

A Nurse's Holiday in Ireland.

My people objected when I mentioned the plan. That was, of course, inevitable. Since I was fifteen and knew my own mind, they have objected to everything. They are such dear, good, middle-class, go-on-in-the-humdrum-style old folk, that dearly as I love them, I am perpetually shocking them. I can't help it—no more can they; and there it is.

When I took to nursing they objected to that, adding that I had not the perseverance to carry it through.

But I did.

When I went on to my midwifery training, they were so much shocked that they did not write to me for two months, for fear the postmistress in our little country village should see the address of the Maternity Hospital on my letters. I assure you that I am not joking.

But the worst of all was when I took a Workhouse Infirmary appointment.

"To think, my dear, of people knowing that we have a daughter in the workhouse—poor girl, poor girl!"

And so, when after eighteen months' hard, hard, but most pathetic and deeply interesting work, I broke down, they were, if anything, pleased rather than otherwise, and the subdued "I told you so" air with which they received the strayed sheep back to the fold, was delightful to witness. Not that they ever said a single word. Only you felt it. You saw it in every triumphant side-glance at each other. You caught it in the pitying tones. Altogether it was very funny.

Unluckily, I found home the worst place in the world to get well in. The doctor had said three months, and when the first exhaustion was over, and sleep was beginning to come back, and rest became a possibility to mind and body, I laid my head together (I don't believe you can say that) with a friend, and we ran away together to a tiny cottage she knew of in the West of Ireland.

Alas, I write of it as having but to-day settled up the accounts, eaten on the journey the last of our spring chickens, packed up our china, and our penny spoons and forks, and crocks, and hammers, and dusters, and all those delightful things which tempt one without end in a penny bazaar, left strict injunctions with our "girl" as to scrubbing, that we may leave an untarnished name behind us in the matter of cleanliness, and waved a farewell for a mile or two along the road to our dear cottage neighbours, whose sweet kindness and consideration have helped to make our stay amongst them an almost perfect one.

How little we English folk know of the Irish peasantry of the West—hardworking, uncomplaining, full of a wonderful depth of love of land and country. All, but the young folk, who stream away year by year, to the great Continent overseas, which will soon be more Irish than Ireland herself. Year in, year out, as weather permits and it is not often that it is kind, they till an

ungenerous soil, under difficulties and hardships that would puzzle an average Englishman. Their turf, the only form of fuel they know, is gathered in, as and when they can—and if the spring be a wet one, they must do without firing, until the sun shines, and dries the thick, wet ooze out of their "sods."

Do not speak of the cow and the calf in their houses. What else can you expect? It is but a few years since in the West, where we were, the whitewashing of a cottage, the running up of a rough stone-walled, rush-thatched cattle shed, meant the coming of the agent or rent-warner, and the adding of a pound or may be twenty-five shillings to the rent. And where but in the house should the cow find shelter from the cruel winds and driving rain, when the hour of her pain is on her, or the tender calf, new-born, rest warmly?

Before we look down on what, alas, some of us know as "the too Irish," let us ask ourselves, whether we under the same disadvantages could have shown ourselves as they, honest as the day, patient, toiling, considerate, gentle, sober. Yes, sober, for in the whole of my time in the country I am not speaking of the towns, where man's civilisation and a mighty bad one takes the place of God's simplicity, I saw but two men, and never a woman, otherwise than sober.

Dirty? Ah, well, wait. Soap costs money, and they are of that poverty that looks at every penny, except when a neighbour is in want of a helping hand. And as to water, where would you be for cleanliness, dear fellow nurses, with a family of children to mend, and wash, and cook, and sew for, and water to fetch for everything, three fields away? Have you ever tried carrying a full bucket that far? And do you know how your arms ached when you came back the third time? I do—and somehow I felt a little bit ashamed of some of the things I used to say. After all, godliness *does* come first, and cleanliness second. I know myself to be cleanly, but as to being as godly as they—well, I very much doubt it—and so would you if you had ever lived amongst them.

You will call me an enthusiast, perhaps.

I admit it—I fully admit it. All I say is: Wait until your chance comes of seeing these dear folk in their own homes, under their own conditions.

Well, well. The holiday's over, you know.

We have baked in our funny pot oven, over our turf fire on the hearth, and washed in a tub at the front door, and dried our clothes on furze-bushes, and driven away the pigs that found them a *bonne bouche*, and stroked the bull—a perfect gentleman—and spilt the water all over the floor and wiped it up again, and whacked the dog-thief that watched us out of the house, and popped round the corner to steal our meat and butter, for the very last time.

We were doing everything for ourselves. Standing at the wide-open kitchen door, looking across the blue bay to the blue hills, with the soft southwest wind brushing our faces, we wiped our china, running back and from the table. Sitting on the

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