

Irish News

OUR IRISH LETTER

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

DUBLIN, May, 1908.

Recollections of Lismore.

There died lately one of England's richest noblemen, one of Ireland's absentee landlords who, owning great estates and having many duties in this country, chose always to live away from as fair a home and as kind-hearted a people as any man could wish spend half of each year amongst. The Duke of Devonshire, the lord of Lismore Castle and estate, the owner of half a million per annum, has passed away. He was a stranger to his beautiful Irish home and his Irish people, leaving them to the care of an agent, never coming to Lismore but for two brief visits, caring nothing for the place or for the people to whom he might have given much happiness had he come amongst them in person and taken the part all landlords ought to take in the lives and interests of those who are not one whit more dependent upon him than he is on them.

With the Duke's English life Ireland has nothing to do: his sympathies, I should rather say his prejudices, were all against the Irish, of whom he really knew nothing at all. Had he spent a part of his life amongst those who contributed so largely to his great wealth, had he honestly tried to know and benefit them, he would have been, I think, a happier man. How any man owning such a place as Lismore could, having once seen it, neglect it is a marvel to those who know the spot. It is long years now since I spent some months there, but I never can forget its charm. There are, perhaps, some natives of Lismore in Dunedin; may I copy for them and your other Irish readers a few of the impressions of the spot, written while the scenes were fresh in the memory?

The Valley of the Blackwater, or Avon Duv.

A green meadow or ince; in the centre a group of limes, under whose branches is cool shade from the glare of the sun. From under these limes the traveller will see behind him a gently rising slope, planted with groups of forest trees; in front the river Blackwater, gliding quietly and pleasantly along, as if itself enjoying this scene so full of rest on every side; the opposite bank is again a broad ince, backed by green woods whose shade looks so tempting that one almost makes up his mind to ford the shallow river at once and start on an expedition up through the wooded heights, to the yellow fields far above, and on to that farmhouse just appearing over the trees and looking down into the valley. To the right the river winds and twists away by the meadows and woods towards mountains that just show the outlines of their forms, a faint blue seen through the lovely haze that is one of the beauties of our Irish scenery. To the left is the loveliest picture of all, one that has over and over again been painted by artist and writer, but still can never be fairly described, because no one picture can give the ever-varying colors, the lights that flit like smiles, the rosy morning hues, the soft midday glow, the floods of glory that come with the setting sun, or the shadowy veil of a summer's moon.

It is about four o'clock in the afternoon, the sunniest hour on the Avon Duv, when the sun shines straight up the river, and every rippet is a sparkling gem, all life and motion, save under the shadows of the bridge. Each arch of this bridge frames in a separate little scene: one, dancing water with a boat gliding over and scattering into diamond spray the sunlit ripples that seem to laugh back at the oarsman, whose motions tell plainly they are enjoying the life there is in such a day; a second archway gives a quiet bit of greensward, where a group of children are gathering flowers and paddling in a shallow inlet of the river; a third shows a bit of woodland where all is deep, cool shadow—a place all quiet; the very boat that is moored in amongst the sedges is asleep, rocking itself up and down, to and fro, with a sing-song movement that tells of repose as plainly as the boat in the first picture speaks of quick life.

Behind the stone bridge, sheer up from the river, rise, pile above pile, rocks so densely wooded that, whilst the lowest branches stoop over and dip their tips into the tide, the masses of foliage seem unbroken until they part, some two hundred feet above, to let Lismore Castle look out upon the river beneath upon the peaceful valley, the hills, and, right opposite, the high

peaks of Knockmealdown, a range of mountains that rise, now blue, now violet, and again—as their name implies—bare and brown, according as they reflect the many changes of air and sky.

And in all this scene there is not one touch to mar its beauty; no thing, turn which way we will, but what is fair and pure. No sounds in the air but harmonise the sweetest. The song—it is a very melodious, happy, home-like one—of the river, that seems singing quietly to itself as it glances about and takes its tone from the scene around: no brawling and no rushing, no hurry to be off, only a sweet soothing in its voice as it ripples in and out of the shallows, makes little excursions up the tiny creeks, laughs round the bare feet of the children, and enjoys their slips and splashes in their chase after trout as heartily as they do themselves; it steals in under the shadows by its banks, and stops there a while to mirror the flowers that droop over and gaze into its depths; then it is out again, bubbling and tripping over that reach of stones in the shallow, near which stand the cows from the farm that is hidden away just behind the trees on the slope.

Oh! it is truly a spot full of peace and beauty, this Valley of the Avon Duv, a spot that grows lovelier and dearer to one the longer one lingers amid its scenes.

All this beauty was once upon a time the property of the holy and learned Monks of Lismore; and once upon a time, too, it was the dwelling of that man around whose name lingers such a ring of romance, Sir Walter Raleigh. The knight fell into poverty, and his estates were purchased by Sir Richard Boyle, afterwards Earl of Cork, an adventurer who came to Ireland with £9 in his pocket. But he came in the days of fine pickings from Papists, so he managed to accumulate vast wealth. A descendant of his married into the Cavendish family (that of the Dukes of Devonshire), and thus Lismore became the property of the Duke of Devonshire of 1748.

A New Gallery of Paintings

Has been opened in Dublin in one of the fine old houses of which the capital boasted so many in the days when Ireland had Home Rule, or a native Parliament. The house is the gift of the City Corporation, the works of art have been mostly presented by a generous lover of art, Mr. Hugh P. Lane, a gentleman of fortune, who has for years devoted his wealth and leisure to creating a gallery of modern painting for the citizens of Dublin. Mr. Lane is by far the largest donor to the collection; many others have followed his good example, so that the large house given by the corporation is fairly filled from ground floor to attics, and nothing is left for the general public to do but enjoy the gift.

It is essentially a gallery of modern art, and contains many really charming pictures by Constable and other well-known painters; but it also contains a very large number of what are called works of the 'Impressionist school,' and, as you are so many thousand miles away, I will candidly confess that the impression made on ordinary mortals by most of them is a highly uncomfortable one. Some of these huge canvasses are, in fact, nightmares, not pictures of anything that exists in nature. We all know that there are eyes in which the vision is distorted, but no sane person will say that a distorted vision is proper eyesight. These pictures—raw, crude, stiff, unnatural, ugly to a degree—are simply the outcome of an age of affectation: all affectation is vulgar, and it is a pity, a great mistake, to encourage it. The old masters labored to reproduce nature so faithfully as that the beholder should fancy himself in presence of living beings, of scenes replete with atmosphere and with nature's tints when blended, as nature always blends colors; these Impressionists disdain all fine art; they tell us that if we really have eyes for art we can evolve for ourselves the truth of sunshine, trees, flowers, animated nature, draperies, etc., out of smudges of the contents of sundry pipes of crude red, white, blue, green (and such violent green!) paint, laid on by the pound. Wooden men and women with (perhaps) a face here, a hand there really well painted in a way that shows that the artist can do something, but thinks it better not.

There are some very fine portraits in the gallery, amongst them life-like pictures of Parnell and Michael Davitt. If the Impressionist part of the collection was replaced by some real works of art the whole would be a splendid addition to the treasures of Dublin, and they are not a few. Indeed, with or without them, the citizens have reason to be very grateful to Mr. Hugh Lane, to the City Fathers, and to those others who have so generously worked with them.

Then the beautiful old house, with its fine specimens of Chippendale, Adams, and Sheraton furniture, is well worth preserving as it will now be. The ceilings, doorways, and walls

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