

An Englishman's Rambles 1834

The angler in Ireland : or An Englishman's ramble through Connaught and Munster, during the summer of 1833

William Bilton

1834

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One of the first fine days after my arrival, I resolved to explore the celebrated mountain-pass, called the Gap of Dunloe, for which purpose I took a car to its entrance, and thence walked leisurely through the Pass to the head of the Upper Lake, where Doherty's boat was to meet me.

The first part of the road lay along the northern shore of the Lower lake passing by Lord Kenmare's Western Demesne, Lord Headley's House, and Mr. John O'Connell's, of Grena. I then crossed the river Laun, about half a mile below its exit from the Lake, and immediately saw before me Dunloe's dark Gap, which opens its mountain jaws in a very imposing manner, as viewed from this point.

The Gap of Dunloe is a deep chasm between the eastern termination of the Reeks and the range of the Toomies, looking as if the mountains had been there rent asunder. It is about two or three miles in length, and is undoubtedly a very magnificent gorge ; the rocks which enclose it are extremely lofty and rugged, sometimes descending perpendicularly, and at others with a bold and beautiful sweep, into the very depth of the valley. The ascent from the northern side is by a series of *stages*, if I may so call them, which form a succession of wild, secluded glens, each with its own dark little lake in its bosom. But, though similar in this respect, they all present very different and characteristic scenery, whose details and general effect equally arrest the attention. I saw the Gap of Dunloe in weather that I should imagine to be the best suited to its peculiar character. The morning had been gloriously fine ; but, by the time I got deeply entangled in these rocky solitudes, the Western Ocean had sent up mists, which wreathed round the mountain-tops, and occasionally descended in semblance of a waving veil far down their sides, without ever long concealing them.

From the point where I left the car, I was at first pestered with guides, both young and old, but, pertinaciously refusing their services, was at length permitted to pursue my own path in peace ; when, leaving the beaten track, I rambled as I listed along either mountain's side, wherever a finer view or more beautiful flower was likely to reward my toil. A botanist, I am sure, would have discovered many rare plants ; whereas, I only looked for the beautiful ; among which the heaths pre-eminently excited my admiration, and particularly the white varieties of the three usual kinds, of all which I gathered numerous and elegant specimens.

In the uppermost valley, as wild a spot as an anchorite could desire, stands a small lone cabin. The Mother retails what she calls " poteen," but which is nothing more than the usual solution of vitriolic acid ; and the children offer what they call " Kerry diamonds," but which are nothing better than common quartz crystals. On reaching the summit of the last ascent from this savage glen, the view down through the dark chasm of the Gap I had just traversed, upon the richly cultivated plains beyond, was striking in the extreme, and leaves the mind with a most favourable impression of its romantic scenery. It is certainly one of the finest

mountain passes I know on the same scale ; but it has not the magnificence or the majesty of Glencoe.

Upon descending towards the Upper Lake, I again left the regular road, and scrambled along the heights to my left ; for which I was rewarded by splendid views of the Cwm Duive, or Black Valley, with its girdle of stern mountains, and its glittering lakes ; as well as of the whole Upper Lake of Killarney. I had dwelt so long upon the various objects of interest my walk had afforded, that, although the distance was scarcely four miles, it had taken me more than five hours to accomplish ; and my boatmen were beginning to be alarmed for my safety. They were waiting for me at the head of the Lake, near a very pretty place, usually named after its late possessor. Lord Brandon, but now belonging to Mr. Hutchinson.

I just looked into the gardens, and then embarked in company with another boat, on board of which was one of the best buglers next to Spillane, young Gandsey. I had privately succeeded in persuading him to treat us with some extra music on our passage down the Lake ; and the afternoon being propitiously calm, I was greatly charmed with its effect. This is infinitely preferable to having the bugle in your own boat ; as the notes come to the ear much sweeter across the water, being mellowed by the distance.

I have already described the general appearance of the Upper Lake ; and will, therefore, only say that I enjoyed its scenery with increased relish, from having been all the morning buried in the deep and dark glens of the Gap. But still, beautiful as it is, and must be at all times, the tourist who wishes to see it to the greatest advantage ought to ascend it from the Lower Lake, as then the eye is continually directed to the grandest features of the landscape.

I stopped to dine at Dinis Island : and, having purposely brought a salmon which I had caught the day before, got it cooked after the most approved Killarney fashion, on “ Arrabus Skivers ;” which, being Englished, means skewers made of the arbutus. This is a process not described by Dr. Kitchener ; but which deserved being known by that *great man*. The salmon (after being caught, as Mrs. Glasse would wisely premise,) is cut into slices, which are split, and a strong skewer of arbutus run through each as close to the skin as possible. These skewers are then stuck upright in a sod of turf, before a clear wood fire : they are constantly turned, and basted with salt and water. The fish, when sufficiently roasted, is served up on the skewers, which are supposed to communicate a peculiarly aromatic flavour. Whether from fancy, or not, I must say that each time I have tasted salmon cooked in this manner I have thought it decidedly better than any other.

The evening was most lovely : and, long before I landed beneath the aged walls of Ross Castle, the moon rode high in the blue heavens, beautifying with her silver light the gray battlements, the waving woods, and the rippling water of the Lake.

Not many days after this excursion, I took my boat, as usual, and fished up Mucruss shore, without much success : I then entered the Middle Lake, and, rowing up to its head, landed close to Captain Herbert’s cottage. The morning had been somewhat doubtful : but, it having now cleared up most promisingly, I and a gentleman who accompanied me determined to embrace the opportunity to ascend Mangerton. Accordingly, taking one of the boatmen as a guide, and leaving the others to fish, we commenced the ascent by way of Turk Cascade. This is not the side from which Mangerton is usually scaled ; but it is so easy an operation from any side, that it signifies little which road is taken.

Turk Cascade is scarcely half a mile from Captain Herbert's pretty cottage ; and is situated in a picturesque glen, whose rocks are clothed with larch and very fine heather. The water, in consequence of the drought, was scanty ; but the valley itself sufficiently recompensed us for the trifling *détour* we made to view it. From the waterfall we ascended into the old Kenmare road, which we followed for a short time ; and then turned directly up the side of the mountain by a rocky path, which bears the name of Lady Jersey, from that distinguished lady having once ridden up it while sojourning in these wild scenes.

After proceeding about three quarters of an hour in this direction, we suddenly came upon the romantic chasm, lying immediately beneath the real summit which contains the Lake called "The Devil's Punchbowl." This is a scene of great wildness, though scarcely meriting the character of sublimity in which some former travellers have painted it. From underneath the bold precipices that overhang its southern side issues a remarkably cold and pure spring, of which, properly *diluted* with whisky, we drank *quantum suff.*

A large party was lunching under the rocks on the opposite shore of the Lake, surrounded, of course, by hundreds of beggars, who no sooner saw us than a detachment of them ran across, offering us whisky and milk in neat little wooden vessels. The former they christened "mountain dew ;" but it was safe from any exciseman, being true "Parliament :;" and the latter they were 'cute enough to call "goat's milk ;" but when asked where they got it, they ingeniously confessed, "from our own *cows*, your Honour! And sure, isn't cows' milk better than all the goat's milk in the world, your Honour ; and far wholesomer too, your Honour !"

The number of these beggars who annoy the touristy all the way up and down Mangerton, really detracts very much from the enjoyment of the scenery. The only thing I can say is, that, for their numbers, they are as little troublesome as can be expected, and very thankful for a trifle.

From the Devil's Punchbowl we immediately commenced the last ascent, which is neither steep nor difficult. The summit of Mangerton is a huge, rounded, grassy ridge, with very precipitous cliffs on the side of the Punchbowl and the Horse's Glen ; but on all other sides sloping gently down into the surrounding valleys. How it could ever have been considered the highest mountain in Ireland I cannot conceive, for, both from the plain and from its summit, it is evidently commanded by M'Gillicuddy's Reeks, whose loftiest point is in fact eight hundred feet higher than Mangerton. However, though inferior in height, its position gives it an advantage over many more elevated rivals, and the prospects enjoyed from it on a fine day are excessively captivating.

It would be very unsatisfactory to give a meagre detail of all the objects seen from this point, which comprise the whole environs of Killarney, with the exception of the Upper Lake, which is hidden by Turk Mountain. And yet I fear I can do little more.

To the south, appear Kenmare town, river, and bay ; with the noble chain of mountains between it and Bantry Bay. To the west rise the Reeks, and some of the Iveragh Mountains ; while, further to the north, in the same direction, stretches the long and wide Dingle Bay, backed by lofty and rocky ranges. Killarney itself is distinctly seen ; and beyond it lies a vast expanse of the fertile plain, which extends to Tralee and Limerick. Scattered over this extensive scene were a thousand mountain lakes or tarns ; of which only Lough Kittane seemed of considerable size ; and, immediately beneath the point where we stood, yawned the chasms of the Punch Bowl and the Horse's Glen, each with their lone sheet of water in their lowest depths. The panorama thus commanded from the top of Mangerton must

certainly be considered very beautiful by any one, and to a person unaccustomed to mountain scenery may be in a high degree striking and imposing.

Its interest was increased to us this day by watching the flight of a pair of eagles. Considering how much this mountain is frequented during the summer by parties of pleasure, we were much astonished as well as delighted at seeing two of these majestic birds rise from the ground, within a couple of hundred yards. For a long time they continued circling round us, with that calmness and majesty which always distinguishes this acknowledged sovereign of the feathered creation. Disturb him how or when you will, the eagle never betrays any symptom of fear ; but slowly leaves the spot invaded by man, rising and rising above you, without any perceptible movement of his outstretched pinions.

I have often watched “ the way of the eagle in the air ” for a considerable time together ; and never could perceive him once flap his wings to his side. His movements seem to be entirely governed by the inclination of his huge wings and tail to the wind ; in the same way as a ship is propelled by the action of the breeze upon its sails.

We descended by the Cwm a Coppul, or Glen of the Horse, a very deep chasm, enclosed on all sides by very savage and precipitous rocks. I only saw it from above ; but it was evident that, to appreciate its “ beautiful horrors,” it should be viewed from below. In its very wildest spot is a curious cabin, or rather *chalet*, for it is only inhabited during the summer months. It is formed by a simple roof inclined against an enormous boulder of fallen rock ; and is tenanted by as singular an inhabitant, the only occupant of the solitary Glen, who tends a few cows in this rocky pasture.

We descended by the common road to Cloghereen, in company with a large party, from whom we separated at the foot of the mountain ; and, turning to our left, through Captain Herbert’s plantations, rejoined our boat. Doherty and his son had, during our absence, caught a tolerable number of fair-sized trout ; the largest weighing nearly a pound. Turk Lake is considered the best for trout-fishing ; and, on any tolerable day, three or four dozen may be easily killed here. But, I must confess that, wherever I can have salmon-fishing, I take little pleasure in slaying these minor denizens of the deep.

I was however induced, by the accounts of the size and quality of its trout, to drive over one morning to Lough Kittane, about four miles from Killarney. The large fish here, as everywhere else, will only take the troll ; and therefore our first object was to catch some small trout for bait ; which we at last did, by the assistance of a sharp young lad, named Courmayne. I never saw so adroit a youth at catching small fry.

We had been trying in vain for half an hour before he came ; when in a moment he dammed up the streamlet that issued from the lake, ran the poor little trout into the shallows, and, if they got into the weeds, pounced on them with his hands, or, if under a flat stone, “ let drive at it with a lump of a two-year old,” and generally succeeded in so stunning them, that he easily picked them up. The poor little devils had no chance with him “ at all, at all.”

Our baits, however, proved of little service : for the day turned out misty, and rainy, and cold ; and we had no success worth mentioning. I caught a few tolerable trout with the fly ; but we had only one run at the troll, although we twice circumnavigated the whole Lake. At the same time, I am satisfied that there are very large trout in Lough Kittane ; which will on certain days take the bait well.

Exactly in the centre of this Lake is a single island, which has a curious effect ; but the scenery at its head seemed very wild and romantic : and, I feel convinced that Glen Kippock, as it is called, must be well worth exploring.

We had just given up fishing, and were leaving the Lake, when we observed young Coumayne running after us, with a large fish in his hands, still alive. This turned out to be a perch, of about three pounds in weight : and, singular to say, the only one of that species ever known to be in the Lake. Coumayne himself did not know what it was. His account of the mode of capture was, that, just as he was mooring the boat, he saw something splashing in the weeds by the bank ; and, approaching quietly, hit it as hard as he could with an oar, and then, instantly dashing into the water, secured the fish with his hands. This feat completed our idea of Coumayne's sharpness and adroitness.

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Excursion into Iveragh—Lough and River Carra—Dingle Bay—Cahir Civeen—Iveragh Fair
—Waterville—Lough Currane—The Skellings.

During the night that succeeded this excursion, and the next morning, it rained in torrents, which only confirmed my previous resolution of going into Iveragh, as I was aware my chance of sport would be much increased by the floods that might be expected in all the mountain streams. It was not until two o'clock in the afternoon that the storm would allow me to start, when, leaving all my heavy baggage at Killarney, I set out with the intention of making a fortnight's tour of the coast of Kerry and Cork, as far as Bantry.

The Barony of Iveragh, which comprises the mountain district between the Bays of Dingle and Kenmare, is very little visited. But, from what scanty information I could collect, as well as from what I had seen of it from the top of Carrân Tual, I was convinced it must contain much grand scenery, as well as interesting manners, while the fact of its being so little known, although so near a place of such resort as Killarney, was a still further inducement to penetrate its wilds.

I had wished to make my first halt at Cahir Civeen, the capital of Iveragh, and distant from Killarney about twenty-eight miles ; but, being prevented by the weather from starting until a late hour, I made up my mind to stop at the small inn, (kept by a man of the name of Wailes) rather more than halfway.

It still continued to rain so hard that I was compelled to close all the leathern curtains of my vehicle ; and I therefore cannot give a very accurate description of the scenery. The first half of the road was the same that I had passed in going to Carrân Tual ; and, from what I could see of the latter part, there was a fine, continued range of mountains to my left, and occasional glimpses of Dingle Bay to my right. I was heartily glad, when, at the end of four hours, the machine stopped, and I was told I had arrived at my journey's end. Wailes's Inn is a slated house, wholly on the ground floor, with a single bedroom and a parlour for a stranger ; but I believe it is going to be enlarged. There was, at any rate, as much accommodation as I wanted ; and in those main ingredients of a traveller's comfort—cleanliness and attention—I had reason to be more than satisfied.

Wailes himself is all the way from Essex ; and most singularly did his strong provincial accent fall upon my ear, so long accustomed to the soft, and (to my taste) harmonious Milesian pronunciation. He originally came over for the purpose of superintending some

embankments on a large scale ; but, having married a woman of the country, he was afterwards persuaded to remain, and is become a sort of land-bailiff to Lord Headley . Yet, though he has now been thirteen years here, and has from one hundred to two hundred labourers constantly under him, who mostly speak nothing but Erse, he himself is totally ignorant of the Irish language. He is, in fact, a thorough, down-right, honest John Bull, with the most amusing contempt for all the blarney and humbug he meets with amongst this people. Finding that Lough Carra was only about two miles from his house, and the river that flows out of it not half so far, I agreed to remain the next day, as I thought it very probable the late rains might have induced some salmon and sea-trout to run up. Accordingly, after breakfast, I sallied forth to the River Carra, accompanied by the youngest disciple of old Izaak that was ever recommended to me as guide and assistant. He was only thirteen or fourteen years old, and scarcely looked so much. His name was Cornelius Clifford ; and, for his age, he certainly was an extraordinarily clever angler ; and, withal, a sharp, intelligent, good boy.

There was a flood in the river from yesterday's rain, which had induced a few white trout, and perhaps an odd peel or two, to come into it ; but I was greatly disappointed with my sport. From what I could learn, the salmon chiefly enter this river in winter ; and I believe it affords very good angling in early spring, but at no other time. Its course from the Lake is about two miles ; I fished up it, killing on my way a few small sea-trout, and then tried for a short time the Lake itself, which is celebrated for its brown trout ; but, not being able to obtain a boat, I fished from the shore, and caught but a few Lilliputians. Becoming soon tired of this, I put up my tackle, and ascended one of the highest neighbouring hills, to command the best view of the Lake and surrounding country.

Lough Carra is an extensive and handsome sheet of water, but with little or no wood on its banks, except at the upper end, where is a neat looking place, belonging to Mr. Newton. It is at this end that the best angling is said to be ; and both salmon and large brown trout are frequently killed here. Looking the other way, I observed near the mouth of Carra River a low and dangerous sandbank, running almost across Dingle Bay. On this shoal numbers of vessels have been wrecked ; on which distressing occasions the Kerry men are said to behave very little better than the Cornish wreckers.

To the west of this point lies the extensive tract which Lord Headley has reclaimed from the sea ; he also possesses in this neighbourhood a very considerable property, on which he has for many years been introducing vast improvements, that, I trust, will prove as beneficial to himself as they must at least be to the district at large, by the employment they create, and the example they afford.

The next day was the Sabbath ; when, finding myself at least seven miles from any Protestant place of worship, I had prayers at home ; and in the afternoon rode over to Cahir Civeen, under the guidance of the postboy who conveys his Majesty's mail to these *not unlettered* regions. He proved to be a civil, intelligent fellow, and ministered considerably both to my amusement and information.

Soon after leaving Wailes's Inn, we passed under a beautifully wooded hill, belonging to Lord Headley ; and thence pursued the course of a small river, that waters the wild, open Vale of Glanbeg. This stream issues from several small lakes, in which is an abundance of fine trout. Leaving the valley, which, though wild, is not picturesque, we crossed over some rather high ground, and descended upon Dingle Bay, along whose rocky shores we rode for several miles.

From this point, the scenery assumed a character of great magnificence. The southern coast of this noble estuary is composed of very lofty and precipitous mountains, clothed throughout their upper masses with heather, and resting upon dark slate cliffs, which rise boldly from the water. In traversing this rude coast, it is interesting to observe the successive improvements that have taken place in the science of road-making. The first line passes directly over the shoulder of the hills ; the second about halfway down ; while the present, which is an excellent road, preserves an admirable level throughout. To effect this, it is often thrown across, or winds round, deep and dangerous ravines, worn by the mountain torrents in the abrupt face of the cliff ; or at other times is conducted along the brow of beetling crags, whose base is far beneath, washed by the sounding sea.

The eye is thus alternately engaged by these immediate objects of interest and grandeur, and ever and anon is cast across the blue waves of the Bay, to the still sterner rocks that guard the opposite shore. The northern coast appears to be even more lofty and rugged, with little appearance of either cultivation or habitations ; the entrances to Dingle and Ventry Harbours are distinctly seen, but not the towns themselves.

After seeing the three principal Bays of this fine coast, which forms a worthy barrier to the vast Atlantic, I think that, upon the whole, although Bantry may be perhaps the most *beautiful*, I must award the palm of romantic *grandeur* to Dingle Bay, over either of its rivals, Kenmare or Bantry. About four or five miles from Cahir, we came upon a pretty little bay, in which is a Waterguard Station, together with a few houses, for the accommodation of a small number of bathers, who annually visit this retired spot to avail themselves of its excellent sands. Here, to my regret, we left the coast, and, turning inland, soon obtained a view of Cahir Civeen, at the head of its little inlet. The whole intervening road appeared thronged with peasants, driving their cattle towards the town, to be in readiness for a great fair that was to take place there the next morning. Their appearance, and manner, and dress, added much to the interest of my ride.

The aspect of the country on the land side of Cahir is peculiar, though not beautiful ; displaying a very extensive circular plain, interspersed with bogs, and bounded on all sides by distant ranges of mountains. This is the fatherland of the O'Connells. Mr. Charles O'Connell, who married a daughter of Dan, has a house in the centre of the plain, but is at present building another and much handsomer mansion, close to it. Nearer the town, and on the side of a hill, is the place belonging to Mr. Primrose, another son-in-law to the "Counsellor." This house has some wood round it, which is a very scarce article in Iveragh. Almost at the foot of the same hill stands the ruined old family mansion, in which the "Liberator" himself was born and which, for the honour of the name, I think he might put into somewhat more decent order.

Passing close by the dilapidated cradle of so much greatness and celebrity, I almost immediately entered the town, through nearly the whole of which I had to ride before I reached the only respectable inn in the place, kept by an O'Connell, of the true and ancient breed. Here I was very comfortably accommodated ; and was interested to find traces of the customs that prevailed a century or two ago in England, and which may still be observed in parts of Germany, where the landlord and his guests form, as it were, a family for the time, and eat their meals together.

Cahir Civeen is confessedly the capital of Iveragh, and has been much increased and improved of late years ; the whole of it either belongs to O'Connell, or is held by him under a lease from Trinity College. It is situated on a small arm of the sea, at the head of a bay, which

is completely closed by Valentia Island. O'Connell tried to induce the people to build higher up this inlet, on his own private land, with which view he erected, or rather commenced, a large chapel. However, the experiment seems not to have succeeded, and the chapel has not been finished. I also observed many new houses untenanted ; and should therefore suspect that the place has been *overbuilt*.

The predominant rock about Cahir Civeen is slate, which, though not of first-rate excellence, is used on most of the houses in the town. But the adjoining Island of Valentia is entirely composed of roofing-slate, of such a quality as to be quarried to a great extent for exportation, being little inferior to the Welsh. The island belongs to the Knight of Kerry ; who, some time ago, was very sanguine about getting it appointed the Packet Station for America, to which it is almost, if not quite, the nearest point of Europe. Opposite its north-eastern shore is the tall, bluff cliff, called Dulas Head, where is a very spacious and grand cavern, that I had certainly intended visiting, if the boisterous state of the sea had not rendered it impracticable.

I was, perhaps, better employed in watching the humours of next day's fair ; for, understanding it would be very numerously attended from all parts of the Barony, I at once made up my mind to remain the day, instead of proceeding on my tour ; and consider myself very fortunate in having accidentally witnessed the " gathering" of two such wild districts as Cunnemarra and Iveragh—the wildest, probably, in the British dominions.

Immediately after breakfast I sallied forth, and found the streets thronged with pigs and sheep, and a few ponies, but principally with the staple commodity of the Barony, the Kerry cattle. These are very small, but well shaped, and, when put into good grass, are good thrivers and milkers. There were also a great number of buyers, as well as sellers : the men were, in general, fine, tall, strapping fellows, and it was curious to see them standing two or three feet above their cattle, and pulling them about by the horns, just as we would a sheep. I mixed among the crowds, and was greatly diverted in watching the wrangling and bargaining, which was of the most animated description ; but, being carried on entirely in Irish, it was only their eloquent tones and gestures that I could understand. From four pounds to seven pounds seemed to be the price of a cow, and of a cow with her calf, according to their size and quality.

After observing these scenes for a considerable time, I ascended the heights immediately overhanging the town ; from whose lofty ridge I commanded the whole line of the coast of Iveragh, with a large portion of Dingle Bay. Upon my return, in two or three hours, I was much struck by the change that had come over the *face of the fair*. When I had left it, the streets were full of cattle and traffickers ; nothing but business was attended to. The cattle were now mostly sold and driven off, and the public-houses rapidly filling. Pleasure was evidently superseding business ; the more by token that the women were flocking into the town, from all sides in great numbers ; it was not difficult, therefore, to guess that the fun and the mischief were about to commence. The females were, as usual, strikingly inferior to the men in relative stature and comeliness : they wore, moreover, dark blue cloaks, which had by no means so picturesque an effect as the red mantles of the Cunnemarra damsels.

When again I walked out in the evening, I found still further changes ; the drama of the fair was evidently approaching the fifth act. From one house (for every house was turned for the day into a whisky shop)—from one came the sounds of merriment, the pipe, and the dance : from the next, the noise of quarrelling, shilelaghs, and fighting. Much the same variety of sounds and scenes might be observed in the streets. There were many fights—two

or three of them very opportunely in front of my Hotel. Some awkward knocks were exchanged, but there was much more talking than fighting—many more hard words than hard blows.

Towards nightfall, a strong faction of the Sullivans for a time cleared the fair, and paraded the streets, calling on their feudal enemies, the Sheas of Valentia, to come out and meet them. A battle ensued between the two parties of so fierce a description, that at length two young priests, backed by the Police, appeared to quell the riot ; in which they perfectly succeeded, the people all flying before them. One of the priests, a stout young man, seized a loaded, stick from one of the combatants, and proceeded therewith to lay about him, as hard as he could, most impartially on both Sheas and Sullivans : and in particular he aimed a blow at one bareheaded fellow, who was scrambling over a wall, which all present declared must have killed him, had it taken effect. I wonder what would be thought in England of a Protestant clergyman who should thus dear a fair !—but the Irish priests often make themselves very useful by this personal and plenary administration of the law.

So much for an Irish fair which, except perhaps at Donnybrook, can nowhere be seen in such perfection as in Iveragh—at least in these degenerate days. There were a thousand rich scenes, that afforded me infinite entertainment at the time, but which defy description, unless I could borrow Lover's pen and pencil.

The next morning I set out, though not with much pomp and circumstance, to Waterville, a small village, situated at the point where the short-lived stream from Lough Currane empties itself into the sea. Cars being unknown in this mountainous country, I was glad to hire a pony to convey my baggage, and to walk by its side, the distance being only nine or ten English miles. The road passed, for the most part, over a flat and boggy plain, from which rose a line of gently-swelling hills.

This district, I learned, belongs almost entirely to the O'Connells, or is held by them under College leases. The extent is great, but the soil of the poorest description. Daniel O'Connell himself happened at this very time to be staying with his son-in-law, Mr. Charles O'Connell, being on his way to Derrinane. As might be expected, therefore, I heard enough of him while in this neighbourhood, where he is naturally looked up to as the first man in the world. His usual appellation among all classes is, "*The Counsellor*," or, "*The Liberator*;" and, whatever may be thought of him elsewhere, in Iveragh, at least, he is considered a kind of demi-god.

He was generally described to me as a very kind and good landlord ; and, where politics are out of the question, a pleasant companion. He is very fond of hunting, and keeps a small pack of hounds. I had hoped to join him at his favourite sport, in the neighbourhood of Cahir, as a hunting party had been fixed for him the morning before I left, and was only prevented by the unfavourable appearance of the weather. It would have given me great pleasure to witness the Counsellor breathing the free air of his native mountains, and hallooing on his hounds, as if politics or party had never engrossed his whole mind, nor senates listened to his eloquent diatribes. The country is not altogether such as a Meltonian would think the best adapted to the chase ; in fact, it is so rugged and boggy, that even the mountain ponies are seldom employed, the sport being much better seen on foot.

But to return from this digression. About a couple of miles before reaching Waterville, I crossed a considerable stream, the Inny, which, if I had not been assured to the contrary, I should have imagined to be a splendid river for salmon-fishing. Waterville is the name of Mr.

Butler's residence, on the banks of the stream that issues from Lough Currane. Adjoining it is a large, but straggling village, where I had been recommended to take up my quarters in the house of a farmer, named Roger Sullivan. Here I secured a very comfortable single room, furnished with a good bed, and experienced, during my stay, the utmost civility and attention. Spirits and groceries I had brought with me : every other necessary they supplied cheaply and well.

Immediately after establishing myself in my lodgings, I despatched a note to Mr. Butler for permission to angle in the Lake and River ; a favour which he never refuses to any gentleman. He, however, accompanied his kind sanction by an unpleasant intimation that the River was so low he did not imagine it offered any chance of sport. And such I found to be the case.

The stream is not half a mile long from the Lake to the sea, but is said to afford very excellent trout and salmon-fishing, whenever there is a flood : at other times, it is small and trifling. There is, besides, a weir built entirely across it at highwater-mark, which completely prevents any fish from passing, and must destroy the rod-fishing above. Mr. Butler this year took several hundred of the finest white trout out of the boxes, and let them run into the Lake ; but what are they in such a wide expanse !

There being no hope of sport upon the river, I agreed with a boatman named John Seagerson to go for two or three hours on the Lake. He was accompanied by a young son, who, with his father, had been at the fair the night before ; they were consequently both very sleepy, and unequal to any great exertion. The wind being likewise very high, they proved quite unable to manage the boat ; I was therefore compelled to return, after trying but a very small portion of the Lake ; where, however, I caught five trout, which averaged three quarters of a pound each, besides rising a great many more.

Lough Currane is an irregularly circular piece of water, many miles (perhaps eight) in circumference. Its scenery is fine, though not extraordinarily so ; and it contains several islands, of which only one, Church Island, is any way remarkable. I fished it under such very inauspicious circumstances, as to be scarcely able to form a personal judgment of its capabilities ; but, from what I saw and heard, I believe that there are always a few salmon in it, still more white trout, and an abundance of very fine brown trout.

If Mr. Butler's weir did not so entirely block up the river, and were it not down for so great a part of the year, there would be capital fishing of every kind. As it is, the salmon are annually decreasing ; but this diminution Mr. Butler will not attribute to what appears to me the real cause ; but lays the blame on a novel mode of salmon-fishing, lately practised with nets in the open sea. The fact is, that no small river will bear to have weirs, or salmon-boxes, across the whole stream, for eight or ten months in the year. Not only many of the spawning fish are prevented reaching their favourite gravel beds, &c., but thousands, upon finding these obstructions, betake themselves to the neighbouring rivers, as has been proved in Scotland.

The next day I was early on the Lake with great expectation of success, the wind having become more moderate, though still from the north and very cold. I carefully fished both the eastern and western shores ; and had a vast number of rises, but only caught eleven fish, chiefly brown trout, some of which weighed a pound and a half. I rose some of evidently much larger size, but must confess I had anticipated infinitely much better sport.

Nothing makes a man so hungry as piscators disappointment, nothing so thirsty as to be looking all the day at water. We, therefore, unanimously resolved upon adjourning to a sweet

little secluded bay, to divest ourselves (as Homer says) of the desire of eating and drinking. Having some potatoes with us, I sent them up to a neighbouring farm-house to be boiled ; which the inmates most readily did, with the native kindness ever to be found in the unsophisticated Irish ; and, though they were at some trouble in cooking up their little fire, &c., so far from accepting any remuneration, they assured me that if I had not brought potatoes with me they would have been most happy to supply me with them. These little traits display the genuine features of national character better than the more important but more artificial movements of large bodies in towns ; and their study cannot fail greatly to interest the tourist who is concerned, as he should be, for his fellow-men—who “ *humani nihil a se alitem putat.*”

While we were thus dining and moralizing on the picturesque shores of this lovely bay, the breeze entirely died away, and the evening came on, still, serene, and beautiful. We had therefore no option but to row leisurely homewards, and silently watch the dying splendours of the sun as he sank to his rest,

“ Arraying with reflected purple and gold
The clouds that on his western throne attend.”

The next morning broke equally serene, but, with the hope that a breeze would spring up, I again repaired to the Lake. We this time coasted along the southern shore, and, there being scarcely any ripple on the water, I contented myself with trailing my flies forty or fifty yards behind the boat ; by this method I caught several small trout, and one very fine and beautifully mottled brown trout that weighed above two pounds and a half. I have nowhere seen such large fish rise in such calm water as on this Lake.

Having reached the upper end of the Lake, I left the boat to explore a small Lough, about a mile higher up the Glen ; it is said to abound with both white and brown trout of large size : but the surface was so unruffled that I saw it would be useless to attempt to lure any of them from their crystal haunts. I was much struck with the impressive air of loneliness that characterised this secluded spot ; surrounded by an amphitheatre of rugged mountains, and uncheered by one whitewashed cabin, or a single smiling corn-field, it seemed cut off from the rest of the world. What would a London citizen feel if suddenly transported from the City’s crowded mart into this wild and solitary glen !

In the afternoon the breeze freshened a little, and we hastened to our boat, which our appetites induced us to steer towards the little bay of the day before. While dining there, beneath our favourite rock, the treacherous gale again deserted us, and we had again to row home beneath the influence of another sunset not less serenely beautiful than that of the previous evening. I had often heard of the exquisite tints seen on the western coast ; in confirmation of which, I must say, that I have scarcely ever witnessed such pure yet glowing colours in the sky as on the occasion of these two lovely sunsets on Lough Currane.

On our way homewards we landed on Church Island, where Seageron observed two wild ducks, near the shore ; and, having a gun, he crept up and got a shot within twenty or thirty yards. He had previously been boasting of his skill as a marksman, and it was therefore amusing to hear his excuses for a most palpable miss. “ Och ! to think of her flying away, cut to pieces as she is ! Why she’s got shot enough in her to stock an ironmonger’s shop of her own ! Watch her, Owen ! she must drop—Watch her, Owen !”

The duck, however, seemed as unconscious of any such impediments to her flight as King O'Toole's goose, and topped hill after hill until we soon lost sight of her.

I took this opportunity to inspect the curiosities of Church Island, which proved well worth examination. There is one considerable church in a complete state of ruin, though still much resorted to as a burial-place. Within its hallowed precincts is a great collection of skulls and bones ; among which are said to be some of an enormous size, but none such could I discover. There are also the remains of several smaller churches, most probably of seven in all, this being the favourite number in the olden days of Erin.

But much the most interesting antiquity is the ruin of a Celtic Tower, exactly resembling those that exist in some parts of the north of Scotland. It is eight or ten feet in height, of a circular shape, and formed of large stones without any mortar. On one side is a low square entrance, surmounted by a huge block, and the walls gradually converge, so as to be covered with a single broad slab at the top. There is little doubt that these ancient Towers were used for religious purposes, before the introduction of Christianity ; but, further than this, I believe, antiquaries are not agreed either as to their exact age, or uses, or builders.

When too late, I felt sorry that I had not devoted a day, thus unfavourable for fishing, to visiting the very singular rocks called the Skellings. They are about ten or twelve miles from Waterville, and can only be approached in serene weather. From the accounts I received, and from an examination of them through a good glass, they would amply repay the trouble of inspection. They rise perpendicularly out of the sea, to a great height, and consist of nothing but bare, broken rock. On the larger one are two Lighthouses, tended by a couple of families, who are obliged to have always six months' provisions on the Island. Formerly their houses could only be approached by most perilous climbing : but a road has now been cut in the solid rock, which enables the stranger to view these awful precipices without any risk.

I was anxious to examine them, but felt I could scarcely sacrifice another day to the purpose ; besides which I had sent over a messenger to Kenmare for a car to meet me at Sneem. The same reasons obliged me also to decline Mr. Butler's polite invitation to dine with him that day—though with much regret—as, from the kindness and intelligence I had previously remarked in him, it would have afforded me sincere pleasure to become better acquainted with him, and to obtain that further information about this secluded district which he was so competent to give.

The angler in Ireland : or An Englishman's ramble through Connaught and Munster, during the summer of 1833 .. (1834)

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