

THE IRISH SKETCH BOOK:

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY'S IRELAND

FOR ENGLISH READERS

A THESIS

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PREFACE

Any traveler who visits Ireland today may anticipate that the country will stimulate in him sensations of awe and elation, and he will leave as a more sensitive being for having seen its picturesque countrysides and cities. I experienced these sensations as I traveled about Northern Ireland in June, 1969; and when I returned to the United States, a piece of the Irish spirit seemed to have come with me. Later, William Makepeace Thackeray's The Irish Sketch Book stimulated my interest in Ireland, and I further learned that he, a Victorian tourist, had seen much more of the country in a different era and still he had observed the same Irish atmosphere in the scenery and the society which I had seen. Thus, the outcome of Thackeray's travels through the emerald-colored lands was The Irish Sketch Book, and the outcome of my Irish travels and my reading of the Sketch Book is this thesis.

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May, 1971

Sue Dee Duncan
Sue Dee Duncan



. . . at a few hundred yards, most of the objects were enveloped in mist; but even this, for a lover of the picturesque, had its beautiful effect, for you saw the hills in the foreground pretty clear, and covered with their wonderful green, while immediately behind them rose an immense blue mass of mist and mountain that served to relieve (to use the painter's phrase) the nearer objects. (ISB, p. 104.)

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| PREFACE | 111 |
| ILLUSTRATION. | 1v |
| Chapter | |
| I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Thackeray, Both Traveler and Writer. | 1 |
| Before 1842. | 2 |
| Paris: <u>The Paris Sketch Book</u> | 2 |
| The journalist behind a pseudonym | 3 |
| Domestic Troubles. | 4 |
| Delay of journey. | 5 |
| Resumption of Literary Work. | 6 |
| Developing as a writer. | 7 |
| Writing and associating with people | 7 |
| 1842 | 8 |
| Decision to go to Ireland | 8 |
| Timely demand for a book about Ireland. | 9 |
| Works about Ireland preceding Thackeray's | 10 |
| The Journey to Ireland | 11 |
| Mood in which Thackeray set out | 11 |
| Thackeray's route to Ireland. | 12 |
| The Challenge Thackeray Faced. | 13 |
| His feeling for the Irish | 15 |

| | |
|---|----|
| His awareness of his English readers | 16 |
| A Foretaste of <u>The Irish Sketch Book</u> | 17 |
| The Picturesque. | 17 |
| Impressionistic sketches | 18 |
| Critical responses | 20 |
| Satiric tone | 21 |
| Balancing of sentiment and satire. | 22 |
| II. SCENERY IN <u>THE IRISH SKETCH BOOK</u> | 24 |
| Thackeray as Traveler | 24 |
| Thackeray as an Observer of the Picturesque . . | 25 |
| Types of Scenery. | 26 |
| Scenery in Southern Ireland | 27 |
| Countrysides | 28 |
| Wild areas. | 28 |
| Hills and mountains. | 28 |
| Forests. | 29 |
| Bodies of water. | 31 |
| Fields. | 32 |
| Farms | 34 |
| Farmers. | 35 |
| Large farms. | 35 |
| Urban areas. | 37 |
| Villages. | 37 |
| Cities. | 39 |
| Buildings | 40 |
| Streets | 40 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Composition of scenes. | 42 |
| Scenery in Northern Ireland | 43 |
| Countrysides | 44 |
| Wild areas. | 44 |
| Hills and mountains. | 45 |
| Forests. | 46 |
| Bodies of water. | 47 |
| Fields and farms. | 48 |
| Urban areas. | 50 |
| Villages. | 50 |
| Cities. | 51 |
| Buildings | 51 |
| Streets | 52 |
| Composition of scenes. | 53 |
| Summary of Thackeray's Irish Scenery. | 54 |
| III. SOCIETY IN <u>THE IRISH SKETCH BOOK</u> | 56 |
| Manners of the People | 56 |
| Upper socio-economic level | 57 |
| Lower socio-economic level | 59 |
| Institutions. | 62 |
| Church | 63 |
| Religions of Ireland. | 64 |
| Clergy. | 66 |
| Church buildings. | 67 |
| Thackeray's recommendations | 68 |
| Critics' interpretations. | 70 |

| | |
|---|----|
| State. | 71 |
| Justice | 72 |
| Courts | 72 |
| Jails. | 74 |
| Asylums. | 74 |
| Irish politics | 75 |
| Thackeray's recommendations | 76 |
| Critics' interpretations. | 77 |
| Education. | 77 |
| Schools | 78 |
| Schools of agriculture | 79 |
| Schools of academics | 80 |
| Schools of higher learning | 81 |
| Activities of Daily Life. | 82 |
| Business | 82 |
| Urban situations. | 84 |
| Rural situations. | 86 |
| Recreation | 86 |
| Types of sports and activities. | 87 |
| Types of special events | 90 |
| Society in Ireland. | 91 |
| Thackeray's Ireland | 92 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout literary history writers have sought to sketch life as they have seen it in countries other than their own. They have hoped not only to put on to paper their impressions of people and places, but also to provide for their armchair readers the vicarious experience of traveling from one picturesque scene to another. William Makepeace Thackeray, one of these "picturesque reporters"¹ who found both detestable and delightful sights where he traveled, strove to capture for his English readers the essence of the culture of foreign countries and to point out problems of English society as they existed in foreign societies. He journeyed beyond his England for the conventional reasons which are given by most travelers: curiosity, business, adventure, relief from problems, meeting new people, and encountering old friends. Perhaps the most significant reason for his wanderings, however, was his search for an insight into his own identity.² Indications are that

¹Charles Whibley, William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1903), p. 42.

²Gordon N. Ray, Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity, 1811-1846 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955). Referred to thenceforth as The Uses of Adversity.

his life experiences helped him establish this identity or the style which characterizes his written works.

One answer to this quest was, for a period of time, Paris, for there in the early 1830's Thackeray mingled with the Bohemians of the city. He came to know poor artisans who were struggling to be accepted by the French Academy, café waiters, chorus girls, wharvesmen, and many others. He loved the French esteem for the arts, the freedom and economy with which he was able to study painting, the French scorn for affectation, and the appreciation of good manners in any social class. The Paris Sketch Book, published on July 1, 1840, is one product of his association with France, and it illustrates his ability to create verbal images of people as seen through the eyes of a foreigner. Even though Thackeray lived for several years in Paris and was a veritable Englishman in French clothing, his outlook and his attitude towards the city revealed the innate personality of the British citizen and inspired other Britishers to look at Paris for themselves. His Sketch Book included caricatures of Frenchmen, opinions of political doctrines, comments on cultural traditions, and criticism of sociological practices. A collection of essays, it exposed the humor and cultural habits of seemingly alien Frenchmen to equally alien Englishmen and received an unusually large amount of praise as the work of an unknown author.³

³The Uses of Adversity, pp. 251-52.

Thackeray found it necessary to remain unknown to his reading public, for the profession of journalistic writing was not then a well rated profession. His career had actually begun in 1837 with free-lance writing for Blackwood's Magazine, Fraser's Magazine, and other periodicals of the day; yet to each of the essays and articles that he contributed he had signed a nom de plume of some sort; as for example, C. Jeames de la Pluche, Mr. C. J. Yellowplush, Major C. O'Gahagan, George Fitz-Boodle, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, and the Fat Contributor. His Paris Sketch Book bore the name of M. Titmarsh, as did several other works published later, because of the stigma placed on the periodical writer. He was perhaps overly conscious of society's opinions, as he says in The Paris Sketch Book:

. . . a literary man (in spite of all we can say against it) ranks below that class of gentry composed of the apothecary, the attorney, the wine-merchant, whose positions, in country towns at least are so equivocal. As for instance, my friend, the Rev. James Asterisk [i. e., James White], who has an undeniable pedigree, a paternal estate, and a living to boot, once dined in Warwickshire, in company with several squires and parsons of that enlightened county. Asterisk, as usual, made himself extraordinarily agreeable at dinner, and delighted all present with his learning and wit. 'Who is that monstrous pleasant fellow?' said one of the squires. 'Don't you know?' replied another: 'It's Asterisk, the author of so-and-so, and a famous contributor to such-and-such a magazine.' 'Good heaven!' said the squire, quite horrified; 'a literary man! I thought he had been a gentleman!'⁴

⁴The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1898), V, 43.

Thackeray had established his style and personality in letters by 1840, yet he remained behind a pseudonym until 1847, when he published Vanity Fair; one minor exception was his Preface to The Irish Sketch Book, which was published in 1843 and in which he addressed the novelist Charles Lever in his own name, W. M. Thackeray, instead of M. Titmarsh.

During the course of his writing and traveling, Thackeray met and married a petite Irish girl named Isabella Shawe, and by 1840 and the completion of The Paris Sketch Book the couple had two daughters, Anny and Harriet. Isabella was of a delicate nature, and life with a man who was constantly busy with his work became for her an increasingly difficult struggle. Her mind could not cope with the demands of being a wife, mother, companion, and housekeeper; gradually she slipped deeper into acute melancholia. Thackeray likewise was struggling to maintain his mental equilibrium; for not only were the creditors demanding money which he did not have, the "children were in one room crying, and [their] Momma was raving in the other."⁵ An advance payment of £120 from Chapman and Hall for a book on Ireland temporarily relieved him from the financial crisis, and he decided that perhaps his wife's home in Cork could provide some kind of additional relief. He planned to leave his family in the charge of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Matthew Shawe,

⁵The Uses of Adversity, p. 255.

and begin work on "Titmarsh in Ireland," as the book was first titled. He had made an agreement with his publishers for £350 as payment on the release of the first edition of 1,250 copies,⁶ the manuscript being due at the end of the year. His time to work was short, but he intended to write as he toured Ireland.

However, the book was destined to be delayed, for during the journey to Cork from London in September, 1840, the poor insane Isabella tried to commit suicide near the Isle of Wight:

. . . [she] flung herself into the water (from the water-closet) & was twenty minutes floating in the sea, before the ship's boat even saw her. O my God what a dream it is! I hardly believe it now I write. She was found floating on her back, paddling with her hands, and had never sunk at all In the next night she made fresh attempts at destruction and the first week here was always attempting to quit the bed: You may fancy what rest I had. I had a riband round her waist, & to my waist, and this always woke me if she moved.⁷

She failed to rally during the visit with her mother and sister in Cork; and because of the constant care which her illness required, her husband was never able to do the necessary traveling at that time for "Titmarsh in Ireland." The family stayed four miserable weeks in Ireland, and Thackeray consequently lost more patience, money, peace of mind, and time for working than he could afford. At the point of desperation, he moved his wife and two children to Paris and his mother's home for better care of all concerned.

⁶The Uses of Adversity, p. 255.

⁷The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945-46), I, 474, 482-83; II, 429. Subsequently, this work will be referred to as Letters.

In the months that followed, Thackeray did much traveling, trying to find a solution for his wife's trouble. Finally, at Chaillot, France, he entered Isabella in an institution for the mentally ill and made his way alone back to London to live the life of a bachelor. For eighteen months, before his return trip to Ireland, he wrote avidly, using both his own experiences and material that he gained from old friends and business colleagues. To say that during this time he was happy at his freedom from the early responsibilities would be a gross injustice to the moral character of the man. His life in London and his writings from that period on reflected the deep-seated wisdom which he gained from the hardships of the past. He bore his burdens with increasing self-knowledge and a sense of humor, however despondent he may have felt. Gordon Ray, his biographer, suggests that, as grueling as it was, the period between August of 1840 and August of 1841 was necessary to the development of his style and attitude towards his work:

The ordeal of Thackeray's 'year of pain and hope . . . and bitter bitter tears'⁸ fortified his character, deepened his understanding, and matured his talent. Even of the domestic happiness that he had once enjoyed, it may be said that he understood it better and felt it more profoundly for having lost it.

Hence the peculiar bitter-sweet flavour of Thackeray's mature personality and work. Though his own happiness had been shattered, his belief in the possibility of happiness for others remained unimpaired.

The events of this crucial year affected Thackeray in another way, imparting to his work a perspective that has seemed to some readers the height of wisdom, to others the depth of bathos. The pain that he had felt in watching over and cherishing Isabella, the joy that he had experienced when his family

⁸Letters, II, 12.

came to his aid, made an indelible impression upon him. 'It's worth while to be unhappy for a time,' he told FitzGerald '—to find how such admirable creatures tend and suffer with one.'⁹ Affection, which he had earlier taken for granted, came to seem to him life's chief justification.¹⁰

Ray also points out that W. M. T. pushed aside Titmarsh with increasing frequency and personally stepped forward to speak his own mind, not in rash and hasty judgment, as he had done in the early years, but with consideration and fair appraisal. Thackeray learned much which advanced him towards his career as a novelist, but the price had been high.

Feeling more enthusiastic about his work, he composed his stories and essays with a more personal interest than ever before. Writing and associating with people became his whole life, and his circle of friends expanded to include "attorneys, business men and financiers from the City, publishers, and returned Anglo-Indians, but he was friendliest with such literary families as the Brookfields, the Carlyles, the Crowes, the Dickenses, the Pollocks, the Proctors, and the Sartorises. Of them all he was perhaps closest to the Proctors, who had known him during his years with Isabella, and to whom he turned for consolation during his troubles."¹¹

Thackeray did a great deal of traveling during his bachelor days,¹² especially to Paris to visit his family, which he longed to be with, and one of his journeys was his postponed tour of

⁹Letters, II, 36.

¹⁰The Uses of Adversity, pp. 274-75.

¹¹Ibid., p. 291.

¹²Ibid., p. 278.

Ireland for Chapman and Hall. He originally planned to leave in May of 1842, but he did not actually leave London until the end of June. The possibility of acquiring the editorship of the Foreign Quarterly posed a threat to the journey, but Chapman and Hall insisted that Thackeray go on to Ireland.

Not only was the sum of £120 for a book on Ireland being held as security, but also the publishers, aware of the Irish situation, believed that a book on that particular subject at that particular time would be of concern to the public:

Interest in the Irish question was then at its height, the agitation for repeal of the union combining with the Chartist movement to provide the most anxious problems confronting Sir Robert Peel's newly established government. Threats of rebellion in Ireland were ultimately defied by the arrest of Daniel O'Connell in November, 1843, an event occurring some six months after the publication of The Irish Sketch Book. The idea of an Englishman visiting the disaffected country to examine, with an open mind, the social conditions, character, and feelings of the people, and to describe impressions obtained by personal observations, appealed to the publishers as an attractive proposition, and, as few writers possessed better qualifications than the most popular author of magazine articles on Paris and Parisian affairs, Chapman and Hall commissioned Titmarsh to undertake the task.¹³

The Act of Union of 1800, the granting to Ireland its own representation in the Parliament of the United Kingdom and an attempt at tempering the Anglo-Irish irritation, did nothing more than create what nineteenth-century England referred to as "the Irish Question"; consequently London in Thackeray's day witnessed the political influence of Ireland and her

¹³Malcolm Elwin, Thackeray: A Personality (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), pp. 114-15.

problems and felt the threat of some approaching tragedy.¹⁴ The Ireland of 1842 was politically and religiously divided and was preparing for some of the most devastating days of "the Irish Question," one example being the Great Famine of 1845 and 1846. The General Election of 1841 had brought the Conservative Government under Sir Robert Peel to Irish soil, a change which was not totally approved of: "Peel's main reforms in 1842 . . . were scarcely discussed during the Budget debates."¹⁵ The grounds for the powerful public controversy during this time illustrate the causes and the extent of Irish poverty and adversity, and neither England nor the Established Church, in fact no single element or person, can be solely blamed for the problems. In The Irish Sketch Book Thackeray frequently comments on the horrible conditions as they existed in Ireland at that time. In his concluding paragraph in his book, he states:

It is the want of the middle class that has rendered the squire so powerful; and I think Mr. O'Connell himself would say that the existence of such a body would do more for the steady acquirement of orderly freedom than the occasional outbreak of¹⁶ any crowd, influenced by any eloquence from altar or tribune.

The English were aware of the problems which were brewing on that little green island located to the northwest, but they

¹⁴Angus Macintyre, The Liberator: Daniel O'Connell and the Irish Party, 1830-1847 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), p. xiii.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁶The Irish Sketch Book in The Complete Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1889), XII, 363. All subsequent references to this volume will be cited as ISB.

had no working knowledge of the causes. Commission and committee investigations between 1810 and 1833 were so limited in scope that the attitudes of the "foreigners" remained unchanged. This stagnant concern of the mother-land was inexcusable, for numerous sources, varying from technical to literary, existed in easy reach of any interested hands. As early as 1780 Arthur Young published A Tour in Ireland, and in 1812 Edward Wakefield released the more technical An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political. A translation of Gustave de Beaumont's L'Irlande sociale, politique, et religieuse was available in 1839, and later in 1843 Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall produced their compassionate review entitled Ireland, its Scenery and Character. Stories about Irishmen and Irish ways had been and continued to be written and applauded. Irish authors, such as Lady Morgan, William Hamilton Maxwell, John Banim, William Carleton, and Charles James Lever, all with hearts of emerald green, wrote volumes telling of their culture and heritage. Maria Edgeworth published in 1800 the first novel of Irish life, Castle Rackrent, inspiring Thackeray to write later in his Sketch Book about the hotel in Kenmare: "It is a great vacant house, like the rest of them and would frighten people in England, but after a few days one grows used to the Castle Rackrent style."¹⁷ One Irish writer and editor or Fraser's Magazine, William Maginn, established in Thackeray

¹⁷ISB, p. 112.

the basic creed that writing is to be "robust, fine or rough according to its nature, but in any case without dissimulation or sensationalized warping,"¹⁸ a law which Thackeray modified for himself. Ireland had produced writers and been the subject of writings, all of which gave evidence to prove that the Englishman was not responding to the stimuli and not viewing the Irishman as a self-governing, respectable human being. N. W. Senior, a noted economist, stated in 1843 that "the great majority of the members of each House . . . know less of that country than they know of Belgium or Switzerland,"¹⁹ and the later economic disasters in Ireland acted as the cause for the eventual alteration of that English attitude. It was with this history and condition of Ireland in mind that Chapman and Hall requested in 1840 and later in 1842 that Thackeray go to the Emerald Isle and report to England the Irish culture with the Thackerayean flavor.

On May 21, 1842, Thackeray wrote a letter to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, stating that his going to Ireland was indefinite and remained "like everything in suspense."²⁰ In the latter part of June, however, he grudgingly set out. He was well supplied with letters of introduction which were contributed for the most part by Edward FitzGerald, a long-time

¹⁸Miriam M. H. Thrall, Rebellious Fraser's (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), p. 80.

¹⁹Macintyre, p. 168.

²⁰Letters, II, 49.

friend, who was to have accompanied him but who could not find enough energy to pack and leave London. Consequently FitzGerald was left "lying idle & moping in the country, very sorry I think that he didn't join me,"²¹ a comment which Thackeray put in a letter written as he made his way about Ireland alone. The absence of his friend on the journey, however, benefitted Titmarsh, for "when a man travels alone, it is wonderful how little he cares to select his society; how indifferent company pleases him; how a good fellow delights him; how sorry he is when the time for parting comes, and he has to wisk off alone, and begin the friendship hunt over again."²² And being the congenial fellow that he was, Thackeray had no difficulty in meeting new people, among them FitzGerald's brother Peter, "the honestest fat fellow ever seen,"²³ and the family of Peter Purcell, FitzGerald's uncle: "I have made no such pleasant acquaintances as the Purcells since: such people are not to be met with more than a few times in a man's life, and as for fat Peter Purcell, I feel the warmest regard for him"²⁴

Thus, armed with his letters, his friendly personality, his eagerness to write, and his hesitancy to leave his family, Thackeray began his journey in a round-about route through Liverpool and Wales. With regard to this preliminary excursion, Lady Richie, his daughter Anne, first published in the Cornhill

²¹Letters, II, 80.

²²ISB, p. 114.

²³Letters, II, 80.

²⁴Ibid., p. 71.

Magazine the manuscript entitled "Cockney Travels," essays written while Thackeray traveled through Wales. "I was in hopes to have had a glimpse of Wales," he wrote in a letter to his mother, "as well as of Ireland, making my pen pay my expenses at least in the former place."²⁵ There is some speculation concerning his intention to publish the piece in Fraser's Magazine or to include it with The Irish Sketch Book.

However, the first edition of the Sketch Book, sans "Cockney Travels," was released to the public in May, 1843, organized so as to begin and end with Dublin. His correspondence with Chapman and Hall regarding the construction of the book was occasional, as they had already agreed that he was to include his visions and impressions taken during the tour of Ireland. Thackeray then thought of calling his book The Cockney in Ireland, but "his publishers insisted upon the less provocative title," The Irish Sketch Book.²⁶ Chapman and Hall knew that he was faced with a heavy challenge in trying to assemble between two covers the divergent forces which had baffled writers before him, but he took the "tentative and unsystematic approach [which] gave him the real advantage of presenting what he had seen as nothing more than one individual's observations."²⁷ He did not side-step the controversial issues of

²⁵Letters, II, 57.

²⁶John W. Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 65.

²⁷The Uses of Adversity, p. 312.

politics and religion but inserted when he pleased his own personal ideas, whether or not they were complimentary to either the Irish or the English ways of life. He made no attempt to conceal his disgust with the shabbiness and acute poverty which he found in every inhabited area, but he did not condemn a man for his lot in life. In fact, he states the following idea several times in his book:

I have met more gentlemen here than in any other place I ever saw: gentlemen of high and low ranks, that is to say: men shrewd and delicate of perception, observant of society, entering into the feelings of others, and anxious to set them at ease or to gratify them; of course exaggerating their professions of kindness and in so far insincere; but the very exaggeration seems to be a proof of a kindly nature, and I wish in England we were a little more complimentary.²⁸

He wrote what scholars have termed an "agreeable"²⁹ book and planned it to be organized in the same casual manner that he maintained while traveling. The first chapter, "A Summer Day in Dublin, or There and Thereabouts," was a preliminary survey of the other chapters. In a letter to his friend Emile Forgues, who later accused the Sketch Book of being cynical, Thackeray described it as "un petit tableau d'Irlande, laissant au lecteur le poin d'y trouver la morale."³⁰ In October, 1842, near the end of his traveling, he believed that he had fulfilled his obligation in the writing of the Sketch Book, and he felt eager to see how his public would respond to it:

²⁸ISB, p. 116.

²⁹The Uses of Adversity, p. 314.

³⁰Ibid.

. . . the book is very near done—a clever book too, but beside the point. If it will amuse people however, that is all I ask, and I think Dickens's new book³¹ which all the world is talking about will in so far help me, as people who have read that & liked it will like more reading of the same sort. If it succeeds, why then * * * never mind the future. I am glad at any rate to have been over the ground and to have seen the country for this sort of experience involuntarily acquired & observation of manners & nature will always stand a man instead.³²

The casualness which characterizes the organization and attitude of the Sketch Book also illustrates Thackeray's feelings for the Irish people. Mrs. Shawe of Cork, Isabella Thackeray's mother, had not given him much reason to feel kindly towards the Shawe family, which was one of the reasons for his regretful spirit at having to go to Ireland at all. But as he came to know the different types of people and places in the country, his opinions changed: "I am beginning to find out now that a man ought to be forty years in the country instead of 3 months, and then he wouldn't be able to write about it. I wonder who does understand the place? not the natives certainly"³³ By the time he returned to London in November, 1842, he no longer saw Ireland as a remote piece of land supporting Cork, the one city he had visited until this tour; but he came to respect his host country for its own culture, just as he did England for her culture. As if he had been asked whether or not he liked it, Thackeray stated in the closing pages of his book:

³¹American Notes.

³²Letters, II, 88-89.

³³Ibid., p. 78.

As for forming 'an opinion of Ireland,' such as is occasionally asked from a traveller on his return—that is as difficult an opinion to form as to express; and the puzzle which has perplexed the gravest and wisest may be confessed by a humble writer of light literature, whose aim it only was to look at the manners and the scenery of the country, and who does not venture to meddle with questions of more serious import.

To have 'an opinion about Ireland,' one must begin by getting at the truth; and where is it to be had in the country? Or rather, there are two truths, the Catholic truth and the Protestant truth. The two parties do not see things with the same eyes.³⁴

Thackeray's unopinionated opinions of Ireland are disguised in The Irish Sketch Book as subtle observations and comparisons with the English life with which he was more familiar. He took for granted that his readers were going to be alert and intelligent enough to see not only the good and bad aspects of this foreign land, but also the good and bad aspects of their own England; he was objective, and he hoped to encourage the quality of objectivity in his readers as well. Consequently the manners and the scenery which he witnessed were reported with the accuracy of a camera, for indeed Thackeray's eye and pen were of an artistic talent. Thackeray interpreted with the insight of a true novelist, another natural gift which he enjoyed. A critic in Ainsworth's Magazine commented that the book must have been written by "a man of acute observation, of warm sympathies, and excellent humour."³⁵ As anyone who has personally witnessed Ireland can testify, words simply do not capture the natural elegance of the landscape or the

³⁴ISB, pp. 362-63.

³⁵Ainsworth's Magazine, 3 (May 1843), 438.

picturesque aura about the natives, but Thackeray put to paper some of the most accurate descriptions:

. . . the best guide-book that ever was written cannot set the view before the mind's eye of the reader, and I won't attempt to pile up big words in place of these wild mountains, over which the clouds as they passed, or the sunshine as it went and came, cast every variety of tint, light, and shadow; nor can it be expected that long level sentences, however smooth and shining, can be made to pass as representations of those calm lakes by which we took our way. All one can do is to lay down the pen and ruminate, and cry, 'Beautiful!' once more; and to the reader say, 'Come and see!'

Wild and wide as the prospect around us is, it has somehow a kindly friendly look; differing in this from the fierce loneliness of some similar scenes in Wales that I have viewed. Ragged women and children come out of rude stone-huts to see the car as it passes. But it is impossible for the pencil to give due raggedness to the rags, or to convey a certain picturesque mellowness of colour that the garments assume. The sexes, with regard to raiment, do not seem to be particular. There were many boys on the road in the national red petticoat, having no other covering for their lean brown legs. As for shoes, the women eschew them almost entirely; and I saw a peasant trudging from mass in a handsome scarlet cloak, a fine blue-cloth gown, turned up to show a new lining of the same colour, and a petticoat quite white and neat—in a dress of which the cost must have been at least £10; and her husband walked in front carrying her shoes and stockings.³⁶

Other passages in the Sketch Book illustrate Thackeray's sensitivity to color and composition. Any one of them could have been subjects for well-known English painters, such as Joseph Mallord William Turner, a suggestion which Thackeray made several times in his book and in his letters: ". . . in Connemara I saw 1000 lakes," he wrote in a letter to his mother, "of w^h 10000 beautiful pictures might be made."³⁷ The fall of classicism and the rise of a new humanism in the

³⁶ISB, pp. 205-206.

³⁷Letters, II, 76.

nineteenth century called for a new type of setting, and Thackeray, with his appreciation and knowledge of art, automatically incorporated the artistic trends into his prose and his artistic tastes: "Thackeray was always an enthusiast of the novels of Fielding and Smollett and also the prints of Hogarth . . . [and he] seldom thought of one without the other."³⁸ "The Fighting Téméraire," a painting by Turner, at whom Thackeray usually aimed harsh criticism, inspired the novelist to make a statement which comes exceedingly close to defining his own objectives in writing his journal about Ireland: "He [Turner] makes you see and think of a great deal more than the object before you; he knows how to soothe or to intoxicate, to fire or depress, by a few notes, or forms, or colours, of which we cannot trace the effects to the source, but acknowledge the power."³⁹

The Sketch Book includes one such elusive scene which was written as he traveled from Glenarm up the Antrim coast:

. . . —as I was looking up the hill, admiring two goats that were browsing on a little patch of green, and two sheep perched yet higher (I had never seen such agility in mutton) —as, I say once more, I was looking at these phenomena, the grocer nudges me and says, 'Look on to this side—that's Scotland yon.' If ever this book reaches a second edition, a sonnet shall be inserted in this place, describing the author's feelings on HIS FIRST VIEW OF SCOTLAND. Meanwhile, the Scotch mountains remain undisturbed looking blue and solemn, far away in the placid sea.⁴⁰

³⁸Robert Etheridge Moore, Hogarth's Literary Relationships (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1948), p. 162.

³⁹Diane Hirsh, The World of Turner: 1775-1851, ed. by the editors of the Time-Life Art Series (New York: Time, 1969), p. 166.

⁴⁰ISB, p. 315.

However, the second edition of The Irish Sketch Book came to its readers in 1845 without the sonnet and at a price reduced to fourteen shillings from twenty-one; perhaps the actual view of "the Scotch mountains" and not the recollection was the only stimulus powerful enough to inspire Thackeray's abilities as a lyric poet. He admitted in a letter written at the end of September to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth that he had made the tedious trek up and down the hills of Wicklow, and lovely as the scenery was, he found the verbal picture extremely difficult to create:

. . . —but this beauty though delightful to the eye is by no means profitable to the penny a lining trade: for one tries in vain to describe it—a cataract in print will answer for most cataracts & so on. I have spent much time fruitlessly over these descriptive subjects: wh^h shows clearly a great defect in a writer—it is the same with the pencil likewise.⁴¹

The Sketch Book itself contains various illustrations from Thackeray's own pen, yet any scenes from nature which he chose to include in his book were always upstaged by his drawings of people: one such view of those lavender colored Wicklow mountains capped with white clouds, "some trees waving on the hillock, and . . . the waters of the waterfall descending . . . ," is monopolized by the form of a "snob on a rock."⁴² The following is Thackeray's illustration of that scene:



⁴¹Letters, II, 79.

⁴²ISB, p. 255. The illustration is also found on this page.

An impressionist he was, and an impressionist he was to remain, for he hoped that the view through his eyes would be interpreted for his readers in England in such a way as to instill in them the same feeling which Thackeray himself felt at the time. Following a review of the Giant's Causeway on the northern tip of Ireland, he commented, "This is not a description of the Giant's Causeway . . . but of a Londoner there."⁴³

Gordon Ray states in his biography that Thackeray gives the impression of being the self-controlled, indifferent observer, "not readily excited or moved to excessive exertion."⁴⁴ Several passages in the Sketch Book suggest, however, that Titmarsh must have found this "relaxed, unambitious" manner difficult to maintain. One instance in particular found its way into a letter and also into his book. He happened to dine one day with Theobald Matthew, an Irish Catholic priest, who was eager to convert anyone, especially Peter Purcell. Matthew, who reminds one of Robert Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi and will be discussed more fully in the third chapter, took Thackeray and Purcell to his burial ground, "a pretty cemetery he has established in the vicinity of this place."⁴⁵ The remainder of the tour about the grounds stirred up in Thackeray some of his English Protestant ire:

⁴³ISB, p. 255.

⁴⁴The Uses of Adversity, p. 310.

⁴⁵Letters, II, 70.

. . . a young lady took us to a convent introducing us to a real live nun who took us over house, chapel, burial place, cells &c—It gave one a strange turn, but I won't be eloquent about it, having already flared up in the journal.⁴⁶—I've no notes but write into a book at once when I've time.

After visiting the entire place and seeing the nuns in their intimate lives, he wrote in his Sketch Book that he "had never seen the like before, and own that I felt a sort of shudder at looking at the place . . . O honest Martin Luther! Thank God, you came to pull that infernal, wicked, unnatural altar down—that cursed Paganism!"⁴⁷ The previous statement proves that Thackeray, who was keenly sensitive to the worth of the human being, abandoned his self-controlled, indifferent point of view to declare his impression of a wrong doing when he saw one.

Occasionally his powers of observation changed their course and wandered from the picturesque to the satirical, but the writer only did so intentionally. Lady Richie noted in the Introduction to a collection of his journals that "he sometimes seems almost to reproach himself for being distracted and amused by the fancy of the moment."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, he launched into some biting criticism and satire concerning Irish and English behavior either as a whim, resulting in a colorful bit of prose, or as an illuminating comment upon some

⁴⁶Letters, II, 70.

⁴⁷ISB, p. 74.

⁴⁸Thackeray, Works, V, xxiii.

social or political situation as he saw it. Many times he was able to be objective about controversial issues, such as Catholicism or poverty, but just as many times he was admittedly biased either towards his home-land or, depending on the issue at hand, towards his host country. His satire pointed out or, in some cases, actually attacked the subjects in order that his English readers might at least be aware of them, at most try to publicly recognize or correct them:

And where in the midst of all the lies that all tell, is a stranger to seek for truth? O Connell among the liars is the greatest liar of all however, and a man coming here as I did with a strong predisposition in favor of the Catholics, priests & all can't fail to get indignant at the slavish brutal superstition of the latter, and to become rather Toryfied so far. So I shall be abused by the Catholic Press for abusing the priests, and by the Tory papers for being a liberal and very unhappy be sure will this make me. And both parties will ask, what business has this bookseller's hack who is only fit to cut jokes and scribble buffooneries, to write about our country? —and both parties will be right too.⁴⁹

Thackeray was quite aware that his point of view left his book vulnerable to his opposing critics, some of whom were offended by his straight-forward honesty. He discounted their reproaches, for his proposed aim was to appeal to humanity and not to factions.

His sentiment is, let us say again, objective and of value only to portray the image as he saw it. Through his early journalistic training from William Maginn, Thackeray learned that the surest way to literary attack was the abundant use of the heart. The Irish Sketch Book won acclaim in part for the accurate balance of satire and sentimentalism, achieved

⁴⁹Letters, II, 78.

primarily because the writer was himself the chief view-master, an actor giving the interior monologue on stage. As in his novels, in Vanity Fair, for example, Thackeray had an instinct to plunge in "medias res"⁵⁰ in the Sketch Book and thus appeal to his readers. He believed, too, that the role of a novel is to "represent nature, to convey the sentiment of reality as strongly as possible,"⁵¹ just as his Irish Sketch Book does.

⁵⁰John A. Lester, Jr., "Thackeray's Narrative Technique," PMLA, 69 (June 1954), 394.

⁵¹Dodds, p. 474.

CHAPTER II

SCENERY IN THE IRISH SKETCH BOOK

William Makepeace Thackeray departed from his native England on June 26, 1842, to visit Ireland. On the cold, damp deck of his plodding English packet he reviewed his leave-taking. He had experienced little of the hustle, bustle, kissing, hugging, tears, and well-wishes accorded to his fellow travelers by their families; his family, burdened with an abundance of serious problems, remained in Paris with his mother, Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, while he traveled abroad primarily to gather material for his forthcoming book, The Irish Sketch Book. He traveled alone. On this particular trip and at this particular time in his life, the future popular and highly traveled W. M. T. was not a typical Victorian tourist traveling for pleasure. He was visiting Ireland to appraise the countrysides, the cities, and the people for his fellow Englishmen. Though he undertook this task to inform his countrymen, his motive was not totally selfless; he also hoped to improve his finances and his reputation as a writer. He was preparing to write for men who thought Ireland was a remote wilderness with no attractions worthy of English consideration, least of all the Irish landscapes. Once in Ireland, he pondered this attitude as he traveled from one setting to

another, taking notes for his journal. As an artist he admired most of the scenery for its unique composite of color and subject matter, and as a writer he admired the challenging and inviting spirit which was whispering to its visitor from private glades and domesticated fields. As both artist and writer, he was impressed by the picturesque, and he wrote not only of what he saw but also of how he felt about what he saw.

The word which Thackeray used frequently in his descriptions of the Irish scenery is "picturesque," a term which denotes the character of a picture. He used graphic language, and he described his landscapes with an almost poetical arrangement of colorful and onomatopoetic words. He also conveyed the liveliness and intensity of Ireland by his choice of scenery. His descriptions made the landscape seem sometimes incredible. In fact, Thackeray realized that his problem was to convince his reader of Ireland's beauty. Many a scene he described picturesquely, as in his description of scenery to the north of Dublin:

The Meath landscape, if not varied and picturesque, is extremely rich and pleasant; and we took some drives along the banks of the Boyne—to the noble park of Slane . . . , and to Trim—of which the name occurs so often in Swift's Journals, and where stands an enormous old castle that was inhabited by Prince John.¹

and in the area of the Mourne Mountains in northern Ireland:

The fields were yellow with the stubble of the corn—which in this, one of the chief corn counties of Ireland, had just been cut down; and a long straggling line of neat farm-houses and

¹ISB, p. 276.

cottages runs along the picturesque flat called Lurgan Green; and gentlemen's residences and parks are numerous along the road, and one seems to have come amongst a new race of people, so trim are the cottages, so neat the gates and hedges, in this peaceful, smiling district.²

Thackeray noted the various types of picturesque scenery in both southern and northern Ireland. As do most visitors, he observed the predominant color of green on the rugged mountain slopes, on the fertile farm lands, and on the rolling meadows. His eye also detected the subtle shades of color and the texture of the various rivers and lakes. The roads on which he traveled from the countrysides to the cities formed their own type of scenery with their various obstacles; and the urban streets, depending on their width, seemed to illustrate the character of the respective towns. The rich compositions of the scenes were his proof of the unparalleled beauty in Ireland, the same which haunted Charles Lever and Maria Edgeworth, and later William Butler Yeats and James Joyce. He recorded the sights and sounds of his environment as he traveled from Dublin, his temporary home-base, through the southern and western counties. He passed through Rathcoole, Naas, Kilcullen, Carlow, Waterford, and Cork, all the while taking notes on the appearance of the wild areas, farms, and fields. After several days in Cork, he moved by coach to Bandon, Skibbereen, Bantry, Glengariff, and Kenmare, and finally arrived in Killarney on August 15, 1842. As he passed

²ISB, p. 281.

the scenery along the coast and back through the center of Ireland to Dublin, he further recorded the colorful countryside as well as the areas of urban development. In Dublin he spent the month of September becoming further acquainted with the capital city. In October he began still more adventurous rides through northern Ireland. He saw the wild landscape in the Meath area as he traveled through Dundalk, Belfast, Glenarm, and Ballycastle. With artistic accuracy he recorded the wild charm of the farms and fields along the roads from Coleraine, Londonderry, Strabane, and Enniskillen. He returned to Dublin during the last days of October to polish his notes, but, for the most part, his words are those of an on-the-spot picturesque reporter.

The "spacious" yet "shabby" scenery of southern Ireland, the part of the country which he visited first, provided the subjects for a great number of picturesque accounts in his book. He included various types of wilderness, some of which were more appealing than others, and he noted such scenes as wild thicket-covered hills, placid lakes, patch-work fields, and colorful farms rich with grain. In the southern landscape he found the picturesque, the practical, and the primitive. Most of the sights impressed him, but the desolate countrysides and wild, mysterious mountains made him ill at ease and eager to return again to civilization:

The hill-tops are shattered into a thousand cragged fantastical shapes; the water comes swelling into scores of little strange creeks, or goes off with a leap, roaring into those mysterious caves yonder, which penetrate who knows how far into our common world? The savage rock-sides are painted of a hundred colors.

Does the sun ever shine here? When the world was moulded and fashioned out of formless chaos, this must have been the bit over—a remnant of chaos! Think of that! —it is a tailor's simile. Well, I am a cockney: I wish I were in Pall Mall!³

Among the picturesque wastelands are the rugged, hilly regions in southern Ireland. The Cahra Mountains in County Kerry are one example of the mysteriously primitive regions in which he traveled. He saw that "gradually the country grew wilder and more desolate, and we passed through a grim mountain region, bleak and bare, the road winding round some of the innumerable hills, and once or twice by means of a tunnel rushing boldly through them."⁴ He noticed that the mountains in Ireland seemed to support, more than complement, the landscape. Often he described a particular mountain which appeared as if it had just popped up from the surface of the earth: ". . . and the last and prettiest part of the journey [from Glengariff] was round the Lake of Ballinahinch, with the tall mountains rising immediately above us on the right, pleasant woody hills on the opposite side of the lake."⁵ And on another day during his stay in that same area, he noticed these mountains again, but this time they "covered their modest beauties in impenetrable veils of clouds."⁶ The Connemara district which he visited later also embodied the same quality of wildness which was "so mysterious to the London tourist."⁷ The mountains here

³ISB, p. 325.

⁴Ibid., p. 110.

⁵Ibid., p. 206.

⁶Ibid., p. 211.

⁷Ibid., p. 204.

were only one element of the total picturesque scene:

These wild solitudes, which occupy by far the greater part of the centre of the country, are held by a hardy and ancient race of grazing farmers, who live in a very primitive state, and, generally speaking, till little beyond what supplies their immediate wants. For the first ten miles the country is comparatively open; and the mountains on the left, which are not of great elevation, can be distinctly traced as they rise along the edge of the healthy plain.⁸

One mountain, Croaghpatrick, particularly remained in sight as he traveled about the Westport area in the central western section of Ireland. He saw it rising more than two thousand feet and towering over Clew Bay and the nearby towns with a certain singular authority:

Printer's ink will not give these wonderful hues; and the reader will make his picture at his leisure. That conical mountain to the left is Croaghpatrick: it is clothed in the most magnificent violet-color, and a couple of round clouds were exploding as it were from the summit, that part of them towards the sea lighted up with the most delicate gold and rose-color.⁹

The "noble purple hills"¹⁰ were only a part of the wildness of southern Ireland. There were also the "aboriginal wood" areas, especially those which border the Shannon River and bury ancient castles with their foliage:

The Guide-book mentions that one of the aboriginal forests of the country is to be seen at a few miles from Limerick, and thinking that an aboriginal forest would be a huge discovery, and form an instructive and delightful feature of the present work, I hired a car in order to visit the same, and pleased myself with visions of gigantic oaks, Druids, Norma, wildernesses and awful gloom, which would fill the soul with horror. The romance of the place was heightened by a fact stated by the carman, viz., that until late years robberies were very

⁸ISB, p. 205.

⁹Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 25.

frequent about the wood; the inhabitants of the district being a wild, lawless race. Moreover there are numerous castles round about,—and for what can a man wish more than robbers, castles, and an aboriginal wood?¹¹

This particular forest, however, was not romantic. It served as an asset to the Irish wilderness in that it blanketed the landscape with rugged greenery:

. . . I began to believe more and more with regard to the splendor of the aboriginal forest, which must be most aboriginal and ferocious indeed when approached by such a savage path. After travelling through a couple of lines of wall with plantations on either side, I at length became impatient as to the forest, and, much to my disappointment, was told this was it. For the fact is, that though the forest has always been there, the trees have not, the proprietors cutting them regularly when grown to no great height, and the monarchs of the woods which I saw round about would scarcely have afforded timber for a bed-post. Nor did any robbers make their appearance in this wilderness¹²

Thackeray tramped through several "noble woods" and noticed that leafy ferns took advantage of the abundance of shade and grew at the bases of many trees. The various colors of the plant life in these forests contributed to the mystery and picturesqueness: "It was but September: yet the autumn had already begun to turn the green trees into red; and the ferns that were waving underneath the trees were reddened and fading too."¹³ As he strolled through the underbrush, he found "ferns, heath, and rusty-colored funguses sprouting here and there in the same [blue shadows of the nearby cliffs]."¹⁴

¹¹ISB, pp. 151-52.

¹²Ibid., pp. 152-53.

¹³Ibid., p. 255.

¹⁴Ibid.

Often the woods would stretch down to the edge of a body of water: a silver river, a placid lake, or a rushing mountain stream. The scenic route along the banks of the Shannon River to Limerick inspired him to record several vivid descriptions of the view from his coach. The following passage, written on the road to Tarbert, is only one of many examples:

Near the prettily situated village of Ballylongford, we came in sight of the Shannon mouth; and a huge red round moon, that shone behind an old convent on the banks of the bright river, with dull green meadows between it and us, and white purple flats beyond, would be a good subject for the pencil of any artist whose wrist had not been put out of joint by the previous ten miles journey.¹⁵

The waters of southern Ireland seemed to leave him feeling at least impressed, at most inspired, because more often than not a body of water was arrayed in some prolific greenery or flowering plants and was shaped, depending on its size, in some attractive natural order:

Standing by a big shining granite stone on the hill-top, we looked immediately down upon Lough Tay—a little round lake of half a mile in length, which lay beneath us as black as a pool of ink—a high, crumbling, white-sided mountain, falling abruptly into it on the side opposite to us, with a huge ruin of shattered rocks at its base. Northwards, we could see between mountains a portion of the neighboring lake of Lough Dan—which, too, was dark, though the Annamoe river, which connects the two lakes, lay coursing through the greenest possible flats and shining as bright as silver. Brilliant green shores, too, come gently down to the southern side of Lough Tay; through these runs another river, with a small rapid or fall, which makes a music for the lake, and here, amidst beautiful woods lies a villa¹⁶

Moving water especially caught his attention, and one good example of such a Thackerayan reaction occurs in Chapter

¹⁵ISB, p. 143.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 257.

Twenty-four in which he recalls his visit to the waterfall in the parks of Powerscourt, an area near Wicklow. The park was apparently closed, but the car-boy informed Thackeray and his companion that "'the water-fall runs for everyman.'"¹⁷ They had to descend a steep hill on foot in order to see it; but, though they grumbled all the way down, the actual sight of the water against the purple hills, autumn-colored trees, and sapphire sky recompensed them for their aching muscles. Thackeray, inspired by the beauty of the scene before him, further noted that "purple mountains rose before us in front, and we began presently to hear a noise and roaring afar off—not a fierce roaring, but one deep and calm, like to the respiration of the great sea, as he lies basking on the sands in the sunshine."¹⁸ As the men watched the waters "varnish" the plum-colored cliffs, they were awe-struck, and they wondered which words would be most effective in capturing the vision for all to see on the printed page.

Contrasted with the mountain and lake regions, areas which he termed as "very hilly, or wavy rather, being a sort of ocean petrified,"¹⁹ Thackeray also noticed that the multi-colored fields produced a patch-work effect on the Irish horizon. The various colors of the sections of land indicated the types of plants growing. Some of the "somber purpled and green" fields consisted of grasses which, if put to use, fed

¹⁷ISB, p. 254.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 256.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 219.

livestock: ". . . here and there are picturesque gray rocks to meet it [the bank of a lake], the bright grass as often, or the shrubs of every kind which bathe their roots in the lake. It was August, and the men before Turk Cottage were cutting a second crop of clover, as fine, seemingly as a first crop elsewhere."²⁰ As he drove along the countrysides, he occasionally saw fields dotted with animals which stood knee-deep in the grasses. In the Galway area, for example, he noted the "extensive mossy plains and wild pastoral valleys" containing "numerous herds of cattle and horses, for which the district has been long celebrated."²¹ These stretches of lush meadows often lay on the edges of bodies of water, which made the vegetables or even boglands more prolific and colorful. The Shannon River in west central Ireland supplied the nourishment for many a prosperous meadow:

The way to these wonderful sights lies through the undulating grounds which border the Shannon; and though the view is by no means a fine one, I know few that are pleasanter than the sight of these rich, golden, peaceful plains, with the full harvest waving on them and just ready for the sickle. The hay harvest was likewise just being concluded, and the air loaded with the rich odor of the hay.²²

For the most part, the "vast green plains, skirting a lake or river" were used solely for pasture land, but farmers converted some of the fields into productive fruit orchards, potato fields, and other types of productive gardens. The road to

²⁰ISB, p. 134.

²¹Ibid., p. 205.

²²Ibid., p. 152.

Limerick contained many such fields, which Thackeray noted as "not particularly picturesque, but large, liberal and prosperous."²³ His coach rolled past the colorful patches of land, and he further noted that "gentle sweeps of rich meadows and cornfields cover the banks, and some, though not too many, gentleman's parks and plantations rise here and there."²⁴

Thackeray was able to predict when he was leaving an undeveloped field and entering a developed one which was attached to a farm. Often "huge gray boulders plumped here and there"²⁵ in the more useless but expansive areas; but when the rocks bordered the fields in the forms of fences, he was usually able to assume that the fields were being put to some use. Though he hardly considered himself an authority in agriculture, he did know that little more than thickets are able to grow in rock infested earth. After the desolate areas of wilderness, he was rejuvenated by the sights of prolific meadows full of crops. He found that those agricultural methods which had been adopted by one successful small farmer were also those of the successful neighbor farther on down the road. Consequently the more prosperous farms, regardless of size, usually resembled one another in appearance. "If we saw a field with a good hedge to it," he wrote on the road to Brandon, "we were sure to see a good crop inside."²⁶

²³ISB, p. 145.

²⁵Ibid., p. 256.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 94.

Because of the size of Ireland and the proportionately vast number of people on the island, about two-thirds of the population lived in rural areas and subsisted on the land. The small farmer, the person working on land measuring from fifteen to thirty acres in area, made up the single largest group in the country. The small farm was the only means of acquiring the necessities of life for the peasant family which occupied it; the large farm, however, made use of hired help, an over-abundance of crops, and the exportation of cattle, and the prosperous gentleman who owned the farm rarely experienced hunger. The small farmer worked not for wages but for physical and moral satisfaction, whereas the large farmer worked mostly for capital and was better in tune with the rise and fall of the Irish economy. The small farmer of Ireland owned relatively nothing. Thackeray, like the large Irish farmer, had invariably had something, and thus he found his identification with this prosperous land owner much stronger.

Thackeray reported several good samples of Irish agricultural achievement on a large farm, descriptions of which were easier for him to write than those of the picturesque wild areas. Ironically the fruitful areas, which were giving forth grain or grazing, appeared barer and more ragged than, for example, the rich but unproductive area around Lismore in

²⁷Conrad Arensberg, The Irish Countryman (Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press, 1968), pp. 49-55.

southern Ireland, "some of the most beautiful, rich country ever seen."²⁸ One of the large farms, located near Kildare and about one hour's journey by coach southwest from Dublin, so pleased Thackeray that he devoted an entire chapter in his Sketch Book to the discussion of elegant Irish plantations. The owner of one plantation, a Mr. P—, made practical use of "four hundred acres of land about his house"²⁹ and employed on his estate some one hundred and ten persons. The proprietor had planned his agricultural program in such a way that each family living on the huge farm was busy earning wages in programmed divisions: some in potato fields, some in turnip fields, some in livestock areas. "Each individual root . . . in the field," wrote the enthusiastic Thackeray, "was thus the object of culture; and the owner said that this extreme cultivation answered his purpose, and that the employment of all these hands . . . , which gained him some reputation as a philanthropist, brought him profit as a farmer too; for his crops were the best that land could produce." He further reported that Mr. P— had "the advantage of a large stock for manure [fertilizer for the crops], and does everything for the land which art can do."³⁰ Thackeray summarized this blissful state of co-existence as the union of able bodies and shrewd perseverance, all working together for the betterment

²⁸ISB, p. 52.

²⁹Ibid., p. 31.

³⁰Ibid., p. 32.

of not only the gentleman's farm but also the laborer's cottage. The success came from the rich man's desire to make others affluent along with himself.³¹

In like manner Thackeray reported on the cities and towns of southern Ireland, though they were not as numerous as the farms. He saw the attractive little hill villages and noted the appearance of their buildings and streets; and then if the townspeople appeared too "wretched," he passed on, turning his attention in the journal to perhaps their Roman Catholic chapel or an especially exciting experience which occurred in the inn. He was often critical of such colorful though poor towns as Bantry in the southwest corner of Ireland. He attempted to sketch the cheerful, yet shabby, little area of buttermilk and green apple producers, but he gave up with an exclamation that even "an ordinary pigsty in England is more comfortable."³² He appreciated a town for its natural resources, and he was just as repulsed by an unnatural display of prosperity as he was by a lack of it. Of one overrated metropolis in County Kerry, he wrote in a letter: "I don't think I cared much for Killarney, it is too fine and showy and looks as if it were there on purpose to be admired."³³ He saw Killarney in its average, though uncomplimentary, setting—a downpour of rain. His response to a village depended, of course, on how familiar

³¹ISB, p. 32.

³²Ibid., p. 100.

³³Letters, II, 76.

he had become with it in the short period of time that he could remain in it. He never made the remark so often heard among American tourists that "each town looks just like another." The little town of Naas, located on the outskirts of Dublin, was poor and relatively insignificant, but Thackeray was able to report its singularity with an overtone of gaiety: ". . . by far the finest, and I think the most extensive edifice in Naas was a haystack in the inn-yard, the proprietor of which did not fail to make me remark its size and splendor."³⁴ He also found several picturesque but unappealing towns. Loughine, for example, made a "poor figure in a book," but it was surrounded by "a country which for a mile is rich with grain though bare of trees . . . [and] a boggy bleak district, from which you enter in to a sort of sea of rocks, with patches of herbage here and there."³⁵ Occasionally, he found a town which, when seen as a whole, would have enticed any artist to come to Ireland and record it on canvas:

The little town as they call it of Kilcullen tumbles down a hill and struggles up another; the two being here picturesquely divided by the Liffey, over which goes an antique bridge. It boasts, moreover, of a portion of an abbey wall, and a piece of round tower, both on the hill summit, and to be seen (says the Guide-book) for many miles round.³⁶

Of Glengariff, he wrote likewise as an artist:

Within five miles round the pretty inn of Glengariff there is a country of the magificence of which no pen can give an idea. I would like to be a great prince, and bring a train of painters

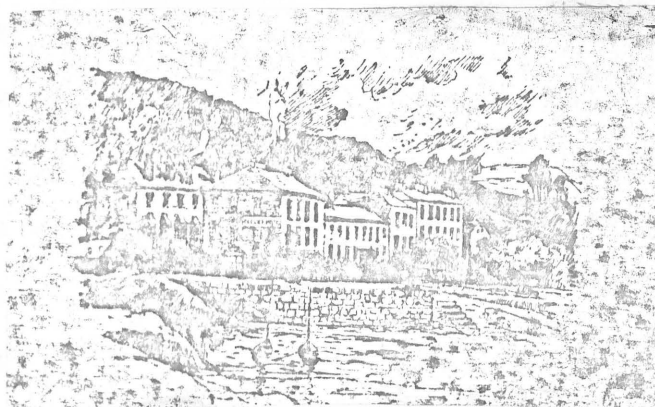
³⁴ISB, p. 25.

³⁵Ibid., p. 97.

³⁶Ibid., p. 26.

over to make, if they could, and according to their several capabilities, a set of pictures of the place.³⁷

and on his sketch pad he recorded his impression of the inn.³⁸



Dublin, too, was an interesting subject for his Sketch Book:

Walking towards the river, you have on either side of you, at Carlisle Bridge, a very brilliant and beautiful prospect: the Four Courts and their dome to the left, the Custom House and its dome to the right; and in this direction, seaward, a considerable number of vessels are moored, and the quays are black and busy with the cargoes discharged from ships. Seamen cheering, herring-women bawling, coal-carts loading—the scene is animated and lively.³⁹

Westport, located in the western portion of the country, is one example of a thriving Irish commercial city with a large enough population to make use of gigantic warehouses, churches, and schools which would be quite worthy of comment. His chief impression of that city, however, was the Pattern Day which

³⁷ISB, p. 101.

³⁸Eyre Crowe, Thackeray's Haunts and Homes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), p. 43.

³⁹ISB, p. 16.

was being celebrated by dutiful Catholics. Each large town, as well as each country village, through which he passed possessed some significant feature which he recorded in the Sketch Book. Seldom was the dominant feature of a town a single building or group of buildings. When one edifice struck his fancy, however, he wrote of it. The Hedge-School Library in Galway led him to launch into a long description, not of the physical features of the library itself, but of the Irish narratives which he read there during the days of boredom occasioned by continuous rainy weather. He spent several paragraphs and one sketch in two long chapters presenting Galway, and even then he merely listed the structures about the town:

The houses in the fashionable street where the clubhouse stands . . . have the appearance of so many little Newgates. The Catholic chapels are numerous, unfinished and ugly. Great warehouses and mills rise up by the stream, or in the midst of unfinished streets here and there; and handsome convents with their gardens, justice-houses, barracks, and hospitals adorn the large, poor, bustling, rough-and-ready-looking town.⁴⁰

Because he spent much of his time on uncomfortable coaches traveling from town to town, Thackeray included in his Sketch Book his notes concerning the urban and rural thoroughfares. In the cities, for instance, the sides of the streets were so lined with peasants who were selling their wares that movement through the streets was almost impossible:

All the street was lined with wretched hucksters and their merchandise of gooseberries, green apples, children's dirty

⁴⁰ISB, p. 181.

cakes, cheap crockeries, brushes, and tinware; among which objects the people were swarming about busily.⁴¹

He found that progress was especially difficult during market time when "a vast number of donkey-carts urged hither and thither, and great shrieking, chattering, and bustle"⁴² clogged the veins of urban transportation. Often the construction of the town was such that a street passed by a residential area on one side, complete with noisy children and garrulous mothers, and a peaceful park or garden on the other side. On entering Dublin he made note of just such an urban area:

The entrance to the capital is very handsome. There is no bustle and throng of carriages, as in London; but you pass by numerous rows of neat houses, fronted with gardens and adorned with all sorts of gay-looking creepers. Pretty market-gardens, with trim beds of plants and shining glass-houses, give the suburbs a riante and cheerful look; and, passing under the arch of the railway, we are in the city itself. Hence you come upon several old-fashioned, well-built, airy, stately streets, and through Fitzwilliam Square, a noble place, the garden of which is full of flowers and foliage. The leaves are green, and not black as in similar places in London; the red brick houses tall and handsome.⁴³

The roads between the cities seemed to possess more personality, if such may be said of a road, than did the urban streets because of the manner in which they affected their travelers.

He was especially impressed with one particular highway:

". . . of all the roads over which human bones were ever jolted, the first part of this from Listowel to Tarbert deserves the palm." He complained that "it shook us all into headaches; it shook some nails out of the side of a box I had; it shook all

⁴¹ISB, p. 48.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 6.

the cords loose in a twinkling, and sent the baggage bumping about the passengers."⁴⁴ By the time he left Ireland in November, Thackeray had become an authority on the Irish roads and city streets.

Much of the urban and rural scenery appeared in The Irish Sketch Book as a composite of various picturesque subjects. Thackeray believed that if his fellow countrymen could read of the beauty in Ireland as portrayed through his sketches, then they too would make a visit to the Emerald Isle. Certain scenes in southern Ireland inspired him to consider some English painters who might be employed to capture the wild Irish beauty on canvas:

I was glad to see some specimens of Connemara litigation, as also to behold at least one thousand beautiful views that lie on the five miles of road between the town and Ballinahinch. Rivers and rocks, mountains and sea, green plains and bright skies, how (for the hundred and fiftieth time) can pen-and-ink set you down? But if Berghem could have seen those blue mountains, and Karel Dujardin could have copied some of these green, airy plains, with their brilliant little colored groups of peasants, beggars, horsemen, many an Englishman would know Connemara upon canvas as he does Italy or Flanders now.⁴⁵

Often these captivating scenes would suddenly appear as his coach peeked over the top of a mountain or came up from a bleak and barren plain. His first view of Bantry, for instance, reminded him of some scenery at the theater:

At length, after winding up all sorts of dismal hills speckled with wretched hovels, a ruinous mill every now and then, black bog-lands, and small winding streams, breaking here and there into little falls, we come upon some ground well tilled and

⁴⁴ISB, p. 143.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 214.

planted, and descending (at no small risk from stumbling horses) a bleak long hill, we see the water before us, and turning to the right by the handsome little park of Lord Bearhaven, enter Bantry. The harbor is beautiful. Small mountains in green undulations rising on the opposite side; great gray ones farther back; a pretty island in the midst of the water, which is wonderfully bright and calm. A handsome yacht, and two or three vessels with their Sunday colors out, were lying in the bay. It looked like a seaport at a theatre, gay, cheerful, neat, and picturesque. At a little distance the town, too, is very pretty. There are some smart houses on the quays, a handsome court-house as usual, a fine large hotel, and plenty of people flocking round the wonderful coach.⁴⁶

About scenery Thackeray did not generalize. If one scene might seem to sum up the beauty of southern Ireland, however, the following description of the area outside Westport might suffice:

. . . I caught sight not only of a fine view, but of the most beautiful view I ever saw in the world, I think; and to enjoy the splendor of which I would travel a hundred miles in that car with that very horse and driver. The sun was just about to set, and the country round about and to the east was almost in twilight. The mountains were tumbled about in a thousand fantastic ways, and swarming with people. Trees, cornfields, cottages, made the scene indescribably cheerful; noble woods stretched towards the sea, and abutting on them, between two highlands, lay the smoking town. Hard by was a large Gothic building—it is a poorhouse; but it looked like a grand castle in the gray evening. But the Bay—and the Reek which sweeps down to the sea—and a hundred islands in it, were dressed up in gold and purple and crimson, with the whole cloudy west in a flame. Wonderful, wonderful! . . . The valleys in the road to Leeane have lost all glimpses of the sun ere this; and I suppose there is not a soul to be seen in the black landscape, or by the shores of the ghastly lakes⁴⁷

Whereas in southern Ireland fields and farms supported much of the population, in Ulster to the north economic progress came from the cities. The lands in the northern portion of

⁴⁶ISB, p. 99.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 226-27.

the island are so barren and rugged that relatively few people choose to live in rural areas. Those nineteenth century Irishmen who were able to make a sufficient living from the land did so with an attitude of human pride. Thackeray was charmed by these people and their rustic counties of Tyrone, Antrim, Down, Londonderry, Armagh, and Fermanagh. Often (some critics believe too often) he compared this area with that of England: ". . . the only point which may be mentioned here as peculiar to this part of Ireland, is the difference of the manner of the gentry to that in the South. The Northern manner is far more English than that of the other provinces of Ireland—whether it is better for being English is a question of taste, of which an Englishman can scarcely be a fair judge."⁴⁸ Whatever may have encouraged his enthusiasm, either the Irish landscape or the pseudo-English manner, he seemed to enjoy the countryside and the cities of the northern region more than those of the southern region of Ireland.

The countrysides contained the same types of wild areas, fields, and farms as were in southern Ireland, the same types of cities and villages, but Thackeray felt that the sights which he recorded were of a different nature. The wild areas, for instance, may have been lonely and rugged, but he detected a sense of nobility and grandeur which the equally mountainous county Kerry in the southwest lacked. He enjoyed his ride up

⁴⁸ISB, p. 350.

the Antrim coast which, he informed his readers, was referred to in his Guide-book as "Switzerland in miniature."⁴⁹

He described the mountain walls, the caves visible from the road, the villages dotted along the coast, all "of this noble line of coast scenery,"⁵⁰ as being more picturesque than anything else that he saw in Ireland. Equally picturesque were the peaks in the northern tip of the country from Coleraine to Londonderry, and here he chose colorful imagery with which to paint his picture:

Then we began ascending wide lonely hills, pools of bog shining here and there amongst them, with birds, both black and white, both geese and crows, on the hunt. Some of the stubble was already ploughed up, but by the side of most cottages you saw a black potato-field that it was time to dig now, for the weather was changing and the winds beginning to roar. Woods, whenever we passed them, were flinging round eddies of mustard-colored leaves; the white trunks of lime and ash trees beginning to look very bare.⁵¹

The hills supplied stone and lime for exportation products, and in the mountains at night, the kilns were "lighted up in the lonely places, the flaring red in the darkness."⁵² From his seat on the travel cart, Thackeray looked at the tops of the mountains and found them odious, yet mysteriously attractive with their plum-colored blankets of mist covering their rocky crests, a sight which caused the feeling of loneliness in any onlooker. He was impressed by the brusque beauty of the Antrim cliffs and caves and was amazed to learn that the wild crags

⁵⁰ISB, p. 314.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 334.

⁵²Ibid., p. 314.

housed creatures of nature:

Rounding this beautiful bay and valley, we passed by some caves that penetrate deep into the red rock, and are inhabited—one by a blacksmith, whose forge was blazing in the dark; one by cattle; and one by an old woman that has sold whiskey here for time out of mind. The road then passes under an arch cut in the rock by the same spirited individual who has cleared away many of the difficulties in the route to Glenarm, and beside a conical hill, where for some time previous have been visible the ruins of the 'ancient ould castle' of Red Bay. At a distance, it looks very grand upon its height; but on coming close it has dwindled down to a mere wall, and not a high one.⁵³

He also saw the Mourne Mountains as "highly picturesque and romantic,"⁵⁴ yet they lacked the wasteland appearance of the Antrim cliffs. The mountains, known for swooping sharply down to the Irish Sea, appeared luxurious and dense, for the hills housed thick forests, such as the Tallymore Forest, and towering azalea bushes. Unfortunately, Thackeray was only able to see the mountains from a distance:

. . . the road to Dundalk is exceedingly picturesque, and the traveller has the pleasure of feasting his eyes with the noble line of Mourne Mountains, which rise before him while he journeys over a level country for several miles. The 'Newry Lark,' to be sure, disdained to take advantage of the easy roads to accelerate its movements in any way; but the aspect of the country is so pleasant that one can afford to loiter over it.⁵⁵

Another feature of the Ulster wilderness, the primeval wooded areas which occasionally appeared from behind a rough hill, seemed to complement the scenery with their vast array of colors. Thackeray visited them in their most exciting season and was rewarded with a visual feast:

⁵³ISB, p. 316.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 312.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 281.

Here, near the woods of Nappan, which are dressed in ten thousand colors—ash-leaves turned yellow, nut-trees red, birch-leaves brown, lime-leaves speckled over with black spots (marks of a disease which they will never get over)—stands a school-house. . . .⁵⁶

As his coach raced past the clumps of trees, he saw a kaleidoscope of autumn shades. The first frost of 1842 had come, and the "woods, whenever we passed them, were flinging round eddies of mustard-colored leaves; the white trunks of lime and ash trees beginning to look very bare."⁵⁷ The woods in the north seemed to be less numerous, however, than those in southern Ireland because of the texture of the landscape and because of Thackeray's rapid transit through them. He found the forests attractive, yet his experiences with them were recessive in his mind, whereas his experiences with certain bodies of water were unforgettable.

Thackeray's appreciation of the lands of northern Ireland exceeded his appreciation of its waters. He was politely complimentary when writing of the various lakes which had already earned reputations for beauty: he acknowledged the Lough of Belfast, Lough Foyle, Lough Neagh, and others for their contributions to the picturesque scenery. The Irish Sea put him at a loss for an apt description. His most impressing experience with Irish waters occurred during his visit to Giant's Causeway, which is located in the extreme northern portion of the island. The North Channel between Ireland and Scotland is by nature

⁵⁶ISB, p. 314.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 334.

quite colorful, especially during the summer months when the lush green hills of the Causeway enhance the background.

Thackeray, however, would gladly have chosen any vantage point other than his from a small boat on the "little wild bay, flanked on each side by rugged cliffs and rocks, against which the waters came tumbling, frothing, and roaring furiously."⁵⁸ As four rowers gave him a tour in and out of the bays, Thackeray, not even daring to take notes, asked himself why he was not walking calmly along the picturesque shore:

'Is it a fine day or a rough one now?' said I; the internal disturbance going on with more severity than ever.

'It's betwixt and between; or, I may say, neither one nor the other. Sit up, sir. Look at the entrance of the cave. Don't be afraid, sir: never has an accident happened in any of these boats, and the most delicate ladies has rode in them on rougher days than this. Now, boys, pull to the big cave. That, sir, is six hundred and sixty yards in length, though some say it goes for miles inland, where the people sleeping in their houses hear the waters roaring under them.'⁵⁹

He was able to return to shore as was promised him, without a mishap; but, sadly enough, he had uncomfortable memories of Giant's Causeway and the North Channel ever afterwards. He wrote in a letter that he had had no predictions of enjoying the Causeway; he merely felt that he must see it in order to be able to say that he had seen it. Such he also said in the Sketch Book with no pretense intended.

The farms of northern Ireland might even be considered part of its wilderness, for the rocks and the rugged highlands

⁵⁸ISB, p. 321.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 322.

required its inhabitants to be of a durable nature in order to make living possible. Thackeray ventured upon the countryside during the onslaught of winter; consequently, to his readers, he said, "the pursuit of the picturesque under umbrellas let us leave to more venturesome souls: the fine weather of the finest season known for many long years in Ireland was over."⁶⁰ The road from Newtown Limavaddy to Derry contained about as many examples of farms owned and managed by London businesses. The scene was impressive for its prosperity and picturesque cheerfulness:

From Newtown Limavaddy to Derry the traveller has many wild and noble prospects of Lough Foyle and the plains and mountains round it, and of scenes which may possibly in this country be still more agreeable to him--of smiling cultivation, and comfortable well-built villages such as are only too rare in Ireland. Of a great part of this district the London Companies are landlords--the best of landlords, too, according to the report I could gather; and their good stewardship shows itself especially in the neat villages of Muff and Ballikelly, through both of which I passed.⁶¹

Now and then he passed the farmers in their rough little fields and noted the "handsomely and comfortably" built plantations, and occasionally he sketched a likeness on his note-pad:



⁶⁰ISB, p. 351.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 338.

After he had bumped through a particularly wild piece of territory, any civilized town pleased him. Some of the towns presented an appealing picture to the weary Thackeray, who usually wanted to find the inn more than any other building. The town of Coleraine in the desolate and rocky north country consisted mostly of a number of "cabin suburbs," but they lay "picturesquely grouped on the Bann river."⁶² The scene of the town as a whole presented quite a delightful picture in the

Sketch Book:

Some time before we came to it, we saw the long line of mist that lay above the Bann, and coming through a dirty suburb of low cottages, passed down a broad street with gas and lamps in it (thank heaven, there are people once more!), and at length drove up in state, across a gas-pipe, in a market-place, before a hotel in the town of Coleraine, famous for linen and for Beautiful Kitty, who must be old and ugly now, for it's a good five-and-thirty years since she broke her pitcher, according to Mr. Moore's account of her. The scene as we entered the Diamond was rather a lively one—a score of little stalls were brilliant with lights; the people were thronging in the place making their Saturday bargains; the town-clock began to toll nine; and hark! faithful to a minute the horn of the Derry mail was heard tootooing, and four commercial gentlemen, with Scotch accents, rushed into the hotel at the same time with myself.⁶³

These Ulster towns, too, clanged and banged as much as had the southern towns. Much of the commerce which went noisily on in these cities kept the people alive with economic prosperity, and thus they appeared to Thackeray as typical English cities full of shops, warehouses, and huge residential areas. Armagh, "the aspect of a good stout old English town,"⁶⁴ was known for

⁶²ISB, p. 327.

⁶³Ibid., p. 328.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 301.

its cathedral, and he noted that the combination of the Catholic structure with "that dismal combination of house and pigsty"⁶⁵ was so common in Munster and Connaught. Belfast, the Irish Liverpool, presented a picture of as "neat, prosperous, and handsome a city as need be seen."⁶⁶ The unaffected scenes around the city convinced him of its English kinship:

The men have a business look, too; and one sees very few flaunting dandies, as in Dublin. The shopkeepers do not brag upon their sign-boards, or keep 'emporiums,' as elsewhere, —their places of business being for the most part homely; though one may see some splendid shops, which are not to be surpassed by London.⁶⁷

The buildings in these towns were unimpressive in that they tended to lack color and form. They were of practical rather than picturesque use, and Thackeray was rather bored sometimes with their appearance but not with their purpose. Occasionally a town boasted of a significant structure, and after reading of its historical or pictorial importance in his Guide-book, he relayed the impression to his readers:

Look at that little snug harbor of Portrush! a hideous new castle standing on a rock protects it on one side, a snug row of gentlemen's cottages curves round the shore facing northward, a bath-house, an hotel, more smart houses, face the beach westward, defended by another mound of rocks. In the centre of the little town stands a new-built church; and the whole place has an air of comfort and neatness which is seldom seen in Ireland.⁶⁸

The "bustling and comfortable"⁶⁹ appearance of many of the towns made Thackeray's travel much easier, especially when he was able to see the various buildings nestled together along the

⁶⁵ ISB, p. 301.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 304.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 309.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 329.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 347.

well-kept streets: "though not fine

In the town [Glenarm] is a town-house, with a campanile in the Italian taste, and a school or chapel opposite in the early English; so that the inhabitants can enjoy a considerable architectural variety. A grave-looking church, with a beautiful steeple, stands amid some trees hard by a second handsome bridge and the little quay; and here, too, was perched a poor little wandering theatre. . . .⁷⁰

Many types of streets tied the city buildings together, and often Thackeray found just as much commotion in them as he had found in the streets of southern Ireland. His "first flourishing look"⁷¹ was often a lasting one: "It is not splendid, but comfortable; a brisk movement in the streets; good downright shops, without particularly grand titles; few beggars."⁷² Basically a lover of humanity, Thackeray enjoyed the villages of northern Ireland and their streets; he could estimate a town's prosperity, or lack of it, by the appearance of the streets as he first entered the city limits. The ride from Derry through the heart of Ireland to Dublin revealed some ugly, though welcome, little streets: "On and on, across the iron bridge, and through the streets (dear streets, though dirty, to the citizen's heart how dear you be!), and lo, now, with a bump, the dirty coach stops at the seedy inn."⁷³ There were no suburbs to most of these towns in Ulster. Thackeray found that, "strange to say, the houses begin all at once, handsomely coated and hatted with stone and slate."⁷⁴ Armagh, for example,

⁷⁰ISB, p. 313.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 347.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., p. 352.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 299.

contained main streets, "though not fine . . . [but] bustling, substantial, and prosperous; and a fine green has some old trees and some good houses, and even handsome stately public buildings, round it that remind one of a comfortable cathedral city across the water."⁷⁵ The streets between the towns could not hope to win such a compliment, but they too, because of their picturesque surroundings, received ample praise in the Sketch Book: "The new road [to Cushendall], luckily, is not yet completed, and the lover of natural beauties had better hasten to the spot in time, ere, by flattening and improving the road, and leading it along the sea-shore, half the magnificent prospects are shut out."⁷⁶ Nevertheless the Irish roads must have left their impressions on Thackeray, both mentally and physically, for he often recalled his rides on them.

Much of Thackeray's scenery of northern Ireland possessed an English flavor in its aspects of civilization and agriculture. For the most part, he saw Ulster as friendly but "savage and lonely, except where the kilns were lighted up here and there in the hills,"⁷⁷ and except where the gas lights of a town shone through the gray mist. On the whole a pleasing landscape, Ulster became a permanent friend to Thackeray, not so much for its landscape as for its charming personality: So, heaven bless us, the ways of London are beginning to be known even here. Gentility has already taken up her seat in

⁷⁵ ISB, p. 301.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 314.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 316.

the Giant's Causeway, where she apologizes for the plainness of her look: and, lo! here is bribery, as bold as in the most civilized places--hundreds and hundreds of miles away from St. Stephen's and Pall Mall. I wonder, in that little island of Raghery, so wild and lonely, whether civilization is beginning to dawn upon them? --whether they bribe and are genteel?⁷⁸

In presenting to his English readers the picturesque descriptions of Irish scenery, Thackeray tried to communicate the appealing beauty of the Emerald Isle. He had visited each corner of the country for the purpose of seeing a cross-section of the villages, the cities, the buildings, and the streets, all of which made up urban Ireland. "He scarcely emerges from the city when he is struck by the colour of the landscape, the peculiar green of Ireland," wrote Charles Lever in a review of the book. "That rich emerald tint in which blue seems to enter, at once attracts his attention, and in the few brief words in which he alludes to the fact, we can trace the artist-like tact that distinguishes all his descriptions of scenery."⁷⁹

In passing from the towns to the countrysides, Thackeray made a point of noting the wild areas, the mountains, the forests, the bodies of water, the fields, and the farms which incorporate the Irish landscape. He believed that "we can feel the beauty of a magnificent landscape perhaps: but we can describe a leg of mutton and turnips better."⁸⁰ If one of Thackeray's descriptions must represent all of the picturesque scenery,

⁷⁸ISB, p. 338.

⁷⁹Charles Lever, rev. of The Irish Sketch Book, by William Makepeace Thackeray, The Dublin University Magazine, 21 (June 1843), 650.

⁸⁰ISB, p. 327.

possibly his illustration of Glendalough would suffice:

I don't know if there is any tune about Glendalough; but if there be, it must be the most delicate, fantastic, fairy melody that ever was played. Only fancy can describe the charms of that delightful place. Directly you see it, it smiles at you as innocent and friendly as a little child; always happy when you think of it. Here is a little lake, and little fords across it, surrounded by little mountains, and which lead you now to little islands where there are all sorts of fantastic little old chapels and grave-yards; or, again, into little brakes and shrubberies where small rivers are crossing over little rocks, plashing and jumping, and singing as loud as ever they can. Thomas Moore has written rather an awful description of it; and it may indeed appear big to him, and to the fairies who must have inhabited the place in old days, that's clear. For who could be accommodated in it except the little people?⁸¹

Thackeray's picturesque scenes found their way into at least one of his later novels: Barry Lyndon incorporates many of the Irish scenes which were not included in the Sketch Book. The necessity of arranging the scenery gave him invaluable training for his career as a writer and especially opened his eyes to a further understanding of a foreign culture.

⁸¹ISB, p. 265.

CHAPTER III

SOCIETY IN THE IRISH SKETCH BOOK

While visiting Ireland, Thackeray was generally treated with civility and kindness because, according to all that he relates in The Irish Sketch Book, he treated the Irish people with respect. Being a "thorough cockney,"¹ he recognized in the manners of certain sections of Ireland the English mode of living; other sections he found more independently Irish. As he learned the nature of the Irish people, he became more familiar with their customs and conduct in matters of religion, justice, politics, education, and daily life. The Irishman who practiced his manner of living according to the tenets of the family, Irish independence, and the Catholic church was often the Irishman who tilled fields, worked in country stores, or did some other manual labor. The Irishman who sought financial success and comfort was generally the Irishman who would readily accept support from England and her church. In Ireland the two modes of living and thinking were not clearly definable. Consequently, the Irish Question was not clearly definable, either to Thackeray or to other Englishmen.

¹"Review: The Irish Sketch Book," The Tablet, 6, May 13, 1843, p. 292.

Nevertheless, by presenting his view of Ireland in his Sketch Book, Thackeray helped his English readers gain a certain degree of flexibility in their outlook.

Thackeray possessed about as much snobbery as most men of his socio-economic position, and he left no doubt in his readers' minds that he preferred the clean and comfortable upper-middle class to even the most picturesque peasantry. In many of the cities, towns, and plantations he found his favorite types of people, people with whom he preferred to associate. Several times in his book he ventured into a discussion of the definition of "Irish gentleman." A gentleman in Irish society was thought to be neatly dressed, though not necessarily in finery, jovial in conversation, courteous in manner, and refined enough to enjoy a mild cigar and a bit of wine after dinner. Thackeray observed the ladies of the same socio-economic level to be "well educated and refined, and far more frank and cordial, than the generality of the fair creatures on the other side of the Channel."² Many of his Irish friends belonged to this higher class of citizen, and from them he learned of the workings of the Irish church and state. One of these friends, Charles Lever, who was the "lion of literary Dublin,"³ received Thackeray's letter of introduction and cordially welcomed him as his dinner guest. He assisted Thackeray in learning of the customs of Dublin's society; and Thackeray, impressed with the

²ISB, p. 31.

³Elwin, p. 116.

gentleman's finesse, attempted to persuade Lever "to leave Dublin and settle in London, pointing out that he [Lever] was at present surrounded by men of inferior ability and that he would find greater scope for his attainments at the hub of affairs."⁴ Though Thackeray found that meeting gentlemen and ladies was easier in the cities, he also enjoyed associations with owners of Irish plantations. An example of an Irish gentleman farmer in the Sketch Book is the head of the Latouche family, whose large farm was located to the south of Dublin. The refinement of the father was reflected in the behavior of his family, and Thackeray was somewhat surprised to see such a good-natured, yet cultured, household:

First came out a young gentleman, the heir of the house, who, after greeting his papa, began examining the horses with much interest; whilst three or four servants, quite neat and well-dressed, and, wonderful to say, without any talking, began to occupy themselves with the carriage, the passengers, and the trunks. Meanwhile, the owner of the house had gone into the hall, which is snugly furnished as a morning-room, and where one, two, three young ladies came in to greet him. The young ladies, having concluded their embraces performed (as I am bound to say from experience, both in London and Paris) some very appropriate and well-finished courtesies to the strangers arriving. And these three young persons were presently succeeded by some still younger, who came without any courtesies at all; but, bounding, and jumping, and shouting out 'Papa' at the top of their voices⁵

All of these aforementioned types of gentlemen formed the upper socio-economic level in Ireland, what Thackeray believed to be a minority group. Too, he believed that being a gentleman was more than some money in a pocket and an air of

⁴Elwin, p. 119.

⁵ISB, pp. 26-27.

sophistication; the status included a genuinely cordial spirit, a bit of education, and an appreciation for life. In fact, Thackeray prided himself in his ability to distinguish a gentleman from a less refined individual. As he entered Skibbereen, he noticed some people coming to meet his coach:

Some gentlemen were at the coach, besides those of lower degree. Here was a fat fellow with large whiskers, a geranium, and a cigar; yonder a tall handsome old man that I would swear was a dragoon on half-pay. He had a little cap, a Taglioni coat, a pair of beautiful spaniels, and a pair of knee-breeches which showed a very handsome old leg; and his object seemed to be to invite everybody to dinner as they got off the coach.⁶

Perhaps if one must summarize the character of an Irish bourgeois gentilhomme, it should be noted that he paid much more attention to time, reason, and social dignity than his brother who was further down the socio-economic ladder.

Thackeray's description of the manners of the lower class of people presented a more picturesque view of Ireland, but not necessarily a more attractive one. According to government reports, there were approximately twelve hundred thousand people living in Ireland in 1842, and one sixth of that number were beggars or wards of the State.⁷ Thackeray found, however, that some of those individuals who, according to governmental analyses, had a source of income were individuals who scarcely subsisted on a meager potato or a loaf of bread. Thackeray had little sympathy for the ragged and dirty peasants who hounded him for money, for he believed that an Irishman's lot

⁶ISB, p. 95.

⁷Ibid., p. 39.

in life was self-made. When besieged by a "squalid congregation of beggarly loungers"⁸ in Leighlin Bridge, Thackeray made clear his intentions with regard to their demands for money:

Of course, as we stopped for a moment in the place, troops of slatternly, ruffianly-looking fellows assembled round the carriage, dirty heads peeped out of all the dirty windows, beggars came forward with a joke and a prayer, and troops of children raised their shouts and halloos. I confess, with regard to the beggars, that I have never yet had the slightest sentiment of compassion for the very oldest or dirtiest of them, or been inclined to give them a penny: they come crawling round you with lying prayers and loathsome compliments, that make the stomach turn; they do not even disguise that they are lies; for, refuse them, and the wretches turn off with a laugh and a joke, a miserable grinning cynicism that creates distrust and indifference, and must be, one would think, the very best way to close the purse, not to open it, for objects so unworthy.⁹

But there was a discrepancy in his definition of the term "beggar." The "squalid congregation" considered begging a job and worked at it with pride; they were free to move about as they pleased, and, poor though they may have been, they were happy. Thackeray, on the other hand, believed that begging was a disgraceful way of providing for one's family and should be discouraged by means of poor houses provided by the government. The meaning of Irish pride was somehow forgotten in the discrepancy, and the lack of communication between the lower socio-economic group and the government resulted in an abundance of beggars in Ireland:

⁸ISB, p. 43.

⁹Ibid., pp. 38-39.

A considerable poor-house has been erected at Waterford, but the beggars of the place as yet prefer their liberty, and less certain means of gaining support. We asked one who was calling down all the blessings of all the saints and angels upon us, and telling a most piteous tale of poverty, why she did not go to the poor-house. The woman's look at once changed from a sentimental whine to a grin. 'Dey owe two hundred pounds at dat house,' said she, 'and faith, an honest woman can't go dere.' With which wonderful reason ought not the most squeamish to be content?¹⁰

Also, Thackeray placed the financially indigent small farmer, wage-earner, and tradesman in this same vast lower-than-comfortable economic class. He did feel a little more sympathetic towards these Irishmen, though, because here were men who worked hard for a meager bit of bread to sustain life. Again, the Irish instinct of personal pride was extremely evident, and he noted that it could raise or lower a man's lot in life. One of many examples occurred near the Blackwater salmon fishery at Lismore. Thackeray chanced upon an angry mother and her adolescent son, and he boldly asked the cause of her anger. The woman explained that "his father, that's now dead, paid a fistfull of money to bind him 'prentice at Dungarvan," and the son had become friends with a group of lads who convinced him to "go poaching and thieving and shchaming with them."¹¹ The conclusion of the encounter convinced Thackeray of the complexities of the Irish spirit:

So, cursing and raging, the woman went away. The son, a lad of fourteen, evidently the fag of the big bullies round about him, stood dismally away from them, his head sunk down. I went up and asked him, 'Was that his mother?' He said, 'Yes.' 'Was she good and kind to him when he was at home?' He said,

¹⁰ISB, pp. 49-50.

¹¹Ibid., p. 53.

'Oh, yes.' 'Why not come back to her?' I asked him; but he said 'he couldn't.' Whereupon I took his arm, and tried to lead him away by main force; but he said, 'Thank you, sir, but I can't go back,' and released his arm. We stood on the bridge some minutes longer, looking at the view; but the boy, though he kept away from his comrades, would not come. I wonder what they have done together, that the poor boy is past going home? The place seemed to be so quiet and beautiful, and far away from London, that I thought crime couldn't have reached it; and yet here it lurks somewhere among six boys of sixteen, each with a stain in his heart, and some black history to tell. The poor widow's yonder was the only family about which I had a chance of knowing anything in this remote place; nay, in all Ireland; and God help us, hers was a sad lot!—a husband gone dead,—an only child gone to ruin. It is awful to think that there are eight millions of stories to be told in this island. Seven million nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight more lives that I, and all brother cockneys, know nothing about. Well, please God, they are not all like this.¹²

Thackeray observed the Irishmen's keen sense of pride, their spirit of freedom, their romantic habits of dreaming, and their disregard for logic. He estimated that these people of the lower socio-economic level were more typically Irish.

Just as the manners of the majority of Irish citizens differed from those to which Thackeray was accustomed, so the Irish institutions of the church, state, politics, education, and daily life were also different. During his tour Thackeray encountered the two dominant religions in Ireland, the Catholic and the Protestant; and, though he was also a Protestant, he pointed out in his Sketch Book the idiosyncrasies of both groups. He recorded his views of the workings of the Irish courts; and as he learned of the Irish political structure, he was able to detect weaknesses in not only the Irish government

¹²ISB, p. 53.

but also the English government as well. Thackeray noted the educational system in Ireland with interest, for all the scrubbed little faces in the schools reminded him of his own children. And how could he leave Ireland without having observed the daily activities of Irish life? He saw men and women at their work and at their play and occasionally even participated in their events. He tried to see as broad a spectrum of Irish life as possible, and he recorded his impressions of Irish institutions with concern and occasional wonder.

In 1842 the church in Ireland was strongly guiding the lives of the Irish citizens by giving them staunch rules for their moral conduct. These rules were divided into two main groups, Catholic and Protestant, and each followed a religious head who was located outside Irish boundaries: the Catholics served the Pope in Rome, and the Protestants served the Archbishop in London. The Irishman was not concerned with how he followed the rules as much as he was with which rules he followed. This is not to say that religion was a superficial part of life in Ireland, for whatever religious affiliation an Irishman had depended on that of his father and on the district or neighborhood in which he lived. Therefore, any attack on a man's religion was an attack on his personal pride, his family pride, and his civic pride; and a single derogatory word easily aroused a great swarm of angry Irishmen. Thackeray saw the role of the church and the way it affected the people's lives, and he commented upon it and criticized it in his Sketch Book.

201811... p. 140

Irish and English critics in turn reproved him for unfair and harsh judgments of Catholics and Protestants.

Of the main religious factions, one might name as the predominant group the Catholics, for historically they preceded the Protestants and had time to gain a stronger hold on the lives of the people. The Catholics prided themselves in maintaining a single doctrine and believed that the principles of Catholicism "must be right"¹³ because they attended church services in the same building every Sunday and because "their fathers have done the same thing before them."¹⁴ They criticized the Protestants for being inconsistent in their beliefs and for "gadding from one doctrine to another."¹⁵ The Catholics were devoted to religious calendar events, and they heartily dedicated themselves to the celebration of feasts and fastings, to blessings and repentings.¹⁶ Thackeray saw a celebration of the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin in Tralee in which thousands of dutiful Catholics were "on their knees, rosary in hand, for the most part praying and mumbling, and casting a wistful look round as the strangers passed."¹⁷ Inside the chapel were still more people "kneeling, bowing, and humming and chanting, and censer-rattling."¹⁸ Thackeray even sketched four members of this "ghostly crew"¹⁹ on his note-pad:²⁰

¹³ISB, p. 69.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 140.

²⁰Ibid., p. 140.



The Catholics were outnumbered by the Protestants in the north, where Protestantism was in the ascendant, as Thackeray observed when he visited Armagh:

Strolling round the town after service, I saw more decided signs that Protestantism was there in the ascendant. I saw no less than three different ladies on the prowl, dropping religious tracts at various doors; and felt not a little ashamed to be seen by one of them getting²¹ into a car with bag and baggage, being bound for Belfast.

He noticed, too, that those farms and towns which were managed by Catholics were "shabbier" and more disreputable than those which were managed by Protestants. As more than one "Church-of-England man" said to him, the religious differences were attitudes of "thrift, prudence, perseverance, boldness, and common-sense,"²² from which, as Thackeray stated, anybody would prosper. Besides the Catholics and the Protestants, Thackeray also observed a group of Quakers outside the town of Carlow

²¹ISB, p. 302.

²²Ibid., p. 303.

and in various other spots around the country. They had "set up in Ireland a sort of monkery of their own," and he suggested that soon "a community of Fakeers and howling Dervishes"²³ might move into the country. By presenting these various types of religious doctrines in his book, Thackeray tried to point out that the Church actually governed Ireland's people. Consequently, England was finding political control difficult to maintain at that time.

Thackeray found the clergy who guided the Irish people as interesting as the people themselves. He met several of these men "of the cloth" and was surprised in several instances to see that they had actually retained some of their human characteristics. In Cork he met one such priest, a "stout, handsome, honest-looking man, of some two-and-forty years"²⁴ named Theobald Mathew. Thackeray was impressed with Mathew's cordial attitude towards all the townspeople and was somewhat ill at ease because of his temperance:

The day after the famous dinner at MacDowall's, some of us came down rather late, perhaps in consequence of the events of the night before—(I think it was Lord Bernard's quotation from Virgil, or else the absence of the currant-jelly for the venison, that occasioned a slight headache among some of us, and an extreme longing for soda-water), —and there was the Apostle of Temperance seated at the table drinking tea. Some of us felt a little ashamed of ourselves, and did not like to ask somehow for the soda-water in such an awful presence as that. Besides, it would have been a confession to a Catholic priest, and, as a Protestant, I am above it.²⁵

²³ISB, p. 51.

²⁴Ibid., p. 64.

²⁵Ibid.

Theobald Mathew was unlike most of the Irish priests in that he was genuinely interested in improving the state of the peasantry and the rich, and in that he avoided all political questions. He resembled the other Irish priests in their eagerness to convert people to their religion. Another quality which Thackeray found to be consistent with many of the clergy was "a downcast, demure look": he was compelled to ask, "whence comes that general scowl which darkens the faces of the Irish priesthood?"²⁶ But the clergy of Ireland, Protestant and Catholic alike, earned his approval by being hard-working and helpful to the people:

. . . busying himself with kind actions from morning till night, denying to himself, generous to others, preaching the truth to young and old, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, consoling the wretched, and giving hope to the sick; —and I do not mean to say that this sort of life is led by the Vicar of Dundalk merely, but do firmly believe that it is the life of the great majority of the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy of the country.²⁷

For the most part, the church buildings earned less of Thackeray's approval than did the clergy. The large, richly decorated Catholic cathedrals were, of course, more impressive than the Protestant structures, and he enjoyed looking at the church history as it was displayed by paintings and statues within the buildings. Many of the Catholic churches were still in the process of construction because the people of the parish had not enough money to finish building all at one time:

²⁶ ISB, p. 64.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 285.

Most of the Roman Catholic churches that I have seen through the country have been built in this way,—begun when money enough was levied for constructing the foundation, elevated by degrees as fresh subscriptions came in, and finished—by the way, I don't think I have seen one finished; but there is something noble in the spirit (however certain economists may cavil at it) that leads people to commence these pious undertakings with the firm trust that 'Heaven will provide.'²⁸

Thackeray found that the cathedrals were striking, but the Protestant church buildings, such as the one in Ballikelly, were pleasing:

In Ballikelly, besides numerous simple, stout, brick-built dwellings for the peasantry, with their shining windows and trim garden-plots, is a Presbyterian meeting-house, so well-built, substantial, and handsome, so different from the lean, pretentious, sham-Gothic ecclesiastical edifices which have been erected of late years in Ireland, that it can't fail to strike the tourist who has made architecture his study or his pleasure.²⁹

He was not much interested in church ornaments and gaudy fixtures; therefore, he judged a church building to be effective if it comfortably enclosed the worshippers and protected them from the elements. According to Thackeray, nobility was attained by means of simplicity.

Because of his own Protestant training and because of what he observed in Ireland, Thackeray tended to direct his criticism of religion at the Catholic church. Its overbearing control was so evident, in fact, that he noticed its influence almost immediately upon entering the country. He was more sympathetic to the Protestant teachings than to those of the Catholics, but in many instances his compassion for humanity

²⁸ISB, p. 332.

²⁹Ibid., p. 338.

helped him to see that there were some good and bad aspects of both groups. For instance, when Thackeray saw the internal workings of the Catholic religion, the activities of the nuns and the priests, he wondered how in the name of humanity and all that is good a religion could extract from man and woman what had naturally been given to them in the beginning. One instance in which he was inspired to make such comment was after his visit to the Ursaline Academy:

I came out of the place quite sick; and looking before me, —there, thank God! was the blue spire of Monkstown church soaring up into the free sky—a river in front rolling away to the sea—liberty, sunshine, all sorts of glad life and motion round about: and I couldn't but thank heaven for it, and the Being whose service is freedom, and who has given us affections that we may use them—not smother and kill them; and a noble world to live in, that we may admire it and Him who made it—not shrink from it, as though we dared not live there, but must turn our backs upon it and its bountiful Provider.

And in conclusion, if that most cold-blooded and precise of all personages, the respectable and respected English reader, may feel disposed to sneer at the above sentimental homily, or to fancy that it has been written for effect—let him go and see a convent for himself. I declare I think for my part that we have as much right to permit Sutteeism in India as to allow women in the United Kingdom to take these wicked vows, or Catholic bishops to receive them; and that Government has as good a right to interpose in such cases as the police have to prevent a man from hanging himself, or the doctor to refuse a glass of prussic-acid to any one who may have a wish to go out of the world.³⁰

He could not but point out the irony in the Irish attitude towards life. The people desperately clung to their political freedom, but they were "bound over to the church, body and soul: their free thoughts chained down and kept in darkness, their honest affections mutilated."³¹ Thackeray let his "free

³⁰ ISB, p. 75.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 248-49.

thoughts" run loose in his book and often became involved in heated theological controversies while visiting the towns and even while traveling in the coaches. Towards the end of his Sketch Book he summarized the religious state of affairs in Ireland as he had viewed them, and neither Catholic nor Protestant received favorable comment:

. . . the Protestant of the North is as much priest-ridden as the Catholic of the South:—priest and old-woman ridden, for there are certain expounders of doctrine in our church, who are not, I believe, to be found in the church of Rome; and woe betide the stranger who comes in to settle in these parts, if his 'seriousness' be not satisfactory to the heads (with false fronts to most of them) of the congregations.³²

Most of Thackeray's critics were as severe with him as he had been with the religions in Ireland. Many of the Irishmen who read the Sketch Book felt that he had trampled upon their inherent dignity with his attacks on the practices of the Catholic church. He was accused of being "an English Liberal, . . . a Protestant, a hater of controversy, austerity, asceticism, dirt, and Repeal."³³ Some critics believed that he was unfair in his judgments, for he only saw Ireland from a prejudiced point of view:

Everybody knows, for instance, that if the Irish Catholic Clergy have a fault, it consists in too little regard for clerical externals where the essentials are rigidly maintained. This trait of manners has been engendered in a great measure by a rooted antipathy to swaddling Methodistical sourness. When, therefore, we read (vol. i., p. 114)—'Whence comes that general scowl which darkens the faces of the Irish Priesthood? *

³²ISB, p. 329.

³³The Tablet, p. 292.

'the downcast, demure look,' &c., we answer, very composedly, that they come from Mr. Titmarsh's own imagination, and from no other place either nearer or more remote.³⁴

Still other critics, however, found Thackeray's illustrations and notes on Irish religion to be delightful. Charles Lever, the Irish novelist to whom the Sketch Book was dedicated, wrote in his complimentary review that Thackeray's comment on religion in Ireland was a "bold experiment" but, as was the description of Theobald Mathew, "cleverly done."³⁵ Also, the editor of The Morning Chronicle of London found the author of the Sketch Book to be "without prejudices" and "subdued" in his handling of such a controversial issue as religion. Perhaps the critics, both Irish and English, who opposed Thackeray did not wish to believe that he had not published the book with the intention of attacking Irish morality.

In certain respects Thackeray was just as adversely criticized for his presentation of such governmental functions as the courts, the jails, and the asylums. He visited Ireland during the time when Daniel O'Connell presided as the Lord Mayor of Dublin and George IV reigned as the King of England. Thackeray chanced to see the Right Honorable Lord Mayor at the Mansion-house in Dublin, and the view was an impressive one: "I saw him in full council, in a brilliant robe of crimson velvet, ornamented with white satin bows and sable collar, in an enormous cocked-hat, like a slice of an eclipsed moon."³⁶

³⁵Lever, p. 651.

³⁶ISB, p. 354.

The large cities, such as Dublin, employed mayors as their heads of state, but in the smaller townships usually the largest land-owner was the authority because many of the families in that town worked for him. These officers of the government more or less enforced the laws of Great Britain, but the opposing political factions often delayed final justice.

The scales of justice in Ireland usually weighed in favor of the Irish citizen, and the judges, whether they were city magistrates or small parish priests, tried to find the fairest and quickest solutions to what were sometimes complicated and enigmatic problems. Much of the litigation involved homeless beggars who tried, often by illegal means, to acquire some money for food. Still other cases concerned disagreements between employers and employees and were solved by either plaintiff or defendant "quitting court without a stain upon his honor."³⁷ Sometimes a case was tried without strict attention being paid to court appearance or management; and after his over-view of Irish legality, Thackeray believed that the spirit of justice prevailed—in most cases.

Judicial activities in Ireland took place in various types of buildings, some having been constructed especially for court trials, others being merely convenient anterooms. Thackeray attended several trials in the court at Roundstone, which is located in the Connemara district, and he described the room as follows:

³⁷ISB, p. 216.

'The temple of august Themis,' as a Frenchman would call the sessions-room at Roundstone, is an apartment of some twelve feet square, with a deal table and a couple of chairs for the accommodation of the magistrates, and a Testament with a paper cross pasted on it to be kissed by the witnesses and complainants who frequent the courts. The law-papers, warrants, &c., are kept on the sessions-clerk's bed in an adjoining apartment, which commands a fine view of the courtyard—where there is a stack of turf, a pig, and a shed beneath which the magistrates' horses were sheltered during the sitting. The sessions-clerk is a gentleman 'having,' as the phrase is here, both the English and Irish languages,³⁸ and interpreting for the benefit of the worshipful bench.

An accompanying sketch³⁹ served to illuminate the scene for his English readers:



He attended court sessions in Waterford and noted the assurance of the court officials in their business:

The witness is here placed on a table instead of a witness-box; nor was there much farther peculiarity to remark, except in the dirt of the court, the absence of the barristerial wig and gown, and the great coolness with which a fellow who seemed a sort of clerk, usher, and Irish interpreter to the court, recommended a prisoner, who was making rather a long defence, to be quiet. I asked him why the man might not have his say. 'Sure,' says he, 'he's said all he has to say, and there's no use in any more.' But there was no use in attempting to convince Mr. Usher that the prisoner was best judge on this point: in fact the poor devil shut his mouth at the admonition, and was found guilty with perfect justice.⁴⁰

³⁸ISB, p. 215.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 49.

After having been pronounced guilty by the court magistrate, the offender took up residence in the local jailhouse, and many times the prisoner found himself in a better position than he had been in before being brought to court. Thackeray described the county jail in Cork as

so neat, spacious, and comfortable, that we can only pray to see every cottager in the country as cleanly, well lodged, and well fed as the convicts are. They get a pound of bread and a pint of milk twice a day: there must be millions of people in this wretched country, to whom such food would be a luxury that their utmost labors can never by possibility procure for them; and in going over this admirable institution, where everybody is cleanly, healthy, and well clad, I could not but think of the rags and filth of the horrid starvation market before mentioned; so that the prison seemed almost a sort of premium for vice. But the people like their freedom, such as it is, and prefer to starve and be ragged as they list. They will not go to the poor-houses, except at the greatest extremity, and leave them on the slightest chance of existence elsewhere.⁴¹

The lunatic asylum in Cork, another of the well-managed public buildings which Thackeray visited, boasted of a staff of "medical men of far more than ordinary skill."⁴² His tour around the building revealed the care and understanding with which the institution was run. Because of his previous experiences with his wife's mental condition, he took particular notice of asylums in Ireland. The little town of Ballinasloe, for instance, had a particularly impressive asylum outside the town limits. Thackeray described it as "magnificent" and "as handsome and stately as a palace."⁴³ Most of the public institutions of a charitable nature were clean and well-ordered

⁴¹ISB, pp. 81-82.

⁴²Ibid., p. 81.

⁴³Ibid., p. 244.

and relatively uncrowded:

The public buildings of Derry are, I think, among the best I have seen in Ireland; and the Lunatic Asylum, especially, is to be pointed out as a model of neatness and comfort. When will the middle classes be allowed to send their own afflicted relatives to public institutions of this excellent kind, where violence is never practised—where it is never to the interest of the keeper of the asylum to exaggerate his patient's malady, or to retain him in durance, for the sake of the enormous sums which the sufferer's relatives are made to pay? The gentry of three counties which contribute to the Asylum have no such resource for members of their own body, should any be so afflicted—the condition of entering this admirable asylum is, that the patient must be a pauper, and on this account he is supplied with every comfort and the best curative means, and his relations are in perfect security. Are the rich in any way so lucky?—and if not, why not?⁴⁴

Nevertheless, many of the mentally unbalanced or beggaredly Irish people preferred the freedom of dirt and starvation to a life in a clean and well-ordered institution.

The force which ultimately controlled the public institutions, the Irish political system, was as divided in doctrine as the religious and judicial systems. The differences between the Whigs and the Tories, the Liberals and the Conservatives, seemed to grow out of the question of patriotism: should an Irishman be loyal to Ireland or to England? It was considered treasonable to be loyal to both. And, too, because the backbone of Ireland was constructed of religious doctrines, the Irish political system had become deeply embedded in each of the principal religious bodies. The Liberals and the Conservatives, the Catholics and the Protestants, the peasantry and the aristocracy were so disjointed in their political attitudes that

⁴⁴ISB, p. 350.

Thackeray was amazed to see Ireland making any economic progress at all. Mayor O'Connell, an advocate of the repeal of the corn laws and union with Great Britain, tried to nationalize Ireland under Catholic rule; but, because of the power behind the money of the Protestant aristocracy, he found the establishment of a large middle class with a moderate income was impossible. Thus, political unity in Ireland was impossible.

Thackeray witnessed the workings of Irish politics not only in the courts but also in the daily lives of the Irish people, and generally he was not pleased with what he saw. He believed that because there was such a large gap between the two socio-economic classes, there was little chance for compromise on issues of political reform. The Protestant's opinions of rent money, agricultural methods, and education were surely to differ from the Catholic's opinions; and each professed his to be the truth. Somehow, however, amid the opposing forces of controversy, he saw signs that, "wretched as it is, the country is steadily advancing, nor nearly so wretched now as it was a score of years since."⁴⁵ After having visited the Corn Exchange in Dublin, he suggested in his Sketch Book a way of solving Ireland's political battles:

Is it not too monstrous to howl about English tyranny and suffering Ireland, and call for a Stephen's Green Parliament to make the country quiet and the people industrious? The people are not politically worse treated than their neighbors in England. The priests and landlords, if they chose to

⁴⁵ ISB, p. 363.

co-operate, might do more for the country now than any kings or laws could. What you want here is not a Catholic or Protestant party, but an Irish party.⁴⁶

The Irishmen rejected Thackeray's suggestion, and the suggestions of other non-Irish commentators, as English chauvinism. In several reviews he was accused of being an "English Liberal"⁴⁷ interested only in seeing Ireland in total submission to England. Some critics dismissed his political comments in the book as those of an opinionated political amateur; others were infuriated with his impressions of the Irish political system and retorted that he was "indolent in all that required penetration to fundamental principles."⁴⁸ But any comment Thackeray could have made in his Sketch Book on the subject of Irish politics was destined to be harshly judged by the critics of either side of the Irish Question.

Because of the political and religious controversies, Thackeray saw that the unification of the Irish schools was being retarded. Some of the schools functioned under the auspices of the Church, others under the State with a concentration in agriculture. But regardless of the purpose of the school or the purpose of the education, often the religious and political controversies were incorporated into the lives of the children:

By a large public school of some reputation, where a hundred boys were educated (my young guide the Orange-man was one of

⁴⁶ISB, pp. 242-43.

⁴⁷The Tablet, p. 292.

⁴⁸B. G. MacCarthy, "Thackeray in Ireland," Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review, 40 (March 1951), 55.

them: he related with much glee how, on one of the Liberator's visits, a school-fellow had waved a blue and orange flag from the window and cried, 'King William forever, and to hell with the Pope!'). . . .⁴⁹

Children attended these various types of schools according to their families' religion, socio-economic status, and location in relation to the school. The public or national schools in southern Ireland were Catholic, and only Catholic children attended them:

The few Protestants of the district do not attend the national-school, not learn their alphabet or their multiplication-table in company with their little Roman Catholic brethren. The clergyman who lives hard by the gate of H—town, in his communication with his parishioners cannot fail to see how much misery is relieved and how much good is done by his neighbor; but though the two gentlemen are on good terms, the clergyman will not break bread with his Catholic fellow-Christian. There can be no harm, I hope, in mentioning this fact, as it is rather a public than a private matter; and, unfortunately, it is only a stranger that is surprised by such a circumstance, which is quite familiar to residents of the country.⁵⁰

But, Thackeray reported, in the north the Catholics and the Presbyterians "are said to go in a pretty friendly manner to the national schools."⁵¹ He was especially pleased with the Templemoyle School, for it educated and housed seventy boys of both Catholic and Protestant faiths and had no religious disputes: education was its most important goal, and it tried to keep the well-being of the students uppermost in the minds of its teachers.⁵² The Irish schools also varied as much in appearance as they did in principles. Several woeful and

⁴⁹ISB, p. 280.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 34.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 306.

⁵²Ibid., p. 345.

dilapidated schools which Thackeray saw were either that way because of misuse, such as the Presbyterian College in Belfast, or that way because of lack of funds, such as the hedge-school outside Waterford: "a crowd of half-savage-looking lads and girls looked up from their studies in the ditch, their college or lecture-room being in a mud cabin hard by."⁵³

The type of school which the Irish people, especially those in the farm districts of the south, believed to be the most practical was the school of agriculture, but again it was apparent to Thackeray that the two religious factions hindered most of the progress of nationalization:

A man has no need to be an agriculturist in order to take a warm interest in the success of the Irish Agricultural Society, and to see what vast good may result from it to the country. The National Education scheme—a noble and liberal one, at least as far as a stranger can see, which might have united the Irish people, and brought peace into this most distracted of all countries—failed unhappily of one of its greatest ends. The Protestant clergy have always treated the plan with bitter hostility; and I do believe, in withdrawing from it, have struck the greatest blow to themselves as a body, and to their own influence in the country, which has been dealt to them for many a year.⁵⁴

One agricultural school, however, did not have the problems of religious differences that most of the other schools had: the Agricultural Seminary of Templemoyle urged the students to study agriculture, their own religion, and literature:

In winter the farm works do not occupy the pupils so much, and they give more time to their literary studies. They get a good English education; they are grounded in arithmetic and mathematics; and I saw a good map of an adjacent farm, made

⁵³ISB, p. 45.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 57.

from actual survey by one of the pupils. Some of them are good draughtsmen likewise, but of their performances I could see no specimen, the artists being abroad, occupied wisely in digging the potatoes.⁵⁵

Thackeray found a more academic curriculum in the schools which were often affiliated in some manner with a church group. More often than not, the school building, though it may have been public in function, was located next door to the church building. Again he found some dissent between the religious groups, but for the most part, he was amazed that such an education as was available in England was also available in Ireland for a much lower price—from thirteen to twenty pounds a year. Thackeray regretted that the classics were not taught at these Irish schools, but the educational standard seemed to be higher than at those public schools in England where the students were well-informed in the art of being a gentleman. One of these schools which Thackeray visited on his tour was Dotheboys Hall in Dundalk:

Classics, then, these young fellows do not get. Meat they get but twice a week. Let English parents bear this fact in mind; but that the lads are healthy and happy, anybody who sees them can have no question; furthermore, they are well instructed in a sound practical education—history, geography, mathematics, religion. What a place to know of would this be for many a poor half-pay officer, where he may put his children in all confidence that they will be well cared for and soundly educated! Why have we not State schools in England, where, for the prime cost—for a sum which never need exceed for a young boy's maintenance 25l. a year—our children might be brought up?⁵⁶

But apart from the religion and the academics, perhaps to Thackeray the most significant aspect of the schools was the

⁵⁵ISB, p. 342.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 292.

shining and cheerful little faces which reminded him of his own children who were in England.

Thackeray also visited several institutions of higher learning as well as the grammar schools. Trinity College in Dublin was an elegant Irish institution:

In spite of the solitude, the square of the College is a fine sight: a large ground, surrounded by buildings of various ages and styles, but comfortable, handsome, and in good repair; a modern row of rooms; a row that has been Elizabethan once; a hall and senate-house, facing each other, of the style of George I.; and a noble library, with a range of many windows, and a fine manly simple façade of cut stone.⁵⁷

Yet he found it difficult to convince his English friends that he had actually entered the college as a guest:

Suffice it to say, that at Kildare Street we had white neck-cloths, black waiters, wax-candles, and some of the best wine in Europe; at Mr. —, the publisher's, wax-candles, and some of the best wine in Europe; at Mr. Lever's, wax-candles, and some of the best wine in Europe; at Trinity College—but there is no need to mention what took place at Trinity College; for on returning to London, and recounting the circumstances of the repast, my friend B—, a Master of Arts of that university, solemnly declared the thing was impossible: —no stranger could dine at Trinity College; it was too great a privilege—in a word, he would not believe the story, nor will he to this day; and why, therefore, tell it in vain?⁵⁸

Trinity College held claim on the loyalty of the Irish intelligentsia, but there were several other colleges in Ireland.

Thackeray found the Catholic College of Maynooth to be most unimpressive:

Of the Catholic College of Maynooth, I must likewise speak briefly, for the reason that an accurate description of that establishment would be of necessity so disagreeable that it is best to pass it over in a few words. An Irish union-house

⁵⁷ ISB, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 353.

is a palace to it. Ruin so needless, filth so disgusting, such a look of lazy squalor, no Englishman who has not seen can conceive. Lecture-room and dining-hall, kitchen and students'-room, were all the same. I shall never forget the sight of scores of shoulders of mutton lying on the filthy floor in the former, or the view of a bed and dressing-table that I saw in the other.⁵⁹

And the Presbyterian College in Belfast was attractive at a distance, but at a closer view he found it to be in a "woeful state of dilapidation,"⁶⁰ though not as disreputable as the college at Maynooth.⁶¹

The organizations of Church and State made up only a small portion of the every-day life of the Irishman. To the average citizen who was forced to work hard to feed his family, the institutions of education, politics, government, and religion were not the main-stays of his existence. He knew that he was forced to work, that he was born into his lot in life, that his son would carry on in relatively the same manner, and that he must diversify his life of constant hard work with sports, games, and Irish frolic. These activities of his daily life seemed to make the Irishman a whole being which was morally guided by the religious training of his choosing.

Because as a traveler Thackeray was compelled to deal directly with the people, he observed many of the different types of Irish occupations. He saw that the Irishmen took seriously the process of earning a living and took great pleasure in gaining even a single penny. Too, the business

⁵⁹ISB, p. 353.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 306.

⁶¹Ibid.

workers of the city labored just as diligently as the workers of the country, and both seemed to have one common economic attitude, greediness. Thackeray saw the farmers who brought their goods to the town markets; they covered the streets with their goods and then noisily went about the task of bargaining. He also came in contact with waiters, postboys, porters, and guides who were just as interested in getting their fair share of the profits:

I was struck by their excessive greediness after the traveller's gratuities, and their fierce dissatisfaction if not sufficiently rewarded. To the gentleman who brushed my clothes at the comfortable hotel at Belfast, and carried my bags to the coach, I tendered the sum of two shillings, which seemed to me quite a sufficient reward for his services: he battled and brawled with me for more, and got it too; for a street-dispute with a porter calls together a number of delighted bystanders, whose remarks and company are by no means agreeable to a solitary gentleman.⁶²

He saw men who worked in the factories and on the docks of such commercial cities as Belfast and Dublin; and when invited to dine with "gentlemen," he met the owners of those factories and docks. But, generally, he saw most often the Irishmen who dealt with public relations. The view of Waterford's market day, a common sight all over the country, seems to be Thackeray's general concept of business in Ireland:

Before the court is a wide street, where a . . . market was held, with a vast number of donkey-carts urged hither and thither, and great shrieking, chattering, and bustle. It is five hundred years ago since a poet who accompanied Richard II. in his voyage hither spoke of 'Watreforde ou moult vilaine et orde y sont la gente.' They don't seem to be much changed now, but remain faithful to their ancient habits.⁶³

⁶²ISB, p. 347.

⁶³Ibid., p. 48.

What Thackeray saw of business in the cities consisted mostly of the inns, the shops, and the few factories that he had actually visited during the course of his travels: he saw a segment of the Irish workers' daily business activities. The inns, for instance, varied from the neat and prosperous "hospitable houses,"⁶⁴ which provided for the traveler meals and a bed for the night's stay, to the great inns of the cities, such as Kearns' Hotel in Belfast:

. . . with respect to the inn, that in which I stayed, Kearns' was as comfortable and well-ordered an establishment as the most fastidious cockney can desire, and with an advantage which some people perhaps do not care for, that the dinners which cost seven shillings at London Taverns are here served for half a crown⁶⁵

or the Shelburne in Dublin:

The hotel to which I had been directed is a respectable old edifice, much frequented by families from the country, and where the solitary traveller may likewise find society: for he may either use the 'Shelburne' as an hotel or a boarding-house, in which latter case he is comfortably accommodated at the very moderate daily charge of six-and-eight-pence. For this charge a copious breakfast is provided for him in the coffee-room, a perpetual luncheon is likewise there spread, a plentiful dinner is ready at six o'clock: after which there is a drawing-room and a rubber of whist, with tea and coffee and cakes in plenty to satisfy the largest appetite. The hotel is majestically conducted by clerks and other officers; the landlord himself does not appear, after the honest, comfortable English fashion, but lives in a private mansion hard by, where his name may be read inscribed on a brass plate, like that of any other private gentleman.⁶⁶

But not all the hotels were to Thackeray's liking. Too often he found that he had to stay at a poorly managed place, and he

⁶⁵ISB, p. 304.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 6.

criticized the inferior business practices thus in his Sketch Book:

Why should lighting a fire in a back-room fill a whole enormous house with smoke? Why should four waiters stand and jaw and gesticulate among themselves, instead of waiting on the guests? Why should ducks be raw, and dust lie quiet in places where a hundred people pass daily? All these points make one think very regretfully of neat, pleasant, comfortable, prosperous H—town, where the meat was cooked, and the rooms were clean, and the servants didn't talk. Nor need it be said here, that a raw leg of mutton costs exactly the same sum as one cuit à point. And by this moral earnestly hoping that all Ireland may profit, let us go back to H—. . . .⁶⁷

It was easier for him to deal with the ill-mannered proprietors of stores than with the ill-mannered waiters, for he did not have to depend on the storekeepers for the necessary meals and sleeping quarters. He frequented the bookstores and ornament stores and observed what he believed to be unbusinesslike practices, as, for example, in Limerick:

I asked one of the ten thousand fruit-women the price of her green pears. 'Twopence apiece,' she said; and there were two little ragged beggars standing by, who were munching the fruit. A book-shopwoman made me pay threepence for a bottle of ink which usually costs a penny; a potato-woman told me that her potatoes cost fourteenpence a stone: and all these ladies treated the stranger with a leering, wheedling servility which made me long to box their ears, were it not that the man who lays his hand upon a woman is an, &c., whom 'twere gross flattery to call a what-d'ye-call-'im?⁶⁸

Thackeray had the opportunity to visit still another type of business establishment, the factory. He was impressed with the general atmosphere of orderliness and vastness, and he believed that the hard-working employees were much happier than

⁶⁷ISB, p. 29.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 149.

the "free" but hungry beggars. He had the good fortune to be given a tour of several factories, one of which was Shekelton's iron works in Dundalk. The plant seemed to have "brought the greatest benefit to his [Shekelton's] fellow-townsmen—of whom he employs numbers in his foundaries and workshops."⁶⁹

As Thackeray viewed the people working with the huge machines, such as the "iron-devourer, a wretch with huge jaws and a narrow mouth ever opening and shutting—opening and shutting,"⁷⁰ he judged the entire factory to be a "busy, cheerful, orderly, bustling, changing place."⁷¹

The Irishmen who lived outside the city were involved in their own form of business which, for the most part, resulted in their netting enough produce to feed their families. The country folk did, however, have a market day in their near-by towns. Thackeray occasionally participated in their "over-the-counter" business deals by buying an apple or an Irish bit of handicraft. "Here," he wrote, "were the country carts and the country cloaks, and the shrill beggarly bargains going on—a world of shrieking, and gesticulating, and talk, about a penny-worth of potatoes."⁷²

After the business of the day came pleasures, such as various sports and special events which had been participated in so often that they were regarded as traditional. Some of

⁶⁹ISB, p. 284.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., p. 136.

the people found amusement in dancing, drinking, and participating in different types of physical matches, such as fighting. Others enjoyed fishing, stag hunting, horse racing, and boat racing; and still others found pleasure in attending the theaters, visiting the art museums, and reading in the libraries. There was, of course, much intermingling of interests; the man who enjoyed the Belfast museum of art on a Friday might be expected to bundle himself in his old clothes and go fishing in the Lough of Belfast the next day. Irishmen generally had a keen appreciation of their recreation: and Thackeray, who enjoyed as physical sport only a pleasurable and occasional ride on a horse, delighted in watching the Irish people at their various forms of play.

People of all social ranks flocked to sporting events and participated with relish in matching their strength and cunning against those of either their neighbor or the forces of nature. Fishing, for example, seemed to attract people for various reasons, usually for food, but primarily for amusement. Once, while cruising with some boatmen on the Lough of Ballinahinch for the purpose of viewing landscapes, Thackeray found himself suddenly on a fishing expedition:

The mountains covered their modest beauties in impenetrable veils of clouds; and the only consolation to the boat's crew was, that it was a remarkable good day for trout-fishing—which amusement some people are said to prefer to the examination of landscapes, however beautiful.⁷³

⁷³ISB, p. 211.

In an hour's time the crew caught "enough fish . . . to feast the crew, consisting of five persons, and the family of a herd of Mr. Martin's . . . [which was] inhabited by a cow and its calf, a score of fowls, and I don't know how many sons and daughters."⁷⁴ Then, tiring of trout fishing, the men changed their goal to the catching of salmon; and, stated Thackeray, "had they hooked a few salmon, no doubt they would have trolled for whales or for a mermaid."⁷⁵ But the rains came, and poor Thackeray was forced to watch the fishermen, who had grown tired of hunting for salmon, make more casts for trout. He found that listening to fishing tales was much more to his liking than fishing itself, and he later recorded reports of sport fishing in the coastal waters of the Giant's Causeway and was delighted that he did not have to witness the activity for himself. As opposed to his fishing adventures, Thackeray seemed to have enjoyed his experiences at the Killarney stag hunt more because of the nature of the participants: the ladies and gentlemen were of jovial temperaments, and they enjoyed the scenery and the leisurely atmosphere to their fullest. Thackeray used more words in describing the atmosphere than he did in describing the actual hunt, which he briefly included as follows:

Having strolled about the island for a quarter of an hour, it became time to take to the boats again, and we were rowed over to the wood opposite Sullivan's cascade, where the hounds had been laid in in the morning, and the stag was expected to take

⁷⁴ISB, pp. 211-12.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 212.

water. Fifty or sixty men are employed on the mountain to drive the stag lakewards, should he be inclined to break away; and the sport generally ends by the stag—a wild one—making for the water with the pack swimming afterwards; and here he is taken and disposed of: how I know not. It is rather a parade than a stag hunt; but, with all the boats around and the noble view, must be a fine thing to see.⁷⁶

Thackeray also attended less robust, but not necessarily less exhilarating, activities such as theater performances, art displays, and puppet shows. The opera did "not flourish much more in Dublin than in any other part of the country,"⁷⁷ and he was obliged to attend melodramatic performances in the theater, "inculcating a thorough destestation of vice and a warm sympathy with suffering virtue."⁷⁸ Thackeray's description of the Irish Academy suggests that it, too, was lacking in the finesse which characterized European culture:

In one of the streets off Sackville Street, is the house and exhibition of the Irish Academy, which I went to see, as it was positively to close at the end of the week. While I was there, two other people came in; and we had, besides, the money-taker and a porter, to whom the former was reading out of a newspaper, those Tipperary murders which were mentioned in a former page. The echo took up the theme, and hummed it gloomily through the vacant place.⁷⁹

He later paid twopence to see a puppet show which was crowded with not only the children of the city but also many of the laborers as well. It seemed, however, that, regardless of the various types of sports and activities which were available to amuse the people of Ireland, the most popular place for relaxation was the pub:

⁷⁷ISB, p. 356.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 17.

Then in passing homewards of a night, you hear at the humble public-houses the sound of many a fiddle, and the stamp of feet dancing the good old jig, which is still maintaining a struggle with teetotalism, and, though vanquished now, may rally some day and overcome the enemy.⁸⁰

There were various kinds of special events, too, that interested the Irish people and their English visitor: the fairs, the meetings, and the annual horse races. Of particular interest were the people who came from the towns in huge masses. Thackeray wondered where they were hiding when the fair, or whatever the activity was, did not beckon them to its attractions. He noted the varieties of people who watched the events: "I am bound to say that on rich or poor shoulders I never saw so many handsome faces in my life."⁸¹ He wished for a daguerreotype to record their portraits, but he settled instead for his sketch pad. The faces at the fairs delighted him,⁸²



⁸⁰ISB, p. 357.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 128.

⁸²Ibid., p. 129.

as did the faces at the horse races:⁸³



After visiting with the Irishmen, seeing them at their work and at the play, Thackeray concluded that they accepted life with a vigor and an anticipation that were uncommon in England. He enjoyed their unique approach to life, though at times he had become discouraged with their seeming preference for the continuity of filth and stagnation. He appreciated the perseverance of the Irish people as he had witnessed it in every aspect of their world: their religions, their government, and their daily lives. Rather early in the Sketch Book he summarized his impressions of the Irishman and his society, and his impression remained constant throughout the book:

I have met more gentlemen here than in any place I ever saw: gentlemen of high and low ranks, that is to say: men shrewd and delicate of preception, observant of society, entering into the feelings of others, and anxious to set them at ease or to gratify them; of course exaggerating their professions of kindness and in so far insincere; but the very exaggeration

⁸³ISB, p. 127.

seems to be a proof of a kindly nature, and I wish in England we were a little more complimentary. In Dublin, a lawyer left his chambers, and a literary man his books, to walk the town with me—the town, which they must know a great deal too well: for, pretty as it is, it is but a small place after all, not like that great bustling, changing, struggling world, the Englishman's capital. Would a London man leave his business to trudge to the Tower or the Park with a stranger? We would ask him to dine at the club, or to eat whitebait at Lovegrove's, and think our duty done, neither caring for him, nor professing to care for him; and we pride ourselves on our honesty accordingly. Never was honesty more selfish. And so a vulgar man in England disdains to flatter his equals, and chiefly displays his character of snob by assuming as much as he can for himself, swaggering and showing off in his coarse, dull, stupid way.⁸⁴

In November, 1842, when Thackeray left behind Ireland, her scenery, and her society, he regretted having to depart from his newly-made Irish friends. He seemed to have enjoyed his tour of the island because it was a pleasurable journey and because he had found much material to include in his book. The people of Ireland were the country's most engaging feature to him. He saw the lovely countrysides and the picturesque towns with eyes directed at humanity. He asked himself, "What does that farmer do with all that land? Of what importance is the village green to this particular town? Why is that town prosperous? Why are those beggars not in that clean and spacious poor-house?" He tried to report the questions and the available answers with his cockney understanding as a guide. Some of the critics of the book believed that this kind of understanding was insufficient and that he failed in his analysis. More

⁸⁴ISB, p. 116.

critics, however, believed the Sketch Book to be a well-supported abstract of Irish life as he had viewed it in 1842. Thackeray, as objectively as he could, also believed the book to be accurate in its account of the Irish scenery and manners. One must see the country for himself in order to judge Thackeray, Ireland, and perhaps even The Irish Sketch Book.

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