

Binn's Ireland 1837

*The miseries and beauties of Ireland*

Jonathan Binns

1837

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*I am happy to add my testimony to that of other travellers in favour of the hospitality and kindness of the Irish in all parts of the country through which I have had an opportunity of travelling : but it is the most remarkable among the poor. In the hundreds of miserable cabins which I entered, a seat, if there was one, was always at my service, and if the inmates did not invite me to share the best they possessed, it was from diffidence alone, for they always seemed gratified if I took a potato from the bowl uninvited. Indeed, I invariably experienced the utmost civility, accompanied with a courtesy of manner which would have done honour to a higher rank of life. The proverbial shrewdness of reply is truly astonishing ; and I may here mention, that I do not remember a single instance in which there occurred the slightest reservation in answering my questions, whatever the nature of them might be. On their part the greatest inquisitiveness prevailed. If we met a man in the fields or at his house, and entered into conversation by asking him the way, he would immediately inquire the nature of our business ; how far we had come ; where from ; where we were going ; where we lived ; and whether we were going to do any thing for Ireland ?*

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Swords—Round Towers—Drogheda—Dundalk—Newry—Post-chaise travelling—Hedges of furze—Rathfriland—Hilltown—Lords Downshire, Annesley, and Bangor—Mourne Mountains—12th of July, and Orange demonstration—Friends' Meeting- house—Rathfriland—Dresses of the women—Rostrevor—Mountains of Carlingford—Warrenspoint—Kilkeel—An Irish dinner—Cock and Hen Mountains—Peaceable character of the people.

THE Board having now decided upon the routes of the Assistant Commissioners, we left Dublin for the Barony of Iveagh, in the southern part of the county of Down. The first place of any note on our road was the village of Swords, about nine miles north of Dublin. I was here gratified, for the first time, with a sight of one of the pillar or round towers for which Ireland is celebrated. Of the antiquity and objects of these singular structures, of which something will be said in a subsequent part of this work, different writers have given very different accounts. Drogheda, situated on the Boyne, in the counties of Meath and Louth, and distinguished for its gallant defence against the Irish, under Sir Phelim O'Neill, in 1641, and the cruel siege by Cromwell, in 1649, when he put nearly all the garrison to the sword, was the next object of particular interest. Cromwell's letter to the Hon. Wm. Lenthall, Speaker of the English Parliament, describes a course of barbarous murder and cruelty pursued under the pretext of religion over a party of soldiers who defended a tower till hunger compelled them to surrender. He writes thus : " I believe all the friars but two were knocked on the head promiscuously." The cruelties exercised in Drogheda for five days after the town was taken, exceeded any thing before heard of, yet Parliament applauded the bloody slaughter as an act of mercy and warning to others. Near the Boyne, about two miles from Drogheda, stands the obelisk erected in honour of King William's victory in 1690. The brave Schomberg was here killed by an accidental shot from one of his own men. To the westward, the pillar-tower of Monasterboise is discerned. This tower, according to Ledwich, is 110 feet high, and 15 feet

in circumference, and the walls are 3 feet 6 inches thick. Drogheda is well known for its linen manufacture, and has a population of upwards of 17,000 ; the houses in the town are of brick, and wear a respectable appearance, but lines of wretched cabins may be seen in the suburbs.

Proceeding northwards, on a flat uninteresting road, the next place of importance is Dundalk, the immediate neighbourhood of which is woody and of great beauty, having the Bay of Dundalk on the right. During the time of the English Pale, [1] Dundalk was surrounded by castles and strongholds of the English barons. Its fortifications were destroyed in 1641.

We travelled by coach as far as Newry, a town of considerable trade, and from which much of the agricultural produce of this part of Ireland is exported. At Newry, also, many emigrants embark to America. To Rathfriland, in the county of Down, we took a post-chaise, a dirty, damp, ill-shapen, rattling vehicle, that produced an insurmountable dislike for Irish post-chaise travelling ; and it was the first and last we ever entered. When we should have started, the landlord and waiters, knowing the inefficient state of both the equipage and its cattle, busied themselves, some at the wheels and others at the horses, in trying to effect a progressive movement. At length they succeeded ; but frequent stoppages took place up the hill on leaving the town, and the driver had occasionally to alight and tie up his harness. We passed a few old castles, and the sea was occasionally seen. As we proceeded, I remarked that some of the hedges or fences were of furze, not a continuous line, but straggling, and that others consisted of a high bank of earth only ; whilst some land under crops of wheat was left open to the road. The growing wheat, oats, and barley, appeared good, and we observed some beautiful patches of flax. On reaching Rathfriland, the only inn we could have stopped at was filled with soldiers ; we therefore drove to Hilltown, three miles to the south, where we found a most comfortable inn, the Downshire Arms, kept by Mr. Cowan, formerly a favourite servant of the Marquis of Downshire. The inn and village are the property of the Marquis, who has valuable estates in this county. The inns belonging to this nobleman, in various parts of the country, I was informed, are neat, clean, and comfortable, and he selects as conductors men of respectable character who know their business. The Marquis deserves the gratitude of the neighbourhood for his exertions to improve the cottages, and to increase the general comforts of the people. As a proof of the confidence reposed in him, I may state, that though he does not grant leases, the tenant-right or good-will of a small farm, when a tenant leaves it, will fetch £12 or £14 per Irish acre, the new tenant having also to pay the usual rent of £1 per acre for moderate land. The people on his farms are comparatively peaceable, industrious, and happy. Lord Annesley is also spoken of as a good landlord, and adds to his other virtues that of residence. Lord Bangor, another resident landlord, has also the distinction of bearing a similar good character. Sharman Crawford has reduced his rents, and is a good landlord.

The view of the Mourne Mountains, with Hilltown in the foreground, has a very picturesque effect. Amongst these mountains the river Barrow takes its rise, and flows through the county of Armagh to the celebrated Lough Neagh. On arriving at Hilltown, we sent out our notices of the examination which was to take place at Rathfriland. To these notices we attached the great seal, which gave them a wonderful authority in the eyes of the people. The day after our arrival, Sunday, the 12th of July, was the anniversary of the celebrated victory gained by King William “ of glorious memory ” over the Irish at the battle of the Boyne ; and in order to prevent mischievous consequences from the exultation which the Protestants are in the habit of exhibiting on this noted day, soldiers were posted at different stations in the neighbourhood—one company at Hilltown, another at Rathfriland ; and the police had particular orders to suppress any demonstration of political feeling in either party. Capt. Crofton of Hilltown, superintendent of police in that district, found it necessary to disperse a number of people who had met on the banks of the Bann for a sham fight, and he narrowly escaped the attacks of the populace. On my way to the Friends’

Meeting-house, I observed, floating on the church steeple, a large orange flag emblazoned with the figure of King William ; all was bustle and irritation, the town resembling a disturbed hive of bees. On returning through the town, I found the military occupying that portion of the market-place which lies between the court-house, the church, and the post-office ; the people were very tumultuous—bodies of men rushed violently in and out of the church, preventing the performance of religious service, and the soldiers were awfully prepared for action. The minister, fearful of consequences, requested Captain Crofton not to take down the flag till after the congregation had separated ; and Captain Crofton, equally apprehensive of disastrous results, declined to interfere unless the clergyman consented to its immediate removal—fearing that the opposite party would assemble in the interim, and that loss of life might ensue ; the gaudy banner was accordingly suffered to remain on the steeple, to the annoyance and irritation of the opposite party, and to the entire stoppage of divine service. To suppress such demonstrations of party feeling as the above, is one of the main causes of the demand for military aid in this part of Ireland. Had no orange flag been hoisted, the sabbath would most probably have been passed in peace. Some of the other places of worship had garlands of orange lilies and other orange emblems entwined about the gate-pillars ; many of the houses and cottages wore similar indications of the creed of their inhabitants ; and even the trees near the road-side were decked with flowers of the obnoxious colour interwoven in the branches. I looked in vain for emblems of the other party.

The Friends' Meeting-house mentioned before, is an unassuming building, at the lower end of the town, with a grave-yard of considerable dimensions planted round with trees. The exterior of the building wore an appearance of neatness, with which the inside did not correspond : its dilapidated condition marked the humble pretensions of the few of this persuasion who remain within its circle.

In passing through the north country afterwards, I observed in many of the gardens clusters of orange lilies, ostentatiously displayed by the road-side. Christianity teaches us to avoid giving offence, and to do unto others as we would have them to do to us. If the mass of the people are to be taught a better system of religion, a better example should be set before them. To vex and persecute those from whose religious faith we differ, is the surest mode of causing them to cling the closer to it, and gives them good reason to think the worse of us and the religion we profess. Let us rather enter into the feeling described by the poet :—

“ Let not this weak, unknowing hand  
Presume thy bolts to throw,  
And deal damnation round the land  
On each I judge thy foe.”

Let us rather learn to act upon that kinder system taught by Christianity :—

“ Thus artists melt the sullen ore of lead  
With heaping coals of fire upon its head ;  
In the kind warmth the metal learns to glow,  
And, loose from dross, the silver runs below.”

The fable of the trial of strength between the sun and the wind aptly illustrates this kind and persuasive manner, in preference to a rude and boisterous attack.

Rathfriland and many of the neighbouring villages are built upon regular round hills, and being conspicuous from a great distance, give to the country an inhabited and civilized appearance ; disappointment, however, is the consequence of a nearer approach. There are,

indeed, few large towns or villages in Ireland, some parts of which, or whose suburbs, do not contain the most wretched hovels, inhabited by a sallow, squalid, and miserable population, subsisting on bad food and surrounded by filth.

On returning from Rathfriland I observed a multitude of people, who filled the road for a considerable distance. On a nearer approach they proved to be a Catholic congregation leaving their chapel at Hilltown. The white and scarlet dresses of the women, shining brightly in the sun, and backed by the scenery of Hilltown with its noble mountains in the distance, composed a gay and busy picture of indescribable interest. The women are very partial to showy colours, particularly scarlet. Bonnets are never seen, but the caps are very white, with broad borders ornamented with gay ribbons and flowers. It was an imposing scene, and on meeting them I desired Pat to let his horse move slowly, to give me an opportunity of closer inspection. The men had nothing attractive about them, and the dresses of the women, which assumed so splendid an appearance at a distance, were discovered, when closely viewed, to consist of anything but costly materials.

The neat village of Rostrevor, which I visited on the 13th, is five miles south of Hilltown, and lies in a beautiful verdant vale, close to Carlingford Bay. It is surrounded by high mountains, and possesses the peculiarity of being ornamented with noble trees—an advantage but seldom met with in Ireland. Rostrevor deservedly ranks high in the scale of Irish scenery. The houses have an unusual respectability of appearance, and nothing is seen of the appalling poverty so frequently encountered. The mountains of Carlingford, south of the bay, are upwards of 1900 feet high, and liberally supply the southern part of the county of Down with limestone of good quality, which is brought over the lough in small vessels, carrying eleven tons each. One ton of stone is said to produce five barrels of lime (four bushels to the barrel) and twenty-five to thirty barrels are used to the acre. Some of the farmers fetch the limestone to burn with turf on their farms. They are aware that, by purchasing it burnt, it would be lighter of carriage, but in a busy season they frequently cannot get the lime, and lose their journey by returning without it ; by securing the stone, they can burn it at their leisure.

Warrenspoint, near Rostrevor, is a well-known port, from which great numbers of emigrants embarked, two or three years ago, for America, and where large numbers of cattle and quantities of agricultural produce are regularly shipped for Liverpool. Its name is derived from its being the site of a rabbit-warren.

Along the shore of the Lough, for some distance, lies the road to Kilkeel. The ride exhibits at intervals varieties of mountain and lake scenery, richly interspersed with wood. Mourne Park, the seat of Lord Kilmorey, who is the proprietor of Kilkeel, is seen to the left. At Kilkeel, which is in the direct road from Rostrevor to Newcastle, I walked down to the shore, nearly a mile distant. This coast is remarkable for the singular form of the stones, which are principally granite : they are egg-shaped or elliptical. I afterwards saw some of them laid in rows in the yards and pleasure-grounds of Tullymore Park, near Newcastle, the seat of Lord Roden.

At the inn we were indulged with a specimen of an Irish dinner. A woman waited at table without shoes or stockings, and, judging from appearances, the necessary act of washing her hands and feet had long been dispensed with ; this, added to moderate cooking, considerably abated a good appetite.

The road from Hilltown to Rostrevor is barren and devoid of beauty, with the exception of the view of the Mourne Mountains and the descent into Rostrevor. These mountains, beautiful from any point of view, are truly magnificent when seen from Hilltown. They are all

composed of granite. The Eagle Mountain, pre-eminently conspicuous from its bold and indented top, is upwards of 2,000 feet high, and Slieve Donard, near Newcastle, is 2,796 feet above the level of the sea, and is the highest mountain in the county.

The ride to Hilltown by the pass of the Mourne Mountains, and through what is called the Deer Meadows, affords an opportunity of seeing the various bases of this cluster, and gives a comparatively easy access to their summits, whose white glistening appearance at a distance leads one to suppose that they are interspersed with large masses of white spar. This is peculiarly the case with the Cock and Hen Mountains when seen from Hilltown, but on examination it proves to be the effect of the sun upon the small particles of quartz and felspar decomposed by exposure to the weather. These mountains supply the Kilkeel river, which enters the sea at Kilkeel. Many small sheep pasture upon their slopes, and I observed two cabins with their small plots of potato ground. On my return from Kilkeel I walked alone, late in the evening, over the summits of some of the mountains as far as Hilltown, a distance of several miles, and though the country was then in a disturbed state, met with every civility. I feel confident indeed that I could have gone anywhere in the neighbourhood, day or night, without interruption, and with even less risk than would be incurred, at the same time, in most parts of England.

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Examination of Upper Iveagh—Extent of the Barony—Number of the agricultural labourers—linen trade—Cause of its depression—Wages—Mode of keeping accounts—Employment of women and children—Pigs—Cottier tenants and landholders—Expenditure of an Irish family—Clothing of the labourers—Food—Usurers—Potatoes—Cottages—Want of fuel—Conacre—Payment of rents—Ejection—Early and improvident marriages—Sub-division of farms—High prices for tenant-right—Small holdings and their advantages—Rotation of crops—English and Scotch farmers—Absenteeism—Tenancy at will—Lord Annesley.

OUR public examination respecting the Barony of Upper Iveagh commenced in the Court-house of Rathfriland, on the 14th. We had the attendance of the police in uniform, and many soldiers under arms, whom the authorities thought it desirable to retain in order to preserve the peace ; not, however, on our account, but because the Orange party were still parading about the country in cars with banners and music. The clergy, magistrates, and other gentlemen—the tradesmen and farmers, both Protestants and Catholics—and persons of all religious persuasions and politics—gave their evidence candidly and without fear. The kindest feeling appeared to prevail when one person thought it necessary to correct another.

This barony contains 159,038 acres. [2] No evidence was obtained on which reliance could be placed, as to the number of agricultural labourers in the parish above sixteen years of age. It was stated to have greatly increased since the year 1831, when the returns were made. Up to that time the linen weavers confined themselves exclusively to their trade ; but the linen trade has become so bad, that most of the weavers now work as agricultural labourers whenever they can find employment. It is only when they cannot get employment in the fields, and on wet days, that they work at the loom. The number of labourers for this barony in the population returns amounts to 4,545 ; to this, therefore, a considerable addition must be made for the linen weavers who occasionally employ themselves in agricultural work, to which they consider weaving secondary, only pursuing it when they cannot get employment in the fields. The only sensible reason assigned by them for the depression of the linen trade is the very prevalent use of cotton, and the introduction of union linen, a mixture of cotton and linen. It requires a very clever tradesman to make one shilling a day by linen weaving, and

even to do this he must labour many extra hours. The general impression was, that employment had of late years decreased ; for this several causes were assigned, such as the absence of war, the introduction of machinery of various kinds, and the division of farms into small lots, in consequence of which the farmers for the most part do their own work.

In summer, labourers usually get one shilling a day without diet, or eightpence with it ; and in winter, tenpence without, or sixpence with diet. At particular periods, such as harvest and turf-cutting, they get something more. The rate of wages has latterly decreased ; twenty years ago they were 1s. 8d. per day. When corn is shorn by the acre, which is not frequent, they receive 10s. per Irish acre (by corn they mean oats), or 6s. 2d. English. They would prefer task-work, because they could work several hours earlier and later. Besides, they could then employ their families. All the labourers here agreed, and nobody contradicted them, that the utmost a man could earn, one day with another, did not exceed sixpence a day without diet. From the clearing in of potatoes in November, to the sowing of corn in March, and again till the hay time, they are wholly unemployed. Many of the labourers in this district assemble at the market-house in Rathfriland in the morning, and if they be not called out early to work, they will shortly take anything rather than go home idle ! This is especially the case with men advanced beyond the prime of life. “ Steady employment,” said one of the witnesses, Hamilton Fisher, “ is better than a sudden rise of wages ; the want of it is the curse of the country, and the cause of distress and irregularity.”

By a summons at petty sessions, the labourer can easily recover his wages, if withheld. The charge for a summons is sixpence, and the serving of it sixpence, both of which sums he is repaid ; and sometimes he is compensated for the time and trouble he has lost in seeking the debt before he goes to law about it. The labourers, however, are not in general fond of litigation, and but few of them go to law to recover wages. “ When a labourer can write,” said M<sup>r</sup> Allunden, “ he keeps his accounts in writing ; if he can’t write, he keeps a tally—that is, a stick split up—one part being kept by the labourer, and the other by the farmer ; for every day we put a notch or stroke on the stick ; sometimes the farmer does not put a notch on his stick ; and at the end, when we are counting up, if the tallies don’t agree, he makes us go to a magistrate and take our oath ; but if there is one or two days between us, we lose the days, because we don’t think it worth while to go to the magistrate about them.”

The wives of some of the labourers find employment in flax and hay time, and in the harvest ; but women do not earn much by engagements of this sort. Some can earn by spinnings if they be good spinners and devote their whole time to it ; 3½d. a-day ; but when a woman has a family to take care of, she cannot earn more than a penny a day. Mary M<sup>r</sup> Allunden said that “ the yarn which she held in her hand cost her in the market 1s. 2d. ; she spun it in a week ; had five hanks ; and would get 4½d. a hank for it ; a real good spinner will spin a hank a-day.” Thus, according to her statement, her week’s wages amounted to 8½d. ; but the labourers present all said that their wives did not earn, by spinning, more than a penny a day, and that the factory at Castlewellan had destroyed the spinning business for women. A little girl might get eight shillings in the half-year for herding cattle, but is sure to be sent home in the winter ; children do not get anything for hoeing or weeding, except perhaps a penny or their dinner from a farmer. The fact is, the farms in this district are in general so small that the farmers are able to do their own work.

Upon asking what sum could be earned by rearing a pig, one of the witnesses, Davison, said, “ I can get a young slip of a pig about six weeks old for 6s. 6d. ; in six months it will be worth a pound ; we feed it on the refuse of our victuals ; if the farmer will not let it run on the grass, we are obliged to buy something for it, because, as it grows up the refuse will not be enough for it.” M<sup>r</sup> Crome said, “ I have a pig, and he cost me fourpence a week to buy bran

for him.” “ At that rate,” he was asked, “ what would you gain by your pig at the end of six months ?” “ Deuce a hap’orth, sir,” was his reply.

A cottier tenant differs from a small landholder in this, that he has only a house and a small garden. Some have a rood of land, which they call the *cot-take* ; the rent paid is from £1. 10s. to £3. The cottier has a house, garden, and flax ground; some have a cow and ground for it, and pay for grazing £3. 10s. from May to December. The holding is occupied from year to year, generally at the above rent. If the house has but one small room, the rent is from £1. 10s. to £2. A cottier is seldom out of debt, and those who give him credit must wait till he gets work. They mostly work out the rent. When an agreement is made that the rent shall be paid in work of a certain number of days, the landlord will sometimes not allow more than one shilling per day, though the current price of wages at the time be 1s. 6d. The work, also, is generally demanded in a busy time, when the labourer could get more elsewhere. “ In harvest time last year,” said Hugh Hillen, “ I could have got nine shillings a-week, but my landlord made me work-for six.” To avoid this vexatious disappointment, in some cases the cottiers agree to give a day in every week throughout the year.

“ If a labourer were employed every day,” said M’Crome, “ he would have, I suppose, £18 a year ; but then he is not employed half his time; he is employed about three days in the week, at a shilling a day ; the outside is not more than sixpence a day all the year round. His wife, having four children, could not do more than keep the house and family clean ; she could not make as much as would buy soap to wash the children’s clothes. The children gather manure and firings and also assist in the preparation of the potato garden ; and those labourers who are also weavers can make something when farm labour is scarce.” The whole of their earnings, however, would not exceed £9. The following was the account given of their expenditure. For half an acre (of Irish measure) ploughed and manured for seeding, £4 ; (the seed they generally have from the year before—the potatoes used for this purpose being too small for their own eating) ; seeding, moulding (*i. e.* earthing up), and digging out, require twenty-eight days’ work, viz., £1. 8s., (the weeding and clearing are done by the children), this amounts altogether to £5. 8s. A fair average produce will be four tons of potatoes to the half acre ; potatoes average here about 1s. 4d. per cwt., so that the produce of the half acre would be under the expense, amounting only to £5, 6s. 8d. Upon being asked why they preferred paying for the half acre, to buying potatoes in the markets apparently a cheaper plan, they assigned as their reasons that the time they laboured at their potato garden was when they had no other employment ; besides, if they agreed to pay for the ground in labour (no uncommon practice) they were sure of so many days’ work, and had also some small potatoes for the pig. The next item of expense after the ground for potatoes, is what is called the “ kitchen,” which they use with them—consisting chiefly of buttermilk, at a half-penny a quart—three quarts a day answering for a man, his wife, and four children. This will amount to £2. 5s. 7d. ; soap, at half a pound a week, at 4d. per pound, will be 8s. 8d. ; tobacco, ½d. day, 15s. 2d. ; and tea and sugar (taken only at Christmas and Easter) 2s. in the year.

Labourers who are Protestants or Presbyterians pay no dues. The Rev. Mr. Poland, P. P., stated “ that a labourer’s family pay him, upon an average, three shillings a year.”

Some of the labourers in this district were badly clothed, but the generality did not appear very destitute. The following, agreed on by all present, is an account of a labourer’s expenditure in clothes, if properly clothed :—

Two yards of cloth, at 6s. per yard, 10s. ; making, trimming, &c., 5s. ; two coats in the year. ... £1 10s. 0d.

Two pairs of trowsers, at 7s. each £0 14s. 0d.

Two waistcoats, at 3s. each, 6s. ; two shirts, at 2s. each, 4s. ; two pairs of stockings, 3s. 4d. ; two neck handkerchiefs, 2s. ; hat, 2s. 6d. ; total £0 17s. 10d.

Two pairs of shoes, 10s. ; women's clothes, £1 ; children's ditto, £1 2s. 10d.

Total : £5 11s. 10

The above expenditure for potato ground and provisions, amounts to £9 2s. 5d.

Clothing £5 11s. 10

Rent of cabin £1 10s. 0

Total expenditure £16 4s. 3d.

Total income as above stated . . £9 2s. 6d.

Balance against the labourer . . £7 1s. 9d.

It must be remarked, that their calculations for clothing are too high, and are made rather from what they conceive a labourer's clothing ought to be than from what it really is. When the difference between the expenditure and income was shown to them, they stated that it was correct, but said they made up the difference by means of a pig, and some little spinning, and that occasionally the husband went over at harvest time to England or Scotland, and earned as much as released the potatoes. The labourer spends his unemployed time in gathering manure, mending his clothes, and sometimes in reading. It was stated by M'Crome, that many of them could read. The materials of which the clothing is composed are but rarely manufactured at home ; the women scarcely ever make their own clothes—dress-making being a regular business, and two or three professors of it being scattered up and down through the district.

The principal food of the labourers is potatoes—except at Christmas and Easter they never touch flesh meat. They sometimes have salt herrings, and are never reduced to less than the ordinary number of meals, three in a day. A labourer, his wife, and three or four children, require two or three stones of potatoes per day. In times of distress, it has been usual to get provisions on credit ; and in reference to the usurers employed for these purposes (a class of men who have made considerable fortunes in this part of Ireland), Mr. Cadell, who pronounced them the greatest scoundrels in the worlds informed us that their charge at the end of three months would be £1 for the loan of meal or potatoes worth only 12s. “ The people,” added Mr. Cadell, “ were obliged to give bail for the payment, before the provisions were supplied to them, and the bail and the usurer were frequently in league. I have been engaged in a thousand cases against them and defeated them. The assistant barrister at last put them down. The people for the first year felt the loss of them, but now they are more careful of their provisions.” The Rev. Mr. Poland thought that in times of temporary distress the usurers might be of some advantage, but it did not appear that any body considered the benefits arising from them to be equal to the positive injury they produced.

From the middle of July to the latter end of August, the potatoes are unfit for use. “ All that time,” said one of the witnesses, “ the potato colloughs”— that is, becomes ropy or gluey. The interval between the old crop becoming unfit, and the new crop becoming fit for food, is often a season of great distress ; and as the potato, the sole food of the peasantry, is produced only from year to year, the failure of even one year's crop is attended by extreme suffering. On these occasions hundreds of the people may be seen going to the sea side to gather dhulimaun, a sea weed growing on the rocks. It was agreed on all hands, that a man



could not subsist upon less than one stone of potatoes in the day, and some thought that quantity would be hardly sufficient. Bread is a luxury which they cannot afford. A few years ago, according to the statement of the Rev. Mr. Poland, there were corn mills in the neighbourhood fully employed from the end of September to the end of June, but now they are nearly closed, the small tenantry being obliged to sell their oats soon after harvest. They are obliged indeed to sell even the seed oats, and to buy them at a dear rate again in the sowing time.

The cabins, in general from fifteen to eighteen feet long, and from ten to twelve feet wide, are composed of stones and mud rudely put together. In many cases they consist of but one room, but in some a small portion is screened off for a sleeping apartment. In such cases, the kitchen, or room in which the inmates live during the day, is about two-thirds of the entire cabin. The cabins never possess a second story—the thatch being the only shelter from the weather. In general it is tolerably good, but in some cabins we found it full of holes ; in wet weather, the inhabitants are accordingly obliged to remove the bed from one part of the hut to the other. In all cabins the floors are formed of clay ; in some cases nothing whatever being done to the ground, which is left in exactly the same state as it was before the house was built. The floors, for the most part, are uneven and full of holes, containing dirty water, through which the pigs and ducks trample ; and in many cases they are lower than the ground outside, and admit the rain in wet weather. Most of the cabins have low chimneys, composed of mud and sticks ; in some instances an old firkin is made to answer the purpose. Grates, not being required for turf, are never used. The usual size of the windows is one foot square, though many are not larger than the crown of a hat : some are glazed, others filled with old rags. The cost of erecting a cabin is from five to six pounds. The dwellings of the labourers were better a few years ago ; “ better,” in the words of one of the witnesses, “ at the time Buonaparte was afoot.”

These rude dwellings are invariably placed as near the bog as they can be, for the advantage of fuel, and the farmer usually selects the poorest parts of the farm to build them on. “ If there is a bog,” said one of the witnesses, “ or a rock, or a swamp, or a fen on the farm, ’tis there he puts the labourer.”

The ordinary fuel is turf, and although the bogs, which are similar to our peat mosses, are abundant in this district, fuel is not cheap. A creal or pannier-full, which a man carries on his back, costs fourpence. Small farmers generally take about a rood of the bog, at a rent of from fifteen to twenty-one shillings, underletting small portions of this at a higher price to the labourers. By a rood of bog is meant, that the taker may cut out of the bank, or dig out of the bog hole, as much turf as he can spread over a rood of ground. Though many suffer in winter from want of fuel, stealing is not common. The children are the chief offenders in this way, pulling the briars out of the fences when turf is scarce. “ I have often been obliged,” said one witness, “ to burn my bed straw, or an old chair or stool, to boil my supper, though I’m surrounded by bog.” And another said that he had often been compelled to go to bed without any supper at all, for want of fuel to boil it.

Conacre, here called “ rood land,” is a small portion prepared by ploughing and manuring, and afterwards let by the farmer to a labourer, at a rent of £8 the Irish acre (equal to £5 the English) for potatoes, and of £2. 10s. a rood (Irish) for flax. The labourer takes it to supply his family with potatoes ; the flax is usually sold. All that can afford it, take conacre or rood, but many are not able. From one rood to three roods and a half is mostly taken. The average produce of an acre of potatoes is eight tons, six of which are fit for human diet, and two for pigs and for seed. One rood of land, highly manured, will produce at the rate of ten tons per Irish acre. The rent is usually paid in money, but sometimes in labour, the ordinary wages of

the labourer being allowed. In some instances the days are demanded by the landlord in a busy time. If the produce should not be worth the rent, the labourer, by giving notice, can surrender ; but if he neglects to do so, he may be sued for the rent. “ I never knew a notice given, or a labourer sued for the rent,” said Brace M‘Mullen. “ We are afraid to give notice, because we might not get the land next year. I had some potatoes myself last year, and though they were not worth digging out, I did not give notice of surrendering for the rent. We would be glad of the power of giving them up when the crop fails.” The price of conacre has never been known to be affected here through fear of violence. Some allow the labourers to dig their potatoes and put them in pits in the ground, but not to take them away till the rent is paid. “ A consider-able neighbouring proprietor,” said the same witness, “ will not allow a spade to be put in before payment.” If the potatoes are not got up by the first of November, the landlord sometimes turns in his cows, or gives a fortnight’s notice of auction, and then sells the crop. Under the present prices of wages and quantity of labour, it is a great service to have the conacre system. The growth of potatoes is increased by it ; but the labourers would prefer constant employment from the farmers at five shillings per week. “ We cannot tell,” observed Hillen, “ whether the conacre system increases the population, but some way or other it is good for the poor man.”

The peasantry pay the rent of their small holdings, sometimes in money, sometimes in labour, and occasionally in both. An agreement is often made for them to work a certain number of days in the year ; these they call *duty days*. The prevalent competition for small holdings often induces the labourer to give more than he can afford. If a farm of five or ten acres were vacant in the barony, there would be hundreds of bidders ) and in case a farm were at liberty, in consequence of the tenant emigrating, or the landlord wishing to get rid of a tenant who could not pay the rent, the landlord allows him, though he has no lease, to sell the occupation of the farm—and such is the anxiety to possess land, that he will get a large sum of money for a small holding. “ A man makes money in England or elsewhere,” said Morgan, “ gives all he has for a little settlement, and will be in difficulties all his life.”

Land, when out of lease, is not *canted* (*i. e.* put up to auction). A valuator is sent out by the landlord, and whatever he values the land at must be paid by the tenant, who is allowed to keep the holding. If he consents to the new rent, which is always sure to be raised, there seems to be, in fact, a customary right to hold on in a family, a right which the practice of the landlord does not interfere with. There is very little ejecting in the barony. Lord Downshire, the principal landlord in the district, is very unwilling to eject. None of the rent is ever excused, not even in a bad season. No tithe or cess of any kind is paid by the cottier tenant ; the farmers pay all; but “ if tithe and county cess were taken off,” said Morgan, “ the landlord would put it on the farmer ; at least, I’d be afraid if I hadn’t a lease.” Very few tenants have good purses. “ If I was on my oath,” said the same witness, “ I don’t think there is any man with £10 in my townland ; the loss of a cow or two, or of £10, would either ruin a man, or make a man rich that got it ; ’twould make a gentleman of him in a manner.”

In answer to the question whether men are induced to marry, feeling that their condition could not be worse, Morgan said, “ No, faith—they marry when the whim takes them—when the spirit seizes them.” “ Do you mean whiskey ?” “ O no, that’s but a wee bit of false spirit.” “ They find themselves,” said M‘Loughlin, “ but doing poorly at their father’s house, and they try if they could not do better by themselves. And being of no use in weaving, their parents are more willing to let them go.” Labourers often marry from sixteen to twenty years of age, and where *one* thinks of providing clothes and furniture, *ten* do not. “ A boy, before he marries,” said John Davidson, “ looks out for a good comrade to take care of their money. I was married before I was twenty ; my son was married at twenty. Many support their parents—it is common to have their parents living with them.” “ The women,” observed Mr. Bank-

head, “ are generally careful ; poverty compels them to be so ; they may in many ways make a man comfortable.”

In this district the landlords all exact the rent, and everywhere the Assistant Commissioners heard that land was high. The most remarkable circumstances connected with agriculture in this part of the country are the extreme subdivision of the farms, and the high price given for the possession of them. If a man wants to sell the occupation of a small farm of five or six acres, the usual price under a good landlord, even without a lease, will be ten years’ purchase upon the rental, subject, at the same time, to a full rent, as if no such consideration had been paid. This is the case under two noblemen, large proprietors, who do not disturb the tenants as long as the rent is paid. The Assistant Commissioners inspected several small farms, and found that the prices paid for them were most extraordinary ; and were not statements of those prices confirmed in all quarters, they would appear incredible. For one small farm, of four and a half Irish acres of ground, in the parish of Clonduff, sold by Mr. David Lindsay, who holds as middleman under Lord Annesley, the present tenant paid Mr. Lindsay £60 : £30 in hand, and the rest in two or three years with interest. The rent of this is £1 per Irish acre for very inferior land. He stated also, that when he got possession, the house was in a very bad state, and that he had to repair it at his own expense. A farm of seven acres, adjoining the last mentioned, had also been sold to another small farmer for £100 ; the rent of this was also £1 per acre. Such instances are not unusual : this is the common practice and the common price. Upon inquiry how the purchase money could be scraped together, the Assistant Commissioners were told that very many people go from this district to England, and become small dealers in linen, &c., carrying small quantities of goods through the country ; and when, after some years, they have made a little money, they return, and being anxious to settle, they give excessive prices for every little holding. The size of the holdings has of late years been diminishing, fathers dividing them among their families, having nothing else to give them but a bit of land ; “ in fact, there is no other provision here but a little land.” The great subdivision of the holdings has not, however, led to much loss of land, in consequence of the increased number of fences ; “ on the contrary,” said Morgan, “ we have both sides of a ditch for feeding the cattle ; and whins or furze grow on them, which we bruise for the horses, and it makes excellent food.”

Both the quantity and the quality of the produce on the small holdings are improving. “ There is five times as much produce,” said the same witness, “ as there was twenty years ago ; if there wasn’t the produce, what would we do, and the population increasing so fast on us ?” “ The small farmer can afford to manure more in proportion than a large farmer ; he has commonly a hole near the house, in which he puts weeds and other things, and he must have every inch of his farm tilled ; he can’t afford to let any of it be idle.” (Cowan.) “ If he has not good seed himself,” said Morgan, “ he gets it in exchange for his own, by a little balance, and he is careful in making his selection from his own crop. A small farmer can produce one-third more than a large farmer ; he gives more attention to every part of it.” “ But,” it was asked, “ the large farmer has surely more capital in proportion to bring to bear upon it than the small one ?” “ Yes,” was the reply ; “ but we have more labour at command ; we have four or five boys mostly, who can watch and cultivate it. I’ll give you an example, sir : there is a man in my townland, of the name of M’Roney, and he produces more out of four acres and a half than many of his neighbours out of ten. The small farmer can better afford the system of claying, which costs a deal of labour, because he does not value his own labour.” By claying is meant digging clay out of the pits, from which they extract great quantities, and spreading it over the surface of the land when exhausted by constant cropping. By this process solidity and strength are afforded. A regular system of cropping may be followed on a small farm. The following is the rotation usually observed : the first year—potatoes, laid on the sod, and covered with dung ; the earth is dug out of the trenches along the ridges to cover the potatoes.

The second year oats, flax, or wheat, are sown, without any ploughing. The third year, oats and grass seeds, (grass seeds grow remarkably well in flax) ; in this third year the land is ploughed, and also gets a covering of lime. The fourth and fifth year it lies in grass, for mowing or pasturage at the farmer's option. This is the ordinary rotation through all the fields in the farm. But if the land have not sufficient sod to fit it for the "lazy bed" system, then they grow but one crop of oats after the potatoes ; in other respects the same course is followed. When the small farmers require aid, they assist one another—lend horses, and get them in turn. No part of a small holding is ever left untilled. The Rev. John Dubordieu said that the rents of small farms are as well paid as those of large ones. A house and an acre of land are in great demand ; they will "cant" it (bid for it) against each other, and get money in England, and give twice as much for it as it is worth. There is no ejecting. "The reason is," said Morgan," "that they make the greatest exertion to pay the rent, because the population is so large, that if a man is cast out of his holding he has no chance of getting in anywhere, and there is nothing else here for him to do. When the population is crowded as it is now, the small farmers employ more labour and produce more food. There is no difficulty in finding a tenant for any farm ; the land claims us all." "There is more competition for a small farm than for a large one ; there would be twelve purchasers to one for a small farm above what there would be for a large one. If a man were about to sell a farm of twenty acres (that is, his interest in it), he would divide it into several parts, and get more for it in that way. I don't think the landlords here would prevent him from dividing it. I consider twenty acres a large farm. If I had one hundred acres I'd rather divide it among ten men ; they'd pay me more rent." On being asked whether they would not soon exhaust the land, and make it worthless, he replied, "Why, it has been in farms of less than ten acres this long time, and yet it is as good as ever." "But will not the people so multiply upon it when it is so much subdivided, as to require all that grows upon the land for their own food?" "It is the will of Providence to increase the people," was the answer, "and when they become too many they emigrate like bees out of a hive." (Hogan, M'Loughlin, and Morgan).

On being asked whether many farmers had come over from England and Scotland to take large farms, M'Loughlin said that "they'd get the mountains for large farms if they wanted them." [3] In some cases non-subletting clauses have of late been introduced into leases. "But we are never prevented," continued the witness, "from letting a cabin and a garden. Landlords have of late endeavoured to prevent the subdivision of farms by advice and council, but not by force. It is a great deal more difficult now than formerly for a poor man to procure a place for a house, because the farmer is less sure of the rent as the labourer has less employment."

The rent will average about £1, 10s. per Irish acre. "If any leases fell in, or any farms were to be let," according to Morgan, "the rent has been increasing." But it has been mentioned by farmers in the northern part of the barony, that if any leases expired on Mr. Sharman Crawford's property, he does not charge for any land more than £1. 5s. per Irish acre. Bradshaw and his brother (substantial farmers of Armacloan) stated that adjoining land of the same quality was let by other landlords at £2. 10s. an acre. "Rents," says Cowan, "have advanced latterly, but are lower than they were twelve years ago." The farmer relies for the payment of his rent principally on butter, pigs, flax, and lastly on his corn. If the pigs are in good demand, the farmer cares little for the rent."

An absentee is a man residing always or mostly in England ; "Aye," said Morgan, "and a man sometimes residing here, but spending his money in England. They live in poverty here that they may have a great sum to spend when they go over. I am sure I don't know how they spend all their money ; it must be in some extravagance, and not in any natural way of living. We have no great experience of resident landlords. Our corn, our pigs, and our cattle go in

ships, and the money in the post-office ; but if we had them residing at home, we would be the better of them ; they would build better houses for us, and the estates would be more cultivated.”

Tenancy at will is more common than formerly ; more than one half the tenants are without any lease, the landlords not liking to give leases except when the farm is large enough to allow a £10 freehold. The usual lease is for one life, and that too of the landlord’s choosing ; some, however, give three lives and thirty-one years concurrent. The resident landlords give longer leases than absentees. “ To be sure,” observed M’Loughlin, “ we should prefer a long lease ; if we’re broke, we could sell it far better, and we speculate more into it in draining and ditching and planting.” There is no land at present held under the Court of Chancery, and only two townlands under middlemen. The tenantry are better off in general under the chief landlord ; but, provided the middleman or his agent be considerate, it is often otherwise. Lord Annesley resides constantly in the barony, and assists his tenants by building good houses and making other improvements.

[1] Plowden states that “ notwithstanding the nominal or pretended conquest of the whole kingdom of Ireland by Henry II. and the grant and confirmation thereof by the Popes Adrian and Alexander, the truth is that the English power and authority during the reign of Henry II. was confined (and it so continued for above 400 years) to a certain district afterwards called the Pale. This comprised the counties of Dublin, Kildare, Meath, and Uriel, with the cities of Waterford, Cork and Limerick, and the lands immediately surrounding them. Over the other parts of the kingdom which were without the Pale neither Henry II. nor any of his successors until the reign of James I. either had or even pretended to claim more than a naked sovereignty marked by nothing else than a formal homage, an inconsiderable tribute and an empty title.”

[2] The statute acre of 4840 square yards is to be understood, unless otherwise specified. The Irish acre contains 7840 square yards, and is the same as the Lancashire customary acre.

[3] The high lands in Ireland are termed “ mountains,” frequently let at a rent of from ten to twenty shillings the Irish acre, and are used for grazing.

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