

## The Highlands of Donegal

### *The isle of the shamrock*

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1901

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WHEN I left Raheny I journeyed to the rough mountains and glens of the northwest, and the only pause worthy of note on the way was at Drogheda, a town which in itself is dull and uninteresting, but has unusual historic attraction. A few miles to the west the Protestant King William defeated the Catholic King James in the famous “ Battle of the Boyne.” This battle, of triumphant or bitter memory to every inhabitant of Erin, according to the individual’s religious sympathies, is not allowed to sink into oblivion, but is fought over again in the more partisan sections of Ireland with each recurring anniversary ; and unfortunately the monument erected on the banks of the Boyne is inscribed in words calculated to keep alive rather than to soothe and dispel the irritation. It reads :—

“ Sacred to the glorious memory of King William the Third, who, on the 1st of July, 1690, passed the river near this place to attack James the Second at the head of a Popish army, advantageously posted on the south side of it, and did, on that day, by a single battle, secure to us, and to our posterity, our liberty, laws, and religion. In consequence of this action James the Second left his kingdom and fled to France.”

What makes Drogheda most notable, however, to the delver in history, is the dismal tale of its siege by Cromwell in 1649. It was defended by three thousand English Royalist soldiers, and when their opponents forced an entrance into the town, nearly all of them were, by Cromwell’s orders, put to the sword. The officers, of a remnant which surrendered, were knocked on the head, and every tenth man of the soldiers was killed, while the rest were shipped for the Barbadoes.

The old fortifications of the town have mostly disappeared, though there remain portions of the walls, and a certain breach in them is pointed out as the one through which Cromwell’s troopers made their entrance. The finest bit of ancient architecture is the lofty gray tower of one of the old town gates, which is so well preserved it could hardly have been more perfect in its prime.

After leaving Drogheda I went on to Strabane, whence a narrow gauge railroad took me as far as Finntown, a diminutive bogland village among the mountains of Donegal, and left me stranded there. I had expected to drive on over the hills to Dunglow on the coast, fifteen miles distant. But a private conveyance was not obtainable in Finntown, and the only public one was a slender jaunting-car that met the train. This already had six passengers when I sought it out, and besides, there was a vast heap of luggage, not to mention the driver. With cheerful Irish optimism this individual declared he still had room for me ; but his two-wheeled skeleton of a vehicle looked to be in imminent danger of a breakdown already. How the single horse could draw such a load was a problem, and I preferred to leave the jaunting-car to its fate, while I spent the rest of the day in seeing something of the region where I then was, on foot.

It was early in the afternoon, cold and windy, and gloomy with the shadows of threatening gray clouds. The country was one of bogs and rocks, that here and there on favoring slopes gave way to little patches of green fields alternating with plots of newly turned earth. The houses were low, one-story buildings, rarely containing more than two rooms, and of the rudest construction throughout. Roofs were invariably of thatch, criss-crossed with ropes of twisted hay that were either tied to stones dangling in a continuous row along the eaves, or to pegs driven into the house walls. The thatch was sometimes of rushes, oat straw, or heather, but most often was of a wispy grass cut on the bogs, known as “mountain stuff.”

The Donegal soil is very wet, and so yielding that horses cannot work on it. Few of the farmers own even a donkey, and all the work is done in the most laborious and primitive fashion, by hand. One man with whom I stopped to talk was carrying manure in a basket on his back from a great pile in front of his house to a near field. His boy, a lad of thirteen, was helping with a basket of smaller size. Often the women assist in this task. When the land has been dotted thickly over with the heaps dumped from the baskets, and these have been spread with forks, they break up the lumps and distribute the manure more evenly with their hands.

In a plot neighboring the one where I stopped, two men were putting the finishing touches on a small patch of oats. The ground had been prepared and the oats sown, and the men were now digging trenches through the field about eight feet apart, and scattering the earth as they heaved it out, over the seed. But at this particular season more farmers were engaged in securing their year’s supply of fuel from the “peat moss” than in tilling the soil. I could see the lonely groups bending to their work on the bog, digging out the black sods, and laying them all around the cutting, to stay until the completion of the slow two months’ process of drying.

Late in the afternoon, as I was passing a hillside cottage, my attention was attracted by a curious humming sound. The door was open and I looked in. There stood a woman, barefoot in spite of the damp and chill of the hard clay floor, spinning at a great old-fashioned wool wheel — an extremely clumsy affair, which had the appearance of having been homemade about a hundred years ago. I made my presence known, and was invited in to watch the work as long as I chose to stay, though the woman expressed surprise that I should find it interesting. To her the process was commonplace, for, like most persons brought up in these Donegal homes, she had been used to it from childhood. She said the yarn was to be used in part for knitting, and in part was to be made into cloth by a weaver who had a loom in a cabin down the road. Backward and forward the spinner walked, twirling the wheel with her right hand and holding a roll of fleecy wool in her left. An attenuated strand connected the roll with the tip of the spindle, which, in its rapid revolutions, twisted the wool into yarn. The spinner kept the yarn an even thickness by her practised sense of touch, and every few moments she stopped the wheel, shifted the strand, and gave the wheel another whirl to wind up at the base of the spindle the yard or two she had finished. Then the process was begun over again.

By the fire sat a wrinkled old woman, with a red kerchief on her head, carding. She held one card in her left hand, hooks upward, on her knees, and with the card in her right pulled and scratched the wool into an even fleece. That done, she loosened the wool from the hooks, took it between the backs of the cards, and rolled it into a light puff a foot long. Her supply of material was in a sack by her side, and a little two-year old girl, who was pattering about the cabin floor, now and then tried to help by pulling some of it from the bag and tucking it into the old woman’s lap.

The man of the house sat on the opposite side of the fireplace smoking, except for occasional intermissions, when he removed his pipe from his mouth to spit on the floor. A

second child, somewhat older than the other, was playing with a frayed patch on the leg of the man's trousers. In one corner of the room was a rude bed, in another a heap of potatoes. Overhead were the smoke-blackened rafters of the roof, with certain cross-beams, sticks, and lines intervening, from which were suspended all sorts of household miscellany, including several of the brown bags of wool awaiting spinning. One feature of the room, that seemed out of keeping with the rest of the litter, was a modern sewing-machine of expensive make. A tin kerosene lamp was fastened against the wall, and the man said I would find such a lamp in most homes, though there were families so poor they used no light save pitchy fragments of fir wood dug out of the bog. Take a pitch splinter as big as one's finger, he explained, and it made a very good torch to carry about.

The old woman carding wanted to know if I spoke the Irish. Her tongue accommodated itself hesitatingly to English, for Gaelic is the common language of the mountains. I, of course, had to confess my linguistic inability. That I was from America seemed to me sufficient reason for my ignorance, but with her that would not pass. She knew well that Irish was talked in the States — sure ! many and many had gone to the States who knew nothing else — and she was scarce able to excuse my delinquency.

The family could mention a number of relatives and former neighbors now resident in America, just as can almost every family throughout the length and breadth of the island. The Donegal emigrants, however, return to take up anew the life on the forlorn boglands with a frequency probably unequalled in any other section. I wonder that they should, for, at best, they can gain only a meagre support ; but they have a deep attachment for their native soil, and I suppose they miss their customary hardships and the music of the Irish language. It is generally thought by their old neighbors that their foreign sojourn has done them no good. They do not take to the heavy manual labor as kindly as before, and they give themselves airs in their Yankee clothes. Not till every shred of these clothes is gone does the returned traveller become entirely normal, and begin to take his proper place in the bogland world.

I spent the night at Finntown's lone hotel, a big barren structure of gray stone, overlooking a little lough, beyond which rose some bleak, dark mountain ridges. The hotel depended on its bar and a small shop for a livelihood, and not on stray travellers. From the dining room window the foreground of the view was mainly composed of a stack of peat just across the road, with a generous accompaniment of rubbish. The dining room's chief articles of furniture were a dirty lounge, a few rickety chairs, and a round table covered with a scant square of oilcloth. The less said about the floor the better. On the mantel were two silent clocks. Such clocks, or those that kept time on an erratic plan of their own, were common in Irish hotels, but I did not often find two on the same shelf.

My evening meal was hardly more prepossessing than the room. There was some questionable butter with no butter knife ; a bowl of coarse-grained sugar crystals with no spoon ; and bacon and eggs likewise spoonless. The single knife and fork with which I ate and the spoon which accompanied my tea were apparently considered sufficient for all purposes. The knife was of steel, with a wooden handle, and the fork of " silver" worn down to the bare metal underneath, and its tines deformed into the semblance of corkscrews. I had my doubts about the cleanliness of the dishes. Besides, the bacon was half done, dreadfully salt, and floating in grease. The tea might have been willow leaves, the hot water tasted of the bog, and, though the bread was passable and the diminutive portion of milk vouchsafed was sweet, the meal as a whole was decidedly uninviting.

The house upstairs looked like an unfinished barracks, and my chamber had sheathed walls and ceiling, paintless and wholly unornamented. The one window was uncurtained, and

the floor was without a carpet or rugs. That the room was ordinarily used by some member of the hotel household seemed evident from the presence in one corner of a shrine of packing boxes, surmounted with a crockery image of the Mother Mary holding the infant Christ in her arms. A soap box at the base of the shrine projected to form a convenient kneeling place. The bed was as dubious as the rest of the hotel belongings, yet, thanks to my afternoon's tramping, I slept as well as if my surroundings had been palatial.

Rain was falling in frequent showers the next morning, and the wind blew in a chilling gale. I started out in one of the brighter intervals, but had not gone far when a fierce scud drove me to beg shelter at a wayside hovel. I might as well have gone into an ancient cave dwelling, the gloom of the interior was so deep. After all, was I in a human habitation or a henhouse? Sense of smell said the latter, though odors were somewhat mixed, and when sight returned to my at first blinded eyes this impression was strengthened. A wet, scrubby turkey stood drying and warming itself in front of the peat fire glowing low on the rude hearth. Close by, a hen was sitting in a box, and, a little more retiring, a second hen was comfortably established among the tumbled rags of a ruinous bed. On the uneven dirt floor a third hen was picking about with an industrious family of chickens, and later other hens, turkeys, and several ducks wandered in from outdoors. Even without these feathered occupants the room was distressing in its clutter and grime. Up above hung no end of duds and wreckage, while below was a chaos of bags, peat fragments, broken furniture, farm tools, and household implements. I thought I would rather live in an American stable.

A tall tatterdemalion of a man had given me a chair, and found another for himself. From behind him a small boy in a long-sleeved coat, apparently inherited, watched me furtively. By the fireside squatted a woman knitting some coarse men's socks. Presently in a lull of the storm a barefoot little girl came noiselessly in at the door. She was not one of the household, and she crept along the wall until she reached a tiny window that looked out on the street. Then I noticed that a few dusty jars of candy and some other small wares were displayed there. The girl wanted a penny's worth of motto candy, and the boy who had gone to the window with her took down the jar she pointed out and carried it to his mother by the fireplace. The woman poured out the required amount of candies into her hand, and exchanged with the girl for the penny, and the boy carried the jar back. As he replaced it in the window, however, he slyly abstracted one of the sweets and slipped it into his mouth.

The housewife was knitting for a shopkeeper in a town "six miles over the mountain," who acted as agent for some concern in Scotland. The Scotch firm furnished the yarn, and she got a fresh bundle at the shop as often as she finished knitting her former supply and carried the socks to be shipped to Scotland. She received for her work three halfpence a pair, and nearly always took up the money due in trade. Some of the remoter of these Donegal knitters lived fully thirty miles from the shop which gave out the work. They, as well as those who lived nearer, made the journeys to it and back on foot, with packs on their backs containing the socks or the yarn, according as they were going or returning. If it was necessary to be absent from home more than one day, they usually stayed over night with friendly wayside folk. Often they travelled in parties of ten or twelve, and in pleasant weather would only stop toward evening at some house to refresh themselves with hot tea, and then would keep on all night.

The shower which had been the occasion of my seeking shelter at length ceased, and I had left the hut and was walking along the road, when a young man overtook me and began to ask questions as to my business. My answers did not satisfy him, and it was plain he was suspicious and excited. Finally he boldly accused me of working for the government. It was of no avail to deny the charge. He was sure — he declared he had been to Australia and all

over the world, and he knew ! He had had his misgivings of me as soon as I came to Finntown, and now his ill opinion was confirmed, and he would trace me !

So we parted, and I judged from the tenor of his remarks that when the tracing had been done something would happen. Later I inquired the reason for this flurry, and was told that strangers sometimes wandered among the mountains searching for valuable minerals, and that they were secretive concerning their object, or did not satisfactorily explain their actions to the understanding of the natives, who therefore have come to look on them as emissaries of the government. The peasantry have a keen antipathy to England and its rule, and these spies, as they call them, are subject to a good deal of dislike.

The Donegal folk of this particular region have had some very unfortunate encounters with governmental power, and their bitterness, whether just or not, is natural. It was in the neighboring Glen Veagh that occurred forty years ago one of the most distressing tragedies of Irish life, in its relations between landlords and tenantry, of which we have record. An estate in this glen had been recently bought by a Mr. Adair. He was, I believe, a kindly man with the best intentions as regards his treatment of his tenants, but he had the ill luck almost at once to come into collision with them. It began with his shooting on a mountain over which another landlord claimed the sporting rights. The peasantry took sides against Mr. Adair, and regarded him as a usurper ; and one day they came forth in a body to the disputed shooting-ground and turned him off.

This resulted in a series of lawsuits, and Mr. Adair was greatly irritated by the opposition he encountered and the delays in obtaining what he believed was justice. Meanwhile he had bought more property, until he owned a tract of ninety square miles, and he undertook to stock the mountains with Scotch sheep. As an outcome, the bogs were strewn with dead mutton. Accusations were brought against the tenants, and they were compelled to part with their meagre goods to pay for sheep that often, at least, had died of exposure to the weather. But Mr. Adair was convinced that the people were banded together to do him injury, and when, in the late autumn, his manager was found dead on Derry Beagh Mountain, and no evidence forthcoming to show who had committed the crime, he decided to make an example of this pestilential community.

Accordingly, the following spring, he served notices of ejection on all the tenantry of the district. Every effort was made to dissuade him, for to exile several hundred souls so summarily from their homes, and in many cases from their only available means of livelihood, meant for them acute suffering. Mr. Adair, however, was inflexible, and the sheriff, with two hundred police and soldiers, took up the task and spent three days in dragging men and women out of their cabins and levelling their poor huts. The evicted tenants hung about the ruins, and many of them slept for several nights on the open hillsides. Fortunately, the affair was widely noticed, and relief soon came — that which was most effectual being a proposal from one of the governments in Australia to give free passage thither to all who wished to emigrate. Most of the homeless peasants eagerly accepted this offer, and thus the episode ended. The landlord had at last triumphed, and was undisputed master of desolate and unhappy Glen Veagh.

This was a case where the harshness of the proprietor loses him all sympathy ; but injustice, faults of judgment, and feelings of revenge are qualities from which the peasantry are no more free than the landlords. The difficulties and perils under which the latter labored are ably set forth by Mr. W. S. Trench, whose book I have found occasion to quote before. The antipathies existing between proprietors and tenants were most intense about half a century ago. What were known as “ Ribbon Societies” then held sway far and wide, and these

dark and mysterious confederacies spread terror and dismay to the hearts of both rich and poor, and did much to promote the absenteeism of wealthy landowners, which was one of Ireland's chief sources of complaint. As fate would have it, those proprietors who were most anxious and earnest for the improvement of tenantry conditions on their estates came oftenest under the ban of the Ribbon men ; while the careless, spendthrift, good-for-nothing landlord, who hunted and drank and ran in debt, and very likely collected exorbitant rents, was allowed to live in indolent peace on his domain, provided he did not interfere with the time-honored customs of subdividing, squatting, and reckless marriages.

The main object of the Ribbon Leagues was to prevent landlords, under any circumstances, from depriving a tenant of his land. The second object was to deter tenants from taking land from which other tenants had been evicted. In enforcing these two objects, numerous victims, from the titled peer to the humblest cotter, fell under the hand of the assassin.

As the Ribbon Societies were entirely secret and amenable to no laws, they did not adhere very accurately to the precise objects for which they were originally organized. By degrees they assumed the position of redressers of all wrongs, real and fancied, connected with the management of land.

The initial step in bringing their influence to bear was to send threatening notices. Their lack of judiciousness is shown by the fact that the warnings which followed evictions were not confined to cases where it was claimed the rent was exorbitant, but were just as menacing even if the tenant had refused to pay any rent whatever.

Mr. Trench mentions seeing a notice announcing certain death to a respectable farmer because he had dismissed a careless ploughman ; and employers who refused to hire laborers, approved by the local Ribbon League, were threatened in like manner. Mr. Trench himself received a letter illustrated with a coffin, in flaring red, and adorned with a death's head and cross-bones, promising the most frightful consequences to himself and family, if he did not continue in his service a profligate carpenter who had been discharged for idleness and vice.

About the year 1840 Mr. Trench was living in County Tipperary, not far from the small town of CloghJordan. The country was very much disturbed by the wild deeds of the Ribbon men, and a tradesman with whom Mr. Trench constantly dealt had recently been barbarously murdered, as had also a local farmer. Just why these two had been singled out for punishment was not at all clear to any one outside the Leagues.

While the excitement concerning these crimes was still rife, a most daring raid was made on the home of a Mr. Hall, whose mansion was about three miles outside the town. Several armed men entered his dwelling on a Sunday morning, when the male members of the family were at church, and its only occupants were the gentleman's daughters. Mr. Hall was a man of considerable fortune and the robbers expected to secure a rich booty. In response to their demand that all the money the house contained should be turned over to them, the young ladies directed the intruders to their father's iron chest. This chest the robbers lugged out to the lawn, where they tried to force it open with crowbars ; but it was very strong and they did not succeed. It was too heavy for them to carry away, and its treasure, some £200, remained safe. They returned to the mansion now, and took a few stands of arms, and the leader went into the parlor and asked for liquor. His request was too late, for the young ladies, fearing the men might become dangerous if they got drink, had emptied out of the window the contents of a large flask of whiskey that stood on the side table, and there was nothing for the marauders but water. They soon departed, and then the house inmates contrived to send

word of what had occurred to the church. Help presently arrived, and during the afternoon the country round about was thoroughly searched in the hope that the robbers would be captured. The quest was unsuccessful, but at night the police visited some houses of suspicious character, and found concealed in them a number of men with blackened faces. Their clothing was stained with bog mould, and was suggestive of their having crouched in a peat cutting on the marshes while the search of the afternoon was in progress. They were arrested and brought before a magistrate, and four of them were ultimately convicted and transported beyond the seas.

Mr. Hall was a kind, amiable, and much-respected man, but after this occurrence he became exceedingly unpopular and obnoxious to the peasantry. A few months later, toward noon of a bright, sunny day in May, Mr. Trench was riding along the road in the vicinity of Mr. Hall's estate, when he heard a faint report as of a gun or a pistol at a little distance in the fields. Immediately afterward a laborer came running up a lane to meet him, saying, " Oh, sir, Mr. Hall has just been shot."

" Shot !" cried the gentleman, pulling up his horse. Is he dead ?"

" Stone dead," was the reply.

Mr. Trench rode rapidly down the lane to the scene of the tragedy, and there on the grass lay his neighbor's body lifeless, but still warm. Several other gentlemen arrived shortly, and stood about considering what was to be done. Most of them were armed and were intent on arresting the murderer, yet they were utterly helpless, though scarcely a quarter-hour had elapsed since the fatal shot was fired. Numbers of people had been working all around planting their potatoes, and a crowd of them had gathered and were looking at the body, and feigning wonder as to who could have done the deed. Not one of them would tell who the assassin was or whither he had gone, and no trace of him could be found.

Large rewards were offered for his apprehension, and at last an accomplice turned informer and the guilty man was arrested. A great deal of attention was attracted by the trial, and it was largely attended. The informer was a dark, desperate-looking man of about forty years of age, while the prisoner was much younger, pale, slight, and without anything in his countenance to indicate ferocity or passion. The story of the informer was that he had been hired to commit the crime by a farmer on Mr. Hall's estate who had been refused some petty demand by his landlord, and had concluded, " It would be a good thing to rid the country of such a tyrant."

He gave the witness five pounds, which he shared with the prisoner, who agreed to accompany and help him. On that fatal day in May, the witness saw Mr. Hall walking in the fields with a cane in his hand. He slipped his pistol up his sleeve, and stealthily approached the unsuspecting landlord until he was quite close. But Mr. Hall heard his footsteps, and turned round and asked what he wanted. He muttered some excuse and passed on. Again he stole up behind his victim, and again Mr. Hall discovered him, though still with no thought that his designs were unfriendly. The intending murderer, thus twice baffled, now returned to his companion, dashed the pistol on the ground, and said with an oath : " I see it's unlucky. I will have nothing more to do with it."

At this the young man called the witness a coward, took up the pistol, and declared he would use it himself. Mr. Hall had continued walking across the fields, and the murderer went straight up to him, without speaking or showing his pistol. Mr. Hall, fancying from his manner that he meant mischief, sprang back a step or two, and in so doing stumbled over a

tussock and fell. That was the assassin's opportunity. Before the gentleman could get up or recover himself, the young man put the pistol close to his head and shot him dead on the spot. Then the murderer threw his weapon into an adjoining hedge and walked quietly away with his hands in his pockets to meet his accomplice, and they were in the crowd which gathered shortly about the body.

The testimony of the informer was amply corroborated, but the jury disagreed and the prisoner was remanded to jail. By the peasantry the result of the trial was regarded as a decided triumph, the lawlessness of the district increased, and three more murders quickly followed. But Mr. Hal's assailant was presently again tried — this time by a "Special Commission" — and he was convicted. Two weeks later he was executed, and for a long time afterward Tipperary was quiet.

I only stayed at Finntown over one night, and at noon, shortly after my encounter with the man who was going to trace me, I engaged a place on the Dunglow jaunting-car. It was almost as heavily loaded as the day before, and three of the passengers were women. We were a good while in getting started from the station, for there were many articles of luggage to be packed away and tied on, and the driver had a good deal of small business to transact with the station master. The showers kept descending every few minutes, and in one of these, a ragged old woman, with a bag about her head in place of a shawl, and with her feet bound up in some pieces of homespun, climbed over a wall from the bog and addressed the occupants of the jaunting-car. She pulled back her sleeves and showed several scars on her arms which she said were dog bites, and one of the women passengers who, from the fact that she wore a hat, I judged was better-to-do than the others, gave the beggar a half-penny. This was accepted thankfully, with voluble prayers for the bestowal on the giver of blessings of all sorts ; and if these materialized, they were certainly cheaply had at the price.

At length we were off, pursuing a winding road up and down an endless succession of rocky hills, with the boglands frowning around in every direction. We were assailed by frequent windy scuds of rain, but there were spells between, when the clouds broke and the sunshine stole over the wet moors, and the rainbows arched the distance. It was a lonely land — a few grazing cows and sheep, farms at long intervals with their tiny, stone-walled fields and lowly dwellings, now and then a stream dark with the bog stain, many little lakes in the hollows, and never a bush or a tree, save occasional stunted and storm-beaten ones near the farmhouses. We sometimes met a barefoot woman, and once stopped to help a man with an overloaded cart whose horse had come to an exhausted stop in climbing a long, steep hill. Our driver and the two men passengers on the jaunting-car alighted, and by pushing behind, we got the stranded horse and cart into motion again. The assistance rendered by my fellow traveller was, I fancy, more willing than effective. His familiarity with the whiskey bottle was very evident, and his hands were so unsteady he could hardly light his pipe. As we journeyed he swayed limply backward and forward with the jolts of the car, and I was much afraid at first he would tumble off. Later, I was afraid he wouldn't ; for he was a nuisance with his rambling, unceasing talk, and his drunken determination that the passengers should all exactly understand his opinions of matters and things.

About the middle of the afternoon we reached Dunglow, where I found an excellent hotel ; but the place itself was a dreary coast town, and I did not feel like lingering in it. There was little traffic, and the passing to and fro on the chief street was mainly confined to a few carts engaged in conveying seaweed for fertilizer from the shore to the farmlands behind the village. I ought also to mention an old man, who was being stoned by some small boys. He had a pail in either hand, and made several visits to a stream that ran through the town, filled his pails, and then bore them slowly away to his home. He was short and stooping, and too

stiff and aged to give chase to his persecutors, and, encumbered by his pails, his only resource was angry threats and rumblings of wrath, which pleased the lads the more.

The next morning I went back with the car halfway to Finntown, to a little place called Doochary, where I engaged lodgings with a bankrupt innkeeper. The barroom was officially sealed up, but I got the impression that neither the landlord nor his patrons went wholly dry on that account. There was a closet or inner room to which he and they retired when there was occasion, and whence they reappeared with a suspicious cheerfulness and a telltale moisture about their mouths. The people among the hills do not acquiesce willingly in government control of the liquor business, and they evade the law in more ways than one — most often perhaps by illicit manufacture. When you see on an early morning far off across the apparently deserted bogs a wisp of smoke arising, it is not unlikely that marks the place of a still. Drinkers say that a glass of “potheen,” as the outlawed whiskey is called, is worth a pint of such stuff as they get in the towns. They can always tell it by its smoky taste, and by a slight catching in the throat, produced partly by the conditions under which it is made, and partly by its comparative newness — for the bogland “shebeens” have not facilities for keeping their liquor as long as the ripening really requires.

The drive from Dunglow had been a chilly one, with fog and showers, and I sought the hotel kitchen and sat down by the turf fire. A barefoot girl was puttering around doing the housework, and later a barefoot old woman came in and seated herself on a low stool beside the fireplace opposite me. Then she got out a short clay pipe and began to smoke, and I was glad to escape to an apartment upstairs where dinner had been made ready for me. This room did its best to attain a suggestion of elegance by having its windows draped with lace curtains (soiled and somewhat torn) and its floor adorned with a carpet and several goat-skin rugs that imparted their own peculiar flavor to the stuffy atmosphere.

My sleeping-place was in an adjoining chamber — a sort of closet opening off a narrow hall, with no windows and no daylight save what came in across the hall when the door was ajar. Nearly all the floor space was monopolized by the bed and a chair with a washbowl on it. The hall too had its peculiarities, especially in the matter of illumination; for it was customary to temper its evening gloom with the light of a lone little candle set on a window sill in a hardened puddle of its own grease dripped there for the purpose, and serving instead of a candlestick.

Doochary consisted of a few whitewashed two-story houses in a group by a little river of hurrying, roily water. Heaps of ashes and manure, the wreck of a cart and other rubbish, bestrewed the wayside in the village centre. Extreme poverty seemed evident, yet I noticed that a beggar who made a tour of the place, going to each house-door in turn with a business-like impartiality and precision, was by no means unsuccessful. The beggar was an old man in patched and faded clothing that looked historic. Though past his prime, he was still vigorous and, as one of the villagers remarked, “betther able to work than some o’ thim here that’s tryin’ to keep a wee holdin’.” The villager used a Scotch expression in his comment, and I often heard Scotch terms used all through Donegal, in spite of the fact that the people are purely Irish. The explanation is that they get these words from contact with the Scotch in the richer farming country to the east, and in Scotland itself, to which great numbers make annual pilgrimages to work during the corn and potato harvest.

One thing I regret having missed in my Donegal journeyings was the Doon Well, famed far and wide for its miraculous cures. It is not by any means the only well of healing in Ireland, but is at present, I believe, the most notable. Its situation is peculiarly secluded. The nearest town is Kilmacrenan, from which it is about three miles distant off on a waste of

moorland. There you find it, roughly roofed with stones, on a level green space under the shadow of a rude bluff. A rivulet trickles away from it, and on the bank by the streamside, at some remove from the well, the pilgrims sit to take off their shoes and wash their feet ; for you must go to the fount barefooted.

But the most interesting adjunct of the well is a group of crutches thrust into the sod and left standing there by persons who have come crippled and gone away restored and sound. The sight is the more picturesque and touching because the crutches are swathed in rags — rags that the cripples have worn in sickness, and which long exposure to the weather has cleansed and softened to tints that are in pleasing harmony with the surrounding landscape.

The healing virtues of the well are not limited to those who visit it and drink of its water on the spot, and the pilgrims nearly all fill bottles to carry away with them, either for further use of their own or for ailing friends. The ground itself is consecrated, and the prayers offered at the well are believed to be specially effective, even where loved ones far across the sea are made their subject. No record of cures is kept at this humble resort, and how many are benefited is uncertain ; but the Irish peasants are excellent subjects for faith-healing, and cures, more or less lasting, are undoubtedly numerous.

What I saw of the Irish Highlands after leaving Doochary was not essentially different in scenery or people from that already described. There were the same bogs and sombre loughs and stony mountains, and the same low cabins and tiny fields. Small holdings, subdivided by family inheritance for centuries, are the rule, the majority of them under fifteen acres. The land is too poor for the peasants to more than eke out a miserable existence in the best of times on such holdings, and when the crops fail, there is great distress. Yet, under ordinary circumstances, so keen is the demand for land, that from twenty to thirty pounds is readily obtained for the tenant rights of one of these little bogland farms. The rentals vary from five shillings to three or four pounds. This simply pays for the use of the land. The tenants themselves, after the custom almost universal in Ireland, must erect their own houses, put up their own fences, and do all their own draining and reclaiming ; and then, when a man has, by his personal exertions, increased the value of his holding, the rent is very likely raised.

Still, not all landlords are extortionate, nor are all peasants unsophisticated and unequal to the task of coping with the landowners and their agents. It is said that many farmers do all in their power to appear poor ; that they come to pay their rent in their worst clothes, and are careful beforehand to get their banknotes changed into small silver, hoping the possession of only sixpences and shillings will give such an appearance of difficulty in getting the money together, as to gain credence for their assertions of poverty. Then, with the whole amount due in their pockets, they try to get the agent to accept half. The case has two sides, doubtless, and both parties have their troubles, and neither is wholly fair to the other.

One thoughtful observer, with whom I talked, said that the greatest evil with which the peasantry have to contend is not their hard surroundings or the rents, but their tendency to run into debt at the shops. He regarded the shops as encouragers of extravagance. They have multiplied, until now they are scattered all over the country, and are too easily accessible to the people, who buy foolish luxuries and squander on trinkets and unnecessaries, and live beyond their means. They purchase on credit, and many do not know what they really owe, and do not dare to ask. They are timid in the presence of the shopman, who has them in his power, and they buy without saying anything of price, only intent on getting the things to satisfy their immediate desires. When the boys and girls come home in November from service on the lowland farms, and the men and young women return from Scotland, their

wages in part pay the rent, but in larger part go to the shopkeepers. Then the accounts begin to grow again, and if any balance is carried over, a high rate of interest is charged.

The people live largely on what they raise — potatoes, cabbages, and turnips but most of them purchase flour, a small quantity at a time, and bake it into bread. Tea, likewise, has of late years become a household necessity for old and young. They use fish to a considerable extent, and now and then indulge in a bit of bacon. When the potatoes are gone, the poorer folk buy “Injun” meal, and the more prosperous get oatmeal. The porridge is eaten with milk ordinarily, but if the cows are not giving milk, or if no cows are owned, the porridge is eaten “dry.” Some farmers keep as many as eight or ten cows, but they are not high grade beasts, and a bogland cow only gives “about as much as a good goat.” Surplus butter is sold to carts which make frequent trips through the region picking up produce in exchange for groceries. The carts take practically all the eggs and poultry, as well as the butter, for the farmers rarely eat eggs, and only sacrifice a hen or a duck for the home table at Christmas or for Easter Sunday. Even when a pig is slaughtered, nearly all of it is sold except the liver.

As a rule, the poultry are domiciled in rude little huts built in handy nooks close about the house. These are dark and windowless, only three or four feet high, and not much deeper or broader, with sides of stone and roofs of sod or thatch. Where the poultry share the dwelling with the family, a place is usually slatted off for their night quarters at the end of the kitchen, but sometimes roosts are put up immediately inside the entrance, high enough to be out of the way. The cabin door is apt to be in two halves, and when the upper half is open and the lower shut, which is ordinarily the case from early morning until sundown, the hens find the arrangement very convenient in assisting them to mount to their roosting place after their day’s foraging. It is not much trouble to flap up to the half door, and then the rest of the flight to the roosts is easily completed.

Life on the Donegal moorlands is much the same from year to year. It is a day-to-day struggle, and the prospect never attains much brightness. Yet the Highlanders are an independent race and do not ask for charity. To me they seemed hardy and industrious to an unusual degree ; and I could not but regret that the conditions of their homeland were not more favorable.

The isle of the shamrock; (1901)

Author : Johnson, Clifton, 1865-1940

Subject : Ireland — Description and travel

Publisher : New York, London, The Macmillan Company

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : University of California Libraries

Collection : cdl ; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/isleofshamrock00johniala>

Edited and uploaded to [www.aughty.org](http://www.aughty.org)

August 16 2013