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A West of Ireland Girl. A Sketch

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LETTER TO LORD CASTLETOWN
OF UPPER OSSORY.

(Continued.)

DEAR LORD CASTLETOWN,

You yourself witnessed the operation all over Ireland of that sinister influence which I call the Great Enchantment, and which is not a rhetorical expression at all but a fact, and a horrible fact, for where anything of a public or general nature is concerned it deprives us of the use of that plain common understanding which we employ in every-day life and in connection with our private affairs.

As the result of your bold initiative, you witnessed the formation in Ireland of twenty-five County Committees charged with the duty of advancing the national interests as exhibited to an astonished world by the report of the Childers' Commission, taken in connection with the Financial clauses of the solemn international treaty, the Act of Union. The formation of those County Committees was similar in all the Counties. There was first a requisition signed by all the elected representatives of the people, Poor Law Guardians, Town Commissioners, etc., etc., addressed to the Lord Lieutenant of the County as the Constitutional head of the County, the representative of the Queen, and the titular leader of the resident gentry, asking him to convene a County meeting, to take the Report into consideration. At the meetings held in consequence County Committees were formed composed of the leading men of all orders and political and religious sections, with secretaries, etc., and invariably either the Lieutenant of the County or the High Sheriff as Chairman, it being always and everywhere an understood thing that the gentry, the landlords, your own class and order, were to take the lead in that great promising and Constitutional movement. During the six weeks in which that movement seemed to be going forward a new spirit was manifested by the country. The agrarian and popular newspapers dropped absolutely their customary vituperation of your class, and leading articles recalling the events of 1782 when the gentry led the country, were frequent in their columns. Well, of those 25 County Committees so formed in the light of day, and with the whole country, as it were, looking and assisting, not one ever even sat, and only one, the Carlow Committee, made even any attempt at sitting. They all followed the example of that "Committee of Five" appointed on the 3rd of January, 1882, as a sort of Committee of Safety for the protection of your own interests. They were appointed, and accepted the responsibilities of their appointment, but they would not even meet and confer.

That is the Great Enchantment in one mode of its operation; something that darkens away from us our plain sense and understanding and reduces the will to water.

The last of those County Committees was formed in my own County, with the Marquis of Ormonde in the chair. You were present, and though, by that time, you began doubtless to see that everything had failed, you delivered a noble and spirited speech, passages of which I still remember. You are aware that I took a very great interest in the movement in which I seemed to see the solution of all our many distressing Irish problems—that of the land amongst them—and as the Editor of the County paper that I at least did my duty in supporting the movement here in Leinster to the utmost limits of my power. I am ashamed now to recall the number

of the leaders which I wrote and published urging my County to action and that Committee into life. I only gave over when I became aware that my position was as absurd as that of a man preaching in a graveyard, or of a certain enthusiast whom I once actually saw and heard addressing the stones upon the fore-shore at Bray, and teaching them how to be saved.

This County Committee, so far from taking any step towards the settlement of the international Financial Relations, could not even settle their own poor little financial relations with the business people of this town, who after waiting for two or three years for the settlement of their accounts were at last obliged to threaten legal proceedings before the Committee could be got to liquidate their small bills. And it would be all comical enough, dear Lord Castletown, if it were not so tragical; for all that astonishing lethargy and futility which I have been describing are but one mode of the operation of a most real sinister and malignant power which broods over the whole land, which is crushing your own order out of existence, and at the same time driving the people in their millions across the sea, leaving the island waste and ready for exploitation by Englishmen and Scotchmen, Jews and Germans, now taking possession of it, and even a swift possession.

(To be continued.)

LETTER TO THE LEADER.

MR. LEADER,

When you started at the beginning of this year, I believe mine was the very first paper in all Ireland to bid you "welcome," and to say, "go on and prosper." From a subsequent or contemporaneous correspondence I gathered from you that there was a certain friendship or mutually kindly intentioned connection between "A. I. R." and the "Leader," which, in spite of certain differences, not considerable, seemed to me under the difficult circumstances with which all of us are environed here in Ireland, to be very natural and appropriate, on the whole. We both want to see Ireland rely on herself, as to language, manufactures, and everything else. We are both working, according to our lights, for the good of the poor old demented and hebetated country; and in short, have a good many things in common.

Well, last week, you—I hope inadvertently—for I often make such mistakes myself—published an article steeped in hatred and malevolence, and reflecting, in that mood of mind, upon a young Irish gentleman who, instead of going to London or Edinburgh to get his volume of Essays printed, which are entitled "Pebbles from the Brook," gave them to me to print, so that they were printed—badly enough, I fear—but at all events were printed here in Ireland, on the banks of the Nore, and by Irish hands.

The Essay which you have chosen out for special attack is "Regenerate Patriotism." Now, I hold no brief for the defence of the opinions of the authors of the "Library of the Nore." Every one who wants a book printed is welcome to send it to me to print, and, in a sense, publish. I am no more responsible for Mr. Eglinton's opinions than I am for Mr. Rolleston's, or Mr. Paul Grogan's, or Mr. Edward Martyn's, or Mr. Shea's, or Mr. Armstrong's, or Mr. Biggar's, or for the opinions of any of the other authors whose books I am printing here by the Nore.

But I do know, and know well, that the central idea of that fine Essay

of Mr. Eglinton's called "Regenerate Patriotism" is sound and salutary. The idea is this that the man who loves his native land probably is as good an Irishman and doing as much solid service for the poor old country, as any of the loud brawlers on the platform, who, probably, never climbed an Irish hill in their lives or traced even one of all our Irish rivers to its source.

I once travelled in a train coming up to Dublin from Wexford. I there met a friend whose name was Henry Harte. He was an old and dear friend of mine, even from the boyish days.

"What are you doing down here, Henry?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "I have already walked round Ireland, except about 40 miles of the Wexford coast. I went down this morning to do that little bit of work, and to finish the job."

Henry Harte, the Sour-Face, walked round Ireland, with his right hand to the sea, out of sheer love of the country, and for love of the country climbed all our mountains. And, Mr. Leader, you sit up and sneer at men like Henry Harte, and call them "Sour-Faces."

Well, Mr. Eglinton's Essay, which I had the honour of printing, is a plea for men like that, and a kind of patriotism like theirs, and is a wholesome reminder of a certain virtue too apt to be forgotten.

Your review is a column of mere hatred and abuse, and built up too around a misconception. Mr. Eglinton wrote, "I don't like the crucifix." You argue as follows: "The crucifix is the symbol of Christianity, therefore Mr. Eglinton does not like Christianity."

Now the cross, not the crucifix, is the symbol of Christianity, and from the earliest times many good Christians have objected to it, including even Popes.

Mr. Eglinton may not be quite orthodox in his Christianity; I don't know; but do know that such an un-Christian hatred-inspired malevolent bit of writing as that to which you have treated him could by no possibility flow from his pen.

A WEST OF IRELAND GIRL.

A SKETCH.

BY JAMES MARTIN WRIGHT.

An afternoon in the beginning of winter. The wind was blowing softly from the west, coming from the sea laden with moisture, enveloping the bare hills and all the landscape in an impalpable veil of mist.

The bleakness of mountain and rugged hill, the desolateness of bog, ceased to obtrude, all softened and made dream-like with the warm, clinging garment with which the Atlantic loves to clothe the western coast.

A girl who had been walking slowly homeward to a cabin among the hills, stooped on the summit of an upward stretch of road, and left her market basket on the rough stone wall that skirted the path by the sea. She wanted to free her hands to arrange the shawl which had slipped from her head. She spread her arms to open all its folds, and then while in the act of arranging it, paused, leant her elbow on the wall beside her basket, and let her chin rest in her hand.

She was a girl of middle height, with a typical West of Ireland face— indefinite features, and soft outline, with eyes which harmonized with the grey haze that surrounded her, and that yet somehow contained the promise of a gleam of brightness as sweet and warm as the sunshine when it pierces the mist. Her dress betokened poverty

of the careless kind that makes no effort to be decent, but the soft, heavy folds of her shawl—the family one—hid a multitude of defects. The wind came in fresh gusts, but even in its strength it was made gentle as a caress by reason of its burden of mist, which settled on the girl's uncovered head in a white moisture. She looked away into the dull, impenetrable clouds over the sea—and her face wore an expression of dreamy sadness. She knew she ought to be hurrying home to the two-roomed cabin, where her return from market was eagerly awaited by numerous little brothers and sisters.

She knew she ought to have got a higher price for her butter, and her mother would be angry and compare her with Kate Malone, who had a knack of getting the best price for everything; but the anticipation was so accustomed that it brought no change of expression.

Still she gazed into the grey mist, and there came to her a sort of intuition of what life might be under other conditions. Neither by experiment nor knowledge had she any idea of life other than the every day monotony of which this coming home from market was a part. But the desire of a girl's instinct for what is beautiful and pure, and a power of imagination, so fatally common in the Irish, brought her a vision of life as it might be. It had no definiteness, no smallest foundation in fact, and was a sensation more than a picture, but there was in her face the poetry begot of a half-conscious yearning after something intangible, a something beyond what she knew, something to which her nature would respond if once it came into her life. But because imagination had not the finest thread of actuality to cling to, it sank back into the region of possibilities, and Mary thought how that Pat Gallagher was the best-looking boy she knew, and how strong he was, and kind. And now that his father and mother were dead—God rest their souls—Pat was understood to be looking out for a wife, and now her vision, with its foundation in realities, was of a cabin of her own, and hard work and plain fare, and—Pat. Then her eyes smiled and her face was sweet to look on.

She heard voices of some neighbours who were coming home from the market, and she lifted her basket and quickly arranged her shawl. One of the things which made people say that Mary was "strange" was that she often liked to be alone. But surely that was Pat's voice—and, yes, it was Katie Malone's gay laugh, Katie of mercantile success.

Then she remembered that lately her mother's rebuke had taken the form of remarking that "Pat Gallagher wouldn't have far to go to get a better wife than her"—Katie lived in the nearest cabin to Pat's—and that with her careless ways it would serve her right.

She had laughed then, because had not Pat told her how he thought of her all the day long, and when she had remarked tentatively on Katie Malone's superior qualities, Pat had said there wasn't in the country to compare with herself, and Pat had said it in the most convincing manner.

But now it was different; she wrapped her shawl round her and hurried towards home.

She knew that it was the result of deliberate intention that Pat was walking with Katie instead of her. At market that day Bridget Wheelan had told her the match was made between Pat and Kate Malone, and she said it must be a mistake.

But now she felt it must be true, and then her gentle face became troubled, she had felt so sure that Pat was fond of her.

Perhaps he had got tired of her because she was so quiet, and she supposed that as her mother said, he knew she would be an incapable wife. And Katie was a clever, hard-working girl, and she could talk so well—yes, she felt the wisdom of Pat's choice.

And now Pat's cabin was in view. Lately the sight of it had given her a thrill of pleasure.

But now she looked at it and thought of Kate Malone, and her eyes filled with tears, and her lip quivered.

Mary accepted her lot unquestioningly, only—she was sorry she made that mistake about Pat caring for her.

When she reached home, her mother blamed her for delaying, and found fault with the price she got for the butter, and said she was a "good-for-nothing," which Mary believed to be true.

Yet it was hard when her mother spoke of Pat Gallagher's sense in not marrying a careless girl like her.

The possibility of trying to improve her ways did not occur to her.

She accepted herself as unquestioningly as she did her lot in life.

No fatalist believed more in the inevitableness of things than did Mary, and because the inevitable was unpleasant was no reason for rebelling against it, or making a futile effort to change it.

She was glad to get away from her mother's scolding. She was sent out to bring the cow home.

When she came to a tumble-down wall, which divided one miserable little patch of land from another, she paused and her face had a puzzled expression.

This habit of letting her thoughts interrupt the motions of her body earned constant reproach from her mother.

She was again thinking that she was very stupid to have made that mistake about Pat—she had made no mistake about her own feelings that there was no one like him.

Just then Pat was leaving the Malone's house as Katie's affianced husband, and he saw Mary in the distance, and noticed her characteristic pause.

The thought of Katie's gay banter and quick ways faded from his recollection, and instead came the remembrance of just how Mary would look if he stole quietly behind her, as he had often done, and made fun of her dreaming.

Pat had now been persuaded by interesting friends that Mary would be a poor sort of wife for him, and that Kate Malone was the most suitable girl he could take; and then Kate was a likeable girl, and could no doubt make his little farm prosper in a way Mary never would.

And then there came before him a pleasant picture, sweetly familiar, because his imagination had often dwelt on it.

It was evening, and he was coming home tired after his day's hard work, and there was Mary with her gentle face and quiet ways awaiting him in the little cabin which had been so lonely since his mother died.

It was his one poetic picture, and now he had destroyed all possibility of its fulfilment, as he gave it one last look, a thrill of almost agony went through his strong, rough frame.

Mary made no mistake when she thought Pat Gallagher was fond of her, but she never knew this, because Pat and Katie were married shortly after.

Quiet affection is the normal atmosphere of Irish cabins—and Pat's was no exception.

And with her foot resting on a stepping-stone in the gap of the rough wall, Mary still mused, and she too felt one breath of passion that surprised her, it

was like an awakening to a new life.

But as she wondered at it, the warm, damp, westerly wind came blowing in her face, and just as it had softened the outline of bleak rock and mountain, so it was as an anodyne to blur the sharpness of her feelings and drug the bitterness in her life.

TO THE MEN OF CALLAN.

MEN OF CALLAN—We understand that some time since you made a poor little attempt at starting a Gaelic class, and that the same died. Revive it. Our Gaelic class in Kilkenny died; but we revived it: it is alive and well to-day. We are looking to you to do something spirited in this direction. You are there in the west of our county, at the foot of Slieve-na-man, and looking out upon the Ormondes, Upper and Lower, and with all that noble county of Tipperary facing you, and with, we understand, still a good proportion of old Gaelic-speaking people in your neighbourhood. You have facilities for the learning of your native language not enjoyed by the capital of your County. Here we have to learn Irish out of books; there you have people who still speak the language as it was spoken by your fathers and grandfathers, and back for some three thousand years. You have in your midst a most competent teacher ready and willing to instruct you if you will let him; a young man who knows the language as only those know it who have lived in an Irish-speaking district, and you have in your neighbourhood men and women who still retain this price-less inheritance, the great tongue of the Gael, the language spoken by Saint Patrick and all your famous saints and scholars, and by illustrious Irish Kings, Earls, and Chieftains without number. Yet this great language you seem to be determined to put to death.

How is this? It is because you don't think; and, because you don't or won't think, absurd prejudices and false ideas have taken possession of your minds. And is it not strange that it is we, Tories, Conservatives, True-Blues, &c., who are standing up for the old tongue, not you who, no doubt, imagine that you are great Irish patriots, despise your native tongue, allow your Gaelic class to die and are doing your best to kill Gaelic at the foot of Slieve-na-man?

You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, and when you get a little more sense you will be ashamed of yourselves. We believe that there are in Callan at least twelve or twenty young people who with a little encouragement and approbation, instead of contempt and ridicule, would make an effort to revive the class. Our class in Kilkenny died too. It died in 1900 but it is alive and well to-day. We hope that you will make a move in the same direction, and we on our side faithfully promise that we will do all we can to help you. If you want money for the hiring of a room or any other purpose connected with the class, write to the Manager of the KILKENNY MODERATOR and he will send you a pound, and if you want more we shall collect it amongst our friends. You allowed yourselves to be bullied by the ignorant into the notion that Gaelic was "low." It is not low at all, and we assure you that at this moment many of the highest and noblest people in the land are studying it, and with great pride and pleasure.

When you determine on an opening night, let us know and we shall be very glad to be present and assisting, and to bring as many friends as we can.