

CHAP. iv.

Of Vraic. The seasons of gathering it, & y^e severall uses of it.

But because I haue made mençon of Vraic, which is a thing peculiar to these Islands, it will not be from my purpose to treat here of y^e propertyes thereof. They who haue walked about y^e Island must needs haue taken notice that it is euery where, but espally from Montorgueil to St^t Heleryes Mont, enuiron'd with rocks, some flatt, others steepe & pointed, some hid at high water, others allwayes aboue water both farre & neere the shore, soe thicke that many times a Cart cannot passe betwixt them, from the shore to the lowest water marcke & as farre againe beyond it, which is a space soe vast, that one can hardly conceiue it, who hath not ben eye witness. These Rocks, though bare of all earthy matter, & cleane wash't by the continuall beating of y^e Sea, produce a weed called by the Inhabitants Vraic & in ancient Records *Veriscum*. This weed groweth there as thicke as grasse in a meadowe, and much more, espally in moist yeares, which is an argum^t that the raine as well as seawater contributes to its growth. There are two kinds of it, y^e round, & y^e flatt leau'd. The first is more drye & approaching the nature of wood; & therefore it is vsed for firing, & maketh as hot a fire, as that which is made of Sea-coales, but not soe lasting: after it is burn't, the ashes of it serue of an excellent manure for the ground to produce either corne or grasse: for if you sowe it vpon yo^r grasse, about Christmas, or rather before, you shall easily discerne in y^e Spring y^e place where it fell from y^e other where there was none. The same ashes are vsed for making of soape:

& if you continue y^e fire two or three dayes, seruing it still with more fewell, it will growe into a lump as firme as glasse, & be glazed all ouer, whereby it appeareth that it may be vsefully applyed that waye. This sort of Vraic is not cutt down till about midso^mer: for then it hath attained to some growth & firmenesse: but I am perswaded that if the people could lett it continue two or three yeares without cutting, it would become exceedingly better for all vses. About the Termes end, & before Hay-haruest y^e people are gⁿally permitted by y^e Court to attend that occupation; which before they may not doe, without danger of a fine. A fortnight y^e permission continueth; & it is scarce credible how many a Thousand Akers of y^e sayd Vraic is cut downe from y^e rocks all about the Island, with short smooth sickles, farre different from those wee reape wth, & caryed off to bee dryed vpon y^e Shoares: where being spread it is quickly parched by y^e sunne, & there by drying diminisheth to the third part, both for waight & quantity: soe y^t three Cartloades of green shrinke into one of drye. The other kind of flatt leaued Vraic is more slimye & fatter then the former; & therefore rotteth easily, imbibes into the ground, & keepes it fresh & moist during y^e heate & drought of su^mer, & soe is more propitious to corne & other seeds, yea to plants allsoe, as is demonstrable by experience the surest argument. This sort is not found soe neere the shore as the other, but in deeper water, and thereby is more difficult & chargeable to drawe off in Carts. But there is a remedy to that: for it is easily come by in boates, euen vp^o such rockes which stand furthest off, & are neuer quite cleare of water & therefore inaccessible to Carts. This sort is of more accompt with y^e Islanders, because it serues of manure for halfe y^e Island at least: & therefore in y^e gathering thereof noe anticipation is tolerated; nor is it euer by ancient Tradition permitted to be cutt in y^e moneth of January, without vrgent necessity, nor protracted beyond y^e first day of Febr^y, & y^e permission lastoth till S^t. Georges day; during which time there is a perfect Truce from Ordinary Lawesuits, but not from those quarells which the communion of that weede produceth.

Besides these two Seasons for cutting of Vraic, it is to be noted that at any other times, espally after stormes, y^e Sea casteth greate quantities of it to the seuerall coasts of the Island, which is for y^e most part taken vp, & applyed either to firing or manure, according as the season permitts. But it may not bee omitted, that in y^e West coast, chiefly in S^t Ouens Bay the Tyde bringeth thereof soe prodigious a throng, that the people of that great Parish & of two or three more next to it, haue euery one of them enough to lay it vpon their grounds as thick as y^e spade or plough can turne and couer with conueniency; & is the Cause why that Canton otherwise barren produceth more plenty & better Corno then the best grounds in other parts of y^e Island. In diuiding of this Vraic there is seldome any dispute; because there are two sworne officers in euery Coast appointed by y^e Court to attend vpon y^e place who are to see that every one, though but a stripling, haue his due proportion, according to the rule established of old in y^e behalfe. This sort is deemed by most men y^e best of all other, both for fewell & for manure. That which comes in May & June or after they drye, & then put it vp in greate Stacks made sure against y^e raine, till plowing time, & then spread & turne it vp, after the first dewe hath sufficiently moistened it. Another part they cary home & keepe it for their prouision & burne it, with y^e help of ferne, brake, firzes & such slight fire-stuff. The vse of this Vraic is such that in y^e sayd Parish of S^t Ouen there are many fields which otherwise of litle value are soe fertile that they equall in worth & proffitt y^e richest grounds, & many that haue ben (by y^e help of this manure) plowed euery yeare constantly, for soe many generations past, that there is none liuing that can say he euer sawe them rest one yeare onely. And it is supposed that the plenty of y^e sayd dung is y^e cause that the Turnops which the sayd parish affords in great quantity haue y^e reputation to be y^e best, y^e sweetest & dryest in all y^e Island.