon servant left me. He declared that he could not exist any longer in such a state of barbarism—without soup!) A large joint of roast meat is commonly carried from one to another, and each cuts off what he likes. This is accompanied by potatoes or other vegetables, boiled in water ; and a ‘ plat de ménage’ filled with sauces is placed on every table; beer is poured out, and there, in a common way, ends the dinner. Only the luxurious eat fish before meat.

But now follows the second stage :— the tablecloth is removed ; clean plate, and knife and fork laid ; wine and a wine-glass, and a few miserable apples or pears, with stony ship-biscuits, are brought : and now the dinner seems to begin to enjoy tranquillity and comfort. His countenance assumes an expression of satisfaction; apparently sunk in profound meditation, leaning back in his chair, and looking fixedly straight before him, he suffers a sip of wine to glide down his throat from time to time, only breaking the death-like silence by now and then laboriously craunching his rocky biscuits.

When the wine is finished, follows stage the third,—that of digestion. All motion now ceases ; his appetite being satisfied, he falls into a sort of magnetic sleep, only distinguishable from the natural by the open eyes. After this has lasted for half an hour or an hour, all at once it ceases ; he cries out, as if under the influence of some sudden possession, ‘ Waiter, my slippers ;’ and seizing a candle, walks off gravely to his chamber to meet his slippers and repose.

This farce acted by five or six men at once has often amused me more than a puppet-show ; and I must add, that with the exception of the incident of the slippers, pretty nearly the same scene is represented in the first clubs of the metropolis. I scarcely ever saw an Englishman read at dinner ; I am not sure that they don’t think it an act of indecorum—perhaps of impiety—like singing or dancing on a Sunday for instance. Perhaps, however, it is only a rule of diatetics converted by time into a law, which no vivacity of temper can break through.

Englishmen who do not belong to the aristocracy, and are not very rich, usually travel without a servant by the mail or stage-coach, which deposits them at the inn. The man who waits on strangers to the coach, cleans their boots, &c. has the universal appellation ‘ Boots.’ It is, accordingly, ‘ Boots’ who brings your slippers, helps you to pull off your boots, and then departs, first asking at what time you will have, not as in Germany, your coffee, but your hot water to shave. He appears with it punctually at the appointed hour, and brings your clothes cleanly brushed. The traveller then hastens to dress himself and return to his beloved coffee-room, where the ingredients of breakfast are richly spread upon his table. To this meal he seems to bring more animation than to any other, and indeed I think more appetite ; for the number of cups of tea, the masses of bread and butter, eggs and cold meat, which he devours, awaken silent envy in the breast, or rather in the stomach, of the less capable foreigner. He is now not only permitted, but enjoined (by *custom*, his gospel) to read. At every cup of tea he unfolds a newspaper of the size of a table-cloth. Not a single speech, crim. con., murder or other catastrophe invented by the ‘ accident maker’ in London, escapes him.

Like one who would rather die of a surfeit than leave any thing uneaten which he had paid for, the systematic Englishman thinks that having called for a newspaper he ought not to leave a letter of it unread. By this means his breakfast lasts several hours, and the sixth or seventh cup is drunk cold. I have seen this glorious meal protracted so long that it blended with dinner ; and you will hardly believe me when I assure you, that a light supper followed at midnight without the company quitting the table.

On this occasion several were assembled ; and I must remark, generally, that when that is the case, a very different scene is exhibited.

The wine, instead of producing the lethargic reverie I have described, makes them rather too talkative. Something of the kind occurred to-day. Five or six travellers were very jovial, and having carried this a little too far, a violent quarrel arose among them, which, after long continued noise and confusion, ended, strangely enough, in their all falling foul of the waiter and pushing him out at the door. Upon this the host was forced to come in, and to beg pardon for the poor fellow, who was perfectly innocent. Not one of the men who were eating at their solitary tables took the slightest notice of this affray, but stared straight before them just as indifferently as if nothing were going on.

Soon, however, one of them who had begun his dinner very late gave us a new scene. He was dissatisfied with the mutton they had brought him, and desired the waiter to tell the cook she was a d—— b——. On receiving this communication, the Irishwoman lost all respect for the author of so sensible an insult ; tore herself out of the arms of her companions who vainly attempted to hold her at the dining-room door, darted with doubled fists on the offender, and over-whelmed him with such a torrent of truly national epithets, that he turned pale and left the field, roaring “ my slippers” as loud again as usual, and without further attempt at resistance hastily retreated to his chamber in the third story ; for, as you know, the bedrooms here are always under the roof, ‘ comme au Columbier.’

When the late Grand Duke of W—— was in England, he was seized with the desire to travel alone and incognito by the ‘ stage,’ as a means of becoming more intimately acquainted with English life. It

amused him much : the next morning, however, he was not a little surprised, when the ‘ boots’ brought him his clothes, at his saying, “ I hope your Royal Highness slept well last night.” He thought, however, he might have misunderstood, and taking no notice of the thing, continued his journey on the outside. The next morning, the same title. He now inquired into the matter, and found that a card with his name and rank was stitched to the inside of his cloak, and had destroyed his ‘ incognito.’ What struck him the most doubtless was, that people troubled themselves so little whether a German sovereign prince sat on the top of the stage-coach or not. The common people in England care little about rank,—about foreign rank nothing. It is only the middle classes that are servile : they are delighted to talk to a foreign nobleman because they cannot get at their own haughty aristocracy. The English nobleman, even the least of the Lords, in the bottom of his heart thinks himself a greater man than the king of France.

This mode of travelling, to a man who has any thing in view beside mere change of place, or who does not feel himself flattered by the increased reverence of innkeepers and waiters, is certainly preferable to the usual manner of making the grand tour. The diminution of comfort and convenience is counterbalanced by so much that is instructive and agreeable, that one gains a hundredfold by the change.

Dublin, September 1st.

I returned, this time, by way of Kingston, along a rough but very romantic road, close to the sea. A crowd of beggars stood on the road. They were not, however, deficient in industry and activity, for an old woman among them was busily gathering up some white sand which had fallen from a cart. How I wished to open the treasures of our Sand-Golconda to this poor creature ! As I could not, I made her happy with a few pence, of which I always carry a cargo in my coat-pocket to throw out like corn among fowls ; for here every body begs.

Kingston is a little town, consisting chiefly of the country houses of the opulent people of Dublin. The Lord Lieutenant sometimes resides here. Since the king’s visit a harbour has been made, at which the men are still at work. The shallowness of Dublin Bay renders this very desirable ; but its principal end now is to give work to the lower classes. The many ingenious inventions which are here applied, the four rail-roads running side by side, on which one horse can draw enormous loads, the chain windlasses by which huge masses are brought to hand and walled into the dam, and other things of the like kind, are uncommonly interesting and instructive. Several large ships are lying in the unfinished harbour, in which they already find deep water and safe anchorage. Among them I was struck by the appearance of a black hulk, which lay like a solitary ghost ; it contained, as I was told, the convicts ordered for transportation to Botany Bay ; the transport ship which was to convey them had already arrived. This is no very severe punishment (deducting sea-sickness), and converts two-thirds of these criminals into useful citizens. Every government might (according to its local resources) create a Botany Bay ; but it will be long ere the principle of vengeance is banished from our systems of law or of religion.

A monument has been erected at the entrance of the harbour, in honour of the King’s memorable visit (memorable, that is, for its disappointing all hopes and expectations). It is designed and executed with the sort of taste which seems to lie like a curse on all the public buildings of Great Britain: it is a small, ridiculous stump of an obelisk, perched on the corner of a natural rock ; it stands on four balls, and looks precisely as if the first blast of wind would roll it into the sea. One cannot suppress the wish that this may happen ;—the sooner the better. The royal crown is stuck at the top like a lid on a mustard-pot, and the whole, contrasted with the noble dimensions of the harbour and surrounding buildings, is so small and ‘ mesquin’ that it might be taken for the whim of a private man, but certainly never for a national monument. Perhaps the architect was a ‘ mauvais plaisant,’ and meant it satirically :— as an epigram it is deserving of praise.

The road from hence to Dublin is very fine, and covered with riders and carriages. I wondered not to find it watered, which makes the roads near London so agreeable. Probably it is only done when the Lord Lieutenant is here. The dust to-day was almost insufferable, and all the trees covered as if with chalk.

I returned to Dublin just at the moment of a meeting of the ‘ Catholic Association,’ and alighted at the door of their house : unfortunately, however, neither Shiel nor O’Connell was present, so that there was no great attraction. Heat and bad smells, (‘car l’humanité Catholique pûe autant qu’une autre,) drove me out in a few minutes.

In the evening I was better amused by the performances of some other charlatans,—a company of English horse-riders who are here. Mr. Adams, in his way indisputably ‘ le premier des homines,’ was leader of the ‘ Academy,’ which deserved its name better than some others I could mention.

It was pleasant to see about twenty elegantly dressed young men, all moving with nearly equal grace and dexterity—often bewildering the eye by the artful confusion, the variety, difficulty and extreme rapidity of their movements, forming a wild dissonance or chaos, and then resolving this into the most graceful harmony. Still more delightful were two inimitable clowns, whose limbs were perfectly at their disposal. The one was excellently supported by his piebald ass, which shamed the noblest horses in the precision with which he executed his feats ; and the other on an instrument of his own invention, produced a sort of music so truly mad, that even the mere tones excited resistless laughter.

The performance was closed by a ‘ pas de deux’ of the two clowns, danced on their hands and feet ; the latter cutting capers in the air, while the former supported the weight of their bodies. Here the human form seemed obliterated ; and the scene, frightful as a tale of Hoffman’s, appeared to the bewildered spectator like the dance of two mad polypi.

[Here some leaves of the correspondence are wanting.]

B—m, in the West of Ireland, Sept. 5, 1828.

DEAR JULIA,

You make me laugh by your gratitude for my diligence in writing. Are you not aware that I can have no greater enjoyment ? I have hardly written a word before I feel myself at home, and new comfort and courage are infused into my heart.

Do you remember the young parson at Bray ? Though he converted the God of Mercy into the greatest of all tyrants, he himself is a very good-hearted fellow ‘ qui n’y entend pas malice.’ He gave me such a hearty invitation to accompany him to his father’s house in Connaught,—who, as he assured me, was no less hospitable than rich,—that I consented, ‘ et m’y voilà !’ This wild part of Ireland, seldom visited by natives, never by foreigners, has such a bad name, that there is a proverb—‘ Go to hell and Connaught !’ It was therefore a matter worthy of deliberation ; but what deters others often attracts me ;—such situations too I have often found the richest in amusement. The present promises me this in abundance, at least so far as novelty and strangeness go.

Yesterday evening after dinner we left the metropolis in my carriage. We had just a hundred-and-one miles to go. In England this is soon accomplished; here things are very differently managed, and it took us four-and-twenty hours.

The scenery is strikingly like the Wendish districts of Lower Lusatia, whither my unlucky stars once drove me ; except that there are thick woods, while here, with the exception of a few arid furs, they appear only to *have been*. Boundless plains are covered with bog and turf ; the oakwood, thousands of years old, which is found sometimes at a great depth, fetches a high price for decorative furniture ; snuff-boxes and ladies’ ornaments are likewise made of it. The other part of the soil is sandy or wet : the dry lands are meagre and barren ; but on the other hand the bog cultivation, which is admirably understood, is very successful. The bog is first levelled, the projecting part being cut into squares of turf, and the soil then burnt and sown with corn. All the bogs appear to be remarkably deep : the principal crops are buck-wheat, potatoes, and oats. The cabins of the inhabitants are beyond description wretched, and the appearance of all the flat country extremely poor, till you approach my friend’s estate, where Nature becomes more smiling; and blue hills, the scene of many a wondrous tale, peep above the horizon.

My host, Captain W——, is one of the ‘Notables’ of his county, but his house is not better than that of a German nobleman of moderate estate. English elegance and English luxury are not to be thought of ; wax lights are unknown ; port and sherry, but above all ‘whiskey-punch’ are the only beverages : the coffee is detestable ; but the food excellent, nutritious, and plentiful. The house is not over-clean ; the small establishment very respectable from length of service, zeal and attachment, but of a somewhat unwashed and boorish appearance.

From my chamber windows I penetrate into all the mysteries of the domestic economy, which is too modest to spread out the dunghills as chief ‘point de vûe,’ as in North Germany. The rain (for alas ! it does rain) runs merrily through my windows, and falls in romantic cascades from the window-sill to the floor, where an old carpet thirstily drinks the stream. The furniture is rather tottering ; but I have tables enough (a great matter to me with my multitude of things,) and the bed seems at least large and hard enough. In my chimney burns, or rather smoulders, capital turf, which not only gives heat, but covers everything with fine ashes, like an eruption of Vesuvius. All this does not sound brilliant ;— but how largely are these trifles outweighed by the patriarchal hospitality, the cheerful, easy, unaffected kindness of the family. It is as if my visit were a distinguished favour, for which all seem to feel indebted to me as for some real service.

Sept. 5th.

I like my host very much ; he is seventy-two years old, and still hale and vigorous as a man of fifty. He must have been very handsome, and has given the world twelve sons and seven daughters, all by the same wife, who is still living, though just now too unwell for me to see her. Some of the sons and daughters have been long married, and the old man sees his grandsons of twelve at play with his youngest daughter of fourteen. The greater part of the family is now here, which makes the abode rather a noisy one ; this is increased by the musical talents of the daughters, who daily perform on an instrument horribly out of tune,—a circumstance which seems not to annoy them in the slightest degree. [1] The men generally talk about horses and dogs, and are somewhat uninstructed. To-day a country squire in the neighbourhood searched long and patiently in a map of Europe for the United States : at last his brother-in-law gave him the fortunate suggestion of trying his luck on the map of the world. The occasion of the search was, that the old gentleman wanted to show me Halifax and

B—— town, which latter takes its name from him. He laid the first stone of both during the American war, in which he commanded seven hundred men, and loves to recal those days of his youth and im-portance. The scrupulous and chivalrous courtesy of his manners, the constant and ready sacrifice of his own convenience to others, are proofs of the education of times long passed, and marks his age more surely than his appearance does.

Our amusements for some days to come are arranged as follows.—In the morning we go to church ; the day after to the town of Galway, to see some horse-races, in which the poor animals not only run a German mile, but in the course of it have to leap several walls ! They are ridden by gentle-men. In the evening is a ball, at which I am promised a sight of all the beauty of the neighbourhood.

To tell you the truth, touched as I am by the kindness shown me in this house, I rather dread a long stay : I should, however, vex these excellent, cordial people if I showed it ; ‘Je m’exécute donc de bonne grace.’

Sept. 7th.

The manners here are so old-fashioned that the master of the house every day drinks to my health, and we have no napkins at table, for which pocket-handkerchiefs or the corners of the table-cloth are obliged to serve as deputies.

We passed four hours this morning in the church of the neighbouring town of Tuam, and saw four clergymen ordained by the archbishop.

The English Protestant service differs much from ours : it is a strange mixture of Catholic ceremony and Protestant simplicity. Pictures on the walls are not suffered,—on the windows they are. The dress of the priests, even of the archbishops, consists only of a white surplice. On the other hand, the seat of the latter, built like a throne, covered with purple velvet and adorned with an archbishop's crown, stands ostentatiously opposite to the chancel. The sermon is read, and lasts very long. The most wearisome part, however, both before and after it, is the endless repetition of antiquated and contradictory prayers, the burthen to which is occasionally re-echoed in singing from the choir. These form a perfect course of English history. Henry the Eighth's ecclesiastical revolution, Elizabeth's policy, and Cromwell's puritanical exaggerations, meet and shake hands ; while certain favourite phrases are repeated every minute, many of which are more characteristic of cringing slaves prostrate in the dust before an eastern tyrant, than of Christian freedom and dignity.

The text was chosen, strangely enough, from the story of the passage of the evil spirits into the herd of swine ; and after this had been discussed for an hour, the four priests were ordained.

The old archbishop, who enjoys a high reputation for strict orthodoxy, has a very dignified air, and a fine sonorous voice ; but the deportment of the young divines displeased me exceedingly ; it was disgustingly hypocritical. They continually wiped their eyes with their pocket-handkerchiefs, held them before their faces as if in the deepest emotion, answered with a broken voice ;—in short, Herrnhuters could not have acted it better : ‘ La grace n'y étoit pas ;’ of no kind.

One of the oddest customs is, that every body during the short prayer at coming and going, turns himself to the wall, or into a corner, as if he were doing something not fit to be seen.

I must frankly confess it,—I do not understand how a reflecting man can be edified by such a service. And yet how beautiful, how elevating might the service of God be, if while we dismissed all ridiculous and unmeaning ceremonies, we did not require an abstract worship, from which sense were utterly excluded,—an impossibility for creatures of sense ! Why should we not devote all our best powers to the honour of him who gave them ? Why not employ every art in its highest perfection, in order to consecrate to God the noblest, the finest works that the human faculties can produce ?

I can imagine a congregation, whose piety is equally removed from mean servility and from arrogant conceit ; who meet to praise the infinite greatness and love of the Universal Father, and the wonders of his creation—not to bring within the walls consecrated to him the hatred of bigotry and intolerance ;—whose creed demands from each man only that degree of belief which his own inward revelation makes possible to him. Before my fancy no longer float separate churches for Jews, and for fifty sorts of Christians ; but true temples of God and Man, whose gates at all times stand open to every human being, who when oppressed by the Earthly, seeks to have the Holy and the Heavenly within him, animated and sustained by all the aids and appliances of sense or spirit ; or who longs to pour out the overflowings of his heart, when filled with happiness and gratitude.

Galway, Sept. 8th.

We arrived very late on the ‘ race-course,’ and saw little of this day's sport. The sight of the people was however extremely curious and interesting to me. In many points of view this nation is really semi-barbarous. The universal want of decent clothing among the lower classes, even on festivals like the present ; their utter inability to resist ardent spirits, so long as they have a penny in their pockets ; the sudden and continual wild quarrels and national pitched battles with the shillelah (a murderous sort of stick which every man keeps hidden under his rags), in which hundreds take part in a minute, and do not resist till several are left dead or wounded on the field ; the frightful war-whoop which they set up on these occasions ; the revenge for an affront or injury, which is cherished and inherited by whole villages :—on the other hand, the light-hearted carelessness which never thinks of the coming day ; the heart-felt merriment, forgetful of all want and suffering ; the kind hospitality which un-grudgingly shares their last morsel ; the unreserved cordiality with the stranger, who makes any advances to them ; the natural fluency and eloquence which they have ever at command ;—all are characteristics of a half-civilized people.

Hundreds of drunken men accompanied our carriages as we drove from the race-course to the town, and more than ten times, fights arose among them. The confluence of guests was so great that we with difficulty found a miserable lodging :—our dinner was however good and very abundant.

Galway was chiefly built by the Spaniards. Some descendants of the ancient families still exist, as do several very curious houses of that period. It struck me as characteristic, that in a town of forty thousand inhabitants there was not a single bookseller's shop or circulating library to be found. The suburbs and all the villages through which we passed on our way, were of a kind which I should vainly attempt to liken to any thing ever seen before :—pigsties are palaces in comparison ; and I often saw numerous groups of children (for the prolificness of the Irish people seems to keep pace with their wretchedness), naked as they came into the world, roll and paddle about with the ducks in the filthy kennels, with the greatest delight.

Athenrye, Sept. 10th : Morning.

I write to you this morning from the house of one of the sweetest women I ever saw in my life : an African too,—and as she tells me, by birth a Mademoiselle H——. ' Que dites vous de cela ?' But more of her hereafter. You must now accompany me to the ' race-course,' and see the running and leaping from the beginning. It is a remarkable sight of its kind, and exactly suited to a half-savage nation. I confess that it far exceeded my expectations, and kept me in a state of intense anxiety ; only one must leave pity and humanity at home, as you will see from what follows.—The race-course is an elongated circle. On the left side is the starting post ; opposite to it, on the right, is the goal. Between them, at the opposite points of the circumference, are built walls of stone without mortar, five feet high and two broad. The course, two English miles in length, is run over once and a half. You see then, from my description, that the first wall must be leaped twice, the second only once in each heat. Many horses run, but none is declared winner till he has beaten the others in two heats ; so that this is often repeated three, four, or even five times, if a different horse comes in a-head each time. To-day they ran four times ; so that the winner, in a space of less than two hours, reckoning the intervals, ran twelve English miles at full speed and leaped the high wall twelve times !—a fatigue which it is difficult to conceive how any horse can stand. Six gentle-men in elegant jockey dresses of coloured silk jackets and caps, leather breeches and top-boots, rode the ' race.' I had an excellent hunter belonging to the son of my host, and could, therefore, by crossing the course, keep up perfectly well, and be present at every leap,

It is impossible not to have a favourite on such occasions. Mine, and indeed that of the public, was an extremely beautiful dark bay, called Gamecock, ridden by a gentleman in yellow,—a handsome young man of good family, and a most admirable rider.

After him the horse which pleased me the most was a dark brown mare called Rosina, ridden by a cousin of Captain B—— ; a bad rider, in sky blue. The third in goodness, in my opinion, Killarney, was a strong, but not very handsome horse, ridden by a young man who showed more power of endurance than perfect horsemanship: his dress was crimson. The fourth gentleman, perhaps the most skilful, though not the strongest of the riders, rode a brown horse, not remarkable in its appearance, and was dressed in brown. The other two deserve no mention, as they were ' hors du jeu' from the beginning : they both fell at the first leap 5 the one sustained a severe injury on the head, the other came off with a slight contusion, but was disabled from riding again. Gamecock, who darted off with such fury that his rider could hardly hold him in, and flew, rather than leapt, over the walls, with incredible bounds, won the first heat with ease. Immediately after him came Rosina without her rider, whom she had thrown, and took the remaining leaps of her own accord with great grace. Gamecock was now so decidedly the favourite that the bets were five to one upon him : but the result was far different from these expectations, and very tragical. After this noble animal had distanced the other two in two successive heats, and had achieved the two first leaps in the most brilliant manner, he set his foot, in the third, on a loose stone which one of the less skilful horses had pushed down as he fell, and which *it was not permitted to remove out of the course*. He fell backward upon his rider with such violence that both lay motionless, when the other riders came up, took not the slightest notice of them, and accomplished the leap. After a few seconds Gamecock got up, but his rider did not recover

his senses. A surgeon present soon pronounced his state to be hopeless ; both his breast-bone and skull were fractured. His old father, who stood by when the accident happened, fell senseless on the ground, and his sister threw herself with heart-rending cries on the yet palpitating though unconscious body. But the general sympathy was very slight. After the poor young man had been repeatedly bled, so that he lay on the turf weltering in his blood, he was taken away, and the race began again at the appointed time as if nothing had happened.

The brown rider had been the first in the preceding heat, and hoped to win the last and decisive one. It was what the English call ' a hard race.' Both horses and men did their part admirably, they ran and leaped almost in rank. Killarney at last won only by a quarter of a head :—it was necessary therefore to run again. This last contest was of course the most interesting, since one of the two running must of necessity win everything. There was a great deal of betting, which at first was even. Twice did the victory appear decided, and yet at last terminated on the contrary side. At the first leap the horses were together ; before they reached the second it was evident that the brown was exhausted, and Killarney gained so much upon him that he reached the second wall more than a hundred paces before him. But here, contrary to all expectations, he refused to leap, and the rider had lost all power over him. Before he could be brought to obey, the brown came up,—made his leap well ; and now putting out all his strength, was so much a-head that he seemed sure of winning. Bets were now ten to one. But the last wall was yet to cross, and this was fatal to him. The tired animal, who had exhausted his last remaining strength in fast running, tried the leap willingly enough indeed, but had no longer power to effect it ; and half breaking down the wall, he rolled bleeding over and over, burying his rider under him so that it was impossible for him to rise. Killarney's rider had in the mean time brought his refractory horse into subjection, achieved the two remaining leaps amid the cheers of the multitude, and then rode at a foot pace, perfectly at his ease and without a rival, to the goal. He was so exhausted, however, that he could scarcely speak.

In the intervals between the preceding heats I was introduced to many ladies and gentlemen, all of whom most hospitably invited me to their houses. I however preferred following my young host, who promised to show me the fairest of the fair, if I would give myself up to his guidance, and not object to riding ten miles in the dark. On the way he told me that this lady was called Mrs——, and was the daughter of the late Dutch governor of ——, that she had had a complaint in the lungs, and was now staying in the solitary village of Athenrye, on account of the salubrity of its air.

We did not arrive till ten ; and surprised her in her little cottage (for the place is miserable) at tea.

I wish I could describe this sweet and lovely being to you in such a manner as to place her visibly before you ; certain that you, like me, would love her at the first glance. But I feel that here all description falls short: all about her is heart and soul, and that is not to be described ;—she was dressed in black, with the greatest simplicity, her dress up to the neck, but fitting closely to her beautiful form. Her person is slender and extremely youthful, full of gentle grace, and yet not without animation and fire in her movements. Her complexion is of a pure and clear brown, and has the soft polish of marble. More beautiful and brilliant black eyes, or teeth of more dazzling whiteness, I never beheld. Her mouth too, with the angelic, childlike character of her smile, is enchanting.

Her refined unaffected good-breeding, the sportive graces of her gay and witty conversation, were of that rare sort which are innate, and must therefore please, whether in Paris or in Pekin, in town or country. The greatest experience of society could not give more ease or address, and no girl of fifteen could blush more sweetly, or jest more joyously. And yet her life had been the most simple and uniform, and her youth was rather the unfading spring of the soul than that of the body ; for she was mother of four children, near thirty, and but just recovered from an attack on the lungs which had threatened to prove fatal. But the fire of all her movements, the lightning-flashes of her conversation, had all the freshness and all the power of youth, imparting a resistless charm to the gentleness of her nature. One felt that this was the child of a warmer and kindlier sun, of a more luxuriant soil, than are to be found in our misty climes. And indeed she felt the most melancholy longings after her native land, and a painful expression passed over all her lovely features as she said, she should never more breathe that balmy air charged with sweet odours. I was too much absorbed in looking at her to think of food, had she not, with all the kind activity of a good housewife, made preparations for

entertaining us as well as she could, in her little cabin. A table was set in the room in which we sat; so that our frugal meal caused no interruption to the conversation, and it was long after midnight ere we separated.

It was not till I was in bed that I learned that, finding it impossible to get us beds in a place consisting of only a few cabins, this kind-hearted and unceremonious woman had quitted her own for me, and gone to sleep with her eldest daughter.

Concerning her family, whose name was necessarily so striking to me, Mrs. — herself could tell me but little. She had married Mr. —, then a captain in the British army, in her twelfth year: immediately afterwards she lost her father, and embarked with her husband for Ireland, which she has never left. She had heard, indeed that she had relations in Germany, but never corresponded with them. Three years ago she received a business letter from a cousin in A —, announcing that her father's brother had died and had left her heir to his whole property. The indifference of this African child of nature went so far, that she had not only up to the present time left this letter unanswered, but, as she told me, had never been able to decypher the whole of it, as it was written in Dutch, and she had almost entirely forgotten the language. "I don't know the man," added she innocently, "and the money affairs I left to my husband."

This bathing-place, Athenrye, is also one of the curiosities of Ireland. From what I have already said, you will conclude that no Polish village can have a more wretched aspect. The cluster of cabins is on a bare hill rising out of the bog, without tree or bush, without an inn, without any convenience, inhabited only by ragged beggars, and by the few invalids who bring with them everything they want, and must send for even the most trifling article of food to Galway, a distance of twelve miles. Once it was otherwise; and it saddens one to see at the further extremity of this wretched village the proud ruins of better times. Here stood a rich abbey, now overgrown with ivy: the arches which once protected the sanctuary lie in fragments amid the unsheltered altars and tombstones. Further on is a castle, with walls ten feet thick, in which King John held his court of justice when he came over to Ireland.

I visited these ruins with a most numerous company: I do not exaggerate when I say that at least two hundred half-naked beings, two-thirds of whom were children, had collected round my carriage at a very early hour in the morning, doing nothing: they now thronged round me, all begging, and shouting, "Long life to your honour!" Every individual among them stuck faithfully by me, leaping over stones and brambles. The strangest compliment now and then resounded from the midst of the crowd: at last some called out, "Long life to the King!" On my return I threw two or three handfuls of copper among them; and in a minute half of them, old and young, lay prostrate in the sand, while the others ran with all speed into a whiskey-shop, fighting furiously all the way.

Such is Ireland! Neglected or oppressed by the government, debased by the stupid intolerance of the English priesthood, and marked by poverty and the poison of whiskey, for the abode of naked beggars! I have already mentioned that even among the educated classes of this province, the ignorance appears, with our notions of education, perfectly unequalled: I will only give you one or two examples. To-day something was said about magnetism, and no one present had ever heard the slightest mention of it. Nay, in B — m, in a company of twenty persons, nobody knew that such places as Carlsbad and Prague existed. The information that they were situated in Bohemia did not mend the matter:—Bohemia was not less unknown; and in short, everything out of Great Britain and Paris was a country in the moon. [2] "And where do you come from?" asked one. "From Brobdig-nag," said I in jest. "O! is that on the sea? Have they whiskey there?" asked another. The son of my host, whom I have repeatedly mentioned, asked me one day very seriously as we met some asses, whether there were any such animals in my country? "Ah! but too many," replied I.

B — m, Sept. 12th.

Yesterday we returned home, tearing ourselves away from the lovely African, who however had promised soon to follow us. To-day I took advantage of a leisure day to ride to Castle Hackett, a solitary hill in the neighbourhood, believed by the people to be a favourite resort of the fairies, or

‘ good people ’ as they call them. No nation, it more poetical, or more richly endowed with fancy. An old man who has the care of the woods of Castle Hackett, and has the reputation of knowing more than other men about the ‘ good people, ’ told us these circumstances connected with the death of his son, in the style of a romance.

“ I knew it, ” said he, “ four days before—I knew he would die ; for as I was going home that even-ing about twilight, I saw them scouring in a wild chase over the plain : their red dresses fluttered in the wind ; and the lakes turned to ice as they came near, and walls and trees bowed themselves to the earth before them ; and they rode over the tops of the thicket as if it were over the green grass. In front rode the queen, on a white stag-like horse; and by her I saw, with a shudder, my son, whom she smiled upon and caressed; while he, with a fevered eye, looked wistfully at her, till all were past Castle Hackett. Then I knew it was all over with him ;—that same day he took to his bed ; —on the third I carried him to the grave. There was not a handsomer or a better lad in Connemara, and it was for that the queen chose him.”

The old man seemed so firmly and unaffectedly convinced of the truth of his story, that it would only have offended him to express the least doubt of it. He replied to our inquiries for further details with great readiness, and I promise myself the pleasure of giving you the most accurate description of the dress of the fairy queen for your next masked ball. At the foot of this hill is a pretty country-seat ; and the hill itself is covered to its summit with young and thriving plantations. On the top is a sort of artificial ruin, made of loose stones piled together,—laborious and almost dangerous to climb. The view from it is, however, worth the exertion. On two sides the eye wanders over the almost immeasurable plain ; on the other two lies Lough Corrib, a lake thirty miles in length, behind which are the mountains of Clare; and in still remoter distance the romantic ridge of Connemara. The lake just at its middle bends inland like a river, and its waters gradually lose themselves between the lofty mountains, which seem to form a gateway for their entrance. Just at this point the sun set; and Nature, who often rewards my love for her, displayed one of her most wondrous spectacles. Black clouds hung over the mountains, and the whole heavens were overcast. Only just at the point where the sun looked out from beneath the dusky veil, issued a stream of light which filled the whole ravine with a sort of unearthly splendour. The lake glittered beneath it like molten brass ; while the mountains had a transparent, steel-blue lustre, like the gleam of diamonds. Single streaks of rose-coloured cloud passed slowly across this illumined picture over the mountains ; while on both sides of the opened heavens, distant rain fell in torrents, and formed a curtain which shut out every glimpse of the remaining world. Such is the magnificence which Nature has reserved for herself alone, and which even Claude’s pen-cil could never imitate.

On our way home my young friend discoursed largely on the perfections of Mrs L——. Among other things, he said, “ Never with all her vivacity did I see, even for an instant, the least trace of impatience or ill-humour about her ; never had a woman a sweeter temper.” This word is, like ‘ gentle, ’ untranslatable. Only the nation which invented ‘ comfort ’ was capable of conceiving ‘ good temper, ’ for ‘ good temper ’ is to the moral what ‘ comfort ’ is to the physical man. It is the most contented, the most *comfortable* state of the soul : the greatest happiness both for those who possess it, and for those who feel its influence. Perhaps it is found in perfection in woman alone ; for it is rather a passive than an active quality : and yet we must by no means confound it with mere apathy, which is either tedious, or exasperates one’s anger and contempt ; whereas ‘ good temper ’ soothes and tranquillizes all who approach it. It is a truly kind, loving and cheerful principle ; mild and balmy as a cloudless Mayday. With ‘ gentleness ’ in his own character, ‘ comfort ’ in his house, and ‘ good temper ’ in his wife, the earthly felicity of man is complete. ‘ Good temper, ’ in the highest sense, is doubtless one of the rarest qualities ;—the consequence of an absolute harmony, or equilibrium of the moral powers, the most perfect *health of the soul*. Great and striking single qualities cannot therefore be combined with it ; for wherever one quality is predominant, the equilibrium is destroyed. It is possible to be most captivating, to inspire passionate love, admiration or esteem, without ‘ good temper ; ’—to be *perfectly* and lastingly amiable without it, it is impossible. The contemplation of harmony in all things has a salutary effect on the mind; often unconscious of the cause, the soul is gladdened and refreshed by it, whatever be the sense through which it is communicated. A person therefore who is gifted with ‘ good temper, ’ affords us continual enjoyment, without ever awakening our envy, or exciting any vehement emotion. We gain strength from his tranquillity, courage from his

cheerfulness, comfort from his resignation; we feel our anger vanish before his loving patience, and are finally the better and the happier for listening to the spiritual music of his harmony.

How many words, you will say, to describe one! And yet, dear Julia, I have very imperfectly expressed what ‘good temper’ is.

September 13th.

The beautiful view of yesterday evening enticed me to take a nearer survey of what I had beheld at a distance. My obliging friend speedily fitted out an equipage for this purpose, a little ‘char à bane,’ which was drawn by two horses ‘tandem’ (one horse before another). We determined to visit Lake Corrib, Cong and its caverns, and to return in the night. After four hours smart trotting, and some little accidents to our frail tackle, we reached Cong, at a distance of twenty miles, where we ate a breakfast we had brought with us, of lobster prepared after the Irish fashion. [3] Knives and forks were not to be had, so that we adopted the Chinese mode of eating. We then set out to the caverns, accompanied as usual by a half-naked *cortège*.

Every one of them was on the watch to do us some service: if I stooped to pick up a stone, ten or a dozen scrambled for it, and then asked for money; if there was a gate to open, twenty rushed to it, and expected a like reward. After I had given away all my small money, came one who affirmed that he had shown me some trifle or other. I unwillingly refused him, and told him my purse was empty. “Oh,” said he, “a gentleman’s purse can never be empty!”—no bad answer; for under the form of a compliment lurks a sort of reproach. “You look too much like a ‘gentleman’ not to have money, but if you are so ungenerous as not to give any, you are not a true gentleman; and, if you really have none, still less are you one.” The crowd felt this, and laughed till I bought my deliverance from him.

But to return to the ‘Pigeon-hole.’ It lies in the middle of a field, bare, and treeless, which, although flat, is covered with masses of limestone of a peculiar form, between which the scanty soil is with difficulty cultivated. These pieces of rock are as smooth as if polished by art, and look like stones regularly piled and half prepared for some colossal building. In this rocky plain, at about half a mile from Lough Corrib, is the entrance of the cave, like a broad dark well, in which thirty or forty steps, roughly hewn in the rock, lead down to the stream, which here flows subterraneously, making its way through long and romantic arches, till at length it rises into day, and turns a mill. It then buries itself a second time in the earth, and at length appears again as a broad, deep, and crystal river, and thus flows on till it falls into the lake.

Not far from the cave before which we were now standing lives a ‘Donna del Lago’ who pays the lord of the soil four pounds a-year for the privilege of showing the ‘Pigeon-hole’ to strangers. She was admirably fitted for the portress of such an entrance to the nether world, and indeed the whole scene could not be better ‘in character,’ as the English say. We had descended the steps in the dark, and heard the rush of invisible waters, when the gigantic, haggard old woman, with a scarlet cloak loosely thrown around her, long streaming white hair, and a firebrand in each hand, (came down the living original of Meg Merrilies. It was a wild scene! Her flickering torches threw fitful gleams on the rolling water, and the lofty vaulted roof bristling with stalactites; and now and then brought out the pale and squalid figures behind her with a broad red glare. She took some bundles of straw, and with words which sounded like an incantation, lighted them and threw them blazing into the stream. As they floated rapidly away, they disclosed new grottoes, more grotesque forms, and at length, after a hundred windings, disappeared in the distance like small tapers. We followed them, scrambling over the slippery stones as far as we could, and discovered here and there a trout in the ice-cold water. They have this peculiarity, that whatever bait may be offered them, no attempt to catch one has ever succeeded. The people of course think them enchanted.

On emerging from the darkness to the spot where daylight breaks faintly, as down a shaft, you see the ivy and creeping plants hang around the rocks in the most picturesque festoons and garlands. Here flocks of wild pigeons roost, whence the cave has its name. The popular superstition permits no sportsmen to molest them in this spot, so that they are fearless as in a dove-cote.

We quitted this gloomy region, where all is close and oppressive, and wandered down to the broad sea-like lake, where all seems to lose itself in boundless space. This majestic body of water fills a basin of twelve German miles long, and at its widest point, three broad. It contains just as many islands as the year days ; at least so the natives assert,—I did not count them. It is bounded on two sides by the high mountains of Connemara ; on the others its waters are nearly level with the plain : the approach to it opposite to the mountains was, therefore, more beautiful than the return. The navigation of this lake is very dangerous from its numerous rocks and islands, and the sudden squalls which often arise upon it. We saw in a newspaper a short time ago, that a boat, having on board a butcher and his sheep, had gone down, and man and beast perished. We had a very calm, though not a bright day. When we landed, my companion went before to give some orders ; while as the sun was setting, I visited the ruins of an abbey, which contained some striking remains of architectural and sculptural beauty.

Ireland is studded with ruins of old castles and monasteries more thickly than any country in Europe, though they do not present such enormous masses as those in England. These *old* ruins (for unfortunately even here are many new ones) are constantly used by the people as places of burial,—a poetical idea, peculiar, I believe, to this nation. As there are none of those tasteless modern monuments which deform English churches, and the grave is marked only by a mound of earth, or at most a flat stone, the touching picture of human frailty is enhanced, not impaired, by this custom. The impression is, however, sometimes heightened into horror by the little heed paid by those who dig the graves to the earlier buried, whose skeletons are thrown out without ceremony as soon as there is a want of room. The ruins are consequently filled with heaps of skulls and bones thrown confusedly together, and some-times placed in pyramids or other forms by children at play. I climbed over a heap of mingled stones and bones, and crawled up into a ruinous chamber of the first story, where I feasted myself on the strange romantic picture. On my left the wall had fallen in, and opened to the eye the beautiful landscape which surrounds the lake, with its bright-green foreground, the mountains in the distance, and on one side the house and the high trees in the park of the Macnamaras, who reside here. Before me was a window in good preservation, surrounded with carvings like ‘ point d’Alençon ;’ above it hung large bunches of deep purple blackberries pendant from their luxuriant branches, which crept in one continuous mass along the open wall. On the right, where the wall of the chamber re-mained perfect, was a low niche, which no doubt formerly contained a saint, but was now occupied by a skull ; the empty eye-sockets were directed exactly towards the beautiful landscape spread before it, as if its brilliancy and freshness had power to gladden even death itself. Following the same direct-ion, I discovered a grated window just above the ground, which I had till then overlooked : it gave light to a spacious cellar, in which I descried a vast heap of bones, all arranged in the way I have mentioned, in various forms. The sunny landscape above, the dark charnel-house below, in which childhood sported with death,—it was a glance at once into life and the grave,—the joys of the one, and the unsympathizing calm of the other ; while the rays of the setting sun threw a cheering glow over the living and dead, like messengers from a fairer world.

Our return in a dark night, with incessant rain, was fatiguing and unpleasant; we broke several springs of our carriage, and had all sorts of calamities to endure. . We arrived at B—— after midnight, and to my real dismay found the good old Captain and the whole family still up, and waiting supper for us. The prodigal attentions and the infinite kindness of these excellent people daily put me to shame, and I continually admire to see that their cordial hospitality is not deformed by the slightest trace of ostentation.

That my letter may not be too large, and cost too much postage, (for I have to pay some pounds sterling to the English post-office for my voluminous packets,) I close it before I leave B——m. You will know me safe and well up to this point, and in the care of people whose hearts are like your own, however inferior to you they may be in mind and cultivation. —Heaven bless and preserve you.

Your most faithful L.——

- [1] I have often had occasion to remark, that the love of music in England is a mere affair of fashion.
There is no nation in Europe which plays music better or understands it worse.
- [2] “*Bohmische Dorfer.*” The *jeu de mots* is inevitably lost.—TRANSL.
- [3] An excellent dish ! the receipt, *vivâ voce*.

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