

4 *An Irish Idyll*

It is a measure of the leisurely pace of upper class life in the eighteenth century that the Delanys spent the first twelve months of their marriage in England visiting friends and relatives, before departing for Delville, Dr Delany's house in Dublin, where they arrived in June 1744. The twenty-five years of their marriage, spent mostly in Ireland with occasional visits to England, was to be a time of great happiness for Mary, and D.D., as she called him in her correspondence, was to prove a tender and devoted husband, giving Mary his constant affection and the encouragement to persevere in her artistic works. Swift described Dr Delany to Pope as 'a man of the easiest and best conversation I ever met with in this Island, a very good list'ner, a right reasoner, neither too silent, nor talkative, and never positive'. It was to be a comfortable marriage based on companionship rather than passion but the poem Dr Delany wrote comparing Mary to a rose shows the depth of his affection:

O fairest emblem of the fair
My pride, my life, my bliss, my care!
Where all the lovelinesses meet--
Beauty and grace, both bright and sweet!
Emblem of Mary, gift divine.
Blest be the hour that made her mine!

They shared their delight in the progress of their gardens at Delville and Downpatrick, they both enjoyed entertaining freely, and they concerned themselves with the welfare of their friends and the parishioners in the deanery.

One of their first duties after their arrival was to call on the Viceroy at Dublin Castle, which was the centre of Irish society--'I dressed *in my airs* for formal visits'--and in return they received callers at Delville. There must have been many who remembered Mary from her visit to Dublin thirteen years earlier, and who were keen to make her acquaintance again, surprised perhaps that the charming, talented and aristocratic widow, who must have had so many opportunities to marry a man of fortune, should have chosen an obscure, middle-aged Irish clergyman.

Mary's interest in clothes alerted her to the plight of the Irish traders resulting from the restrictions on the export of cloth: 'the poor weavers are starving, --all trade has met with a great check this year.' She decided that she must try and persuade the ladies who attended the frequent receptions at the Castle to have their dresses made of Irish cloth: 'Mrs Chenevix, the Bishop of Killaloe's wife, and I have agreed to go to the Birthday in Irish stuffs.' This apparently had the desired effect, because only three days later she wrote: 'On the Princess of Wales' birthday there appeared at Court a great number of Irish stuff, Lady Chesterfield (the Vicereign) was dressed in one, and I had the *secret satisfaction* of knowing myself to have been the cause, but *dare not say so here*; but I say "I am glad to find my Lady Chesterfield's example has had so good influence."' Mary was just the person to set this example because the other ladies, knowing that she had attended the very finest Court functions in England, were content to trust her good taste and follow her. How encouraged she must have been when at another royal birthday she noted 'It was prodigiously crowded, and all the ladies were dressed in Irish stuffs, and never looked finer or more genteel; except five or six who wore silk, and they were *not* distinguished to their honour. The men were not so public-spirited as the ladies--most of them were in their foreign finery.'

In middle-age Mary's comments on dress are less detailed and refer more to style and practicality, but are nevertheless interesting historically. When she attended a reception at Leicester House in 1747, during a visit to England, she wrote:

There was not much new finery, new clothes not being required on this Birthday, They curl and wear a great many tawdry things ... the only thing that seems general are hoops of an enormous size, and most people wear vast wickers to their heads. They are now come to such an extravagance in those two particulars, that I expect soon to see the other extreme of thread-paper heads and no hoops, and from appearing like so many blown bladders we shall look like so many bodkins stalking about.

The Delanys' main home was in Dublin, and they only paid annual visits to Downpatrick, seventy miles north of Dublin, where Dr Delany held the deanery; in those days a dean was not expected to move into the district to live among his parishioners. Soon after their arrival in Dublin they set out to make their first acquaintance of the deanery: 'The Dean and I travel in our chaise, which is easy and pleasant; Betty and Margaret, the cook and housemaid, in the coach and four, and Peg Hanages (who I am breeding up to be a housemaid) in a car we have had made for marketing, and carrying luggage, &c, when we travel.' They took with them linen, china, and similar domestic items, packed in hay by the servants, whom she referred to as 'the family'.

For a while they occupied a house called Holly Mount, before moving to another named Mount Panther, which was nearer the town of Down. It was a shock to them both to find how the parishioners had been neglected by the curate left in charge:

Never did any flock want more the presence and assistance of a shepherd than this Deanery, where there has been a most shameful neglect; and I trust in God it will be a very happy thing for the poor people that D.D. is come among them. The church of Down is very large, but it is not a quarter filled with people; the Curate has been so negligent as never to visit any of the poor of the parish, and a very diligent and watchful dissenting preacher has visited them on all occasions of sickness and distress, and by that means gained great numbers to the meetings. D.D. has already visited a great number, when he has been with all the Protestants he designs to go to the Presbyterians, and then to the Papists, they bless him and pray for him wherever he goes, and say he has done more good already than all his predecessors; the last Dean was here but two days in six years!

Dr Delany's appointment as Dean of Downpatrick had been achieved through Mary's family connections with Lord Carteret, then Prime Minister. Indeed, most appointments in both church and state came from private patronage. There could be great disparity in the position of clergymen: some of the bishops were wealthy and influential men, especially those who had married an heiress, whereas a curate might earn as little as forty pounds per annum.

Mary enjoyed her visits to the deanery, where life was simple and rural. She and the Dean created a new garden round Holly Mount, went for walks in the fields looking for new plants, and met the local people.

This is really a sweet place, the house *ordinary* but is well enough for a *summer house* . . . four pretty good bed-chambers, and a great many conveniences for the servants ... I have a closet to my bedchamber, the window of which looks upon a fine lake *inhabited* by *swans*, beyond it and on each side are pretty hills, some covered with wood and others with cattle.

It is with the eye of an artist and a needlewoman that Mary describes the scene: 'In some places a view of the lake opens, and most of the trees are embroidered with woodbine and the "*flaunting eglantine*".' The following week when she was still in the process of describing her new abode to Anne she wrote:

As soon as dinner was over we walked to Wood Island, where the Dean amused himself with his workmen, and I at my work under the shelter of a young oak in which D.D. had made a very snug seat. When he had discharged his labourers we set forward for adventures; and as bold as Don Quixote, he undertook, armed with a stout cane instead of a lance,

and I (with my shepherdess's crook) followed intrepid, to penetrate the thickest part of the wood, where human foot *had not trod I believe for ages*. After magnanimously combating brakes, briars, and fern of *enormous size* and thickness, we accomplished the arduous task, and were well rewarded during our toil by finding many pretty spots enamelled and perfumed with variety of sweet flowers, particularly the *woodbine and wild rose*.

A typical day at Holly Mount was described by Mary:

We rise about seven, have prayers and breakfast over by nine. In the mornings D.D. makes his visits, I draw; when it is fair and he walks out I go with him; we dine at two; in the afternoon when we can't walk out, reading and talking amuse us till supper, and after supper I make shirts and shifts for the poor naked wretches in the neighbourhood.

They lost no time in getting to know the people of Down, and announced that Tuesdays would be their 'public days', which meant they were at home to anyone who wished to call. So that they might be less rushed on Sundays, they arranged to dine at a public-house in Down kept by a former butler of one of the Deans: '... he has a very good room in his house, and he is to provide a good dinner, and the Dean will fill his table every Sunday with all the townsmen and their wives *by turns*, which will oblige the people, and give us an opportunity of going to church in the afternoon without any fatigue.'

The Delanys frequently entertained at home and the following meal for twelve was typical: 'Our dinner was a boiled leg of mutton, a sirloin of roast beef, six boiled chickens, bacon and greens; apple-pies, a dish of potatoes.' Sometimes at Mount Panther, which was larger, as many as twenty would sit down to dinner, and considerable good management of the household was necessary, for we read: 'On Tuesday sixteen people here at dinner, on Wednesday ten, on Thursday twenty-two'. The younger generation was entertained to small 'drums'; Mary was a keen match-maker and any eligible young man was noted:

Mr Cole (five thousand a year and just come from abroad) a pretty, well-behaved young man... Miss Bayly was queen of the ball, and began it with Mr Cole ... there were ten couple of clever dancers. Remember my room is 32 feet long; at the upper end sat the fiddlers, and at the lower end next the little parlour the lookers-on. Tea from seven to ten: it was made in the hail, and Smith [her personal maid] presided. They began at *six and ended at ten*; then went to a cold supper in the drawing-room made of 7 dishes down the middle of different cold dishes, and plates of all sorts of fruit and sweet things that could be had here, in the middle jellies.

Though Mary delighted in the generous hospitality of the Irish there are occasions when she thought it too lavish:

Last Tuesday we dined at the Bishop of Elphin's ... we had a magnificent dinner, extremely well drest and well attended, nine and nine, and a dessert the finest I ever saw in Ireland; the Bishop lives constantly very well, and it becomes his station and fortune, but *high living is too much the fashion here*. You are invited to dinner to any private gentleman of a £1000 a year or less, that does not give you seven dishes at one course, and Burgundy and Champagne; and these dinners they give once or twice a week, that provision is now as dear as in London... I own I am surprised *how* they manage; for we cannot afford anything like it, with a *much better income*.

Similar disapproval is expressed when they dine with the Primate and have a Périgord pie, sent from France: 'such expensive rarities *do not become the table of a prelate*; who ought rather *to be given hospitality*, than ape the fantastical luxuriences of fashionable tables.'

Unexpected guests were invited to stay for dinner in surprising numbers and must have stretched the ingenuity of the cook, but joints of meat were large and succulent and the menus generous:

They (Dr Mathews and his family) were all the company I *expected*, but there were added to them by dinner-time, Mr Johnston, a very good sort of man (agent, that is rent-gatherer to the Dean); his wife and niece, both *fine ladies*!; the sheriff of the county; and *three persons* of very different characters--Mr Hall, a crafty mercenary man, not at all esteemed or countenanced by the good people of this country; Mr Ward, a plain honest curate, and Mr Cornabee, a Frenchman by birth, who has a living in the neighbourhood--a polite, lively, entertaining man, just come from the Queen of Hungary.

In middle-age Mary tended to become more conservative and regretted change--a trait commonly acquired with increasing years. She deplored innovations in the social customs of local people in Down:

I am very sorry to find here and everywhere people *out of character*, and that *wine* and *tea* should enter where they have *no pretence to be*, and usurp the rural food of syllabub ... The dairymaids wear large hoops and velvet hoods instead of the round *tight petticoat* and *straw hat*, and there is as much foppery introduced in the food as in the dress,--the *pure simplicity of ye country is quite lost!*

Mary was very interested in botany and was always on the lookout for new plants, whether she was taking a short walk or making a journey of several miles. Wherever she went she liked to examine the plants closely and she picked out the details which enabled her to create such realistic designs in her needlework. Mary describes a little walk with her god-daughter Sally Chapone, daughter of her childhood friend Sarah Kirkham:

Sally and I grumble a little at the weather, which prevents us going among the *herbs and flowers* to find out some that may be rare to you. There grows a little pale purple aster, with a yellow thrum (very like the *asterattims*), in all the borders near the lakes and sea. *Matfellow* and *figwort* flourish here remarkably, and the purple vetch and eyebright soften the golden furs, and glowing heath. A poetical pen might have done their beauties justice.

Sometimes there were more adventurous walks and picnics: `According to the country phrase, yesterday Sally and I *fetched* a charming walk at least six miles! We set out at a quarter after ten with bags and baskets to store our curiosities in.'

Mary was not content just to admire the beauty of the plants: she also wanted to know all about them and had her botany books at hand. On a hot August day in 1763 she wrote: `Sally and I saunter abroad a good deal in the cool part of the day, bring home handfuls of wild plants and search for their names and virtues in Hill--but he is not half so intelligible as old Gerard.'

In September 1758 the Delanys and Sally set out for a visit to the Giant's Causeway staying with friends on the way. They travelled in `a train of two chaises and two cars with us, Mr Bayly and Mr Mathew, one of D.D.'s curates, on horseback, and our sumpter-car. From Mount Panther to Ballaneinch (7 miles) is the rudest country I ever saw--rough hills, mountains, and bogs, but some of them covered with furze in blossom, heath, and thyme.' They arrived at the Causeway in a coach drawn by six horses, lent them while their own were resting and, uncharacteristically, Mary seems unable to find words to describe the scene: `I am now quite at a loss to give you an idea of it; it is so different from anything I ever saw.' They proceeded along a precipitous path which 'led us a great way about, and was so frightful that we could not look about us'. Likening the rock formations to three amphitheatres, she continued:

This third amphitheatre contains the greatest quantity of the pillars, some so very exact and smooth that you would imagine they were all chiselled with the greatest care. After gazing, wondering, and I may say *adoring* the wondrous Hand that formed this amazing work, we began to find ourselves fatigued. Our gentlemen found out a well-sheltered place, where we sat very commodiously by a well (called the Giant's Well).

There they picnicked on cold mutton and tongue after a walk of three hours. Out came Mary's sketch-book and pencil to record this strange upheaval of nature; her verbal sketch to Anne continues:

Whilst we were at our repast our attendants were differently grouped, at some distance along the left hand the servants, a little below us the women and children that gathered sea-weed and shells for us, about twelve in number with very little drapery; on the right hand men that were our guides of different ages, seated on the points of the rocks, whose figures were *very droll*, and I believe we ourselves were no less so; eagerly devouring our morsel, and every now and then a violent exclamation of wonder at some new observation. We sat just facing a most aspiring pyramidal hill, and whilst we were there a shepherd drove his flocks to the summit of it, and they looked like as many little white specks; the shepherd stood for some minutes on the highest point of the rocks.

It was a memorable day only slightly clouded by the Dean's shin becoming inflamed after a nasty graze some days earlier, but it was soon healed by the application of Turner's cerate.

Throughout their absence from each other Mary was consulted and kept informed by Anne of family affairs in England. Anne Dewes was living at Wellesbourne, Warwickshire and now had a family of three boys and a girl, and Mary regularly gave advice on the upbringing of her nephews and niece. On the matter of employing a nurse, Mary warned: 'a deaf nurse is not to be endured; the poor dear may make his little moans, and have a thousand uneasinesses that she will hear nothing of.'

Mary was particularly anxious about the upbringing of her niece:

I cannot think it necessary to the accomplishment of a young lady that she should be early and frequently produced in public, and I should rather see a little awkward bashfulness, than a daring and forward genteelness! Good company and good conversation I should wish to have my niece introduced into as soon as she can speak and understand, but for all public places till *after fifteen* (except a play or oratorio) she should not know what they are, and then *very rarely*, and *only* with her mother or aunt. I believe you and I are perfectly well agreed on these points, and I am sure the general behaviour of the young people will not encourage us to alter our scheme. I think all public water-drinking places *more pernicious* than a masquerade, and that I have *not a very good* opinion of.

A warning is given that her niece should not be led astray by her own good looks:

If Mary proves handsome... it is vain to hope that she can be kept *ignorant of it*; all that the wisest friend can do for her is to teach her how little value beauty is--how few years it lasts--how liable to be tarnished, and if it has its advantages, what a train of inconveniences also attend it; that it requires a double portion of discretion to guard it, and much more caution and restraint, than one who is not handsome. Beauty where there is a beam of light to show the virtues of the mind is a blessing to be wished for, but if its allurements *only discover folly and sin*, it is a *curse indeed!*

To emphasise this point Mary wrote to her niece when she was only nine years old: 'the graces of the mind will shine when those of the person decay--and are therefore worth more care.'

Discipline was considered by her to be an important ingredient for happiness, and she thought parents should be in complete control of their children:

An *early obedience* saves an infinite chagrins to parents and children, and a very little experience, must teach us that the most wretched beings are those who have no command of their passions, and *that foundation* must be laid very early, and may be done so cautiously as hardly to be perceived by the little pupil till it gains such ground as to become a habit.

Mary encourages Anne in meting out suitable punishment to her children, including the use of birch twigs: 'I think you have exerted the motherly authority very heroically and I don't doubt but he will bless you in time for the *little smart* he has received from your hands.'

When Mary Dewes was six years old a young gentlewoman was employed to teach her plain needlework and to progress later to fine linen and laces, and to teach good manners. 'I am much pleased with your account of Charlotte Herbert; those gentle refined manners are very desirable; they accustom children betimes to civility, and when they have it not in their nursery they are apt to fly out in the parlour and drawing-room.'

Nowadays when so many minor ailments can be cured by easily obtained proprietary ointments or medicines, it is difficult to imagine what it must have been like to be unwell in an age when there was very little free medical care, particularly in the country districts where physicians were few and far between. Many concocted their own recipes, which if thought to be efficacious would be passed on from one to the other. From Mary's pen we hear of a cure for coughing that had afflicted her niece:

Two or three snails boiled in her barley-water, or tea-water, or whatever she drinks, might be of great service to her; taken in time they have done *wonderful cures*--she must know nothing of it--they give no manner of taste. It would be best nobody should know it but yourself, and I should imagine 6 or 8 boiled in a quart of water strained off and put into a bottle, adding a spoonful or two of that to *every liquid* she takes. They must be fresh done every 2 or 3 days, otherwise they grow too thick.

Some of the recommended prescriptions seem very drastic; when Bernard Dewes, as a young child, was unwell, Mary wrote: 'I am told by a very wise woman, that quick-silver-water is the most effectual remedy for worms that can be taken, and must be continued constantly for a year together, and the elixir may be taken at times. A pound of quick-silver boiled in a gallon of water till half the water is consumed away to be constantly drank at his meals, or whenever he is dry.' When Court Dewes was about two years old Anne was advised:

Meat should now be given three times a week and pudding and panada the other days. Sometimes sheeps totters [sic] which are both innocent and nourishing. Make him to be jumbled about a good deal for fear of falling into rickets, and throw away his wormwood draughts, for they signify nothing for an age. Have attention to him about worms which are the cause of most children's illness.

Mary's continuing interest in Anne's children and her frequent offers of advice do not seem to have caused any offence; indeed Anne recognised and valued her sister's wisdom. Mary was a shrewd judge of character, and was astute enough to recognise her own failings: 'We create the greatest part of our miseries by the uneasiness of our own tempers. I never had one to vex me extremely, but when it was over, and I have examined the cause of it strictly, I have been convinced I had no reason for half the unhappiness I had felt.'

Mary moved in the leading ranks of society, yet skilfully managed to avoid the pitfalls of the '*beau monde*'. She enjoyed life to its full, but was at the same time aware of the over-emphasis on material values which could bring so much unhappiness. Throughout her life her deeply-held religious beliefs lent her a serenity and confidence that are reflected in her words and her work. She was convinced that life after death would bring greater joy than life on earth. At the age of fifty-two she expressed surprise at:

... the horror that most people have of dying, so that instead of preparing them-selves for an event that must come, they drive the thought away as far as they can, not considering how much more dreadful that must make the fatal hour when it arrives. Amongst the numberless mercies of God, surely none is greater than the *gradual* weaning us from the world, which everybody that lives rationally must be sensible of. A strong desire of living and enjoying the world is implanted in us; without it we could not support the thousand shocks we meet with in our progress; but as years increase upon us, that desire lessens; we see how transient and unsatisfactory most of our pursuits and enjoyments are; we feel that our

perfect happiness cannot be made out in this life, and that perfect joys are reserved for another! Why should we then be terrified by a dissolution (if we endeavour to perform our duty, and not neglect the true means of salvation), that is to make us for ever happy, and open the doors of ever-lasting life?

Of attendance at church she wrote: 'Of all our mutual employments none can give us so much satisfaction as that in which we have just been engaged; and through the tender mercies of God, it may be the means of our meeting where we shall never more be separated.'

Whenever possible the Delanys drove into Dublin to attend concerts in aid of charities. At this time some of the notable hospitals were being built. Amongst them was the Lying-In Hospital, founded by the physician Dr Mosse. Funds depended on the profits of these concerts given in the great gardens behind the buildings, where the finest singers from Europe sang in the Rotunda. In an attempt to encourage more subscribers to his list, Dr Mosse organised a free breakfast together with a concert. The Delanys, who were keen to hear the music, went along, but the lure of a free breakfast drew large crowds which evidently had no intention of subscribing. Later, in the evening, the Delanys recalled the events of the day as a 'matter of mirth', as she describes to Anne:

The music allured us ... and with some difficulty we squeezed into the room which is 60 feet long, and got up to the breakfast-table which had been well pillaged; but the fragments of cakes, bread and butter, silver coffee pots, and tea kettles without number, and all sorts of spring flowers strewed on the table, shewed it had been set out plentifully and elegantly. The company indeed looked as if their principal design of coming was for breakfast. When they had satisfied their hunger the remains were taken away, and such torrent of rude mob (for they deserved no better name) *crowded in* that I and my company *crowded out* as fast as we could, glad we escaped in whole skins, and resolving never more to add to the throng of *gratis* entertainments. We got away with all speed, without hearing a note of the music.

Any music by Handel was a special delight to them: 'Last Monday the Dean and I went to the rehearsal of the Messiah, for the relief of poor debtors.' This oratorio was first performed in Dublin in April 1742, when Mrs Gibber, sister of Dr Arne, sang with such feeling that Dr Delany is said to have exclaimed: 'Woman for this, be all thy sins forgiven.'

Not all concerts were so well received, however, and an eighteenth-century audience could be quite ruthless in their treatment of any performer who failed to please. Mary describes a concert given by the eminent though elderly composer, Francesco Geminiani, of his own works, which she attended with the Duchess of Bedford, the Lady Lieutenant, and a small party:

The music began at half an hour after seven; I was extremely pleased with it; there is a spirit of harmony and prettiness of fancy which no other music (beside our dear Handel's) has. He played one of his own solos most wonderfully well for a man of eighty-six years of age, and one of his fingers hurt; but the sweetness and melody of the tone of the fiddle, his fine and elegant taste, and the perfection of *time and tune* made full amends for some failures in his play occasioned by the weakness of his hand; and his clever management of passages too difficult for him to execute with the spirit he used to do was very surprising. On the whole I was greatly entertained, though it is the fashion to shrug up the shoulders and say '*poor old man*' with impertinent etceteras. I felt *quite peevish* at their remarks. The great ladies and their attendant peers were so impatient to get to *their cards* and to their dancing, that a message was sent to Geminiani to '*shorten the musical entertainment*'. I was quite provoked, the concert was not above one hour: I could have sat three hours more with pleasure to have heard it. I have invited Geminiani to come and see me and hope to hear this music some way or other.

There were other social gatherings with entertainment on a flamboyant scale. Mary described one such entertainment arranged by Lord Belfield, their step son-in-law:

... the room represents a wood ... at one end is a portico on Doric pillars, lighted by baskets of flowers, the candles *green wax*, so that nothing appears but the flame ... from the portico to the end of the stage is diversified by rocks, trees and caves, very well represented ... a jessamine bower, a Gothic temple, (which is to be the sideboard) trees

interspersed, the whole terminates with a grotto extremely well express; three rustick arches, set off with ivy, moss, icicles, and all the rocky appurtenances; the musicians to be placed in the grotto dressed like shepherds and shepherdesses ... the trees are *real trees* with *artificial leaves*, but when all is done it will be too much crowded to be agreeable, and most dangerous if a spark of a candle should fall on any of the scenery, which is all painted paper!

The arrangements for providing refreshments seem to have been as original as the decor: 'If tea, coffee, or chocolate were wanting, you held your cup to a leaf of a tree, and it was filled; and whatever you wanted to eat or drink was immediately found on a rock, or on a branch, or in the hollow of a tree, the waiters were all in whimsical dress...' Naturally, such an extravagant show could not please all: '...a few dissenters have the assurance to say, it was no better than a poppet-show.'

Gardens and their lay-outs continued to be one of Mary Delany's chief interests, and no opportunity was lost to visit and comment upon them:

Today we dine at Lord Chief Justice Singleton's at Drumcondra. He has given Mr Bristowe *full dominion* over house and gardens, and like a conceited connoisseur he is doing *strange things* building an absurd room, turning fine wild evergreens *out of the garden, cutting down, full grown elms and planting twigs!* D.D. has no patience with him, and I shall be under some difficulty today to know *how* to commend *anything*, which is what I wish to do.

She had firm ideas on what was acceptable in landscaping, and strict aesthetic requirements. She would have nothing to do with 'virtuoso epiduroso' improvements, such as Mr Bristowe had carried out in his 'conceit', yet she appreciated the charming fancies of Lord Orrery, Pope's friend at Caledon, Co. Tyrone, where he had been planting and landscaping extensively in a style much influenced by Pope's Twickenham (a style that had influenced Dr Delany too). She was intrigued by the hermit's root-house with pebble floor. Inside, on a wooden table, were placed a manuscript, a pair of spectacles, a leather bottle, an hour glass, and mathematical instruments; there was a shelf of books, wooden platters and bowls and a couch of matting completed the imaginary hermit's cultural and practical needs. This was acceptable because it did not interfere with nature, but was a terminal point in a walk around his house taking in a series of gardens, including an orchard, a flower-garden, a physic garden, and a kitchen garden: '. . . I never saw so pretty a *whim* so *thoroughly well* executed.' Mary was also interested in commenting upon the owners:

Orrery is *more agreeable* than he used to be; he has laid aside the ceremonious stiffness that was a great disadvantage to him. He is very well-bred and entertaining; his lady (whose fortune was near 3000 pounds a year), is very plain in her person and manner, but to make amends for that she is very sensible, unaffected, good humoured, and obliging.

Many eighteenth-century hosts enjoyed entertaining house-parties, and showing their guests their newly landscaped estates. Mary's description of their visit to Lord Hillsborough's gives a glimpse of such a party, which of course, included the inevitable tour round the garden.

Lord Hillsborough is very well bred, sensible and entertaining, and nothing could be more polite that he was to all his company. Sally and I being the only women, we had the principal share of his address; he is handsome and genteel ... we were twelve in company ... Lord Hillsborough was very merry and said a great many lively and comical things ... After the ladies had given their toasts they were desired to '*command the house*'; the hint was taken and I said I would upon that liberty go and prepare the tea-table for the gentlemen. Sally and I took a little step out into the garden to look at the prospect, but the weather soon drove us back. Candles lighted, tea-table and gentlemen soon came together. I made the tea. Cribbage was proposed, and I consented to be of the party, thinking it would be some relief to Lord Hillsborough; at ten we went to supper, at eleven to bed; met at nine the next morning at breakfast.

In spite of recent rain which deterred some of the party, Mary, who was not so easily dissuaded, accompanied her host round his park to see 'the improvements, a gravel path two Irish miles long, the ground laid out in very good taste, some wood, some nurseries; shrubs and flowers diversify the scene; a pretty piece of water with an island in it, and all the views pleasant.'

Their travels around England gave them welcome opportunities to see for themselves examples of landscaping by Capability Brown, of whom they had heard so much. While the Delanys were staying at Bath in 1760 for the Dean to take the waters, Mary visited Longleat. She was amazed to note:

There is not much alteration in the house, *but the gardens are no more!* They are succeeded by a fine lawn, a serpentine river, wooded hills, gravel paths meandering round a shrubbery all *modernised* by the ingenious Mr Brown! There are schemes for further improvements... Lady Weymouth carried Miss Chapone and me all over the park, and shewed us the menagerie; I never saw such a quantity of gold pheasants; they turn them wild into the woods in hopes of breeding there.

On passing Lord Cornbury's estate near Burford Mary wrote:

After a good breakfast of caudle we set forward for Cornbury, and sent a messenger forward to ask leave to go through the park, and to say if my Lord Cornbury was alone we would breakfast with him; he sent back an invitation to us to dine as well as breakfast, and entertained us with showing us his house, pictures, and park ... his house lies finely to the park and is most charming, and kept as nice as a garden, and a gravel path quite round it, that you may walk in any weather. The ground lies most advantageously and is planted with great skill and great variety of fine trees, some thick wood, some clumps, in short nature and art have done their best to make it beautiful.

The practical side of the estates that they visited interested her too:

Thursday spent the day at Castle Wellan, Mr Annesley's, and walked two or three miles before dinner, saw all his farming affairs, which are indeed very fine. Three large courts; round the first, which is arched round a kind of piazza, are houses for all his carriages, and over them his granaries; the next court are stables and cow-houses, and over them haylofts; the third court two such barns as I never saw, *floored with oak*, and finished in the most convenient manner for the purposes of winnowing.

She was equally impressed at the unsophisticated scene beside a salmon-leap on the river Liffey when she and the Dean called on Mr and Mrs Law at their bleachyard: 'They have a pretty cabin there, and gave us some fine trout caught out of their own brook just at their door ... it was so new a scene ... the men at work laying out the cloth &c on the grass full in our view was very pretty; the machine for rinsing the clothes is very curious.'

As always, Mary kept herself informed on the events of the day. The political turmoils of the time also feature in her letters. When, on his way to Derby in 1745, the Young Pretender, Bonnie Prince Charlie, invaded England from Scotland his army passed close to Calwich on the Staffordshire border, where her brother Bernard lived. In December Mary wrote in a state of alarm from Ireland: 'Many flying reports we have had of the entire defeat of the rebels ... the rumour of one day is to be contradicted by the next ... I had terrified myself extremely on his account; I could not think of him surrounded by those desperate rebels without fearing the worst that could happen.' But Bernard was safe with Anne at Gloucester. The war with the French also brought worries. On 14 February 1758 Mary wrote of Colonel Clive's victory at Plassey in India: 'Glorious news come today of Clive's victory. He shames all our generals.' The battle had in fact, taken place in June of the previous year; it had taken eight months for the news to travel by ship round the Cape of Good Hope. Two years later Ireland was threatened with invasion and in November 1759 we find the

Delanys thinking of economies: 'We determined to go to the Birthday, but hearing so much said of the *intended invasion*, on our return home (D.D.) resolved against it as an unnecessary expense at a time when money may prove very scarce; I hope the alarm will prove nothing.' Four months later the threat appears to have receded: 'We are all joy and transport at the taking of three French ships ... we are now, thank *God* restored to a peaceful state in *this kingdom*, and I wish the peace were more universal.'