ACROSS THE IRISH CHANNEL.

By LADY WILLIAM LENNOX.

We leave Euston Square by the Irish mail at 8.45 P.M., and are borne swiftly along in the darkness; lit up sometimes by the bright stations past which we fly, or (in rare instances), at which we stop for a few minutes; and illuminated also, as we get far from London, by the glare of furnaces in the Black Country. The weird effect of those flaming chimneys, like enormous torches flaring high in the dark night, must be seen to be appreciated; but anyone who has once witnessed, it and has an eye for the picturesque mingled with a dash of the uncanny, will not fail to be on the look-out the next time he or she takes that journey. On flies the train to Holyhead, where the chill air greets us as we leave the carriage, and go on board the steamer, generally speaking in a drizzling rain. Why it should be so is impossible to say, but so it is more often than not; and consequently the gangway, the deck, everywhere, in fact, is wet and slippery. However, the luggage is got down, and—if we are wise and the night is rough—we are down too on a sofa in a nice deck cabin, which can be had, as a rule, by merely writing for it beforehand.

Sundry noises sound in our ears preparatory to the start, and then we are off, plunging through the waves at speed; pitching not much, but rolling, if there is any sea on, more than enough for most people. If it is calm, all very well; but if not, let us draw a veil over the hours which pass before the welcome voice of the stewardess informs us that we "shall be in in ten minutes." We feel then that "life is worth living," which maybe we began to doubt during the crossing; and gathering ourselves, and our odds and ends, together, we scramble up the companion and along the slippery gangway to the train; the morning air feeling too brisk and unsympathetic probably to suit us at the moment.

Why boxes and bags are banged about at Kingstown as they are, and how they ever contrive to hold together in spite of that process, are unexplainable marvels, but they do survive it, and get stowed away by degrees in the luggage vans; and we are about to start when the figure of a man with long black hair, apparently just emerged from an oil bath, appears at the carriage window, and offers us a choice of Irish papers. If the physical need of breakfas' does not more than counterbalance the mental need of information, we buy a GIRL'S OWN PAPER, and away we go slowly along past Salt Hill, to Westland Row.

Oh, that place in days gone by, when cars, cabs, and horses weie all mixed up anyhow like the pieces of some puzzle thrown loose into a box! In those days boxes and portmanteaus might be seen flying through the air from the arms of porters, alighting by chance possibly on the vehicle they were intended for, but alighting oftener on the ground. It was sheer happy-go-lucky, and the wretched travellers had need of all the patience they possessed. But now things are changed for the better, and "outsides" or "insides"—the word "car" being understood—can be got easily enough; and we begin a progress across Dublin to our next halting-place, Kingsbridge Station. The way thereto is somewhat insalubrious, skirting as it does the banks of the Liffey, which at best is an unattractive river, and at its worst is a trench of black mud. Pocket-handkerchiefs and eau de Cologne are not to be despised upon that route by the olfactory organs; and as for the visual ones, there is not very much for their entertainment, as the way lies a good deal through slums, and in the early morning, a sleepy shopkeeper opening his shutters or a man driving one of the square carts peculiar to Ireland, are the chief objects to be seen.

At Kingsbridge we breakfast fairly well, and after the inevitable wrangle with the cabman, can sit down and wait till our train arrives. The Dublin cab fares are of course fixed by law, but the drivers regard that fact with lofty contempt; and one of them being told that he "knew he was asking a great deal more than his due," replied, "Well, sure, an' if I didn't, how would I live at all?"

But here comes our train, and we are off again. Where to, depends upon circumstances; but in whatever direction we go, we are sure of seeing a green carpet for one thing, and hills—which would be called mountains in England—either near or in the distance; for another, also, we are sure of being irritated by the slowness and want of punctuality of those trains generally, and of being at the same time amused by the cool acceptancy of those facts by the officials, as an inevitable part of the system.

"Yes," said a station-master, in answer to some remarks about not keeping time, "we take it rather happy-go-easy here"—and he smiled benignly at the foolishness which expected anything else. And now our journey has come to an end, and we find ourselves at our destination; having done the last few miles in the carriage sent by our host to meet us, and which saved us the bodily stiffness and mental anxiety inseparable from a progress on one of the "kyars," which lay in wait at the station.

Certainly there are cars and cars, and the vehicle called by that name which is found in a gentleman's coach-house is a delightful thing (although even in that case there is at first a sensation of want of balance to the unaccustomed Saxon); but the Irish car pure and simple, such as is seen in the streets of Dublin, or jaunting along the country roads, is a terrific mode of locomotion to the unpractised; with its narrow seat far removed from the foot-board (the latter, moreover, making an obtuse angle at its point of junction with the car, so that the traveller's feet are on a slant always), its step so completely under the foot-board that to get either on or off is a work of difficulty, not to say danger; and last, not least, its motion, which—especially where tramways abound—has a desperate freedom about it that necessitates the straining of every muscle to "keep on" at all.

But this is a digression, and has nothing to do with the "domain" which we have come to visit, and which casts a spell over us at first sight. Truly Irish estates, like Irish eyes, are beautiful, with their avenues of splendid trees, their hills richly-wooded from base to summit, and covered besides with a thick undergrowth of every imaginable shrub and fern; the deep salmon rivers, spanned here and there by picturesque old bridges, and the lawns and gardens with turf which, for its velvety softness as well as its miraculous colour, is like nothing on earth but itself, and is in some places attended to with such care that a sketch is extant of two gardeners standing under a tree "waiting for a leaf to fall," so that they might sweep it up at once!

Add to these various beauties the distant mountains; unchanging ever as to form, but changing ever in colour according as the bright sunlight gilds them, or a grey sky gives a cold and stern aspect to their heather-covered tops and rugged sides, and we have a picture to be seen every day in Ireland; but none the less to be admired on that account. Then there are the people. What fun they are sometimes.

"Charley," said an English sportsman to an old lodge-keeper, "are there any fish in such a stream?" naming one of which he knew nothing.

"Ah, sure, yer honour, it's full of fish."

Away went the Englishman and tried his best; but it was no use, and at last he came back to the lodge.

"Why, Charley," said he, "I've been fishing for an hour, but not a sign was there of anything!"

"Ah, sure, yer honour," answered Charley unabashed, "yer might as well fish on the turnpike road." The simple fact being that an Irish peasant's one endeavour is to say whatever will best please the person he is talking to, no matter about the correctness or otherwise of what he says; and he is not one bit ashamed when his little ruse is found out, as he looks upon it merely in the light of a necessary courtesy. It may chance, however, that the courtesy is only on the surface, and hides a very different feeling underneath. There is a form of words in use among the peasants which may be (as it sounds) a blessing, but which, by the addition or omission of a word, becomes a curse. This sentence is often spoken by beggars, and the ignorant *Sassenach* walks on unknowing whether he is being blessed or cursed by the ragged object behind him. The old nursery rhyme, "Some in rags and some in tags," comes pretty often to the mind in the "Green Isle," for the garments, or the want of them, are a real wonder; and the unclothed conditions to be seen even in Dublin are enough to make one stand still and ask oneself, "Where are the police?" For, assuredly, if such absence of costume was noticeable in London, presence of the law would soon be observed in the shape of a "Bobby."

Nevertheless, scantiness of wardrobe and possibly shortness in the way of food have no power to destroy either the bright spirits or the brilliant complexions possessed by the children as a rule. They look pictures of health, and as full of mischief and humour as any human creatures can be. "Give me a penny, miss," shout the ragged urchins racing headlong after the carriage as it drives slowly through some wretched-looking town; and the crimson cheeks, bright eyes, and white teeth are marvellously pretty and taking, contrasting as they do so forcibly with the miserable surroundings. Some of the stories told of the people are very amusing. A car driver was asked one day by an English tourist what he did in the winter when visitors were few.

"Sure," said he, "we spind all that time invinting lies to tell the English in the summer."

Another story is of a wedding at which two friends were present, one, however, speaking with a great deal more "accent" than the other. The bride had just driven away amidst a shower of rice and slippers, when the first man complained that no shoe had fallen to his share to throw.

"Oh," said the other, "never mind; just throw your *brogue* after her," brogue being the synonym for shoe in Ireland.

But this paper is getting too long, and must end at once with the return journey from Kingstown, when, if we wish to be comfortable, we shall sleep at Holyhead, and go on next morning at a reasonable hour by the mail, which will give us the opportunity of seeing beautiful wild scenery and sea views to begin with, changing by degrees to the quiet fields and homesteads, which are so essentially English; and these again giving place to the mass of bricks and mortar overhung by a heavy grey sky and lit up by miles of lamps, which we are accustomed to associate with that dark, murky, but still, to many of us, clear and delightful city, London.