

Irish News

OUR IRISH LETTER

(From our own correspondent.)

DUBLIN, October, 1908.

The beautiful summer is over, and all who wander abroad in search of variety or health during its too fleeting months are now settling down at home, looking back to the gaieties, the travels in strange lands, or the quiet country outing of the now past and gone season.

Well, I have been one of those who took the quiet outing. I have been away in the very heart of the midlands, and, comparing notes with those who travelled over thousands of miles, crossed seas, jostled the throngs in big cities, made excitements of every kind the food of their holidays, I have come to the conclusion that, taken all in all, I have had the happiest time of the lot; that is, of course, of all with whom notes have been compared. Most of these came back very tired, somewhat confused in ideas from having seen and heard too much; their pockets very limp.

But, ah! how sweet the country is to those who love it! To those who look into its face and read its heart; who study its good qualities and shut their eyes to its drawbacks, how grateful it is, how it delights in giving pleasure in return for so much trust!

The Heart of the Country.

More than once I have wondered if here in this little island one can feel when in the country so completely alone with nature, so utterly isolated from busy city life, with its wear and tear, its luxury and squalor, its gluttony of pleasures, or, rather, excitements, and its miseries, how must it be away back in the lonely parts of comparatively vast Australia and New Zealand? It must, I fancy, be pleasanter here. It is the real country: fields, gardens, hedge-bounded roads, green banks, and ditches where, in spring, you can gather primroses, violets, and bluebells by the million; in summer, wild roses, woodbines, ferns, all the delicate beauties of our mild northern clime. You have always some blue mountain in sight, perhaps a breezy moor, perhaps rich park and pasture lands; but you never are too lonely, for a pleasant drive or bicycle ride brings you, even in the most secluded parts, in an hour or two to some town, big or little, where there are a breath of the busy world, shops to inspect, friends to greet, quite a variety after three or four quiet days, then home again to summer in the country.

I have been living, then, six miles from anywhere; six miles from three different market towns, a mile even from a tiny hamlet; yet what a gay time, what an infinite variety of simple pleasures could that quiet spot provide!

An old-fashioned house, large enough to hold a good, big family, every window on the ground floor of the house a big glass door, opening on to the lawn and flower garden, the whole embosomed in grand Irish yews, beeches and chestnuts, each a picture, Mount Leinster keeping guard over all. The interior of the gabled house home-like and cosy; the family and friends a pleasant group made up of many elements. As kind an old host as one could wish for: a semi-invalid, yet cheery and merry, with ever a gay word and joke for the young members of the party. Four New Zealanders: I don't mean Maoris, but a family, two of whom were born in New Zealand; one was brought out when a little child, and the fourth was there long enough to call it home. Then there were the host's two pretty daughters, a girl from the capital, and myself from near the capital, an elderly gentleman very much given to falling suddenly in love and as suddenly falling out again, and taking all our jokes on the subject as so many compliments; a bright young girl, fighting inch by inch for her life against the saddest of all maladies, but fighting with such merry goodwill, such courage, such self-forgetfulness that she was the life of the house and everybody's delight. There were the servants; Tommy, a one-eyed boy, who has been a 'boy' about the place for forty years, and John and Mary, all as good-natured as their family. There were Rescue, a beautiful fox terrier rescued from that abode of woe, the 'Dogs' Home—a most loving dog to Christians, but a rascal to chase fowls and hedgehogs; Juno, a fine pointer, and Jack, a cocker; six cats, the most privileged of them—Three Legs—a tortoiseshell pussy, well aware that the fact of having lost a leg in a trap years ago makes her interesting; a brown horse with a quiet will of his own, an Iceland pony that carried me, the only Catholic of the party, to Mass on Sundays, and protested against the Papist the whole way there and back by trying to kick over the shafts. There were hundreds of rare bred and toothsome fowls, turkeys, geese, ducks,

and hens, all highly interesting in their way, loveliest of all the gentle wood pigeons that woke us up in the morning with their soft coo, so quaintly interpreted by the Scotch legend that tells how, long ago, the wood pigeon used to build her nest in the grass, but the cow so often trampled on and destroyed it that the pigeon took to building in the trees, and now, at early dawn and sunset, it sits safe up in the branches, cooing defiance in broad Scotch to the cows beneath: 'Coom noo, coo, coom noo, coo.' A less complimentary Irish story has it that, once upon a time, a Welshman came to the fold to steal a lamb, just one, but the wood pigeons overhead tempted him with, 'Take two-o do-o; take two-o, do-o,' and he did. I don't believe this calumny on Taffy and the pigeons, the latter are too sweet and gentle to do such a thing; but I could easily fancy them talking to the cows of a morning as they graze under the trees, the soft, cosy cooing the first sound to mingle with my morning dreams, and suggest that it was time to leave that snug down bed. Where but far in the country could one now find a bed of down?

Blinds up (no one dreams of shutting bedroom windows nowadays), the glow and perfume of flowers on the window-sills give a foretaste of the pleasures of the day. Mount Leinster opposite in a soft haze means that it will be a fine day. Tommy below, feeding his fowls in their own little private gardens before letting them out; and none of the feathered flock can get on the blind side of Tommy, I promise you, for he sees more with his one eye than any other could with two. Then the sounds of awakening all over the house: the glass doors being opened wide downstairs, our merry Nancy bustling about overhead, light footsteps on the stairs, the servants going to and fro, the tender-hearted old bachelor's door opening, the breakfast bell, and finally happy morning greetings at the breakfast table, where newspapers and letters and the universal picture postcards furnish plenty of topics for conversation. That tender-hearted O.B. is a very thoughtful man. He subscribes to no fewer than three ladies' journals, and wins much attention by handing round pictures of the latest 'Merry Widow' hats, the portraits of the brides and grooms of the week, etc. He is a very good-tempered O.B., save on one or two points, the worst of these being Home Rule, to which he is violently opposed, and when fun is failing, morning or evening, Miss Nancy raises a dispute on the subject that is all the more amusing that neither party knows what Home Rule really means, but grows warm over it all the same, each one round the table plying Nancy with saucy rejoinders (the O.B. is very deaf) to fling at her adversary until a diversion has to be made, which is sometimes done most opportunely by Three Legs holding up her stump to the irate old gentleman, with a pathetic air that says plainly: 'Cream for a poor maimed puss, please, or whatever bacon you can spare.' Then peace prevails once more, Miss Nancy's youth evidently softening down the O.B.'s wrath easily.

Of newspapers and books there is no lack, but I, for one, make a point of never reading newspapers while away from the world: there were no newspapers in Arcadia, and I prefer turning over

The Leaves of Nature's Book for Reading.

Why, how happily the time between breakfast and early dinner can be filled up in such a country house. A visit to the strawberry bed in June, the currant, raspberry, and gooseberry bushes in July and early August, the apples and pears later on. Sweet pea is now the favorite flower, and marvellous are the beauties that have been added to our sweet old 'painted lady' and purple and white; but who that buys a nosegay of sweet peas in the market or at a florist's can imagine the feelings of being let loose daily in an immense hedge of the fragrant flowers? One of my morning's toils for weeks was clipping, clipping, clipping at this forest of bloom. The more you cut sweet peas, the longer the plants will blossom. And didn't I cut! Armfuls! It was impossible to tear oneself away until, literally, no more could be carried in: the whole house was ablaze with the sweet-smelling blooms. Shelling the peas for dinner was the next pleasant piece of work shared in by the New Zealand little girls, who eagerly looked out for the lucky pod with nine peas. Sometimes a merry hour would be spent posing for snap-shots. Next a stroll down the long, winding avenue, where giant trees nearly meet overhead, and where the three New Zealanders, who knew nothing of these countries, were ever eagerly on the watch for three (to them) special curiosities: a fox, a robin redbreast, and a swallow. Thanks to Rescue and Juno, Reynard's visits were scarce, and we never saw him; but robins were there and swallows in plenty, and I have seen the whole family flying wildly down the avenue on hearing that, as there was rain coming, there was a whole flight of swallows at a certain point, flying so low that they could almost be touched. A sure sign of rain, for when the air is heavy with clouds the flies come near the ground, and the swallows follow them. What an excite-