

Excursions in Ireland 1844

Excursions in Ireland during 1844 and 1850, with a visit to the late Daniel O'Connell

Catherine M. O'Connell

1852

•

Voyage from England to Ireland.—Arrival at Kingstown.—Description of Kingstown Harbour.—Irish Cars.—Drive from Kingstown.—Dalkey Obelisk.—Village of Bray.—Excursion to The Dargle.—Picturesque Country.—“Uncivilized Irish.”—Beggars.—Powerscourt Waterfall.

July, 1844.

The evening was most beautiful, calm and clear ; the sea around the steamer breaking into tiny waves sparkling in the beams of the glorious setting sun. And now we turn to look on the receding shores of Wales, and now on the still distant hills of the Irish coast, coming more and more clearly into view, and as we approach them, beautifully defined against the cloudless western horizon ; for a brief space an unbroken mass of gold, and now fading into the soberer hues of twilight, and then deepening into night. It was a beautiful picture, and was likely to call up varied thoughts of the past and the present, of the two lands separated by that little span of water ; the one which we had left so singularly favoured by a prosperous fate ; the other we were coming to, so bountifully blessed by nature, and so tried by adversity ; both united by laws, as yet by nothing more.

We pass the Kingstown light-house, and in a few minutes are alongside the pier, and we touch Irish ground near the spot where George IV. embarked in 1821. Such a chorus of voices greet our arrival, the strongly marked Dublin accent forcibly striking the stranger's ear.

“ Shall we take supper in Kingstown, or go on at once to Dublin !” asked a pallid-looking traveller of his companion, both having been invisible during our little voyage.

“ I'm thinking, sir, you'll have more mind for it after the drive,” said a merry-faced porter, as he appropriated the querist's huge portmanteau for his share.

A very short transit brought us to an excellent hotel, and the traveller who could find fault with it must be most fastidious. The morning sun shone a welcome to us, and from the windows of the hotel the view was delightful. Below the harbour, quite full of shipping, here a merchant vessel, and here a pretty yacht, with their sails unfurled—one for business, the other for pleasure—while combining both is the steamer smoking away at the quay.

Kingstown harbour was formed by the erection of two piers, the eastern one said to be over 5000 feet long, and the western over 3000 ; the first-named is the fashionable promenade, and a walk in the early morning to the light-house brought us to a lovely view ; the bay of Dublin, at this hour, at least, like the far-famed bay of Naples, to which it has so often been likened, in the deep clear blue of its waters, stretching across to the hill of Howth, still capped with a fleecy morning cloud ; and returning towards Kingstown the pretty town lies before us, the church, as it ought to do, showing distinctly among the buildings around it, and backed by the mountains, all looking bright in the summer sunshine.

It is unanimously agreed that the day is too fine to think of a dusty city, and instead of taking the rail for Dublin, we order cars for Bray ; the real Irish car, said to be so characteristic of the soil, where the one view of the question guides the parties that unfortunately divide the country. Alas ! that each party should adhere so pertinaciously to its own side, and not turn round in a friendly spirit to see the good that springs amid the evil on every side of our paths through life!

In the best dispositions towards mankind in general, we *mounted* our cars ; and the word is not misplaced, so high were the seats ; and we rewarded our driver's first attempt at agreeability by a hearty laugh, though the story was an old one.

“ Perhaps the ladies don't know the difference between an inside and an outside car ?” said Jem ; “ an Englishman once asked the question, and he was told that the inside car has the wheels outside, and an outside car has the wheels inside.”

The drive from Kingstown to Bray was through a very pretty country dotted over with villas in every variety of suburban taste, and names rather misplaced ; here a — Hall, judging by the house, I should decide the so-called apartment could contain two chairs, a hat, and perhaps umbrella-stand ; and here we pass a — Park, of about four acres in extent, from which a notice nailed to a tree warns off all trespassers, or else “ They WILL be prosecuted with the utmost rigor of the law ;”

The obelisk that we see on the hill over Dalkey was erected many years ago by a benevolent individual to give relief and work at a time of dire distress. “ Why did he not build something useful ?” asks the Joseph Hume of our party : “ what thoughtless and useless benevolence ! but it was quite Irish.”

Bray is a straggling village ; being near some of the beautiful scenery of the county Wicklow, it is much frequented during the summer months, and the drive from Kingstown to it is very agreeable, the road now bringing us glimpses of the blue sea, and sweet mountain views.

Our first excursion was to the Dargle, and we loitered through it, enjoying the coolness of its shade, the more adventurous amongst us climbing down the steep sides to catch new views of the noisy river, enclosed by such luxuriant woods, the foil rich sunshine streaming through them on the glancing waters, and on the perpendicular cliffs. The effect was beautiful.

On one side of this magnificent ravine is the demesne of Tinnahinch, bought by the nation for its independent orator, the late Henry Grattan.

From the Dargle to Powerscourt waterfall, we came through a most picturesque country, admirable in its native beauty, but far more so in the rural comfort of its little homesteads ; save for the mountains, we could fancy ourselves among the cottage homes of southern England. There was no appearance of poverty, and all around, from the woman knitting by her cabin-door, to the strong-looking workmen so diligently earthing their fields of early potatoes, showed the contentment of industry, which I have vainly sought in other parts of Ireland.

We entered one cottage, and its pretty exterior covered with woodbines, roses, and ivy, corresponded with the neatness within ; the only inmate received us with a ready smile, and dusting the straw-bottomed chairs asked us to be seated ; she looked a picture of the cheerful happiness she acknowledged she felt ; her husband had plenty of work, was a “ dacent, quiet

boy," her children were at school, and they had a good lease of their " little place." She brought a cup of milk for an English lady of our party, and stoutly refused any remuneration —telling us with a tact which I gave her great credit for, that she had a sister in London married to an Englishman, and that " his people were very kind to Mary."

I have often heard the " uncivilized Irish" spoken unkindly of, and very unfavourable contrasts drawn between their mode of life, and that of their wealthier neighbours. Poor Paddy gladly takes the simplest food, and if he have enough of it is a happy man ; and his neighbour John prospers on his three good meals ; and the French peasant contents himself with his *potage* and vegetable diet. In the matter of food surely we shall not decide their relative degree of civilization.

I have attentively studied the Irish character. I know all its national virtues, and, too, its national faults ; and totally uneducated as the poorest among Ireland's very poor classes may be, I maintain there is, in that peasant's nature, in the wildest district of the country, a civilization which prompts respect and politeness to a stranger, that you may unsuccessfully seek for in the peasantry of happier England.

I know, and knowing regret it deeply, that in many parts the national character has been demoralized, and the thirst of gain has replaced an open-hearted generosity. I will instance Killarney, where in late years the vast influx of strangers, the greater portion of them rich and carelessly-generous Englishmen, has taught the poor mountaineer how easy it is to earn a shilling, and how much more agreeable to get it for a song, a jig, " a plate of wild fruits," " a taste of potheen," or even for attending your honour, than to toil for the half of it during a long summer's day.

The path to this cottage was through a pretty garden, abundance of common flowers blooming in the borders, and the little gate in un-Irish style, in good repair. There was no poverty here, the flowers plainly said so, and I have ever found that the very poor do not cultivate flowers ; theirs is a struggle through a life of hopeless apathy ; to gain the bare necessaries of life is with them the only object ; the country child will cull that pretty field-flowers, and string together a daisy-chain, the various tints of the " modest tipped flower" tastefully blended together.

In some of our rambles we came upon a group of beggars ; there was the mother, hunger plainly showing in her pinched features, and in the pallid face of the baby in her arms, and some sturdy children of various ages followed her ; two of them had lingered behind, and one had a bunch of hedge-flowers, and the other held exultingly in her hand a daisy-chain she had just finished : from the first the mother snatched the flowers, and scattered them about, telling her in the expressive idiom of her native language, " that there were no flowers for such." It was painfully true ; and it would have required the gentle earnestness of a Mrs. Fry to reason the poor woman into better feelings. Those pretty lines of Mrs. Howitt on flowers came to my mind.

“ Wherefore, wherefore were they made
All tinged with golden light,
All fashion'd with supremest grace,
Upspringing day and night ?

“ To comfort man, to whisper hope,
Whenso'er his faith is dim.
For whoso careth much for flowers

Will much more care for Him !”

Under the shade of a spreading tree, close to Powerscourt waterfall, was a gay picnic party, whose merry peals of laughter made, to my ears, a pleasanter accompaniment to the falling waters, than the rather discordant music of a piper and two fiddlers who played away in a business-like manner.

The fall has nothing grand about it ; it is a very pretty fall, and foaming down the steep ledge of rock, its spray dashing on us as we stood directly in front of it, brought a most refreshing coolness after the pleasant fatigues of the morning.

Homewards bound towards Bray, we drove through the Glen of the Downs, and then saw the evening shades falling around from Bray head, looking on the magnificent view from its summit, combining sea and mountains, and cultivated valleys, and our good night to the Sugar-loaf showed its cone all gilded by the sun’s last rays, meriting for it its native name of the “ golden spear.”

.

The Scalp.—Lough Bray.—Enter Dublin.—Dublin Beggars.—Stephen’s Green.—Foundation of Dublin.—Contrast between London and Dublin.—Irish Improvidence.—Trinity College.—Bank of Ireland.—Royal Dublin Society’s House.—St. Vincent’s Hospital.—Sisters of Charity.—Viceroy of Ireland.

A GREAT deal of rain had fallen during the early morning, and some dark heavy clouds still threatened us with occasional showers, but the tourist in Ireland will soon learn not to fear them, and in defiance of more than one prognostic that the day would be dreadfully wet, we left Bray. The bright rain-drops glistened on the hedges, and the meadow-flowers sent forth such sweet perfumes, and the clear atmosphere bringing distant objects into view, made us gratefully acknowledge the benefit of summer showers.

We passed through the Scalp, a narrow pass between two steep rocks, apparently rent asunder in some convulsion of nature, and coming, by unfrequented mountain-roads, to Lough Bray, we stopped often in our ascent to take in the full beauty of the lovely panoramic view before us ; below was the bay, river, and city of Dublin, with its numerous environs, and, looming up in the background, the lofty mountains of Down.

A contrast to this landscape is wild, secluded Lough Bray, now dark in the deep shade of the mountain above it. Here is a large military police-barrack, and we ask is it possible that such is needed in this sequestered spot, and we are told that the police are well paid, and have little else to do than to fish, and that they are “ civil, well-spoken, humane men.”

Descending the mountains, we pass through several villages, and by innumerable villas, and, late in the afternoon, we enter Dublin ; the streets are crowded with well-dressed ladies and gentlemen, and with vehicles in every variety, the “ outside car” far preponderating.

Ah ! there by a pastrycook’s, and again by a baker’s, are several beggars ; there is no mistaking the wretched rags, the feet without shoe or stocking ; but, look at them ; on their merry faces there are no traces of a consciousness of past or present misery ; they seem enjoying life in their own way, and now, with a cringing tone, they beg a trifle, and now they turn with a jest to their companions. An elderly lady has just left the baker’s, and, from a

basket, she takes a loaf, and gives it between two young children ; blessings on her benevolence ! I hope it will not teach them how sweet is the bread of idleness !

Our hotel windows look on Stephen's Green, the largest square in Europe, and pleasing, I think, in the want of uniformity of its houses.

A knock at the door, and in comes a dear friend, resident in Dublin, full of hospitable and kind plans, and bent on our taking away with us pleasant recollections of his city. We place ourselves under his guidance, and he proves to be

“ The finest guide that ever you see,
For he knows every place of curiosity.”

To begin then at the beginning, he tells us that Dublin was founded by the Danes about the Christian era, and whoever were its founders, they showed, certainly, great taste in their choice of a situation. How small it is in comparison with London, but nothing so strongly shows a contrast between the two cities as a drive in Hyde Park, and a drive in the Phœnix Park ; in the latter so “ few and far between” are the equipages of the rich, that you have full leisure to admire the really sweet view ; and if you see a fair equestrian cantering, you will notice with what grace she sits her horse ; but all has a deserted absentee-look coming from gay, rich, crowded London.

We met cars in abundance, and these belong to the tradespeople of the city. Yes ! they like leaving their business ; they fail lamentably in persevering industry ; and so it is that in several of the larger towns in Ireland, the principal houses of business are conducted by Scotchmen.

The Irish are the creatures of impulse, thinking of the present, forgetting the future ; of course I heard many examples of the contrary, and I know that away from their country, they seem to need neither the plodding perseverance of the English, nor the thrifty forethought of the Scotch. And the tears of many a mother saddened by bitter poverty, have been dried up by a handsome remittance from America, from the son that had barely scraped together the “ passage money” of the cheap winter's season, and had landed poor fellow, on a strange shore with but a few shillings in his pocket. How diligently he must have laboured, for a few months brought money enough to give comfort in his cabin-home, and enabled another brother to join him.

I could multiply such instances—I need not ; yet I will express my regret that in Ireland the poorer classes are deficient in hearty industry ; theirs is a passive endurance of their lot, a carelessness of improving their condition ; their wants are few, and they barely seek to supply them.

Is their apathy indigenous to the soil, or the effects of early education and example ? At any rate the warm Irish heart conquers all difficulties when moved from home.

To illustrate the Irish want of forethought, a friend told me of a shopkeeper that had cleared over his business 500*l.* ; he thereupon sent his daughters to a boarding-school, particularly requesting that they should be taught French and the piano, and he set up a car for his wife. As may be supposed, the little capital diminished rapidly, and he soon ended by becoming a bankrupt, and emigrating with his family to New York ; he lived then as well as any man could ; and yet how differently an Englishman would have acted ! A trader in “ the city,” so called *par excellence*, having made this little sum, unlike thoughtless Paddy, would

still try to add to it, and probably after a life of close application to business, would end his days in affluence, leaving a large fortune to his family.

Our first visit in sight-seeing was to Trinity College, founded by Queen Elizabeth in 1592, on the site of a suppressed monastery, the benefits of its education so long denied to the Catholic ; but more liberal, more enlightened days have come upon us, and let us heartily hope that in our gentle Queen's Colleges, now rising in the island, the mixed education will drive bigotry from the Catholic's heart, and plant toleration in that of the Protestant or Dissenter, and that all striving in the faith taught them by a mother, for the one great home, shall be united in their onward journey by the bond of brotherly charity.

Such thoughts came forcibly upon me, as we paused in the chapel of the College, and from thence we were shown through the library and museum.

Leaving Trinity College, we came out on the Bank of Ireland, the old Parliament-house, the scene of so many fiery debates, when Irish eloquence pleaded in vain. " We shall again have our parliament in College Green," is the well known prophecy of Mr. O'Connell, and who that has listened to his earnest hopes on this subject, can refuse to sympathise in them, or to give him full credit for heartfelt sincerity ?

The Bank is a magnificent building, with a noble colonnade of Ionic pillars round the centre, above, the figures of Hibernia, with Commerce and Fidelity ; the last-named surely misplaced on the site of so much faithlessness, as the history of the days previous to the Union records against some of the members of the then houses of parliament. On the eastern side is a portico with Corinthian columns, and over it the fibres of Justice, Fortitude, and Liberty.

From the forsaken Parliament-house, we wended our way to the forsaken mansion of Ireland's only duke, sold by the late Duke of Leinster in 1815 for 20,000*l.*, and now the Royal Dublin Society house, said to be the oldest society of the kind in Europe, the library and museum well worthy of the visitor's attention.

Our next visit proved a most interesting one ; it was to St. Vincent's Hospital, Stephen's Green, once the Earl of Meath's residence, and changed to its present benevolent destination in 1835. I cannot speak too praisingly of the admirably arranged system of this hospital ; it is under the care of sisters of charity, and one of them showed us through the wards ; that appropriated to the children, is carried on exactly on the plan of the Hospital des Enfants Malades in Paris. A few years since some of the sisterhood went over to that city, and studied the system and treatment in the hospitals there. In the consumption ward I loitered after the party, to speak to a poor woman whose brilliant eye and hectic cheek told her disease. Every thing about her was beautifully clean and neat, and her own words spoke eloquently to my heart. " I have been here for two months, and many a person in the world with thousands a year, hasn't the care and kindness that I have had." The gentle unceasing attentions of the sisters, guided by holier feelings than even the blessed dictates of humanity, make this hospital an enviable abode for the infirm poor. How noisy, how very terrestrial, seemed the gay world, as the convent-gate closed upon us, making the contrast between the peaceful stillness we had just left ; it was from " grave to gay."

Dublin is unusually empty, I am told, for all the citizens that can leave the city, are gone in search of health and amusement to the sea-side ; but, it is the " fashion," (and how entirely the magic word regulates a certain would-be fashionable class in Dublin,) to meet some days during the week to listen to a military band which plays in some of the squares ; and I

thought those the very slaves of fashion who could leave the fresh country air, for a fashionable lounge under a summer's sun, in a heated city. It felt to us anything but pleasure, though it was pleasant to see so much youth and beauty met together.

The present viceroy of Ireland is very unpopular, and many witty stories are told at his expense. He is said to be peculiarly unsuited to his position as head of Irish affairs, and he passes unnoticed through the people, without one voice to greet him, unlike the enthusiastic reception given to some of his popular predecessors.

Journey from Dublin to Limerick.—Curragh of Kildare.—Scene at A Munster Hamlet.—Limerick Belles and Bells.—Legend of The Bells.—Siege of Limerick.—Voyage To Tarbert.—Deep Green of The Fields.—Description of 'Kingdom of Kerry.—Lislaghlin Abbey.—“ Funerals Performed.”—A County Funeral.—Keeners.

We left Dublin, by the mail-coach, for Limerick, at a very matinal hour, and arrived at the last named city for a late dinner ; an extremely tedious journey, the first part of it through such a well cultivated country that the stranger looking out for contrasts will not find one between it and England, but, advancing farther, Ireland will be recognized by the mud-cabins, the bare-footed women and children, and the famed green of the “ Emerald Isle,” showing here and there pleasantly on the pasture lands.

Coming to the town of Kildare, we crossed the Curragh, famous as a race-course, and making a very fine one in its extent of 8000 acres : in many places it presents remains of the Druidical raths, and is made mention of in the old national ballad of the Insurgents of 1798.

“ Where shall we pitch our tents”
Says the Shan Van Vocht ;
“ Where shall we pitch our tents ?”
Says the Shan Van Vocht ;
“ On the Curragh of Kildare,
And the boys they will be there
With their pikes in good repair,”
Says the Shan Van Vocht.

The country was in its summer bloom, potato-fields now purple, now white with blossoms, hay-makers at their pleasant labour, now pausing to gaze idly at the coach ; ripening fields of corn, with “ the poppy so royally robed in red,” peeping out here and there, the blessed promise of abundance all about us.

We stop to change horses at a country hamlet, and out of the cabins come a swarm of women and children, and our guard has a word and a jest with them, and they talk merrily together in their native tongue, for we are in Munster. This is a very un-English scene.

Among the group there was a young woman, she looks scarcely twenty-five, and from the infant in her arms, to the child holding a very little boy's hand, she has four children of different ages. On being questioned as to her own age, she smilingly says, “ Sure 'tis meself does not know at all at all ;” an admirable state of ignorance which cannot be too closely copied by her sex. The mother has a pretty face beaming with intelligence, the children have plump, rosy cheeks, curly hair, and the baby any duchess might be proud of ; but they are all disfigured by dirty, unwashed faces, uncombed hair, and their clothes in rags, and the finely formed little feet are covered with mud.

Limerick is considered the third city in Ireland, and a walk down its best street, George's Street, and into the Square, the fashionable promenade, will show you it deserves its reputation for "Limerick lassies;" for so many "belles" I never saw in so short a space. Other bells interested me very much too. I visited the cathedral, and from its tower admired the beautiful view spread below, the silvery river gleaming in the evening sun; as I descended, the bells commenced tolling for evening service, and I noticed to our guide the extreme sweetness of their tone, and he told me a pretty tale connected with them.

They were cast by an Italian whose pride in them amounted to affection, and whose greatest pleasure was listening to them. The changes of war which deprived him of these bells brought them to Limerick cathedral. Sad and weary the poor founder forsook his home and country, and wandered forth on a pilgrimage in search of his dearly loved bells. Years rolled on, and still were his wanderings profitless. A very beautiful calm summer's evening he sailed up the Shannon, and suddenly, on his startled ear, came the well-remembered tones of his own bells; the sudden joy was too great for the old man's health, and he died as he touched the shore, listening to their evening peal.

From the cathedral we walked about the old town, and saw the marks in the old walls of the bombardment during the siege of Limerick. And still, after nearly two centuries have gone by, is the remembrance of that violated treaty fresh in Irish memories.

From Limerick, the traveller is delightfully conveyed by steamers to Tarbert; these ply up and down the river between Limerick and Kilrush, and as we hurried on board about eight o'clock, the deck of the steamer was already crowded with passengers, many on their way to Kilrush, and thence to Kilkee on the broad Atlantic, which is the usual resort of the citizens of Limerick during the bathing season.

The sun was shining, and all nature looking smiling, and as we came down the noble river, I could not help contrasting its deserted look with the busy crowded Thames, and wishing commerce more extended; and the one is as much more favoured in natural beauty, as the other is in the cheering beauty of commerce.

A most agreeable Frenchman joined our party; he had come over to Ireland expressly to see Mr. O'Connell. His remarking on the deep green of the fields reminded me to tell him of a countrywoman of his, who, when I had just expressed to her my admiration at the verdure and fertility of the beautiful valleys around us in Normandy, asked me if I had not been surprised to see such green fields, as she heard there were no green fields in England on account of the smoke of the coals! She should have seen some of the country scenes of fertile England, which, by the way, la belle Normandie, one of its parent countries, greatly resembles.

Our passage to Tarbert seemed a very short one, and we were landed on a pier below the town, constructed by the Steam Navigation Company, and so we entered the "kingdom of Kerry," as it is affectionately called by its inhabitants; surpassed by many of the counties in fertility, but by none in sublime and picturesque scenery.

The ordnance survey computes its acres to be 1,148,720, of which only 581,189 are cultivated land, 552,862 bog and mountain, and 14,669 acres under water; in many parts of it, improvements are rapidly advancing. Many new roads, disclosing to the tourist beauties hitherto unknown, are in progress. I do hope that in some years all its natural advantages will be turned to account.

I never knew a sojourner in this beautiful “land of the west,” that did not bring from Kerry pleasant memories.

To our party, having many old friends there, it was a spot of peculiar interest, and we studied its history, and visited every remarkable place in the county, with an earnest wish to let nothing escape our observation.

At Tarbert we hired cars for Listowel, a small country town, where we found a very excellent hotel. The distance was about twelve miles, and on our way we visited the very fine ruins of Lislaghtin Abbey, near the village of Ballylongford, founded in 1478 by John O’Connor for Franciscan friars, and dedicated to St. Laghtin, an Irish saint, who lived in the seventh century ; the choir, with its fine gothic window, and the tower are in good preservation.

A country funeral came up as we were loitering amid the ruins. To a little pencil sketch of the abbey, I appended the following pen-and-ink sketch, called forth by our French fellow-traveller’s remarks in the morning :—“Funerals performed.”

On the forenoon of a bright May-day, I was walking in Oxford Street with a Parisian friend, lately arrived in England, and full of intelligence and observation ; he stopped suddenly opposite a house on which was displayed in large gilt letters “Funerals performed,” and repeated the sign interrogatively to me.

“Funerals performed ? performed ? performance ? is not that what you say of the stage ? I think I have often heard a ‘clever performance’ spoken of?”

“And so you have,” replied I, “and do not you know that ‘all the world’s a stage,’ and continuing the quotation we found ourselves in Cavendish Square, where a mutual friend had invited us to a French breakfast.

Seated round the table, the conversation turned on the Parisian’s remark.

“You would acknowledge that it was a very good one,” said our host, “if you had seen the exemplification of ‘Funerals performed,’ that we had within a few doors of us last winter :

“Our wealthy neighbour, Mr. Marris, died after a lingering illness. His story is a common one in London annals :—he came in early youth to the great city to seek his fortune, began as an errand-boy to a great house, to the head of which his untiring industry raised him ; he loved, it was said, and was beloved by a merchant’s daughter, but her father failed, and Mr. Marris’s affection did not stand the test of poverty : she died, poor thing ! after weary years of toil as a teacher, and he lived and prospered in worldly possessions, and was an aged man when death claimed him.

“We never heard that he had any relations, nor will the lawyers be able to hold out any hopes to the nearest of kin of Jacob Marris, of hearing something to their advantage, for he willed all his property to national institutions, reserving a large sum for the expenses of his funeral, and for the erection of a grand monument over his remains in Kensal Green.

“His funeral was certainly ‘performed’ on the grandest scale, and must have been half a fortune to the undertaker ;—it was a bitterly cold day, a driving wind blew the sleet right in the faces of the attendants, as they placed the coffin in the hearse ; eight mourning coaches followed, in one of them were two physicians, but not one friend, for the occupiers of the

other coaches were the dressed-up and hired men of the undertaker, and this we may well call a 'funeral performed.' ”

The seasons had changed, and we were loitering among the very fine ruins of Lislaghtin Abbey and borne towards as on the breeze came the wailing of a country funeral, the saddest sounds one can hear ; we drew aside within the ruins and slowly came towards us the mournful procession ; the coffin, of reddish painted wood, was borne by six fine-looking men, and I saw tears coursing down the cheeks of the two foremost as they laid their burden on a tombstone, near a freshly dug grave.

An old woman rushed out of the crowd, and flinging herself on her knees, laid her head on the coffin, and burst into a passionate lamentation. Five or six women knelt around the coffin, and one with her hands laid on it, declaimed in her native tongue, pronouncing an eloquent eulogium on the merits of the dead, and from time to time broke out into the “keen” which was taken up by those around, and echoed back by the old abbey walls.

There could not be less than fifteen hundred persons present, there were the peasants from the opposite shores of Clare, the men in their grey frieze coats, and the women with their picturesque red cloaks.

The deceased, I learned, was an old man who had brought up a large family respectably ; and whose life of usefulness merited the regrets that accompanied him to the grave.

“ But these ‘ keeners’ are paid for their services, are they not ?” enquired one of our party.

“ Paid is it, an’ sure they’re not,” replied a stout middle-aged man. “ Paid, indeed ! they and we all wish to compliment the family, a rare dacent family as there’s in Munster, who always has the good word of their neighbours, and the bit and the sup for the poor. God be good to him that’s gone, and open the gates of heaven for him this day, for his door was never shut agin the poor !” and the speaker turned away.

The coffin was taken from its resting-place, and lowered into the grave, and the keeners kept the old wife back, and heart-breaking sobs escaped her ; the sons were supporting the poor woman, and I did not see a dry eye in the group that surrounded her.

The shadows of the old abbey fell on the newly made grave as we left the spot ; the sounds of sorrow were hushed, and all around seemed, as I could imagine the old man, smiling in peace. I was just in a train of delightful thought, when our French acquaintance startled me back to the realities of life by enquiring, “ Is not this, too, an instance of a funeral performed ?”

.

History of Kerry.—Abundance of Game and Fish.—Mines.—Marble.—Diamonds.—Description of Ballybunian and Scenery.—Legend of The Circular Hole near Doon.—The Devil’s Castle.—Volcanoes.—Nivage.—Soirée Dansante in A Cave.—Horse-Race.—Fatal Faction Fisht.—View from Knockanure.

The history of Kerry tells us that its ancient name was Cair-Keegh, or the kingdom of Cair, who was the eldest son of Feargus, King of Ulster, Ptolemy, who flourished in the second century, mentions this county, and says the Milesians effected a landing in the river Kenmare,

A.M. 2736 ; he places the Luceni, the same colony as the Lucensii of Spain, in the inland parts of Kerry.

When the English adventurers arrived, they found the county possessed by powerful septa ; in Henry II's time several English families settled here, and in Queen Elizabeth's reign very large tracts of land, the confiscated estates, were granted to English settlers, whose descendants still enjoy them.

Between the old inhabitants and the new-comers many battles took place ; and those of the former that could not be subdued retired into the fastnesses of the mountains, and beheld their native inheritance parcelled out to strangers, yet not without many a fierce struggle on their parts to regain their birthrights.

Mr. O'Connell's family still retains a small estate among the mountains of Glencare, which escaped forfeiture by its secluded situation.

Camden tells that in his time the Spaniards yearly visited the harbours and sea-coasts of Kerry for cod-fishing ; and there are sufficient proofs of Spanish settlement in the south-western parts of the county, in the remains of Spanish names, the manner of building, and the style of dress, with the black hair and eyes of many of the peasants.

Few parts of Ireland are better supplied with game ; and the rivers, and some of the lakes are well stocked with trout and salmon ; the Killarney mode of cooking the last named on little wooden spits has been long famous.

Salmon are taken in great abundance in the Cashen river, near Ballybunian, in the Killarney lakes, and the river Laune, in Carra Lake and river, in Currane or Waterville Lake in Iveragh, and in the Kenmare and Black water rivers ; and all the rivers and mountain lakes abound in trout, though in the latter the fish is generally of an inferior quality.

In Kerry several mines have been discovered. At Muckross and Ross near Killarney were fine copper mines, and at Kilgaroon there is one now extensively worked ; at Ardfer, and in Glanerought purple copper and marcasites of copper were found. Iron ore near Killarney, and at Blackstones in Glencan, and lead ore in several parts of the county, have been met with.

In the mines at Ross which have many years ceased to be worked, more from deficiency of capital in the proprietors than from deficiency of ore, some very curious mining shafts were discovered, regularly sunk, and several other implements used in mines. Large oval stones called by the peasantry, " Danish hammers," are found in Ross Island, having in the centre of each a mark as if where a handle had been fastened.

Marble of different kinds is raised in this county ; near Tralee are good white and black marble quarries, the latter taking a particularly fine polish, and is manufactured into chimney-pieces, and grey and variegated marbles are found in several places.

Near Castleisland is found the *Lapis Hibernicus auctorum* or Irish slate, and of late years the slate quarries of Valencia are quite famous.

" Kerry diamonds" are found among the cliffs of the sea-coast, particularly near Ballyheigne and Dingle ; they are regular transparent crystals, many sufficiently hard to cut glass. Fine amethysts have been discovered near Kerry head ; of these a complete set was presented

by a Countess of Kerry to Queen Caroline, consort to George II. Coloured crystals have been found, particularly near Lough Lein, tinged like emeralds, topazes, and sapphires.

Mr. O'Flaherty takes notice that pearls were found in this lake. "Et in eo stagno margaritæ multæ reperiuntur, quas ponunt reges in auribus suis :"

 and in the *Epistol. Hibern. Syl.*, we read that in A.D. 1094, a present of Kerry pearls was sent from Gilbert, Bishop of Limerick, to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Throughout the county vestiges of antiquity are thickly scattered ; the numerous ruined churches, monasteries, and castles show that Kerry was once a place of note.

With the kind assistance of a friend, I had just put so much of Kerry history together, when a summons from our fellow-tourists to join in a ramble ended our studies.

We were staying for a few days at Ballybunian, and all the morning the rain had come down in literal torrents, quite obscuring the view from our anxious gaze ; the clouds were now breaking, and here and there a promising bit of blue sky peeping beneath them, and we all gladly came out of doors, and a very charming prospect greeted us.

We stood by the ruins of the old castle of Ballybunian, of which the wintry winds have left but a very small remnant standing, under which runs a curious cavern ; below us was the beautiful smooth beach, edged by a line of foam from the dark turbulent waters; across were the shores of Clare, and Loophead, and Kerryhead forming the portals of the magnificent Shannon, and looming up in the clear atmosphere, the beautiful range of mountains stretching from Tralee to the Blasket Islands ; back of us were the pretty lodges, from which were issuing groups of persons, and following some of them we walked along the cliffs to Lick Castle, a delightful ramble, the coast presenting a great variety of caves, and islands, with fantastic pillars and arches formed by the action of the waves.

Near Doon we came on a curious circular hole, into which the sea enters by arched openings : the ridge of rock dividing it from the sea is very narrow, the height of the cliff here immense, and round this some years since an old gentleman of the neighbourhood galloped on horseback.

The legend of the hole tells that in ancient days a hunter in these parts had nine daughters, and far from duly appreciating the blessings given him, he fretted and fumed as each grew up, and he thought how he could provide for them, and being like some monster in a fairy tale, he brought his daughters separately to this hole and pushed them headlong into the surging waves beneath.

I could not ascertain what was his fate, but, for the sake of justice, hope somebody sent him after his children.

Near Lick Castle, an ancient seat of the Fitzgeralds, and a place of strength, is a curious rock standing out from the shore, called the Devil's Castle, and on its summit is an eagle's nest. The cliffs all here bear marks of a fierce fire ; in some places can be seen clay calcined like a burnt brick, and in others iron ore smelted.

There was here in 1763 a kind of volcano, as Smith in his history of Kerry describes it : "an accidental kindling of combustible matter, on the external surface of the cliff, which became extinguished when the *pabulum*, or fuel, that fed the flame was exhausted. This ignition is not to be attributed to the collision of two hard bodies together, as flints, metals

&c. but to this cause, that most of the cliff is composed of a stone called *pyrites*, and there are in it marks of sulphur and iron ore. Chemists know that if iron filings and sulphur be mixed together, when wet they will burst into flames. In those cliffs, when the beds of *pyrites*, iron and sulphur, were wet by the dashing of the sea-water, they took fire. The phenomenon did not appear until the cliff, undermined by the action of the waters, fell down.”

The caves at Ballybunian are very fine, and, with one exception, can only be entered by boat, and owing to the general heavy swell of the waves here, this is seldom attainable.

A peculiar kind of boat or skiff is used here called a *nivage*, it is composed of a framework of wood covered with tarred canvas, and is rowed by small oars or paddles ; it reminds one of the description of the ancient *carracks* which were formed of wicker or wood work, and covered with skins. These little boats are said to be very safe in a rough sea, as they float lightly on the waves, but as the least motion upsets them, their crews require to keep very still.

Here the poor fishermen venture out in them in all weathers, and when they return home, take their boats on their backs to the cabin door.

A few days since, a party from one of the lodges here embarked in a large *nivage* : they had not gone far when they perceived that one of the boatmen pulled in his oars and kept his hand down at the side of the boat ; they enquired the reason, and heard “ ‘twas only a trifle of a hole, and he’d keep the water out aisy with his finger ;” it is needless to say the party did not wish to test his capabilities, for they insisted on returning to shore ; the boat was then hauled up, and a patch applied to the injured part.

At the spring-tides here, a very fine cave can be entered from the land at low water, and one night we witnessed a novel *soirée dansante* in it ; the entrance is easy, and we came at once on a lofty arched chamber branching off into several smaller caves extending a long way, and opening on the sea.

The outer cave was the selected ball-room, and it was lighted up with torches made of tarred bog-wood stuck into the smooth sand, which threw forth a splendid light, making the shining sides of the caves, which were encrusted with myriads of tiny shell-fish, sparkle with a beautiful effect.

The music certainly was not the most select ; there was a piper and fiddler and some amateurs who tried alternately the comet-a-piston and clarionet in a manner that would have given Jullien a brain-fever had he been a listener ; but the music, indifferent as it was, and the merry voices and laughter of the gay dancers, and the murmuring of the billows, echoed by multiplied reverberations, made to my ears a most pleasing harmony.

The polka had just been introduced into Kerry, and infinite were the pains taken by a laughing girl to teach the air to the fiddler. “ Sure I’d learn it soon enough if I’d the notes,” and quite satisfied with himself he played an improvised polka which sounded extremely like an old air the “ Rakes of Mallow.”

All joys must end, and no meeter remainder of the flight of time than the flowing waters ; one wave gave warning coming near the dancers, and a less polite one quickly followed, and another and another, and *exeunt omnes* on the strand with a flounce deep of water showing on the ladies dresses.

There were races next day, and the description of the *staggeen* race in the “ Collegians” was before me as one jockey was sent head-foremost into the waves, and another sprawling among the crowd. The prize was a saddle.

We mounted ponies after the sports had concluded, and we had most delightful canters on the hard, smooth beach, and across the sands of Ballyea where more respectable races are annually held.

This strand in 1834 was the scene of a fatal faction fight ; both factions backed by their respective friends, came to a fierce encounter, and the defeated party retreated to the water, took to their boats, were pursued, their boats upset, and many lives were lost. For years the races were discontinued in consequence of this fatal occurrence.

Faction fights are now almost unknown since the blessed temperance movement has spread through the country. These fights between different families, each member of the faction espousing the cause of the one aggrieved, generally began at fairs, where the fearfully unrestrained use of whiskey was the true source of these often fatal quarrels. It is only those alone who have mixed with the poorer classes of the Irish, who have seen them at fairs, or “ *patrons*,” or weddings, ruining both health and temper by excessive drink, or above all, who have visited their miserable dwellings and witnessed the wretchedness of a starving wife and children expecting the return of a drunken father after spending his earnings, and her scanty gains in whiskey ; those, those can tell that, in truth, the temperance movement has been a blessed one.

All is now order and sobriety at their public meetings, witness the perfect peace of all the monster repeal meetings of last year ; and in their poor homes the wife can reckon with a happy confidence on being able to apply her husband’s wages to buy food and clothing for their children and themselves.

And humbly and grateful should the friends of Ireland praise the power that inspired the establishment of the temperance society, and that gifted its zealous founder, Father Matthew, with that saint-like charity that watches over its progress with untiring benevolence.

Riding homewards we diverged and ascended the hill of Knockanure, which commands a very extensive view. It being a clear day we were told we saw six different counties from it ; and we could distinctly see the white lodges of Kilkee, and the breakers of the wild Atlantic beyond them, and below us the windings of the majestic Shannon with the Island of Scattery or Inniscattery and its ruins. Moore’s lines and legend of St. Senanus give it an interest at the present day.

Excursions in Ireland during 1844 and 1850, with a visit to the late Daniel O’Connell (1852)

Author : Catherine M. O’Connell

Publisher :

Year : 1852

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : Oxford University

Collection : europeanlibraries

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/excursionsinire00congoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

February 18 2013